

# Report

**Subject** : Recycling of Household Waste – Alternate Week Collection Scheme

**Report to** : The Cabinet

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**Author** : Matti Raudsepp – Head of Environmental Services

**Cabinet Member:** for Environment & Transport Councillor James Robertson

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## 1. Summary:

The purpose of this report is to:

- 1.1 Provide Members with a review of the Alternate Week Collection Scheme (AWC), highlighting:
  - 2 The drivers for change.
  - 3 The underpinning assumptions and components of the project.
  - 4 Consideration of general concerns about AWC Schemes.
  - 5 The way forward, options and analysis.
  - 6 Conclusions
  - 7 Officer recommendations.
- 1.2 Seek direction from Cabinet on the preferred option for progressing the effective management of waste and the increase in recycling performance.

## 2. The drivers for change

- 2.1 Britain is facing serious difficulties in managing the ever-increasing quantity of waste generated by society. With landfill representing the main method of disposal, it has been estimated that there are approximately 9 years of landfill capacity left in this country and the quantity of waste produced continues to increase each year by approximately 3%, compounding the problem.
- 2.2 With an average recycling rate of 27% for household waste, Britain is in the bottom three of European nations for recycling.
- 2.3 In 2000, Government published its first comprehensive Waste Strategy for England and Wales which identified proposals for managing waste in a more effective and sustainable manner. Stringent recycling / diversion targets were set for both Waste Collection and Waste Disposal Authorities. Salisbury District Council's Target for 2005/06 was set at 30%.
- 2.4 Following a comprehensive review by the Environment & Transport Overview and Scrutiny Panel a new Strategy for Waste Minimisation, Re-use and Recycling, to improve recycling performance in line with waste targets, was adopted by the council in March 2003. The aim of the Strategy was to increase recycling from 16% to 34% over 4 years with only limited additional investment.
- 2.5 Subsequent Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Best Value Review, Environment & Transport Scrutiny Review and Internal Audit all expressed concerns over the following years that the strategy would not deliver the necessary improvements without radical change or investment.
- 2.6 In 2005 the implications of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme became clear in that local authorities could face massive fines for failing to meet diversion targets for biodegradable waste going to landfill. Estimates on current performance put the value of fines at a minimum of £1.3m by 2010.
- 2.7 During 2005 the council's Cabinet and E&T Overview and Scrutiny Panel carried out an extensive evaluation of alternative collection methods successfully being operated in the UK that would deliver the necessary improvements. Reports were presented to Cabinet at their meeting in January 2006

recommending fundamental change to the council's waste collection service. The adoption of an AWC Scheme was approved in principle. Following initial public feedback and concerns, the scheme was amended in September 2006 to incorporate the kerbside collection of recyclable cardboard and plastic bottles. The original implementation date of April 2007 was put back by 6 months to allow time for the required changes to the recyclable materials handling and processing systems to be implemented.

- 2.8 Within the past month Government has published its Waste Strategy for England 2007 which has raised the targets for recycling even further. The new targets for waste collection authorities are to recycle and/or compost at least 40% by 2010, 45% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. From our current position of recycling / composting 10,500 tonnes per year (23%), we will need to increase this to 18,400 tonnes per year (40%) within 30 months.

### **3. The underpinning assumptions and components of the project**

- 3.1 During their research of the top ten collection authorities in England, in terms of recycling performance, the E&T Overview and Scrutiny Panel identified that seven operated an alternate week collection service. In terms of cost, those seven operated, on average, at two thirds the cost of the remaining three authorities.
- 3.2 By the time of presentation of the report to Cabinet in January 2006, over 100 collection authorities were operating alternate week collections. Some had operated such schemes for a number of years achieving Beacon Status and without reported difficulty or public complaint.
- 3.3 An AWC Scheme can be contained generally within the existing resources of a weekly scheme by using the same vehicles and crews to pick up landfill waste one week and recyclables the next, at the same time realising the increases in recyclable tonnage.
- 3.4 To achieve a step change in reducing the waste we currently send to landfill, households must accept responsibility for the management of the household waste they produce by separating it for recycling, and, preferably, minimising the amount of wasted food and not buying "over-packaged" products in the first place.
- 3.5 The use of wheeled bins is critical to the success of the scheme. They provide secure storage for waste and recyclable materials yet provide a constraint on the volume of materials that can be included in the landfill waste bin.
- 3.6 The proposed scheme involves the provision of 2 x 180 litre wheeled bins to each suitable house in the district along with a 60 litre Black Recycling Box. One of the wheeled bins will be used for landfill (residual) waste, the other for recyclable plastic bottles and cardboard. The box is used for glass, paper, tins, textiles and foil.
- 3.7 Residents also have an option of paying for an additional wheeled bin in which garden waste can be placed for collection. At an annual charge of £26 per bin the service would become self-financing with 5,000 customers.
- 3.8 Houses not suitable for bins e.g. small flats, areas of terraced housing with no frontage etc. will be provided with controlled numbers of sacks for both recyclables and landfill waste.
- 3.9 All properties would continue to receive a weekly kerbside collection, one week landfill waste is collected, the next week all the recyclables.
- 3.10 The scheme as proposed is estimated to achieve a recycling performance of 34% in a full year (target 30%).

### **4. Consideration of general concerns about AWC Schemes**

#### **4.1 Suitability of properties to store bins.**

- 4.1.1. Concern has been raised in the district by residents whose consider their properties to be unsuitable for bins. The council has undertaken a survey of the entire district and is aware that there are approximately 3,200 out of 50,000 properties for which wheeled bins will not be suitable. The decision is based upon practical issues affecting sufficient space and access to the point of collection.
- 4.1.2. The council accepts that if a resident does not have room, they are unable to have a wheeled bin and alternative sacks to the same capacity will be provided. The detailed information for each property was due to be released in June. This was timed to ensure that the council was ready and had the capacity to manage any concerns or queries from the residents in an effective and timely fashion.

#### **4.2 Assisted collections.**

- 4.2.1 Salisbury District Council Environmental Services are proud to be one of only a handful of councils to have been awarded a Charter Mark for its Household Waste & Recycling Collection Service. The Charter Mark is one of the highest possible accolades for customer care and customer service achievable.

Initially awarded in 2000 the service was re-evaluated in 2003 and achieved even higher scores in each of the criteria.

- 4.2.2 We do go the extra mile to meet our customer's needs and this is reflected in the statutory Best Value customer satisfaction surveys where the service's rating has again topped 92%.
- 4.2.3 Outside of sheltered housing schemes the council has over 390 households currently receiving an assisted collection.
- 4.2.4 In circumstances where a householder is genuinely unable to manage a wheeled bin to the normal point of collection we will either provide sacks, an alternative point of collection, or both depending on the needs of that householder.

#### **4.3 Perceived health hazards.**

- 4.3.1 The issue of potential public health hazards resulting from fortnightly collections of landfill waste have been raised both locally and nationally. This concern is centred around food/putrescible waste and the potential for bacterial proliferation over a fortnight coupled with an increase in the presence of vermin. With the average household disposing of approximately 30% of all food purchased, the quantity of putrescibles in the average bin is a concern.
- 4.3.2 Scientific research in this area is limited at the moment. However, of the studies undertaken so far none have suggested that fortnightly collections themselves result in any additional concerns to public health. A wheeled bin with a lid provides a very effective means of containment for waste. However, problems do arise when residents continue to leave sacks of waste outside the bin or piled up in the bin preventing the lid from closing. These sacks become vulnerable to vermin, flies etc
- 4.3.3 Although considerable national media coverage in recent months has raised public awareness and created some alarm over the principles of AWC schemes, very little attention has been given to the schemes which have been successfully operating for several years and even less attention to the lack of viable alternative schemes.
- 4.3.4 The WWP is about to publish a Food Waste Strategy aimed at trying to reduce the quantity of food waste and help manage that waste in the home. WRAP are undertaking a nationwide campaign in the Autumn of 2007 to raise public awareness into the issue and encourage minimisation.

#### **4.4 Response to complaints and queries from residents**

- 4.4.1 Concern has been expressed that there are insufficient officer resources on the streets to respond quickly to complaints and queries relating to these issues and support the implementation process.
- 4.4.2 Whilst additional resources have been introduced as part of the programme this may not prove sufficient considering the current and continuing level of media attention on this subject.

### **5 The way forward, options and analysis**

#### **5.1 Continue with the implementation of the AWC scheme in existing form.**

- 5.1.1 Salisbury District Council will meet its statutory target for recycling / composting household waste within projected budget.
- 5.1.2 Performance of the scheme effectively monitored using computerised on board vehicle technology to identify and weigh bins to enable continued improvement of the service and its resources.
- 5.1.3 Over 90% of households will receive the benefit of using wheeled bins.
- 5.1.4 Concerns expressed by householders not fully addressed.

#### **5.2 Discontinue with the implementation of the AWC scheme in existing form.**

- 5.2.1 Salisbury District Council will not meet its statutory target for recycling / composting household waste
- 5.2.2 Many households will not receive the benefit of using wheeled bins.
- 5.2.3 Health & Safety improvements for the operational team will not be realised
- 5.2.4 Impact on CPA rating for failure to achieve statutory targets.
- 5.2.5 Risk of incurring significant LATs fines (potentially up to £1.3m pa in 2010).
- 5.2.6 Failing our partners in the Wiltshire Waste Partnership by not adhering to our part of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and potentially exposing all council tax payers in Wiltshire to additional costs through LAT's fines.
- 5.2.7 Handing back the £500,000 contribution for the AWC project to Wilts CC.
- 5.2.8 Financial penalties from the manufacturer of the wheeled bins for cancelled order, which would be a significant sum.

#### **5.3 Continue with the introduction of wheeled bins but collect residual waste weekly.**

- 5.3.1 Will overcome householders concern regarding perceived health risks due to putrescible waste being collected only on alternate weeks.
- 5.3.2 Additional resources required to collect 2<sup>nd</sup> bin for recycling. Estimated cost £800,000 per annum including using an additional 100,000 litres of diesel fuel.
- 5.3.3 Increase in recycling performance will be minimal and unlikely to achieve target.
  
- 5.4 **Continue with the implementation of the AWC scheme but collect putrescible waste weekly.**
- 5.4.1 Will overcome householders concern regarding perceived health risks due to putrescible waste being collected only on alternate weeks.
- 5.4.2 Additional resources required to collected 2<sup>nd</sup> bin for recycling. Estimated cost £800,000 per annum including using an additional 100,000litres of diesel fuel.
- 5.4.3 Increase in recycling performance likely to achieve target.
  
- 5.5 **Provide householders with putrescible waste bags and / or carbon filters to bin lids**
- 5.5.1 These options have not been fully explored but could assist in reducing the odours emanating from bins where this problem may occur.
- 5.5.2 Costs have not been fully identified but bags would be in the region of £125,000 per annum and filters around £100,000 capital and a replacement cost of £50,000 per annum.
  
- 5.6 **Put more resources onto the street to help and advise householders**
- 5.6.1 Without additional funding being available from outside of this project the employment of additional personnel could be achieved for a temporary period by using the funding allocated to fitting bin reading and weighing equipment to the collection vehicles.
- 5.6.2 This would affect the level of information gained to improve the effective management of the scheme and recycling performance.

## 6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The management of waste is one of the most important and challenging issues affecting local government at the present time. The pressures to increase recycling and the penalties for failing to do so are clearly recognised and will create a substantial financial burden on the council in the future if action is not taken now. In view of the circumstances described in this report, it is inconceivable that the Council can make sufficient progress in recycling performance without initiating an AWC scheme.
- 6.2 Alternative options as described in paragraph 5 will either require significant additional resource which it is assumed will not be available at this time, and/or will not ensure the necessary increases in recycling performance in the required timescales. Nevertheless, the concerns raised in this report are real and the project will only succeed if efforts are made to manage them. Consequently, it is considered that any focus for change should centre on how the changes can be brought in to achieve maximum support from residents.
- 6.3 To this end, it is considered that resource should be reallocated from the fitting of reading and weighing equipment to refuse vehicles to the delivery of an increased presence on the ground by waste management staff. It is hoped that this change will ensure a greater level of responsiveness to public concern and an increased capacity to educate residents on how to make the most of the scheme to maximise their contribution to recycling in the district.

## 7 Recommendations

- 7.1 That Cabinet continue with the implementation of the project as in 5.1.
- 7.2 That Cabinet approve the re-allocation of funds from the procurement of electronic reading and weighing equipment for wheeled bins to the temporary employment of personnel to provide improved response to householders before and during the implementation process as in 5.6.

## Implications

Financial:	Contained in report.
Legal:	Contained in report and require further investigation in respect of wheeled bin production contract.
Environmental:	Contained in report.
Wards affected:	All.