

Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel – 2 April 2009

Preliminary Assessment of the New Waste Collection Service

Portfolio: Councillor Rachel Walker - Environment

Service: Street Pride

Wards: All

1. Summary of report

On 19 September 2007, Cabinet approved changes in the waste collection service comprising the retention of weekly collections of refuse using a 140 litre wheeled bin; fortnightly collection of co-mingled recyclable materials including paper, glass, cans, plastics and cardboard in a 240 litre wheeled bin to all low rise properties; and the fortnightly collection of garden waste in a 240 litre wheeled bin to existing residents.

The new service was implemented in two phases:

Phase 1 bins and information packs were delivered to residents in January 2009 with first collections commencing on 2 February 2009 (Northern half of the borough).

Phase 2 bins and information packs were delivered to residents in February 2009 with first collections commencing on 2 March 2009 (Southern half of the borough).

The service is now fully operational and every household has had a minimum two collections for recycling and four collections for rubbish every four weeks.

Early figures show that the new scheme could achieve an increase of circa 13,000 tonnes of additional recycling materials collected which is 100% more than under the old scheme. These suggest that our target for recycling in 2009/10 will be exceeded.

This report identifies the important initiatives and the main issue encountered during implementation and identifies future considerations.

Important Initiatives included

- The use of a five person Encouragement Team who dealt with approximately 3,300 contacts, covering queries such as capacity of containers, storage of containers, delivery of leaflets, materials to be collected and capacity issues. 3,300 contacts is 3.2% of the 102,000 households scheduled to receive the new collection service

- The use of a Reactive Response Team “Mop up Crew”, to deal with missed collections and side waste issues and the delivery of new grey bins or 240 litre bins to larger families quickly. Most complaints were dealt with within 24 hours.

Main Issues Encountered by Street Pride and the Contact Centre

- Initial teething problems with new vehicles including minor breakdowns and adjustment of pressures
- Employees learning new techniques
- New operating arrangements at Greenstar, the Materials Recycling Facility at Aldridge
- Households not receiving their new grey bin or information packs
- Calls from Households advising the capacity of the recycling bin was too small or needed a weekly recycling collection
- Calls regarding missed collections due to contamination
- Calls from people not included on the brown bin garden waste collection service

Future issues that will still need to be considered include

- Use of Enforcement in areas where contamination is high and households fail to comply with policies
- Capacity of recycling containers for families with six people
- Further impacts on partners such as Links to Work

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Scrutiny notes the content of the report.

3. Background information

3.1 On implementation of the revised collection service in February 2009 residents at single residential properties received the following collection service:

- (i) The current 240 litre green coloured bin previously used for general waste is now used to store all the dry recyclates that households generate and will include glass, paper, cans and foil, plastic bottles and cardboard. This is collected on a fortnightly basis.
- (ii) The new 140 litre grey coloured wheeled bin is for general rubbish and collected on a weekly basis.
- (iii) The current garden waste for compost scheme, 240 litre brown coloured wheeled bin, remained unchanged for the 82000 properties that receive this service.

The new collection service was set out to maximise participation in the recycling service and reduce the amount of general waste sent to landfill. This was to help

the Council meet statutory recycling and landfill diversion targets. It also enabled materials such as plastics and cardboard to be collected at the kerbside, that was prohibited by the green box collection arrangements due to volume and the configuration of the kerbside collection vehicles.

4. Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

Waste diverted from landfill reduces the risk and potential liability for the Authority to pay LATS penalties. LATS penalties can be incurred at £150 for every tonne of waste delivered to landfill above an agreed limit. In 2009/10 without the introduction of the new waste collection arrangements an additional 10,000 tonnes of waste could go to landfill. If the agreed limit was exceeded by 10,000 tonnes, penalties of £1.5 million could be incurred.

The service was delivered within existing revenue budgets with additional investments during the implementation (2008/09) for publicity, literature, additional temporary resources and a capital investment for the purchase of the grey 140litre bins and replacement ten recycling vehicles that were historically funded through a Defra grant in 2003/04 when the original green box collection service was implemented.

4.2 Legal:

In respect of Legal considerations, Legal and Procurement advice has been taken throughout the process to ensure probity. Policies have been the subject of consultation with Pinsent Masons who are advising on this matter and their recommendations have been reflected in the new policies. Further advice will be sought as necessary.

4.3 Staffing:

A reduction of seven employees has been possible due to the implementation of the new service. This was a result of wheeled bin system resulting in collection staff not having to separate the recyclables on the kerbside. This brought the service in line with the other wheeled bin schemes for general rubbish and garden waste collections. No redundancies have been made as the reduction in posts has been achieved by the filling of Vacant Posts and a reduction in the use of Agency staff.

The service transition has also enabled greater diversity and use of labour as all schemes are principally a standard wheeled bin operation and the fleet has also been standardised to conventional refuse collection compaction vehicles as opposed to specialist kerbside sorting vehicles. This has also assisted vehicle availability.

5. Citizen impact

The improvements to the new service have made significant changes in the way that residents' waste is collected.

Policies specifically address risks associated with health and safety and easement of participation and presentation of bins in that:

- (i) The new service eliminates the need to lift and carry recycling boxes for both residents and collection staff alike in accordance with guidance from the Health & Safety Executive.
- (ii) All receptacles have wheels and lids.
- (iii) Closed lid policies avoid overloading and the risk of waste falling out of containers onto the street scene.
- (iv) No side waste discourages vermin and prevents wind blown litter.
- (v) Reduced need for storage in relation to multiple numbers of boxes that would have been required to facilitate materials such as plastics and cardboard.

Initially teething problems were experienced during the implementation of the service, but given the size, scale and public impact of the service, there have been far fewer than anticipated.

A five person communication encouragement team is in place to respond to calls, queries and concerns from members of the public, visiting households where necessary, dealing with issues such as capacity, additional bins, and materials to be collected etc. These are issues which have not been dealt with by literature previously delivered or enquiries via the contact centre.

A reactive response resource was identified to deal with missed collections and side waste issues in the first few weeks of the new service to keep complaints to a minimum while the new service becomes established. This resource was successful in ensuring that most complaints were responded to effectively within 24 hours.

It was anticipated that the new service would have a significant impact for the Contact Centre and Street Pride. The main queries were:

- People advising they have not received a new grey bin
- People advising they have not received information pack and literature on the new service
- Contamination of the Green recycling bin
- Side waste with the new grey bin
- Dropped recycling collections due to change in service from boxes to bins
- Resident not understanding aspects of the service such as what materials could be put in what bin

Calls/contacts were monitored in the following categories:

- Missed collections)
- Properties not received bins) Dealt with by Operational Team
- Large families/Capacity Issues)

- Storage arrangements at Flats)
- Understanding of new service/leaflets) Education Team
- Families of 5 with insufficient capacity)

Around 3,300 enquiries were received by the Encouragement Team dealing with issues such as, No Leaflet, Wrong Leaflet, Capacity issues (around 3.2%).

Additional contingency resources were identified from within Street Pride to minimise the impact of the implementation of the new service these include:-

- 2 No "Mop up" crews to deal with missed collections and side waste issues
- 1 No Bin Delivery/Bin Collection crew
- Access to Litter Hit Squad
- Admin support from Policy and Grounds Maintenance Teams

Issues for the operational teams included:

- Minor breakdowns with new vehicles
- Poor vehicle pressures which resulted in lower payloads due to the composition of the recycling material that did not compact as much as general rubbish.
- Employees learning new binning techniques (recycling box collection staff transferring to bin collections)
- Turnaround times at the Materials Recycling Facility.

This did result in some collections being missed on the scheduled collection day, and these issues are still being monitored and developed to ensure continuity of service.

Issue for the future:

Enforcement may need consideration in the future in relation to residents who persistently refuse to adopt the principals of the new service and contaminate recycling materials or for those residents who choose to opt out of recycling. Cabinet have previously approved policy.

Capacity of recycling containers for larger families of six or more. Although waste composition studies indicate sufficient capacity for residents and larger grey bins have been made available for families of 6 or more in permanent residence at a property, early enquires indicate that even larger families are coping with the smaller grey bin. We are however experiencing enquiries in relation to extra recycling capacity. This will be subject to further review around September/October 2009 once the service has been fully imbedded. In the mean time residents have been advised:

Residents (six in the family only) who states they cannot cope with capacity of the green recycling bin are encouraged to create extra capacity by:

- Squashing drinks cans
- Squashing plastic bottles and re-seal with the top
- Breaking down cardboard boxes and packaging into smaller pieces
- Placing items loose in the bin as opposed to bagged

They are also encouraged to use bring sites and recycling centres as opposed to placing recyclables in the grey bin.

The service may also impact in the future on other services such as the plastic bottle collection arrangements with Links to Work, although it is too early to predict the level of impact and at present their primary feed stock of materials is via the household waste recycling centres and schools establishments which may remain unchanged. Street Pride is keeping in regular communication with Links to Work and is exploring other opportunities in services/materials for the future to aid sustainability.

6. Community safety

None arising directly from this report.

7. Environmental impact

Landfill waste produces landfill gases which contribute towards global warming and have significant negative impact upon the environment. Walsall Council is committed to reducing the amount of biodegradable waste sent to landfill. Recycling and composting are very important in meeting the challenge of diverting waste from landfill.

The new service will make a positive impact to climate change, reducing the amount of residual waste to landfill and reducing the number of vehicle movements on the highway. Many residents are keen to play their part in tackling the problems associated with climate change and the proposed improvements to the waste collection service will further assist them to do this.

Some of the individual policies address environmental issues in that the preclusion of side waste minimises wind blown litter and vermin and encourages waste minimisation. The move away from a box collection service will minimise or eliminate altogether vermin and wind blown litter. Addressing issues such as contamination and informing residents on acceptable materials for each bin will increase recycling participation and performance and minimise the amount of rejected loads at the re-processing facilities that could otherwise end up in landfill if high levels of contamination were present.

8. Performance and risk management issues

In 1999, the European Union Landfill Directive set targets to reduce the amount of Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) to be land filled. The UK Government has introduced the Directive through the Waste and Emissions Trading Act (2003). The Act forms a legal framework to control the amount of waste sent to landfill and sets up a system of tradable permits. Landfill allowance trading scheme (LATS), restricts the amount of waste that authorities can send to landfill by allocating specific 'landfill allowances'.

The Government's waste strategy aims to minimise the production of waste, and either recycle or compost as much as the remaining waste as practicable. This approach is reflected through relevant Best Value Performance Indicators, Defra's PSA targets and the Governments Waste Strategy for England 2007.

Failure to meet Government targets will negatively impact on Walsall becoming an excellent local authority.

In 2007/08 a rate 31% for recycling and composting was achieved. It was anticipated with the introduction of the new service a further 10,000 tonnes of waste will be recycled. This would achieve a recycling rate of approximately 40% for 2009/10, an increase of 9%.

Early figures within the first couple of months of collection indicate that Walsall may well exceed its original predicted targets and as much as a further 13,000 tonnes could be achieved resulting in and recycling performance of around 42%. This is an anticipated 100% increase in recycling materials collected at the kerbside. Although we have no performance measure for participation, feedback from operational teams indicates that the in excess of 90% of residents must now be participating as opposed to around 60% historically.

8.1 Risk:

8.2 Performance management:

The proposed policies place emphasis on the prevention and re-use of waste. As such, they will help meet the landfill directive diversion targets, with particular emphasis on target years under the landfill allowance trading scheme being 2010, 2013, 2020, and so deliver on the Council's obligations under the National Waste Strategy for England.

Early indications suggest that with the implementation of the new service and the continued reduction in waste arisings Walsall's tonnage for 2009/10 is likely to be circa 20,000 tonnes below the allowance.

9. Equality implications

Waste and recycling services affect all sectors of the local community and future provision will help to ensure equality of choice and opportunity for all.

An Equality impact assessment for domestic household collections including refuse, garden waste and recycling was completed in 2006/07. A Key recommendation as a result of the assessment was that options for supplying lids for the boxes of the dry recycling collections be investigated.

The new service addressed these needs through the switch to lidded wheeled bins for recycling materials.

It was also recognised that the Council provides a service that offers equal opportunity for all including assisted collection service for the elderly and infirm.

The change to service will benefit residents in that:

- (i) Containers are on wheels, eliminating lifting and handling issues associated with box collections.
- (ii) Containers are lidded to stop materials getting wet and displaying consumption to neighbours.
- (iii) It minimised the number of containers necessary to facilitate card and plastics recycling.
- (iv) It reduced the number of vehicle movements on the highway as a result of route optimisation and fewer journeys to tip sites and in turn reducing our carbon footprint.

10. Consultation

Walsall residents play a vital role in helping to implement the changes to the service, so it is important that we listen to their views about the changes and to understand how the changes will affect them.

In order to keep residents informed and updated on developments within the service the following approach was taken:

- a) A designated call number was established for the contact centre to enable residents to raise queries/enquiries about the new service.
- b) Day changes were made and communicated to residents in October/November 2008 in anticipation of the service changes to materials and containers from January 2009.
- c) A heads up leaflet was mail shot to all households in November 2008 explaining the new service and encouraging larger families and exemptions to apply for additional capacity.
- d) The web site was updated with frequently asked questions and a direct link on the title page to the new service arrangements.
- e) Refuse vehicles were liveried with contact information and stating the service had arrived.
- f) A feature was published in the December 2008 edition of Walsall Pride.
- g) Information packs (booklet, sticker and calendar) were distributed with the bins during January and February 2009.
- h) Article was placed in the local press to inform of the new service.

- i) Road shows took place across the borough to meet residents face to face and explain the new service during January and February 2009.
- j) A focus group was established prior to implementation to obtain customer views on publicity and promotional literature.
- k) A waste encouragement team (five staff) was appointed in January 2009 through to April 2009 in order to undertake door knocking exercises, meeting residents face to face and complaint/enquiry handling.
- l) Additional resources were allocated to the contact centre to assist call handling and dealing with service enquiries and requests.
- m) Additional collection teams were established for the first few weeks of change over of service to facilitate residents, remove excess waste and deal with problems where residents had misinterpreted the requirements of the new service.
- n) Members were briefed and updated on implementation programme via e-mail summaries.
- o) During implementation weekly briefings were sent out to Assistant and Executive Director (Neighbourhoods) and Portfolio Holder to update in progress and lessons learned.
- p) Regular briefings took place between key Operational and Contact Centre Staff.

Background papers

1. Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2004
2. Cabinet report – 19 September 2007
3. Cabinet report – 19 March 2008
4. Cabinet report – 22 June 2008
5. Domestic Waste Collections Equality Impact Assessment

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