

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HEALTH AND LEISURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REFUSE AND RECYCLING SERVICE WORKING GROUP

Third Interim Report to the Health and Leisure Scrutiny Committee

9th February 2005

Working Group Members: Councillors S. R. Peters (Chairman), Mrs. J. M. Boswell, Mrs. K. M. Gall, J. H. Gardener, Mrs. J. D. Luck, D. McGrath, Mrs. C. J. Spencer (ex-officio)

Introduction

The Second Interim Report was presented to the Committee in May 2004 in the expectation that the roll-out of the new service would continue to be implemented in accordance with the published programme.

Our Second Interim Report contained a number of Recommendations to the Committee that were accepted en bloc and communicated to the Executive Cabinet. The recommendations arose from the poor performance of the service up to that time and we are pleased that the Cabinet accepted the recommendations and took heed of the message that we were giving.

Implementation of Rounds 2 and 3

Round 2 was introduced in early July 2004, with Round 3 commencing in early August 2004. Many of the earlier problems experienced in Round 1 were perpetuated in Rounds 2 and 3 and subsequently the newly appointed Portfolio Holder, Councillor Brian Fuller, decided to delay further new rounds until a complete review of the service had been undertaken to improve the performance of the new service.

The Working Group welcomed this bold decision, which recognised the ongoing problems with the new service and the need for a thorough review of the service.

The Portfolio Holder wrote to all Members in early August 2004 explaining the reason for delaying the introduction of Round 4 and subsequent rounds until such time as all outstanding issues had been resolved.

Review of the Service

The review initiated by the Portfolio Holder began in mid-August 2004 and a series of fortnightly meetings have taken place since that date. The Chairman of the Working Group has attended those meetings, by invitation of the Portfolio Holder, and until the new service was re-commenced with the introduction of Round 4 in early November 2004 it was considered unnecessary for the Working Group to re-convene.

The Portfolio Holder wrote a comprehensive report to Members at the end of September 2004 in which he detailed the problems that the new service had encountered and actions taken to improve the situation. There is little point in our present Report repeating the full and frank "warts-and-all" summary of various aspects of the service and the steps taken by the Portfolio Holder to remedy the shortcomings.

A subsequent report from the Corporate Director (Services) presented to Cabinet on 15 December 2004 provided a further update on the state of the service and the steps being taken to implement the Council's Recovery Plan.

Meetings of the Group

The Working Group has met 4 times since the publication of its second interim report, viz: 23 June, 18 August, 17 November 2004 and 12 January 2005. We have continued to receive the help and co-operation of Officers of the Council and the Portfolio Holder. Meetings continued to be held at the Depot to afford the opportunity for members to meet management personnel, inspect the facilities and vehicles and to view the waste transfer arrangements. A number of site visits have also taken place to observe the new service in operation in wards of the district. Comprehensive notes of every meeting have been produced. The Chairman has attended regular meetings of the Review Team and has participated to help improve the service to residents of the district.

Dispensation Claims

The number of approved dispensations (assisted collections, black bag collections, etc) has been reduced as a result of the Review of the service and now stands at a more manageable figure of approximately 3,000 (8% of properties).

It was apparent that many dispensations had been given in early 2004 when the original refuse collection service changed to a kerb-side service and many of these dispensations had persisted when the new service was introduced.

The Working Group welcomes the reduction in unwarranted dispensations and the integration of more properties into the full refuse and recycling service. This will aid the speed and efficiency of the service provided by the high-capacity collection freighters. At the same time, residents with valid reasons for exceptions from the normal service are being accommodated and will be served by the normal collection rounds or special collection vehicles in due course with the ability to collect from narrow roads and confined areas.

Publicity and Promotion

We are pleased that the Review of the service resolved to reduce the number of leaflets delivered to customers in advance of the new service, whilst at the same time improving the content and procedures for delivery of the covering letter and information pack. Residents are now made more readily aware of the commencement date for use of their bins and boxes by the use of stickers giving them the first use date.

Implementation Plan

The decision taken by the Portfolio Holder to delay the introduction of Round 4 and subsequent rounds until problems had been resolved was a correct decision. The length of time required and the considerable efforts of the Management team to remedy the situation are a reflection of the state of the new service before the review commenced.

Round 4 was introduced in early November followed by Round 5 in early December 2004. All indications are that the service has improved considerably – numbers of complaints drastically reduced, few errors in bin and box deliveries, and letters of support appearing in the Press.

The revised procedures and improved management of the service appear to be paying dividends and residents are receiving a much-improved service.

The improvements must be sustained over the remaining weeks of the introduction of the new service which is programmed to be completed before the end of March 2005 (in order to fulfil the terms of the DEFRA grant).

Waste Handling Arrangements

Completion of building work and commissioning of the County Council waste transfer station adjoining the Depot was achieved in September 2004 and the relationship between the Depot and the county council contractors appears to be working well.

The Working Group is still concerned that satellite waste handling stations have not been identified and established as required for the efficient exchange of full and empty containers in all outlying districts. A solution has been achieved in Wythall with a Council-owned site being utilised, but the operation of the service may be compromised by the lack of a similar site in the Hagley area.

It is noted that some full vehicles have been able to utilise the waste depot in Redditch as an interim solution.

Recycling Performance

Data provided to the Working Group in late 2004 indicate that the new service is achieving its main objective of increasing the proportion of household waste that is diverted away from landfill. Some grey waste has been incinerated to produce energy at Wolverhampton and the overall quantity of material diverted away from land-fill and / or recycled stood at nearly 20% after the introduction of only the first 3 new collection rounds. This bodes well for the overall scheme and reflects the higher than anticipated participation rate by enthusiastic households who recognise the desirability of recycling.

Whilst the recycling figures are to be applauded, the Working Group stresses the need for the Council to promote waste reduction and minimisation in compliance with Government objectives and we look forward to working with officers on this issue.

Future Scrutiny

The Working Group will continue to monitor the new service as it is introduced throughout the district. We shall also consider possible improvements to the service and ways of encouraging the recycling of a wider range of materials (such as batteries, cardboard, shoes, etc.)

The County Council (as the waste disposal authority) is contemplating the use of new techniques to handle household waste and recyclables with the aim of increasing efficiency and reducing costs. Future arrangements could involve the collection of co-mingled dry recyclable materials that can be separated in a Material Reclamation Facility (MRF) when one has been established. Collection of mixed dry recyclables would probably require an additional wheeled bin, in lieu of boxes, which would be handled by the new collection vehicles. Any proposal to change the current collection system will need to be closely monitored.

We do not consider it within our current remit to address issues such as the procurement of vehicles, staffing levels, resources and cost of the service but these matters may be worthy of scrutiny at a future date when fuller information becomes available to Members.

Final Recommendation to the Health and Leisure Scrutiny Committee

The Working Group requests that this Third Interim Report be accepted and that we be permitted to continue the current programme of monitoring and involvement to ensure a continuity of the improvement of the service that has become apparent in recent months.

We would also wish to place on record our appreciation for the considerable efforts of the management personnel and refuse collectors for achieving continued improvements in the service.

True service delivery performance indicators can only be produced if Service Standards are published for the new service and this Group recommends that these be formally set out in a publicly available document.

Approved by Members of the Working Group on 12 January 2005

Councillor Stephen R. Peters
Chairman of the Refuse and Recycling Service Working Group