

**WASTE AND RECYCLING SERVICES – PETITION TO COUNCIL
(Report by Head of Environment & Transport)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report considers the current position of the waste and recycling service following the submission of a petition to full council on 8th December 2004, which requested a return to weekly refuse collections, at no additional cost to Huntingdonshire Council Taxpayers
- 1.2 Current Waste and Recycling services are designed to ensure that the District Council meets the waste minimisation and recycling requirements of the EU Landfill Directive together with local and regional targets set out in the Waste Local Plan and the Joint Waste Strategy. The collection systems now in use will ensure that at least 50% of the waste collected by the District Council will be recycled from 2005/06 onwards. Should the Council fail to meet its targets, new regulations could result in local council tax payers facing a penalty of £356k in 2008 because too much waste is still being taken to landfill. In 2010 the penalty could amount to £1.4 million per annum, equivalent to £21 for every household in Huntingdonshire.
- 1.2 If local households are not successful in maintaining the reduction achieved in the amount of waste for ultimate disposal they will face substantially higher costs because of government imposed penalties in the short/medium term and the cost of providing bigger waste treatment plants in the longer term – as landfill becomes prohibitively expensive.
- 1.3 Early results from the new waste and recycling collection services show that the vast majority of households are making good use of the opportunity that it provides to deal responsibly with their waste. Reverting to a weekly collection of residual household waste is operationally unsustainable, will not encourage householders to take responsibility for the waste they produce and will increase further the financial burden of waste collection and disposal.

2. REDUCING RESIDUAL WASTE

- 2.1 Provisional allocations for 2005 to 2020 under the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme (LATS) now have been published, as provided for in the Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003. These set for the County Council, as the waste disposal authority, limits for the disposal of biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) in landfill.
- 2.2 Although expressed at a county level the following table is indicative of the impact for Huntingdonshire –

| | Kilograms of BMW per head | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 05/06 | 06/07 | 07/08 | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 |
| Allowance under LATS | 193 | 185 | 175 | 162 | 146 | 130 |
| Forecast of BMW Landfilled | 170 | 166 | 171 | 177 | 182 | 187 |
| Amount Allowance Exceeded | - | - | - | 15 | 36 | 58 |

- 2.3 The forecast included in the above table assumes that recycling (dry and garden waste) achieves 51% in 06/07, the first full year when all properties have a garden waste service, that this is sustained in subsequent years and that waste continues to grow at 3% annually to 2010/11.
- 2.3 The penalty set by the regulations for exceeding the BMW allocation is £150 per tonne. For each 1% by which the District Council fails to achieve the 51% recycling rate a further 3 kilograms of BMW per head will be landfilled. Once the allowance is exceeded in 2008 each 1% will add £71k annually to the cost of Huntingdonshire's waste disposal in penalties.
- 2.4 In 2010 the County Council plan to have alternative waste disposal arrangements in place to divert waste from landfill. These will be provided at a cost of £80+ million, supported by an anticipated £35-40 millions in PFI credits. Maintaining high levels of recycling at the point of collection, and thereby reducing the residual waste for ultimate disposal, is pivotal to containing both the initial capital cost and ongoing operational cost of the treatment plant such that they are affordable by council tax payers in the county.
- 2.5 The introduction of the alternating weekly collection, concurrently with the garden waste collection service, starting with the 9,000 household pilot scheme in 2003/04, has been pivotal in encouraging householders to fully engage in recycling. This is demonstrated by the results of the best value performance indicators (BVPI) for the last three years, and the targets for 2004/05 and subsequent years.

| | 01/02 | 02/03 | 03/04 | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Recycled/head | 13.10% | 14.90% | 17.40% | 20% | 21% | 21% |
| Composted/head | 0% | 0.60% | 4.10% | 12% | 28% | 30% |

- 2.6 Actual performance in 2004/05, following the roll-out of the first tranche of the new waste services in August, indicate that the targets for 2004/05 are likely to be exceeded. Actual performance for April-October was 20% and 13% for recycling and composting respectively. A further tranche of 10,000 households, extending coverage to some 55,000 households, is to be completed in December and is likely to further improve performance.

3. COST OF SERVICES

- 3.1 Moving from a weekly sack collection to a comprehensive three-stream waste service based on fortnightly collections has not been a cost saving exercise. This is best indicated by the BVPI relating to cost of household waste collection per head (04/05 to 06/07 are forecasts)

| | 01/02 | 02/03 | 03/04 | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Cost of head | £26.64 | £31.44 | £40.95 | £54.68 | £62.47 | £59.44 |

- 3.2 The initial cost of the services have been supported by £1.8 millions of grant from a DEFRA challenge fund in 2003/04 and 2004/05. The funding was secured through a joint bid with other Cambridgeshire Councils forming the strategic waste partnership.

- 3.3 Guidance recently published by DEFRA indicates that a new Waste Performance and Efficiency Grant will be available in the three years 2005/06 to 2007/08. The national pot is to be £40 millions in 2005/06, £105 millions in 2006/07 and £110 millions in 2007/08.
- 3.4 The District Council will receive £52k in 2005/06. Allocations in subsequent years have not been confirmed but on the basis of the national allocation could be expected to be at least double the 2005/06 allocation. However, DEFRA are strongly urging waste partnerships to pool their funding in 2006/07 and 2007/08.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the first call on the District Council's grant should be to support the purchase of blue wheeled bins for dry recyclables to allow public demand for this service to be fully satisfied.

4. OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The collection of refuse in plastic sacks is unsafe. Refuse collectors regularly suffered back injuries, lacerations and stab wounds because there is no way to control what was placed in the sacks by householders.
- 4.2 The availability of wheeled bin collection arrangements makes it impossible to defend sack collections when challenged by the Health and Safety Executive. Such a challenge was almost certain if the District Council had not changed to a wheeled bin system.
- 4.3 Where a weekly wheeled bins collection has been substituted for a sack based service there is ample evidence that the weight of waste collected increases, often by as much as 30%. This is attributable to householders giving less attention to separating recyclables and also placing garden waste in the bin.
- 4.4 Where weekly wheeled bin collections have been introduced with any success there has been substantial investment in public awareness raising and enforcement and associated comprehensive services for collecting recyclables and garden waste. However, the performance of such schemes, in terms of diverting residual waste from landfill, remains at around 20-30%.
- 4.5 In order to maintain current recycling and garden waste services, the introduction of a weekly wheeled bin residual waste collection service would require a substantial increase in resources and increase the revenue cost by around £750k annually.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 There are overwhelming operational reasons why the District Council cannot revert to a universal sack-based waste collection service.
- 5.2 The national waste strategy is to substantially reduce reliance on the use of landfill as a means of waste disposal. The regulatory system currently is targeting the disposal of municipal waste and local authorities face swingeing penalties if they do not reduce the amount of biodegradable

waste (a substantial part of the waste produced by households) taken to landfill.

- 5.3 Achieving high levels of recycling and composting will go some way to reducing the waste landfilled but cannot themselves ensure the targets are met. The County Council must invest in alternative treatment arrangements by 2010 if the cost of waste disposal and the consequential charge to local council tax payers is not to become unacceptable.
- 5.4 The scale of the treatment plants and their cost will be greatly influenced by the amount of waste they have to process. High levels of recycling/composting are key to reducing the amount of residual waste for processing at the new treatment plants.
- 5.5 Awareness raising and promotional activity alone has failed to bring about sufficient change in people's behaviour with regard to waste disposal. The introduction of the alternating weekly collections, however, has encouraged the vast majority of households to engage with the recycling services provided by the District Council. Where households have done this typically they find the service meets their needs.
- 5.6 Where householders are using their best endeavours to recycle/compost but are still experiencing real difficulties with the service every effort is made to assist them – e.g. larger families can apply for an additional bin(s). Assisted services are provided to householders who are disabled/frail and special arrangements are being put in place for flats etc. At the small number of locations where the house types make the storage of wheeled bins impractical provision of a similar service, based on other forms of containment are being developed.
- 5.7 Through the initial pilot and the early months of the roll-out of the district wide service, experience has shown that the often quoted fears relating to smell and maggot/fly infestations have not generally materialised. Simple precautions such as wrapping perishable waste are extremely effective in overcoming the perceived problem. From mid 2005, householders will be provided with the opportunity of putting kitchen waste in their garden waste bin. This provides them with the opportunity of disposing of kitchen waste on a weekly basis if they wish to alternate between the residual and garden waste collections.
- 5.8 South Cambridgeshire District already has a fully implemented alternating fortnightly collection and the other waste collection authorities in the county also are now considering similar collection arrangements as the key to improving recycling performance and making their contribution to reducing the amount of residual waste for disposal – the cost of which will fall on council tax payers across the county.
- 5.9 Acceding to the request by the petitioners to Council for the resumption of a weekly residual waste collection service cannot be done without significantly increased costs and it would undermine the objectives of the joint waste strategy to which the District Council is a signatory.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Cabinet are recommended to reject the petition submitted to Council on 8th December 2004 for the reasons outlined in the main body of this report and continue with the roll-out of the new waste and recycling service across the whole district, based on alternating weekly collections.

Background papers

Best Value Performance Plan 2004

Waste disposal data provided by Cambridgeshire County Council

Managing Waste Sustainably - DEFRA letter dated 9 December 2004

LATS data

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/lats/pdf/allocationdata.pdf>

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