



Meeting: ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area: Environment & Regeneration
Economy, Enterprise and Transport

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DRAFT REPORT

DRAFT REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF REFUSE & RECYCLING

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny review into Refuse and Recycling undertaken by the Environment & Economy Select Committee.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

- 2.1 At the Scrutiny evaluation and planning event in February 2013 and having canvassed Members for potential Scrutiny work plan items the following issues were identified as potential scrutiny items for consideration during 2013-14:

- Bin Collections during and after snow/adverse weather conditions
- Recycling
- Car Park Charges/Bands and the operation of all car parks*
- Communication with the public including residents groups on Environment issues such as Environment Policy on trees, hedges, removal of graffiti
- Parking on grass verges

- 2.1.1 During discussions at its meeting on 11 June, the Environment & Economy Select Committee considered taking up the suggestion of the Scrutiny evaluation and planning event to look at a broad theme of Refuse and Recycling. Accordingly Members suggested the topic of Refuse and Recycling as its subject for scrutiny which the Committee agreed on.

2.2 Scope and Focus of the review

- 2.2.1 The Committee meet and agreed a scope for the review which should look at the following areas:

- How can the Council avoid more use of Landfill? Are we running out of places to take the residual rubbish?
- Look at the options on cardboard and why the change to the service was necessary

- What are the current recycling figures and can we improve recycling i.e. are we at maximum capacity or is there still room for improvement?
- Residents understanding of and co-operation with the service?
- Developing a policy for missed bins collections and the use of Customer Relations Management (CRM) data looking at the causes, numbers, locations and any patterns?
- Communications during severe weather disruptions to service
- Compare the service with a comparative Council with an in-house service, either locally (e.g. Dacorum) or outside Herts (Harlow/Basildon/Milton Keynes) and interview them as a “critical friend”
- Look at the impact of Alternate Weekly Collection?
- Is there a problem with “neighbour disputes” concerning rubbish e.g. rubbish put in someone else’s bin; rubbish not put out but accumulating and blowing around; rubbish just dumped
- The future and options for the Nappy Collection Service, including the promotion of alternatives to the use of disposables. Is the nappy collection service cost effective?
- The future of ‘on street’ recycling in the New Town given the level of vandalism meted out to recycling bins in the town centre
- The cost of replacement of waste and recycling receptacles for residential properties
- Complaints management

2.3 Process of the review

2.3.1 The following Members conducted the review:

Councillors Jackie Hollywell (Chair), Robin Parker (Vice Chair), Lorraine Bell, Phil Bibby, Jim Brown, John Mead, Pam Stuart and Brian Underwood.

2.3.2 The Committee met on 6 occasions to undertake the review on 10 July, 6 August, 11 September (informal meeting) 30 September, 21 October and 6 January 2014.

2.3.3 The Committee received written and oral evidence from the following people:

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr John Gardner
- SBC Head of Environmental Services, Lee Myers
- SBC Service Manager, Simon Martin
- SBC Performance Manager, Chris Dorrow
- SBC Recycling Officer, Tim Fitzsimons
- SBC Environmental Campaigns Officer, Lizzie Moring
- Dacorum Borough Council Head of Environmental Services, Craig Thorpe as the reviews “critical friend”
- Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, Partnership Development Manager, Duncan Jones
- HCC Head of Waste Management, Matthew King

3 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Conclusions of the Environment & Economy Select Committee

3.1.1 Based on the input provided by the witnesses the Committee have made the following conclusions.

3.2 Missed Bins

- 3.2.1 Members expressed interest in how the missed bin service is operated at the 'critical friend' authority (Dacorum Borough Council), who operate a "justified or unjustified" service. At Dacorum unjustified call outs are for requests to revisit a property or business where bins have been put out after the collection has been made. Dacorum invested in new technology which enabled collection staff to report back to the Customer Service Centre in real time and unjustified missed bins were collected when time allowed rather than as a matter of priority, which has resulted in significant savings in fuel and staffing costs.
- 3.2.2 It is estimated that cost to the Council for the whole Street Smart service is almost £43k per a year (excluding the cost to the Customer Service Centre). A proportion of the overall cost is spent on dealing with the administrative burden of responding to missed bins and the cost of resending the refuse freight vehicle.
- 3.2.3 25% of missed bin disputes relate to recycling contamination. In these cases the resident reports their bin as having not been collected or "missed" but the reason it has not been collected is that on inspection by the operatives the resident has contaminated the recycling by putting an inappropriate item(s) into the recycling bin.
- 3.2.4 The context of missed bins is important. When the number of missed bins is viewed against the number of overall bins collected each month it's actually a tiny proportion of the number of collections. In a typical month the service collects 192,000 bin collections, from some 36,000 properties of these between 400 and 650 a month are classified as missed. So although there are occasions of service failure, these are by and large a tiny proportion of the overall number of bins collected and of these only a very small amount of missed bins are as a direct result of service failure. Also a proportion of the missed bins are as a result of blocked roads where it is impossible for the refuse vehicle to access the road because of a local temporary obstruction such as inappropriately parked vehicles or roadworks.
- 3.2.5 With the Council's new Client Relationship Manager (CRM) software it is now possible to monitor more closely than before the behaviour of residents and of the wider refuse and recycling service. The CRM now gives officers the ability to interrogate the software to accurately monitor what the collection service is provided on a street by street hourly basis. It would therefore be possible to develop policies for refuse and recycling with some degree of accuracy based on the numbers collected by the CRM.

3.3 Inclement Weather – Service Disruption

- 3.3.1 During periods of prolonged severe weather as has been the case in recent winters there are unavoidable service disruptions caused by the weather. During these periods it is difficult to provide a full service as snow and impacted ice causes significant safety risks with heavy refuse vehicles.
- 3.3.2 The problem of snow and ice in the past did not have such an impact on the service before the introduction of a town wide wheelie bin service. As previously it was possible for the grounds maintenance staff to be redirected to help with refuse work and pile rubbish bags to create a "stack out" at accessible locations that the refuse vehicle could reach. This is no longer possible, as the refuse vehicle needs to drive along each road to collect the wheelie bins from each property.

- 3.3.3 Residents can be under the misapprehension that the service is being suspended too easily as they can see cars negotiating roads in a particular area where the service has been suspended or they are aware of little disruption in another neighbouring authority. This is because cars can far more easily and safely negotiate snow affected roads compared to very heavy refuse vehicles and also the amount of snow and drifting can vary significantly from area to area.
- 3.3.4 Every effort is taken to continue to provide a refuse collection service when it is apparent that the normal refuse and recycling service is likely to be disrupted by the weather. During these periods recycling teams are redirected into providing a refuse only service as a minimum. The reason for this is that dry recyclables cause no health issues if the resident has followed the advice regarding rinsing out cans and bottles.
- 3.3.5 During severe weather periods the Council's Inclement Weather Plan is used. Officers use a range of sources to help them decide if the plan should be used, these include weather forecasts direct from the MET Office, HCC updates on roads, other local authorities and local knowledge. The decision to suspend the service is based on discussions with the drivers on a day by day basis and the final decision is left with the driver.
- 3.3.6 The impact on the service following the decision to suspend the service in particular areas has a varied impact. It requires services to be caught up or in some circumstances completely missed and only revisited at its next scheduled collection. During these periods residents are affected which gives rise to complaints and where the service is continued there are sometime accidents with the refuse vehicles, so keeping the service running has an impact.
- 3.3.7 Measures are taken to minimise the disruption by providing clear and timely communications with the public via a number of outlets, this includes providing up to date information on the Council's Web site and on road side signs, adverts on Jack FM (local radio station), twitter and other social media and a free text service.

3.4 **Replacement or extra recycling bins**

- 3.4.1 The service currently provides replacement or additional refuse and recycling bins to all households in the town that request them at no cost to the resident. The Council spends approximately £50,000 a year on all receptacles. The majority of this cost goes towards replacement or additional recycling bins. The reason why residents request additional bins is that they become broken or are reported as stolen.
- 3.4.2 The Council's existing policy regarding replacement or additional bins and recycling boxes is to provide them on request free of charge. It is recognised that over time there will be some damage to the recycling boxes and provision for this is covered within the services budget. However, some households appear to suffer breakages and stolen bins more than others. The options appear to be (i) Continue with no change to the current service (ii) Continue with no change to the current service but monitor their provision via the CRM and if there are reoccurrences at specific addresses inform the resident that any further requests will result in a charge for any replacement bins; (iii) Introduce a payment for any additional recycling receptacle boxes and refuse wheelie bins, the first set of any boxes and wheelie bins remain free.

3.5 **Nappy collection service**

3.5.1 Around 600 families use the disposable nappy collection service. The disposable nappy collection service was brought in as a measure to deal with resident's concerns regarding smelly bins when the refuse and recycling service adopted an alternate weekly collection service. Stevenage is the only authority in Hertfordshire to provide a free disposable nappy collection service (one other authority provides a paid for service). Over the period since the service has operated over 1500 households have been on the collection list and over time for varying reasons, the numbers using the service have fluctuated as in time families no longer require the service as the children grow up. There are currently 544 households who are using the purple sacks nappy collection scheme.

3.5.2 The initial potential public health risks and environmental health nuisance appears to be overstated given that other authorities have adopted an alternate weekly collection but not provided a specific disposable nappy collection service with no adverse environmental effects. Therefore Members are of the view that the business case for continuing to provide a service is not strong and the current use of resources to provide the service could be better used elsewhere, perhaps in efforts to help enhance the card collection service, which is a greater priority and concern to local residents given the changes to the service, or the promotion of modern real terry nappy service.

3.6 **Complaints**

3.6.1 Members considered the specific details of complaints raised during 2011-2012 & 2012-2013. Members also looked at the overall statistical analysis of the complaints. The overall number of complaints made are low, although there was a spike in the number of complaints for the waste recycling service following the severe ice and snow in January and February 2013. During a comparative period between January and July in 2012 and 2013 the service received just 52 complaints in 2012 and 103 service complaints for Waste Recycling in 2013. Missed bin figures for the same half year period remained static at 48 for 2012 and 42 for 2013.

3.6.2 During the review Members were advised that when the new Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) of the Customer Services complaints system is in place, complaints will be logged under various categories thereby enabling Officers to address the issues raised. Members were keen to look at the data collected following the first 6 months of the introduction of the new complaints system, at which time officers will have some trend data to report to Members.

3.7 **Recycling in flat blocks**

3.7.1 Members are interested in the survey that officers are undertaking to establish recycling requirements for residents in flats and tower blocks. Members were advised that any modification to the properties to accommodate any recycling facilities would require investments which would need to be drawn from the Housing Revenue Account.

3.8 **Cardboard recycling**

3.8.1 Previously along with all 10 districts in the County Waste Partnership, Stevenage collected cardboard as part of its kerbside green waste composting scheme.

However, in 2011, due to national changes in the nature of acceptable materials allowed for composting, the Herts Waste Partnership reviewed its arrangements. The reason for the change in policy follows national concern over the high levels of contamination to animal feedstock in the compost that was being produced at the recycling facilities. The contamination was coming from the cardboard which included plastics and metals. Following this review process the Herts Waste Partnership agreed to adopt a new composting strategy which meant that cardboard could no longer be included in the material sent for commercial composting, but would be collected separately and sold for remanufacture into paper and cardboard products.

- 3.8.2 The Committee interviewed the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, Partnership Development Manager, Duncan Jones and the SBC Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr John Gardner and received a written response to Members questions from the Head of Waste Management HCC, Matthew King. Duncan Jones challenged SBC and other waste authorities in the Partnership to come up with robust joint initiatives to
- 3.8.3 Members of the Committee were of the view that the changes to cardboard recycling had had a negative impact in the short term, both financially and in terms of our relationship with our residents who have complained about the change of service. Members were therefore keen to hold to account the decision makers regarding this change to the service. Members of the Committee were in agreement with the Council's Portfolio Holder for the Environment who has called for changes to the cardboard / composting contract required scrutiny at a County level. Overall all authorities, including the County Council should be looking to send less waste to landfill. Ultimately home composting was the most economical method of dealing with green waste and should be encouraged if possible.

3.9 **Reduce and Reuse**

- 3.9.1 The Committee looked at what the Council can do to reduce waste including issues such as helping to promote less use of plastic bags, working with retail, promotional campaigns, and decisions about the Council's own practices.
- 3.9.2 The Council is part of WasteAware (Herts Waste Partnership) and together the Herts Waste Partnership are working in partnership with national companies (supermarkets, recycling companies etc.) who are looking to launch national campaigns on plastic bags and packaging. Members supported the view that the Council's best use of its own resources in this area regarding campaigns to reduce the use of disposable plastic bags is to ensure that the Council supports the WasteAware work and national campaigns.
- 3.9.3 Regarding promoting the messages to reduce waste and reuse the Council through its Waste Wizard popup promotional tent encourages residents to think about their consumer habits, including:
- Promoting the reduction to food waste utilising the national 'Love Food Hate Waste' Campaign from WRAP (using up leftovers, writing shopping lists/shop smart, understanding food labels, storing food properly)
 - Smart Shopping- how to reduce the packaging waste you get and avoiding buying disposable items such as razors, plates & cups, paper napkins, nappies, batteries etc
 - Promote options to hire, borrow and share e.g. hiring suits, car sharing and borrowing items used rarely such as gardening equipment

- Promote real nappies to reduce nappies sent to landfill
- Promoting going paperless - billing, no junk mail
- Packaging free present ideas

3.9.4 Regarding encouraging “re-use” the Council through awareness campaigns encourages residents to think about reusing items such as:

- Reusable shopping bags to eliminate carrier bags- we have these which we give away as freebies
- Reusable lunch boxes and water bottles & link waste free lunch campaign to schools and work places
- Promote Stevenage Furniture Recycling Scheme
- Promote reuse websites such as freegle and freecycle
- Encourage buying/acquiring second hand e.g. charity shops, swishing events (clothes swapping, take back events, car boot sales, hand-me-downs)
- Promote Christmas reuse- swap shop of unwanted gifts, using old cloth or newspaper to wrap gifts, gift tags cut out of old cards
- Repair broken items such as electrical goods or find a new use for broken things e.g. broken handle on a mug- use it for storing pens or as a plant pot instead

3.9.5 Recycling Campaigns

3.10.1 The Council engages in recycling campaigns and promotes this through its Waste Wizard corporate marketing tool as described above at paragraph 3.9 Reduce and Reuse.

3.10 Hertfordshire Waste Partnership - WasteAware Challenge regarding closer joint working

3.10.1 Members appreciated the input to the review provided by Duncan Jones, Herts Waste Partnership regarding the need for the partners to work closely together to deliver jointly planned and negotiated outcomes that can provide the most efficient outcomes for residents. To this end Members continue to support the Council position regarding developing closer working relationships with the partner authorities and having an active role in the initiatives of the Waste Partnership. However, the Committee supports the view of the Council’s Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment that at this time the service remains best delivered at a local level so that benefits of a local, flexible service and workforce can still be utilised.

3.11 Equalities & Diversity issues

3.11.1 Members asked officers what provisions were made for residents who have difficulty accessing the service and presenting their bins for collection. The Council provides an enhanced service for residents who request assistance because of disabilities. The assisted service is available on request at no extra charge to the resident where refuse and recycling bins can be collected from the home.

3.12 Conclusion

3.12.1 In conclusion the Select Committee were of the view that the following issues could be considered by the Executive Portfolio Holder and Environmental Services Officers as areas of potential future development:

(i) Officers should consider further developing the existing policy for dealing with missed bins;

(ii) during times of inclement weather service disruption the action plan should be widely publicised;

(iii) Officers should consider developing the options listed at paragraph 3.4.2 in the report regarding policy options for replacement bins;

(iv) Officers should consider withdrawing the nappy collection service or directly charge residents to continue to fund the current service;

(v) Officers should monitor the complaints relating to the service via the CSC Customer Relationship Manager IT module and report back to Members on the performance following a period of six months to one year;

(vi) Officers should report back to Members on the outcome of the consultation with residents regarding recycling in flat blocks;

(vii) Members understand the issues surrounding the necessary changes to the cardboard recycling following the Environment Agency's concerns over the level of contamination to the animal feed product produced from Districts green waste, and fully support the policy of the Council and the HertsWaste Partnership in this matter, however disruptive this is to the Council's recycling figures and revenue and would have welcomed an earlier review of the issue by the County Council;

(viii) Members fully support initiatives to encourage residents to "reduce and reuse"

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 That the Environment & Economy Select Committee considers the findings of the review, contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Environment & Regeneration Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director (Environment) and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.

4.2 That notwithstanding that each inclement weather incident produces a different outcome, that Officers look to draw together an agreed action plan that can be followed during inclement weather so that Members and the public are kept informed of the impact to services and that this is displayed prominently and updated regularly on the Council's web site.

4.3 That Officers investigate how the review's 'Critical Friend' from Dacorum Borough Council have managed to establish 5000 residents to sign up to the text scheme, with a view to increasing the Council's own parallel scheme, which would help during periods of service disruption.

4.4 That Officers report back to Members on the data trends that have been recorded with complaints following at least six months of using the Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) IT software.

- 4.5 That Officers develop further the Policy for missed bins. Officers to consider adopting the 'Critical Friend' Dacorum Borough Council's approach to missed bins, which involves classifying them as "justified or unjustified" as described at paragraph 3.2.1 The Policy could determine when and whether to revisit an unjustified missed bin at a time that is convenient to the service and therefore not incur any additional expense. Members recommend that officers use the experience described by Dacorum as a starting point for further developing the policy for missed bins, including recycling contamination, with a view to making savings in future years.
- 4.6 That the service continue to replace broken or stolen/misplaced bins but monitor patterns via the CRM from specific addresses for both commercial and residential to challenge any misuse of the service, and that consideration be given to charging for requests for extra bins, as described at paragraph 3.4.2
- 4.7 That officers consider a pilot to provide a smaller residual waste bin to new properties or for replacement bins to encourage recycling.
- 4.8 Consider withdrawing the disposable nappy collection service and making a direct cashable saving of £3,500 for the purple refuse sacks.
- 4.9 Investigate alternative simpler vandal proof on street recycling facilities for the town centre and community shopping areas around the town to replace the current vandalised facilities.
- 4.10 That Officers provide Members with the results of the surveys currently being undertaken with residents of flats and tower blocks into the recycling available at these properties.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

If Members recommend reducing or completely removing the nappy collection service then there would be a saving in the region of £3,500 cashable savings to the refuse and recycling service which could be partially reinvested into enhanced recycling campaigns or taken as a direct saving, if enhanced campaigns can be funded from existing budgets. There could also be scope for some savings to be made if a justified and unjustified missed bins policy is introduction.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications for this report other than the wider obligations of the County wide Waste Partnership which the Council is signed up to as a partner.

5.3 Equalities Implications

The service provides an enhanced assisted service for residents with mobility or other incapacitating disabilities to help them access the service. Removal of or

charging for the disposable nappy collection service, could have an adverse impact on households with infants.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Notes of the Committee meetings held on 10 July, 6 August, 11 September (informal meeting) 30 September, 21 October and 19 November 2013 (informal meeting) and 6 January 2014.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Scrutiny Scoping Proforma

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