

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HEALTH & LEISURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REFUSE AND RECYCLING SERVICE WORKING GROUP

Second Interim Report to the Health & Leisure Scrutiny Committee 18 May 2004

Working Group members Cllrs Mrs J M Boswell, Mrs K M Gall, J H Gardener, Mrs J D Luck, D McGrath, S R Peters (Chairman), P J Whittaker (ex-officio)

Introduction

The first Interim Report presented to the Committee on 3 February 2004 covered the planning and preparation for the new service. This Second Report deals mainly with the introduction and implementation of the new service policy.

Matters arising from First Interim Report of the Working Group

After the First Interim Report had been presented to the Health & Leisure Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2004 the following amendments / clarifications to the information contained within the Report were brought to Members' attention:

Service policy document - the correct sizes of the recycling boxes are definitely - red lidded box 44 litre, blue open box 55 litres (this is as reported in the First Interim Report).

It is to be noted that the Service Policy did not require Cabinet approval, as it is an operational policy rather than a strategic policy.

Dispensation claims - it was noted that the cost of the implementation team has been funded partly from the Defra grant (including some promotional costs not incurred) and partly from the payment in full of performance-related income from Worcestershire County Council totalling £300,000.

Implementation plan - it was noted that information on the operational manning requirements produced in late 2003 had since been revised and only Round 1 will utilise 2 refuse freighters. Subsequent collection rounds will use 1 vehicle. The promised revised information has not been distributed to the Working Group.

Resources and costs - it was noted that once the new collection rounds have been running for 4 weeks the intended manpower for each refuse freighter on each round will reduce to one driver + 1 crew. i.e. 16 operatives in total. The overall net effect of the new service will result in 1 less employee.

It is further noted that the General Fund Capital programme for 2004/5 includes a sum of £704,000 for the purchase of grey wheeled bins (these are not funded by Defra); and a sum of £200,000 in 2005/6 in respect of the purchase of 4 additional recycling vehicles to permit a weekly recycling service should this become necessary. This will have revenue implications of £250,000 for a driver and 2 loaders per vehicle.

Progress to date

Meetings of the Group

The Working Group has met 4 times since the publication of its first interim report in January 2004, viz: 5 February, 25 February, 31 March and 23 April 2004. We have continued to receive the help and co-operation of Officers of the Council and the Portfolio Holder. Some of the meetings were held at the Depot to afford the opportunity for members to meet management personnel, inspect the facilities and vehicles and to view the temporary waste transfer arrangements. Comprehensive notes of every meeting have been produced. The Chairman has received regular reports and consultations from the

Portfolio Holder and this close working relationship has been constructive and of benefit to residents of the district during a difficult transitional period.

Dispensation Claims

We have been informed that all claims for dispensations relating to Phase 1 were dealt with prior to the introduction of the wheeled bin collection service. However, the claims for dispensations for subsequent phases still remained unprocessed when the change to kerbside collections throughout the district was introduced and this caused anxiety to elderly and disabled residents unable to carry bins and bags to the roadside. New claims for dispensations continue to be received as the new service evolves.

Publicity and Promotion

A letter was sent to all households prior to the change to a 4-day working week and consequent new collection day (effective from 24 February 2004), requiring householders to place all refuse at the kerbside for collection by the old freighters. This letter and changes caused considerable confusion throughout the district not least because it was sent out to homes in Phase 1 of the new kerbside service and many residents interpreted the information as a cancellation of the new service. Consequently many of them continued to use bins and bags. Refuse remained uncollected for many days in a number of areas and the switchboard was swamped with complaints. **The Working Group reiterates its earlier concerns regarding the introduction of the change to kerbside collections before all dispensations had been processed and has concluded that the change should never have taken place.** We are pleased that the Portfolio Holder agreed and took prompt action to reinstate the back-door collection service pending the phased introduction of the new wheeled bin service.

In addition, the Working Group considers that no further letters should be sent out to householders as they have already received too much detailed information which has only served to confuse them.

Implementation Plan

The Working Group had been informed that the new collection regime was to be based on a 4-day working week (Tuesday - Friday) with employees working 10 hours per day (11 hours including meal breaks) commencing at 0600 and finishing at 1700hrs. It became apparent after the change to the existing service on 24 February 2004 that the announced new working hours had not been introduced and, in fact, employees commence work at 7.00 am. Consequently, the considerable public opposition to the requirement for refuse and bins to be placed at the kerbside by 6.00 am need never have arisen. **The Contracts of Employment did not stipulate the working hours and the Working Group deplores the misinformation it received from officers.**

A further consequence of the change to a 4-day working week was that refuse was not collected on the appointed day in many areas and remained uncollected for several weeks in some instances. Special Sunday and Monday collections have been made to deal with the backlog of refuse lying on the streets and additional costs have therefore been incurred. We are told that the main problem was the inaccurate compilation of the new collection rounds, with many properties missed off the schedules despite the involvement of an external consultant aided by Council employees. There were also instances of inappropriate attitude from some employees and formal disciplinary action has ensued. The refuse collectors now operate a "group task and finish" work method whereby no one goes home until all refuse collections for the day have been completed. **The failure of the management to organise an effective service from day one is a matter for serious concern.**

The introduction of Phase 1 of the new kerbside wheeled bin service and recyclables collection service was achieved with inevitable teething problems and in the first few days acted as a training exercise for the employees who had not received adequate prior training due to late delivery of vehicles. Drivers needed to familiarise themselves with left-hand drive, rear-wheel steering collection freighters, larger than previous vehicles and equipped with computerised control of the novel side-lifting loading mechanism. Members of the Working Group had the opportunity to informally observe the new collection routines and to speak with employees and representatives from FAUN - the

manufacturers of the new collection vehicles.

The supplier did not deliver the wheeled bins and boxes to all households in time for the commencement of the new collection service. Some bins were delivered after the service commenced and some were distributed to properties outside Bromsgrove District in error. **The Working Group stresses the need for improved management and monitoring of the distribution of containers to residents in future phases.**

Non-delivery of bins meant that many householders continued to use their own bins or sacks which remained uncollected for many days in some areas. The Working Group is pleased that arrangements have now been made to dedicate one old freighter to the collection of loose bags from the kerbside during the introduction of the new service. **However, this problem was predictable and should have been foreseen and points to further organisational shortcomings at the Depot.**

Arrangements for dealing with complaints from the public have not been acceptable. Delays in receiving an answer on the dedicated telephone helpline have arisen due to the absence of sufficient BT telephone lines to the Depot. In some cases, responses have been impolite or unhelpful and despite the secondment of additional permanent staff to deal with the large number of enquiries and complaints, the absence of a proper system to record and monitor problems has resulted in an inefficient service. **The Working Group recommends that operation of the helpline and quality of customer service be improved to deal with future phases.**

The Working Group welcomes confirmation that the Head of Depot Services has been designated as the Project Manager for the new service as a single point of responsibility, together with the active involvement of the recently appointed Corporate Director (Services) to co-ordinate service delivery. **We expect to see an improvement in the management structure and delivery of the new service henceforth.**

Waste Transfer Station

The County Council has not yet constructed the new Waste Transfer Station adjacent to the Depot, which should have been operational for the start of the new service. However, temporary arrangements have been made within the Depot to deal with the transfer process and this appears to be working satisfactorily. **The Working Group is concerned that difficulties will arise if the permanent transfer facilities are not provided to cope with subsequent phases and increased volumes of waste.**

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 or amendments to the new service to benefit residents. This includes addressing concerns relating to disposable nappies putrefying for up to 2 weeks during hot weather, and the possible need for weekly household refuse and recyclables collections. The cost-effectiveness of the bi-weekly compostable waste collection service during the winter period will also be examined.

Final Recommendation to the Health & Leisure Scrutiny Committee

The Working Group has received reassurances from Officers that the newly introduced monitoring system and revised operating procedures have resulted in an improved service, with customer complaints being drastically reduced. However, the Working Group is mindful of the many problems that occurred during the introduction of Phase One of the new service and we will only support the introduction of the next phase of the new service when the following conditions prevail:

- a) Industrial relations problems have been resolved and employees have a valid Contract of Employment stipulating the days and hours of work necessary to achieve the specified service standard
- b) The level of customer complaints has diminished to the number being received prior to changes in the service
- c) It has been demonstrated in Phase One over a period of 4 weeks that the specified service

can be achieved, with all properties being serviced on the allotted day; one collection vehicle with driver and 1 crew being used on Round 1 grey waste and green waste collections; one recycling vehicle with driver and 2 crew being used on the recycling round; properties with dispensations having a regular weekly collection with sacks provided by the Council. (The use of additional back-up resources will indicate that the new service is not working as intended)

- d) All wheeled bins and boxes will be delivered in a timely manner to all properties in Round 2 (and only those properties)
- e) Dispensation claims for Round 2 have been fully processed and procedures are in place to implement the dispensation service as each new round is introduced
- f) Effective procedures are in place to receive and deal with customer complaints
- g) Satisfactory Waste Transfer arrangements are in place

The Working Group requests that the Health & Leisure Scrutiny Committee adopts the foregoing statement and incorporates it into a Recommendation to be made to the Executive Cabinet, with the expectation that the criteria set out will be met and in the knowledge that the final decision must rest with the Executive Cabinet

Approved by members of the Working Group on 23 April 2004
Councillor Stephen R Peters
Chairman of the Refuse & Recycling Service Working Group