

COMMITTEE: **Housing and Environment Committee** 16th February 2010

CORPORATE DIRECTOR: Pete Leonard

TITLE OF REPORT: Street Cleanliness Report : Street cleanliness in deprived and better off neighbourhoods - closing the gap.

REPORT No. H&E/10/....

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Update the Committee on the findings of recent research and a report completed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which explores why affluent neighbourhoods tend to have higher levels of street cleanliness than deprived neighbourhoods and how local authorities can close this gap, improve performance and achieve desired standards in all areas.

To provide the Committee with an update on the progress made since 2004 by the Street Cleaning Service in closing the gap and compare the recommendations of that report with the strategies and actions already in place in Aberdeen City.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes that the Street Cleansing Service has made considerable and sustained progress towards reducing the gap in the standard of street cleanliness between less affluent and more affluent areas of the City, while continuing to find efficiency savings.
- (ii) instructs the Director of Housing and Environment Services to provide a further report on progress at the beginning of the calendar year 2011.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications in this report.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

This report links directly to the Aberdeen City Council draft Single Outcome Agreement 2009-12 in terms of National Outcome 15- *Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs*

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no other implications in this report.

6. REPORT

6.1 Background

In November 2009, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report on “Street Cleanliness in deprived and better –off neighbourhoods.” This research was aimed at finding out why affluent neighbourhoods tended to have higher levels of street cleanliness than deprived neighbourhoods and how local authorities could reduce this gap.

6.2 The position in Aberdeen City

Service redesign has been ongoing over the last few years and will continue to move forward and develop, continuing to plan core service provision relative to neighbourhood and area needs.

This type of provision and has proved to be very successful in recent years in terms of improved performance and cost effectiveness.

(i) Savings and cleanliness scores

In common with other services within the public sector, the Street Cleaning Service has had to make substantial savings (approximately £250,000 over the last two years) to help the Council achieve a balanced budget and still provide best value.

The adoption of planning and targeting resources relative to needs has not only led to a dramatic narrowing of the gap in street cleanliness levels between the more affluent and less affluent areas of Aberdeen City, but a high absolute level of performance has also been achieved.

Aberdeen’s street cleanliness SPI (LEAMS) has shown continued improvement over the last few years, leading to the most recent peer review score of 76, well above the Scottish benchmark of 67 and in fact out best score to date.

The services own internal PAC rating has also shown continuous improvement in recent years improving from an average of 82 in 2004 to the present average score of 94 as of December 2009.

Appendix 1 charts the improvement over the last 5 years.

(ii) Mechanical equipment vs. the manually operated barrow.

One of the points made in the report is that local Authorities should ask the opinions and views of their frontline staff when working out how best to target and deploy resources. This is a commonsense approach, as it recognises the fact that frontline staff have an extremely detailed and valuable knowledge of the

areas they keep clean and are therefore in an excellent position to suggest any improvements in the methods used. This is an approach which has been taken by Aberdeen City Council and has led to the use of mechanical sweeping equipment only in areas where it can be used without hindrance and to the best effect. We have taken the staff's advice when they have recommended manual barrow litter picking be applied to a route, rather than mechanical sweeping methods and this has brought benefits, as can be seen by the significant reduction in the gap between affluent and less affluent areas in the City

Appendix 2 which shows the improvement since 2007/08.

Chart 1 highlights neighbourhoods with the lowest PAC rating in 2007/08. All these neighbourhoods would be classed as less affluent areas.

The chart show that directing more resources and in particular more manual beats in to the less affluent areas has brought about a significant improvement in the PAC rating / cleanliness of the areas.

In order to sustain the resource in the less affluent areas it is necessary to withdraw and reduce the resources employed in the more affluent areas. Chart 2 highlights that despite reducing resources the cleanliness rating has not been affected and in all cases remains well above target.

The work undertaken to reduce the cleanliness gap between less affluent and affluent areas has brought about real success and continued improvement in the cleanliness of all neighbourhoods.

Lowest Neighbourhood Pac: 2007/08 – 64, 2009/2010 – 84
Highest Neighbourhood Pac: 2007/08 – 98, 2009/2010 – 100

Chart 3 plots the average PAC rating for the 6 lowest scoring area (areas which can be seen as less affluent) and 6 highest scoring areas (areas which can be seen as affluent) for the last 2 years and this clearly highlights the closing of the gap.

(iii) Environmental walkabouts and involving the community.

As Members will be aware, the Service has been running Environmental Walkabouts for approximately three years, developing them to the point where the local Elected Members and the local Community Representatives are advised of the next scheduled event and provided with a detailed report thereafter. This report can be revisited when the next walkabout in that area takes place, so that improvements can be measured, together, by both the Council and the Community, as they walk around the area.

A recent development which has been received with enthusiasm by local Communities is the provision of litter picking equipment, free of charge, to the Community representatives who then have the means to keep the area well cared for between routine cleans and Environmental Walkabouts. This means that, once a high standard is achieved, the "snowball effect" takes place whereby

the local residents help to maintain their local area. They rightly feel involved and jointly responsible with the Council for the maintenance of their area.

This is in line with one of the conclusions of the report which states that *“The national and case study evidence confirms the views of environmental service providers that environmental problems are not simply caused by the carelessness of residents.”*

(iv) Differences in the LEAMS scoring system between Scotland and England.

The Joseph Rowntree report makes reference to the fact that there are slight but potentially significant differences between the ways in which area transects are scored in Scotland and England, which effectively mean that a good overall score can be achieved in Scotland by concentrating on the more affluent areas and ensuring they have a high average level of attention. This is not possible using the English system as the overall score takes into account the proportion of transects which fail to meet the acceptable standard (below grade B).

The report goes on to say that *“There is a suggestion that the policy signals in Scotland do allow for performance targets to be achieved and improvement made without targeting the least clean areas, whereas in England, the target indirectly encourages a focus on deprived areas.”*

However, in Aberdeen City at least, this potential effect of the scoring system has been accounted for by means of the City Council’s internal PAC (percentage achieving cleanliness) system. All neighbourhoods undergo a programme of inspection which allows for each neighbourhood to have its PAC recorded and monitored.

Street cleaning operations regularly review neighbourhood PAC ratings with resources progressively targeted towards any improvements needed.

This is considerably aided by the Environmental Walkabout system which embeds good practice in the community and demonstrates to it that it is as important as any other area within the City. The fact that this works can be demonstrated by the graphs in Appendix 2.

(v) The next steps?

As mentioned above, the Service has had to make considerable savings in recent years. This situation will continue and the Service will continue to seek efficiencies in the way that street cleansing is provided to the city of Aberdeen.

Accordingly, work has begun on a root and branch review of where we are at the moment, with the aim of building upon what works well for us. It will also involve looking at further community involvement to and deciding on what areas of work we should be concentrating on in the future. This will necessarily involve a large amount of work which will be completed by the end of the calendar year 2010.

In order that this work has a set of quantitative as well as qualitative parameters, the Service is committed to make a further £78,000 of savings in the last quarter of the financial year 2010/11 and £313,000 in the subsequent full financial years.

Work done and lessons learned by the Environment Service in the 2009 tendering process for the grounds maintenance of sports grounds and playing fields will be used to help achieve these savings, while maintaining the absolute standards and reduced gaps between affluent and less affluent areas.

6.3 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report

The report looks in more detail at the varying experiences and outcomes achieved of three local authorities: Lewisham, Leeds and Fife, in the context of a set of central questions which it poses. These questions and the main findings of the report, in relation to each, are given below.

Q 1 Is there a gap in cleanliness between deprived and better-off neighbourhoods?

Finding: YES For each authority, there is a tendency for more deprived streets to have lower grades although this is more pronounced in **Leeds** and **Fife** than in **Lewisham**

Q 2(a) If there is a gap, is it closing?

Finding: YES –In the English Authorities. There is some evidence from national household surveys in England that there has been a narrowing between 2003 and 2007). The gap is slightly widening in **Fife**, however.

Q 2(b) If so, in what ways and to what extent?

Finding: In Scotland, performance is measured by taking the average score for all the transects surveyed.

In England, performance is measured in terms of the proportion of transects which fail to meet the acceptable standard (those below grade B). –more indirect emphasis on the areas with a poorer standard.

Under the Scottish scoring system, **Fife** improved its performance measure by improving standards in better-off areas. Under the English system, **Lewisham** has secured improvements by reducing the proportions below standard in deprived areas as fast as in other areas while **Leeds** has focused improvements almost exclusively on the most deprived neighbourhoods.

This is not to imply that a deliberate strategy was in place in **Fife** to target 'easier wins' for improvement. However, there is a suggestion that the policy signals in Scotland do allow for performance targets to be achieved and improvement made without targeting the least clean areas, whereas in England the target indirectly encourages a focus on deprived areas.

Q.3 Given that 'deprivation' captures a broad basket of indicators, what are the more specific social and physical characteristics of neighbourhoods which predict higher levels of need for environmental services?

Finding: Certain neighbourhood characteristics make some residential areas more difficult to maintain than others. These 'risk factors' are partly about the social composition of the population but also about the physical environment and how it is used.

- The presence of low-income households is consistently identified as a risk factor but so is higher-density housing (irrespective of who lives there).
- There is significant variation between local authorities in the risk factors identified. This suggests that authorities should carry out their own investigations locally where possible, informed by these results. They might consider how they could investigate physical environmental factors as well as socio-demographic issues.

Across the three case studies, the proportion of low-income households in the area is the most important factor but its influence varies: it is far stronger in **Leeds** than in either of the other two. In one case study, **Fife**, housing density has a stronger influence on outcomes than low income. The national and case study evidence confirms the views of environmental service providers that environmental problems are not simply caused by the carelessness of residents. The national-level analysis in particular suggests that a range of neighbourhood characteristics are associated with environmental problems. The case study evidence also suggests some important socio-economic factors are important, along with density (of housing).

Interestingly, however, low-income households emerge as a strong predictor of problems in all three case studies, although it should be emphasised that it is not *just* low income which has these associations. Arguably, the research has not managed to explain what it is about low income that is related to problems.

Q.4 Do resources and services follow need, and to what extent?

Finding: In both the national and the local analysis, there did appear to be a skewing of resources towards the more deprived neighbourhoods. The strength of skewing clearly varied between authorities.

- In spite of this skewing, outcomes were worse in more deprived streets, suggesting that the nature or level of services there was still not sufficient.
- In all three local authorities, resources were clearly skewed towards streets with higher densities but only in Leeds was there consistently higher expenditure in streets with lower-income groups. Yet the earlier analysis showed that it was that measure that was the single most significant indicator of poor standards. Local authorities may need more encouragement to use measures of social composition as the basis for targeting, rather than physical form.

- The analysis does not show that more expenditure is associated with better outcomes, although there is some evidence for this from some parts of the analysis which follow.

Q 5 What is the effect on street cleanliness when service levels are adjusted such that they are provided more in line with need?

Finding : Key messages from the Fife Story

- Standardised services at the level of a twice-weekly manual sweep may be insufficient to meet the street cleansing needs of more deprived streets.
- Local operatives are a key source of intelligence about the actual work involved in individual streets to meet cleanliness standards.
- To understand the true nature of programmed service provision, there is a need to look beyond service frequencies to take account of actual workloads. It is critical that authorities assess how relative workload sizes relate to neighbourhood needs and cleanliness outcomes.
- The imperatives of national performance auditing may encourage locally based staff to – at least in part – target their effort in relation to need.
- Using responsive modes of service to target need is an expensive option and can make deprived areas appear more costly than they would under a different system.

Service changes in Fife

As part of a Best Value review process and in response to the findings of this research, **Fife** Council introduced a new model of service provision for the year 2008/9. This model uses 'local service teams' to work generically and holistically in an area. It also incorporates a provision for a 'local factor' to be applied in areas of particular need which leads to the adjustment of the level of servicing accordingly. In addition, non-mainstream resources (from the Fairer Scotland Fund) are being used to pilot the use and impact of further additional services in such areas. If these resources are found to have a positive impact on cleanliness, this should lead to further targeting of mainstream service provision when the Fairer Scotland Fund comes to an end in April 2010.

. Service provision in Lewisham appears very similar to that provided in **Fife** (see box). A key question is therefore: how does **Lewisham** achieve its relative equality in outcomes?

Finding: Key messages from the Lewisham story

- Mainstream service provision can be engineered to produce broadly equal cleanliness outcomes in the context of neighbourhood diversity.
- A focus on the distribution of 'work', which takes account of variations in neighbourhood needs, will have a positive effect on equality in comparison with a focus on service frequency.

- Again locally based staff are key sources of information when workloads are being devised such that they recognise the diverse needs of neighbourhoods.
- Whereas authorities with high levels of deprivation face substantial challenges in achieving good outcomes, *equality* is likely to be easier to achieve in authorities with less of a range of deprivation between their neighbourhoods. A lack of ‘demanding’ affluent neighbourhoods may allow authorities more latitude to pursue equality.
- In this context, an additional expenditure of around 35 per cent in the more challenging contexts appears to produce similar outcomes to those achieved in a context with an average deprivation profile.
- However, the **Lewisham** case shows that equality across neighbourhoods does not necessarily have to constrain effectiveness for the council as a whole, particularly where there is an aim to maximise ‘acceptable’ as opposed to ‘excellent’ outcomes.

Finding: Key messages from the Leeds story

- It is the balance between the needs of an area and the service provided to it which matters for outcomes. A key question to ask in relation to any neighbourhood context may be: is the neighbourhood getting enough of the right kind of service?
- Non-mainstream resources can be used to deliver top-up services to address acute needs, with demonstrable improvements in outcomes. However, care should be taken to ensure that this form of provision does not mask deficiencies in core service provision.
- Mechanical sweeping systems can be highly effective in less challenging contexts, delivering good outcomes without intensive resource. However, this mode of provision can be inappropriate for denser, busier and more disadvantaged areas.

6.4 A comparison of possible actions

Toward the end of the report, the researchers provide an excellent table which looks at a number of ways to address these complex issues, within the context of service user and political/ economic factors, in a bid to determine the relationship between neighbourhood contexts, service inputs and cleanliness outcomes.

Table 1: Achieving a clean sweep: aspects and issues.

Aspects of a clean sweep	Pathways to a clean sweep		
	Standardised services topped up to meet	Augmenting mainstream services with	Programming core service provision relative to needs.

	diverse needs.	non-mainstream provision.	
Achieving equality of outcomes.	<u>Yes</u> Can adjust service top-ups according to wide range of levels of needs. However, requires to be the underlying rationale for this way of working.	<u>Yes</u> Can give intensive help to designated areas. But areas in need, but outside the designation, can miss out.	<u>Yes, strongly</u> However, only when enough of the right kind of service is provided. It is important that 'bending the spend' is commensurate with need.
Able to be sustained in the face of management, political or financial change.	<u>Can be difficult</u> Easier to trim top-up services than reconfigure programmed, so susceptible to any of these changes.	<u>Not really</u> Dependent on the availability of 'special' funds and on the political will and management capacity to both win and use these.	<u>Yes</u> The aim to provide a clean sweep should be strongly embedded in service allocation and working practices.
Cost-effective (i.e. not achieved at undue cost).	<u>No</u> May be a more expensive mode of provision as responsive services more expensive than programmed.	<u>Possibly</u> Likely to be closely costed and may support mainstream services in working effectively. However, additional costs involved in bidding for and managing any additional resource.	<u>Yes</u> Likely to be cost-effective, where programming reduces the need for responsive or special resources.
Flexibility (capable of strategic adjustment and development).	<u>Yes</u> Top-up services can be readily adjusted to tackle needs.	<u>Possibly</u> Flexibility tends to be limited to the designated areas, but additional funding sources may allow for new approaches to be devised and rolled out.	<u>Possibly</u> Flexibility needs to be built into the system, in order that adjustments can be made as necessary.
Responsiveness (to ad hoc needs and demands).	<u>Yes</u> A very responsive way of working which allows new or unforeseen needs and demands to be met almost as they arise.	<u>Yes</u> Can be highly responsive to needs in designated areas. May be possible for short-run redeployment of these resources in other areas to cope	<u>Possibly</u> Needs to be supplemented with some responsive provision in order that unforeseen needs and demands can be met.

		with unforeseen needs.	
Transparency (reveals the 'true' relationships between neighbourhood contexts, service inputs and outcomes).	<u>No</u> Reliance on expensive top-up services may make the outcomes in more challenging areas appear more costly than they actually are.	<u>Possibly</u> Likely that the additional resources and services being provided will be obvious and impacts auditable. However, beware of mainstream services being withdrawn from initiative areas (i.e. substitution), making them appear more costly.	<u>Yes</u> Should give an accurate assessment of the relative service costs of achieving a given outcome in diverse neighbourhoods. Can be packaged in ways which address political sensitivities over targeting need.

In terms of table 1 above, Aberdeen City Council is already programming core service provision relative to needs.

6.5 Effective Strategies

The report summarises a number of possible strategies and states:

- The most straightforward targeting strategy is to vary cleansing frequency with need. This approach is already adopted in all authorities to some degree: it is standard, for example, for city and town centres to be cleansed more often than other kinds of area. However, political and local sensitivities can be provoked when frequencies are varied between different kinds of residential neighbourhood. A final but important point is that the capacity of operational staff to provide a particular street with a specific actual frequency of service will be determined by the overall size of their workload.
- A complementary strategy to varying service frequency is, therefore, the engineering of the apparent workload of operatives. Thus, the distribution of dwellings and street length between operative workloads should reflect the distribution of 'risk factors' and the actual level of effort required to maintain acceptable cleanliness thresholds. This approach to targeting can be more attuned to political sensitivities as it need not draw attention to the fact that targeting is taking place.
- For some authorities, rebalancing expenditure between responsive and programmed service could result in an approach targeted more towards need. Indeed, providing more programmed service in deprived areas might be more cost-effective than deploying significant levels of catch-up responsive service.
- Operational staff need to have a certain degree of flexibility so that they can deploy their efforts where they are needed. This might mean ensuring that the

right operative is in the right beat, as not all might be willing or able to use their discretion in order to improve outcomes. There is a need to balance top-down planning and organisation with a system which recognises the value of local and experiential knowledge.

- Use manual sweeping where it is necessary and mechanised sweeping where there are scale advantages. Indeed, as machines become obsolete, the strategic use of manual sweeping in areas of higher need may be more effective than mechanical systems.

All these effective strategies have been incorporated into Aberdeen's street cleaning plans and programmes as described in section 6.2 and have ultimately led to the success shown in 'closing the gap'.

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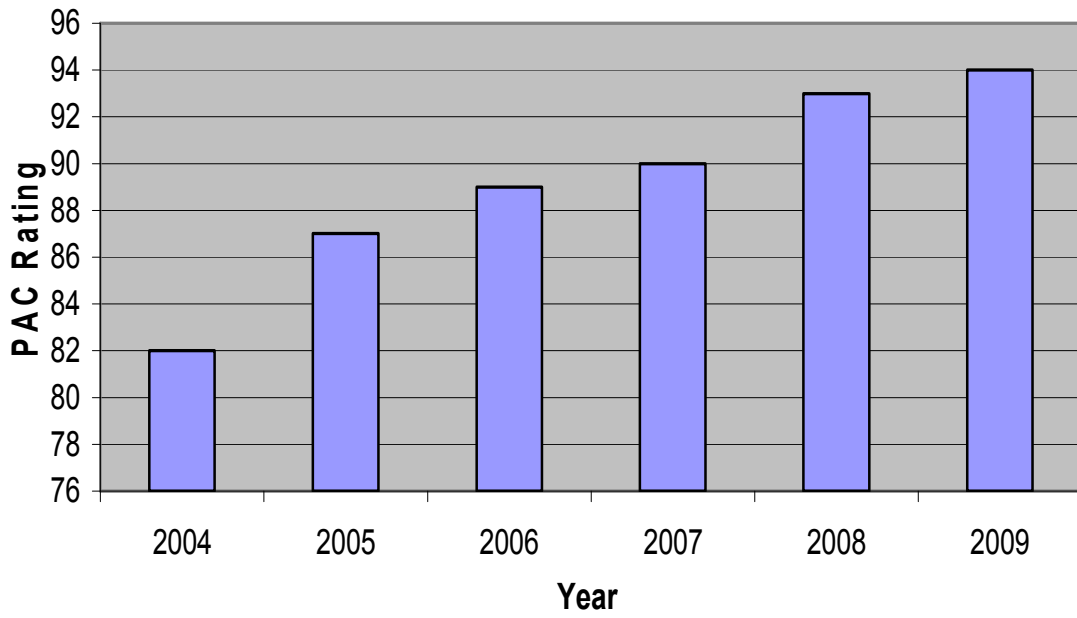
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8.BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (i) Appendix 1 – Chart showing average Pac since 2004.
- (ii) Appendix 2 – Charts showing comparative levels of street cleanliness between affluent and less affluent areas since 2007/08.
- (iii) “Street Cleanliness In Deprived and Better –Off Neighbourhoods” : (November 2009 –Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

Appendix 1

PAC Rating 2004 - 2009



Appendix 2

Chart 1 - Less Affluent Areas

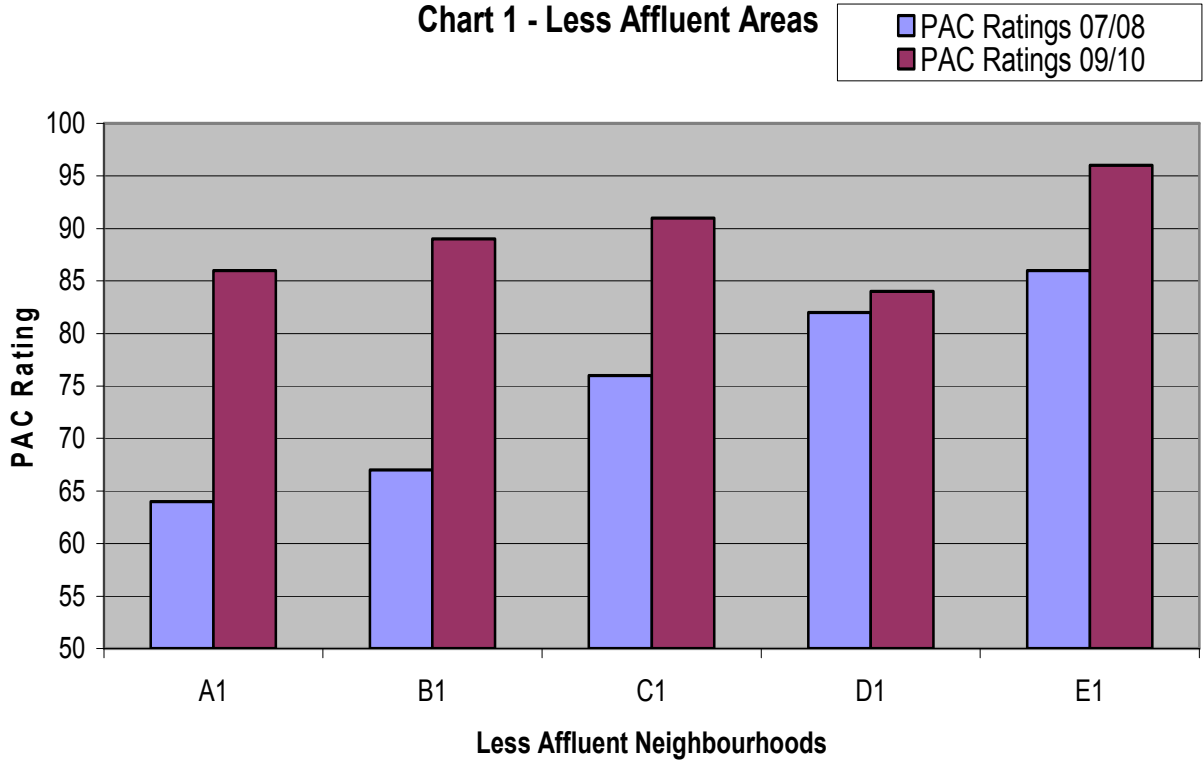


Chart 2 - Affluent Areas

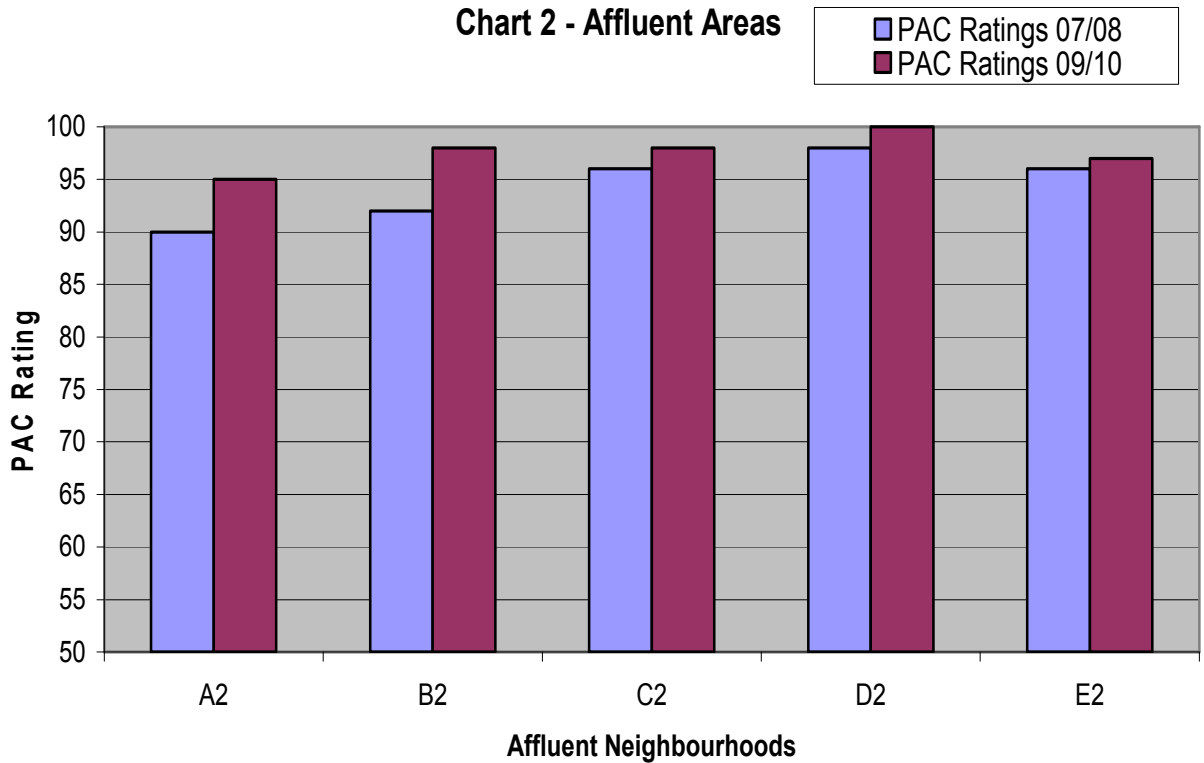


Chart 3 - Closing the Gap Aberdeen

