MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

Local environmental quality – the 'Cleaner, Safer, Greener' agenda – matters to the people we serve, whether as political representatives or service managers, a fact repeatedly confirmed by countless opinion surveys.

This is why the Government, in the Sustainable Development Strategy 2005, committed to provide better joined up information on the local environment, where it matters to the public – namely, where they live.

This report is a realisation of that commitment, a commitment not only to see that councils have the best management information available to them to build on improvements to the quality of the local environment, but also for residents to judge for themselves an individual council's performance.

Since 2001, the Government has commissioned ENCAMS to undertake the annual Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE), to provide Defra with relevant and reliable information on the state of the local environment. We use this information to develop policies, direct support to councils and to allocate priorities for action on the basis of actual evidence.

To help take improvements further, in April 2006 I asked ENCAMS to undertake not only the national LEQSE, but also to increase the size of the survey so that we could provide every English council with its own individual report (this being your council's) between 2007 and 2008.

As you will see, like the LEQSE, this report provides a detailed picture of how your council is performing on a range of local environmental quality issues, including: litter, detritus, graffiti, fly-posting, condition of highways and street furniture, right down to the condition and management of your bin stock.

However, this report isn't just a snapshot assessment of your council's performance, it is more than that. This report allows you to compare your performance with national and regional benchmarks, it provides you with detailed management information about which problems are greatest, where they are worst, who or what are causing them, and how they can best be overcome. All information to help you improve services still further so that your council, along with the government, is better placed to respond to the demands of the people that we serve, and to help us deliver the truly cleaner, safer, greener places that we aspire to.

I do hope that your council benefits from this report, and along with the support package that is being offered by ENCAMS it helps you realise improvements where needed, so that we can continue to report to the public on improvements to the quality of the local environment. After all, by publishing this report, along with those of other councils, on the Directgov website (www.direct.gov.uk) the public will rightly be able to judge our performance themselves.

Jonathan Shaw MP

Minister for Marine, Landscape & Rural Affairs and Minister for the South East

