

**Environment
Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

Agenda Item No.

8

9 MARCH 2010

New Waste Collection Service

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Mike Flower - Environment

Summary of report:

This report informs the Scrutiny and Performance Panel of the progress of the new waste collection service introduced across the borough in February/March 2009, highlights a number of issues that arose during and after implementation and identifies the lessons learnt as a consequence.

Background papers:

None

Reason for scrutiny:

Requested by the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel to review the new collection service post-implementation

Resource and legal considerations:

Finance: The success of the new scheme has resulted in financial efficiencies to the council for 2010/11. These have been tabled for consideration through the budget setting process and include:

Reduction in fleet	£48,000
Household recycling performance (over achievement on target)	£280,000
Total	£328,000

The implementation costs of the service were self-financing resulting in no requirement for an increase in revenue expenditure for 2009/10. Efficiencies were derived through a reduction in fleet, staff reduction (through assimilation – no redundancies required) and diverting waste from landfill resulting in savings in disposal costs.

Legal: None arising from this report.

Citizen impact:

In Autumn 2009, the Citizens' Panel was consulted on a range of topics including the waste service. 646 people responded to the survey. Key highlights were:

- 92% are satisfied with the household rubbish collection service (up from 81% in 2008)
- 88% satisfied with recycling collection service (up from 71% in 2008)
- 78% satisfied with the garden waste collection service
- 2% say their grey bin is overflowing on collection day, 14% full to the top.
- 9% say their green bin is overflowing on collection day, 45% full to the top.

A similar exercise was undertaken with a post-service Waste Management Workshop in May 2009. The group comprised of 42 residents and key highlights included:

- 83% thought the service helped them to recycle more
- Residents were positive about materials that could be recycled and communications made it easier to identify materials that could be recycled – although further improvements could still be made.
- The new scheme made it easier to recycle and encouraged residents to do so.

A waste composition study was undertaken in October 2009, following the implementation of the scheme in order to determine the type of materials in the two bins (green and grey). It should be noted that this was a snapshot study and that, ideally, this piece of work would be undertaken throughout the year to take account of seasonality etc to determine a more balanced and detailed picture. Specifically, the survey revealed that there was 24% contamination in the green recycling bin (i.e. nearly a quarter of the contents of this bin should not have been there) and that 16% of what was being placed in the grey rubbish bin could have been recycled and should therefore have been placed in the green bin. Nevertheless, the results suggested that, in spite of the significant improvements in recycling performance evident since the new service was introduced, there remains scope for further improvement by increasing the extent to which residents place their refuse in the correct bin.

The main materials being placed incorrectly in the green recycling bin were food waste, black bags, textiles, electrical items and nappies.

The results of the study prompted a communications campaign in 11 primary areas including Bloxwich, Blakenall, Goscote, Birchills, Leamore, Caldmore, Palfrey and Alumwell where the levels of contamination were particularly high. The campaign was a combination of door knocking, meeting residents, leafleting and letter drops to promote the service and the acceptable materials criteria. The results of the campaign were positive and resulted in a reduction in rejected loads at the recycling facility due to contamination.

Environmental impact:

Landfill waste produces landfill gases which contribute to global warming and impacts on the environment. The service will set out specific targets and performance measures to ensure landfill diversion targets are met and recycling and composting performance is maximised.

Performance management:

On 9 December 2009, the official Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) results were published. The council was judged to be “Performing adequately” following the Organisational Assessment which is part of the CAA, the new performance assessment framework for local public services.

Waste was noted as a key highlight within the report which commented that:

Walsall is now doing well on recycling. The amount of waste recycled or composted has increased significantly and the Council has met its statutory target. A new household waste collection scheme was introduced at the end of 2008/09 and the recycling rate in the first quarter of 2009/10 was 51.5 per cent which makes the year end target of 45 per cent very much within reach. This means that the national target for 2015 will have been achieved five years ahead of schedule and is 10 percentage points higher than the rate in 2008/9 at 35 per cent. Walsall has above average recycling and composting rate and satisfaction with recycling is in the best 25 per cent.

The scheme has been such a success that, by the end of the second quarter (September 2009), Walsall was the top metropolitan borough council in the country at 51% with an end of year predicted out-turn of around 45%, five percent above the original projection. This constitutes an additional 6,000 tonnes of waste per annum being diverted from landfill. A selection of comparative figures for other Met Councils is shown below:

	82a % recyclin g	82b % compostin g	Combine d
<i>Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (best)</i>	29.6	21.83	51.43
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	16.54	25.73	42.27
Wolverhampton City Council	16.75	24.03	40.78
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	12.38	22.7	35.08
Coventry City Council	15.5	19.22	34.72
Birmingham City Council	14.32	19.27	33.59
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	16.43	16.81	33.24
Manchester City Council (worst)	10.2	8.2	18.4

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 was that options for supplying lids for the boxes of the dry recycling collections should 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.

A choice of bin capacity is available in respect of grey bin for householders producing quantities of clinical waste at home and for larger families who cannot manage with the smaller 140 litre bin capacity.

Consultation:

As set out elsewhere in this report, there has been extensive consultation with residents to assess the success of the new service through the Waste Management Workshop held last May and the Citizens' Panel survey last Autumn.

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Report

In March 2009, the Council introduced a new recycling 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 reason for the change was to maximise recycling and composting performance so helping to ensure that the Council's landfill diversion targets are met.

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.

On 19 March 2008, Cabinet approved the Implementation Plan for the new collection service.

On 16 June 2008 Cabinet agreed revisions to the waste policies and approved a communications plan in relation to the introduction of the new service.

On 1 March 2009 the service went live and operational across the borough to the residents of Walsall.

We have sought to gauge public opinion on the changes and have received positive feedback through a residents' workshop and a Citizens' Panel survey.

A waste composition survey has been carried out to find out the extent to which residents were using the green and black bins correctly.

All of these are detailed elsewhere in this report and this section focuses instead on the issues that the changeover raised and the lessons that have been learnt as a consequence. These are seen as being as follows:

- The procurement and delivery of new bins were considered to have been managed well and their distribution achieved within the planned timelines. Due to the timing of the deliveries prior to going live with the scheme and the number of bins involved, some residents started using the scheme prematurely which posed some operational challenges whilst we were awaiting delivery of new vehicles. However, all in all, this went well, despite some enquiries through the Contact Centre.
- A number of residents claimed that they had not received information packs during the bin distribution phase and consideration should be given in future service changes to how best to communicate with residents when distributing bins. However, given the sheer scale of the project and the fact that it affected all residents, the distribution is considered to have gone well. This was aided by the support of our Encouragement Team which acted as a resource to provide supplementary literature and to carry out door to door communications where required.

- As expected, there was an increase in calls handled via the contact centre and additional staff were deployed and trained to handle the enquiries through a unique new service call number. This went well.
- Vehicles were procured and delivered in accordance with the delivery schedule.
- A project team was established and met on a fortnightly basis throughout the duration of the project. All parties were involved from the contact centre, fleet service, waste disposal, waste collections, First Stop Shop, communications team etc. This was particularly successful and facilitated smooth implementation.
- Communications were timely and most were direct mail shots through householders' letter boxes. Lessons learned post-implementation were around clarity about what was and was not acceptable contents in green bins. In particular, the use of black bags and this had to be addressed post-implementation through various communications channels.
- Introduction of the Waste Livetrack¹ system was delayed and is still to be finally implemented. This is scheduled for April 2010 and will provide useful information on participation. However, based on tonnage and recycling performance to date, participation rates are estimated to be in excess of 90% which is very good.
- During the early months (February, March, April and May), additional resources had to be deployed to facilitate missed collections. This was principally due to three factors. Residents' appetite for the service exceeded expectation and there was a greater than expected increase in recycling materials. The new vehicles had to be calibrated and adjusted to maximise payloads given the composition of the recycling material. Finally, initial teething problems with the turn around times of vehicles at the Green Star facility caused some delay whilst tipping off the loads. All these were resolved in the early months of the new service.
- Residents expressed concern initially over recycling capacity. However, advice to residents about squashing packaging to help maximise capacity in the green bin seems to have addressed the main concerns.
- Day changes to the service were implemented in advance of the scheme going live. This was arranged in November 2008 meaning that residents did not have to adjust to new materials and containers as well as a new collection

1. ¹With this system, drivers' rounds appear on a screen in the refuse collection vehicle which identifies information such as those properties in receipt of an 'assisted collection' for the elderly or disabled and larger families that are entitled to more than one bin. The system is operated by a touch screen and the driver will be able to report information to explain why individual bins have not been collected for one of a small number of specified reasons such as:

- contamination
- bin not out
- bin lid open
- side waste presented
- bin too heavy

This will be reported in real time to the contact centre and to the waste service. This will provide us with more timely and accurate information to handle customer complaints and service enquiries. It will also enable Street Pride to run off reports about recycling set-out (i.e. how regularly bins are put out for collection) and participation (i.e. how many households do not use the recycling service) rates in different parts of the borough. This will enable Street Pride to report on rates more consistently and accurately.

day all at the same time which helped ensure a smooth transition from the previous service.

Taking into account the scale and sensitivity of the changes associated with introducing the new service, it is difficult not to conclude that it has gone extremely well. Recycling performance has exceeded expectations and resident satisfaction has increased significantly. As ever, there are lessons to be learnt and, where possible or necessary, the service has already been adjusted to take account of this. A number will have continued relevance, particularly in relation to communications, and we will seek to reflect this in the future as appropriate.