



Overview and Scrutiny Refuse and Recycling Value for Money

SECOND REPORT

Completed November 2008
SCRUTINY BOARD
Supporting Officer: Della McCarthy



Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk



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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

SECOND REPORT OF THE REFUSE AND RECYCLING TASK GROUP - VALUE FOR MONEY

NOVEMBER 2008

MEMBERS

Councillors C. R. Scurrall (Chairman), Mrs. M. Bunker, Mrs. A. E. Doyle and C. J. Tidmarsh

BACKGROUND

The first report from the refuse and recycling scrutiny investigation was considered by the Cabinet in April 2008. Out of 15 recommendations, 14 were approved by the Cabinet. One recommendation was referred back to the Scrutiny Steering Board and Cabinet also suggested that the Refuse and Recycling Task Group be requested to carry out a separate scrutiny exercise specifically relating to Value for Money (VFM).

The Scrutiny Steering Board considered the Cabinet's response and agreed that the additional piece of work relating to VFM was a key scrutiny exercise. The Board therefore agreed that the Task Group should be asked to look at VFM specifically in relation to the refuse and recycling service.

Out of the 5 Task Group Members, 4 Members agreed to undertake the second scrutiny investigation, as listed in the section above.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference were agreed by the Scrutiny Steering Board at the end of May 2008 and Task Group Members subsequently attended Value for Money training in June 2008. In July, the Task Group had an initial meeting to discuss the terms of reference and minor amendments were made which were agreed by the Scrutiny Steering Board.

In brief, the role of the Task Group in relation to its second scrutiny exercise was to carry out a VFM analysis of the refuse and recycling service and reconsider the one recommendation referred back. The full terms of reference are attached as Appendix 1.

The Task Group was requested to complete its work November 2008 and report to the next available Board meeting.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Task Group were pleased to find that officers are already working hard to ensure that the Council is providing residents of Bromsgrove District with a refuse and recycling service which is value for money.

Members involved in the scrutiny would like to support the efforts of those officers and would like to put forward three recommendations which are summarised below (in no particular order):

1. **Additional wheelie bins for green waste service** (High / Medium Priority)

Once the chargeable green waste collection service has been implemented and the take up of the service is known, Street Scene officers be requested to investigate the option of providing additional wheelie bins for green waste on request at an additional charge.

2. **Monitoring on-street recycling** (Low Priority)

Officers from Street Scene be requested to monitor on-street recycling trials being undertaken by other Councils to see if there is any evidence to suggest it would provide value for money.

3. **Investigate alternative methods of service delivery (e.g. Private contractor)** (Low / Medium Priority)

When the new co-mingled service has been in operation for a minimum of one year, the option of delivering the service using an alternative method (including using a private contractor) be considered to see if it would be an appropriate time for market testing and comparisons to be undertaken.

The Cabinet requested that one of the original recommendations contained within the first refuse and recycling scrutiny report should be reconsidered by Scrutiny Members. The recommendation had suggested that officers investigate trialling wheelie bin stickers to inform the public which collections are scheduled. The Task Group discussed the matter and decided to withdraw the recommendation. Reasons for the decision are outlined on page 14.

Financial Implications to Recommendations

There are no direct financial implications relating to the recommendations contained within this report. However, it should be said that, as with any recommendations for improvement, even if there are no direct costs, there is an impact on officer time as inevitably, officers will be expected to spend time implementing approved recommendations.

We believe that the recommendations put forward will support the Council in ensuring that it is providing a service which is value for money and for this reason, we believe that implementing the recommendations, should they be approved, would be officer time well spent.

If the recommendations are approved, the final outcomes may have future financial implications. These financial implications would need to be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) at that time. (For example, with regard to recommendation 1, officers would undertake an investigation which could lead to a proposal for the provision of additional wheelie bins on request at an additional charge. Such a proposal would need to be considered as part of the MTFP).

Officer Actions supported by the Task Group

The Task Group were pleased to hear the good work that is taking place within Street Scene in relation to the refuse and recycling service. The actions that are already taking place which the Task Group support are highlighted within this report. However, for ease of reference, below is a bullet point summary:

- Regular communication in different forms with the public in relation to the changes to the service (i.e. the chargeable green waste service and the future co-mingled service)
- Striving to increase the percentage of households which can access the chargeable green waste service
- Continued use of the side-arm vehicles for the green waste collection service so not to waste the resource
- Shared working with Redditch Borough Council
- Joint Waste Forums for both officers and relevant Portfolio Holders from neighbouring authorities
- The Joint Waste Strategy for Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Requesting that the recently collated cost comparison data is discussed with Worcestershire County Council and other neighbouring authorities, particularly in relation to how figures are calculated
- Continuing to investigate ways to reduce the cost per household of the service

Issues considered which were not included within Recommendations

The Task Group was careful to remain focussed on value for money as requested, particularly as other issues relating to refuse and recycling had already been scrutinised under the first investigation which was completed earlier this year.

Issues that the Task Group considered but did not form part of our final recommendations included the change of the vehicle fleet. Although the Task Group discussed the change in vehicles to rear loading vehicles and had several questions on this aspect, the Task Group concluded that this change was necessary. This is covered in a future section of this report on page 7.

Other issues considered which did not form part of the recommendations were:

- Food waste collection
- Frequency of collections and night time collections
- Containers used for refuse and recycling collections
- Disposal routes
- Household Waste Site and Recycling Banks
- Progress of MRF (Material Reclamation Facility)
- Boundary issues
- Vehicle Fleet including compensation arrangements

METHODOLOGY

Views of local residents

When the Task Group was initially set up in July 2007, a press release was issued informing and encouraging the public to submit their views, comments and suggestions for the Task Group to consider. Information relating to the Task Group could also be found on the website where again the public were encouraged to voice their opinions and suggestions for improvements. As previously reported, a total of almost 30 letters and emails were received during July and August 2007 and the Task Group revisited these when it carried out its second scrutiny investigation.

During the second scrutiny investigation, the results of the Customer Panel Surveys for 2008 became available. Therefore, the Task Group was able to compare the results of the Customer Panel Surveys for 2007 and 2008, specifically in relation to how satisfied or dissatisfied residents were with the refuse collection service in general.

Internal witnesses

The Refuse and Recycling Task Group requested reports from Street Scene and Waste Management officers and obtained guidance from the Head of Financial Services. The Task Group also believed it was important to gain input from the relevant Portfolio Holder and once again, Councillor Mrs. Sherrey was invited to attend the final meeting of the Task Group when the draft scrutiny report was being finalised.

External witnesses

It was recommended to the Chairman of the Task Group that Dr. Johnston, Head of Centre for Local Sustainability at the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU), would be a good contact for the Task Group with regard to providing examples of best practice which would be of relevance to the scrutiny investigation.

The Task Group researched and contacted local authorities suggested by Dr. Johnston from the LGiU and also contacted neighbouring Councils so that comparisons could be made between the levels of services, performance and cost.

In addition, information was obtained from Worcestershire County Council, as the local authority responsible for refuse disposal.

A full list of those contacted is set out in Appendix 2.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At Bromsgrove District Council providing excellent Value for Money is defined as “*providing the right balance between cost and performance for each service, where right is defined as what our customers want as represented by their Councillors*”.

With this in mind, we wanted to look at different elements of the refuse and recycling service in terms of cost, efficiency, effectiveness, use of resources and customer satisfaction.

➤ Co-mingled Collections

Although there had previously been some uncertainty as to whether or not the MRF (Material Reclamation Facility) also known as ‘Enviro Sort’ being built by Worcestershire County Council would be delayed further, the County Council has confirmed that it is on target for completion in November 2009. As Members will know, once the MRF is operational, not only will a co-mingled service be provided, there will also be a capacity to collect and recycle more types of recyclables with the MRF meaning an increase in recycling rates.

Although the County Council at this time will not commit to any dates as to where this Council fits into its roll out programme, officers from Street Scene are keen to provide a co-mingled service to local residents as soon as possible. ***The Task Group support this as it will mean: an improved level of service; an improved level of performance as recycling rates would increase; and savings could be made.*** For example, residents will no longer need to sort and separate the recyclables into different boxes and recycling teams will no longer need to sort recyclables into the three hoppers on the side of the vehicle at the kerbside. Instead, all materials will be tipped into a single compartment of a compacting vehicle, transferred to the MRF and then sorted electronically, mechanically and with a small degree of manual input. The material will be high quality and re-saleable on the open market. The benefit to the Council is the reduction in cost of the recycling collection because of the need to employ less staff due to the increased speed of the operation and by using compacting vehicles. The benefit to local residents will be providing an efficient, effective, more convenient service which we believe will be excellent value for money.

A co-mingled collection service will allow the Council to use some smaller vehicles resulting in a greater number of households which will be suitable for the collection. ***It is anticipated that the Council will be able to increase coverage from 94% to 98%.***

By improving the service and its performance, making certain as many households as possible can access the service, as well as making savings, are all ways in which the Council is working towards providing a service to its customers which will deliver excellent value for money.

Effective communication was referred to in the Task Group's first scrutiny report because it is our view that there is a **strong correlation between communication and customer satisfaction**. As moving to a co-mingled collection will be a major change to the service, ensuring local residents are clear about what those changes are is vital. Therefore, **the Task Group supports the officers' proposals** to issue regular press releases in local papers, print articles in the Together Bromsgrove magazine, include updates on the Council's website and ensure all Members of the Council and the Parish Councils are fully informed.

The communication would also need to cover any changes to the containers so that residents are clear about what waste needs to go into which wheelie bin and which materials can be recycled, especially as there appears to be some confusion, even now, as to what can and cannot be recycled. Ensuring local residents are fully informed and reminding them about what their role is in relation to recycling, will assist the Council in maintaining good customer satisfaction levels and increasing recycling rates further. This is supported by evidence we found at East Hampshire District Council which had strong community engagement and a good communication plan which assisted it to achieve Beacon Council status.

➤ Chargeable Green Waste Collections

As Members are aware, the new chargeable service will be implemented in March 2009 costing £30 per household for a 9 month service and we were pleased to learn that residents are being provided information on the new chargeable green waste collection service using a variety of methods including: calendars; regular press releases now and in the future; Customer Service Centre; the Council's website; and Parish Councils. As stated under the previous section relating to the new co-mingled service, we believe effective communication with local residents is key to help increase customer satisfaction.

We questioned why the Council could not provide different options for green waste collections such as a slightly higher fee for a 12 month service. However, it is understood that having different options would be very difficult to implement and would cause operational difficulties. As the tonnage collected during the winter months reduces significantly, it does appear unlikely that 12 month service would provide value for money at this time. This may of course change in the future, if it became clear that it was a 12 month service, rather than a 9 month service, that local residents preferred and this would then need to be reconsidered.

Unlike some local authorities, such as Wychavon District Council, which operate a limited chargeable green waste service for approximately 15% of the total population, Bromsgrove District Council will ensure it is open to approximately 90% of households should they wish to opt for the service. **The Task Group feels it is important that as many households as possible have the opportunity to access the chargeable green waste service and therefore supports officers in striving to increase the service coverage, wherever practically possible.**

Within the Task Group’s terms of reference, it was asked that an extended level of service that could be achievable through greater spending be considered. As the green waste collection service is popular with local residents (in the 2007 Customer Survey 70% of residents stated they would be willing to pay for the green waste service) and previously, some residents have requested a second wheelie bin for their green waste, we would like this option investigated further in the future. Hence our first recommendation is:

Recommendation 1	Once the chargeable green waste collection service has been implemented and the take up of the service is known, Street Scene officers be requested to investigate the option of providing additional wheelie bins for green waste on request at an additional charge.
Priority	High / Medium – The Task Group feel this is a high priority as it is something that some of our customers have been requesting and therefore is important to consider. However, as it is not something that can be investigated until the take-up of the new service is known next year, we have stated it is as high/medium.
Financial Implications	There are no direct financial implications to this recommendation. (However, inevitably, officer time would be required to investigate the option.) Any additional charge for extra green bins would need to be fully considered at that time.

➤ Vehicle Fleet

As reported to the Cabinet in July, the Task Group was informed of the serious reliability problems with the vehicles, particularly with the mechanical side-arm leading to major difficulties of keeping all vehicles on the road on a daily basis. As all Members will know, the unreliability of the vehicles is having a negative impact on customer service.

Although we questioned whether a move back to rear loading vehicles was necessary, after our investigation, we are satisfied that rear loading vehicles are required due to: helping maintain and improve customer satisfaction levels by improving the reliability and consistency of the service; make savings in the long term; and increase the Council’s opportunities for shared working (as all other local authorities in the County have rear loading vehicles). It is understood that the current vehicles are due to be replaced in 2 years time regardless.

We also ***support the idea that the side-arm vehicles will continue to be used for the green waste collection service to ensure the Council is not wasting the resource.*** As not all vehicles will be required, there will be spare vehicles meaning unreliability issues should not impact on our customers.

➤ Comparison of costs of current and future service

As there are several changing factors which will affect the overall cost of the service (e.g. charging for green waste collections; replacing the vehicle fleet; introducing co-mingled collections; and disposal options) the most appropriate way for the Task Group to compare costs of current and future services was to look at vehicles and staffing.

The costs of vehicles, vehicle maintenance, fuel and staffing (assuming vehicles continue to tip at either Bromsgrove or Redditch locations) over a 12 month period are shown below:

Side Arm and Kerbsiders	£1,681,500
Rear Loading and Kerbsiders	£1,619,500
All Rear Loading (Co-mingled)	£1,562,800

The above shows that changing the vehicle fleet could see savings of approximately £62,000 and a further saving of over £56,000 when the Council move to providing a co-mingled service. The total amount saved by providing a co-mingled service using rear loading vehicles would be almost £120,000. (Please note: As stated above, these figures relate to the vehicle and staffing costs only and are dependent upon a capital investment to purchase new and additional bins and replacement vehicles.)

➤ Comparison against other local authorities

We contacted Dr. Andy Johnston, Head of Centre for Local Sustainability at Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), and asked him to assist the Task Group by providing examples of best practice which might be of relevance to the second scrutiny investigation.

Dr. Andy Johnston kindly agreed to help the Task Group and suggested 6 different local authorities he believed would be useful for us to look at which were:

- Daventry District Council
- East Hampshire District Council
- St. Edmundsbury Borough Council
- Stroud District Council
- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
- Tumbridge Wells Borough Council

We obtained a large amount of information from these Councils and some neighbouring Councils including:

- Redditch Borough Council
- Wychavon District Council
- Wyre Forest District Council

We compared all the information and although there were several variations of service provided by each Council, the Task Group found that there were no major differences between the level of service provided by Bromsgrove District Council compared to Beacon authorities such as Daventry District Council.

Nevertheless, the small differences were discussed. After some consideration, only one relating to on-street recycling trials formed part of our final recommendations. We believe that on-street recycling may influence recycling rates by helping to change attitudes and encourage people to recycle more and therefore felt it was worth investigating further by simply monitoring the existing trials taking place:

Recommendation 2	Officers from Street Scene be requested to monitor on-street recycling trials being undertaken by other Councils (such as Wyre Forest District Council) to see if there is any evidence to suggest it would provide value for money.
Priority	Low – This is set as a low priority as at present there does not appear to be strong evidence that on-street recycling has been successful. However, we feel that it is worth monitoring other trials taking place at other Councils.
Financial Implications	There are no direct financial implications. However, inevitably, officer time would be required. Officers would simply be expected to monitor the success of the on-street recycling trials by communicating with those local councils (e.g. Wyre Forest) such as at the Joint Waste Forums which officers are already attending.

➤ Cost comparisons with neighbouring authorities

Worcestershire County Council commissioned consultants to compile data on the costs of the waste collection services provided by District and Borough Councils in the area and this information recently became available (attached as Appendix 3). The Task Group considered in detail the costs of the service provided by Bromsgrove District Council compared to other local authorities and, initially, we were concerned to find that it appeared that Bromsgrove District Council costs were very high compared to our neighbours.

It was expected that there would be some differences in costs, particularly where we provided a higher level of service, however this did not account for the significant cost difference in staff related overheads.

Officers too questioned the data and offered the explanation that officers at Bromsgrove District Council include a proportion of the running costs of the

Council as a whole (e.g. ICT, HR). The reason for this was officers believed that this would show a more accurate cost of the service; however, it seemed unlikely that the overhead costs were calculated in the same way by other local authorities which made it difficult to obtain a true comparison. ***The Task Group support officers in requesting this recently collated cost comparison data is discussed with Worcestershire County Council and other neighbouring authorities, particularly in relation to how figures are calculated.***

The cost per household is a performance indicator and we support the efforts of officers in improving this figure. For example, it is expected that in 2010/11 over £100,000 will be saved due to the MRF as kerbside sorting will no longer be necessary and therefore there will be a reduction in the workforce. As the chargeable green waste collection service is due to be introduced in March 2009, this will also contribute to decreasing the cost per household. Additional savings are also expected in the future through shared working with Redditch Borough Council. Furthermore, officers are challenging the County Council on recycling credits as other local authorities outside Worcestershire receive such financial credits which gives them an advantage. Therefore, ***the Task Group supports the work of officers who are continuing to investigate ways to reduce the cost per household of the service.***

One final point on this is it should be noted that within the data compiled by Worcestershire County Council, it shows that ***our recycling rates are the highest within the County by up to 17% higher.***

➤ Shared Working

The possibility of joint working was discussed by the Task Group and it is understood that ***options for shared working with Redditch Borough Council are already being investigated by officers***, not just with the refuse and recycling collections but across the whole service (and indeed the whole Council) and the ***Task Group support this move.***

It was questioned whether we could consider joint working with other neighbouring authorities such as Wychavon District Council, however we understand that Wychavon use a private contractor, unlike Bromsgrove and Redditch which both have an in-house service.

Although it is understood that there are hurdles to cross in terms of shared working with Redditch, as previously mentioned earlier in this report, standardising the vehicle fleet assists the Council in progressing shared working as most local authorities, including Redditch, have rear loading vehicles.

There is also good communication between local authorities across the County, particular via the ***monthly Joint Waste Forums for both officers and relevant Portfolio Holders which the Task Group very much supports.*** Furthermore,

the Task Group ***supports the Joint Municipal Waste Strategy for Herefordshire and Worcestershire 2004-2034*** which outlines the problems we face, where we are now and how we can move forward together.

➤ Alternative methods of service delivery (e.g. private contractor)

Members enquired about the possibility of using alternative methods of service delivery such as using a private contractor. However, the advice received from the Government Office is currently, when the service is undergoing a considerable change to its refuse vehicle fleet and disposal methods, as well as adopting a co-mingled recycling service and introducing a chargeable green waste collection, it is unlikely any outside contractor would be interested at this time.

Although this is not a viable option at present due to the imminent changes, Members believe this may be worth investigating further in the future and at a more appropriate time, market testing and comparisons could be undertaken.

Recommendation 3	When the new co-mingled service has been in operation for a minimum of one year, the option of delivering the service using an alternative method (including using a private contractor) be considered to see if it would be an appropriate time for market testing and comparisons to be undertaken.
Priority	Low / Medium – We feel this is an important option that needs to be considered. However, as the Government Office has advised it is not a suitable time, we have rated this as a low / medium priority at this time.
Financial Implications	There are no direct financial implications. However, as already pointed out, with all recommendations, even if there are no financial implications, there will be a need for some officer input to implement them. The option of using a private contractor, similar to Wychavon, may be a viable option for the future in terms of ensuring the Council is providing a value for money service.

➤ Customer Satisfaction

Similar to last year, Bromsgrove District Council commissioned Snap Survey Shop to assist with their Customer Panel Survey for 2008. The purpose of the surveys is to seek residents' views on how the Council could improve the local area and the services it provides.

During the Task Group's first scrutiny investigation, results from the 2007 survey were considered. However, at the time of the second scrutiny investigation, the results of the 2008 survey were available and therefore a comparison of the results could be undertaken.

The satisfaction levels of the refuse collection service in general for 2007 and 2008 can be found in the following table:

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the refuse collection service in general?		
	2007	2008
Very satisfied	27%	29%
Fairly satisfied	41%	42%
Neither	6%	5%
Fairly dissatisfied	18%	15%
Very dissatisfied	7%	9%

You will see in the next table that the overall satisfaction level (respondents who stated they were “very satisfied” or “fairly satisfied”) in 2007 was 68% and in 2008, the **satisfaction rate increased by 3% to 71%**.

Overall Satisfaction level of the Refuse Collection Service (% who gave a positive response)	
2007	2008
68%	71%

The dissatisfaction level (made up of respondents who stated they were “fairly dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”) was 25% in 2007 and in 2008 it decreased by 1% overall to 24%.

Some of the reasons for dissatisfaction with the service during 2008 which we looked at are provided within Appendices 4 and 5.

Overall Dissatisfaction level of the Refuse Collection Service (% who gave a negative response)	
2007	2008
25%	24%

The remainder of respondents stated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the service. Further information can be found in Appendices 4, 5 and 6.

Members also revisited the comments received from the public and Parish Councils during their first scrutiny exercise and as previously reported, it was interesting to find that not only did we have a very good response rate from local residents but what was more unusual for a scrutiny investigation, was the high level of positive responses, particularly in relation to the recycling service. An extract of comments made by local residents can be found under Appendix 7.

We are very pleased with the positive comments we received from the public and to see that the customer satisfaction rate has increased and the dissatisfaction rate and decreased to 24%. However, this is still a significant amount of our customers who are unhappy with the service which is why we considered the reasons for their dissatisfaction as outlined in appendix 4. What we noticed was there seemed to be four main causes for dissatisfaction with the service:

- Waste containers not left in the correct place after emptying (e.g. not beside the correct property or blocking a drive)
- Recycling boxes not big enough
- Missed bins/bins emptied late
- Certain recyclables being left behind and not collected

With regard to the first and second bullet point, we believe that recommendations contained within our first report address these issues. For example, we recommended NVQ Training in Waste Management from WAMITAB (Waste Management Industry Training Advisory Board) for the existing workforce and new staff members. The recommendations relating to training, which were at no direct financial cost to the Council, were approved and training recently commenced. We believe this will help improve service efficiency and help us achieve higher sustainable levels of customer satisfaction.

As Members will know, with the change to a co-mingled collection, it is likely a wheelie bin which will be used for recyclables instead of the existing blue and red boxes and this should also help ensure residents have enough space in the future to dispose of all of their recyclables. However, in the meantime, another recommendation within our first report addresses the problem as it related to communicating with local residents which specifically included making sure they are aware that they can request additional recycling boxes free of charge. This was also approved.

The third bullet point above highlights the problems with the unreliability of the side-arm vehicles which is why we support officers actions in replacing these vehicles with the standard rear loaders so that our customers receive a more reliable and consistent service. As mentioned earlier in the report, it will also assist with shared working.

The final bullet point on the previous page relating to 'certain recyclables being left behind and not collected' is more difficult for this Council to address as it is reliant on the County Council as the disposal authority. The District Council can only collect recyclables which the County Council is able to process. This means there have been occasions when the District Council's refuse crews have had no choice but to leave certain items behind which householders have left out. However, it is anticipated that more materials could be recycled once the new MRF is in operation and as recommended within the first report (and reiterated within this report), officers are working closely with the County Council in relation to investigating recycling additional materials through the Joint Waste Forums. In the meantime, refuse crews will continue to leave yellow tags with items that cannot be collected so as to inform the householder of the reasons why particular items were left behind.

➤ Reconsideration of one original recommendation

From the first scrutiny investigation carried out by this Task Group, only one recommendation was not approved and instead was referred back:

Scrutiny Recommendation 12 – Collection Arrangements

To ensure that local residents are clear about which containers should be placed in the kerbside and when, officers be requested to investigate trialling wheelie bin stickers during 2008/09 or 2009/10, similar to Lichfield District Council.

Cabinet Response

The Cabinet requested that the Task Group reconsider this proposal as it was felt that the calendars were very popular with residents as an easily accessible source of information on dates of collections and there appeared to be little evidence that a change to wheelie bin stickers would be welcomed.

As requested, we did revisit this recommendation and discussed it once again with Street Scene officers.

When this recommendation was discussed initially in December 2007, we believed that this was an option worth looking into further. Partly due to the success of a similar scheme in Lichfield District Council and also because there had been some problems at this Council in relation to communicating to residents changes to the refuse and recycling service. Therefore, at that time, we believed it was an appropriate suggestion that could be *investigated* (not necessarily implemented).

However, as communication does seem to have improved considerably, we are happy to withdraw this particular recommendation.

CONCLUSION

Value for Money is extremely important as we need to ensure that we are providing our residents good quality services at the right level of cost. Using our terms of reference as a guide, we would like to make the following points:

- In relation to the refuse and recycling collections, we believe the current level of the service is very good; however, the current level of performance and cost of the service could be improved. The way in which this can be achieved is by:
 - Replacing the current vehicle fleet to more reliable rear loading vehicles - This would ensure a reliable and consistent service for residents and assist in future joint working with neighbouring authorities such as Redditch Borough Council; and
 - Introducing a co-mingled service as soon as possible - This would mean an improved level of service, an improved level of performance, extending the service to reach potentially 98% of households and all at a reduced level of cost.

This is something the Council is already working towards and although we did have concerns initially regarding replacing the vehicle fleet and reverting back to rear loaders, we believe this is the best way to ensure a value for money service.

- When we compared the current level, performance and cost of the service provided by other local authorities similar to Bromsgrove District Council, including Beacon authorities, we were encouraged to find that we fared very well and there were no major differences. In fact, comparing ourselves with neighbouring authorities, our level and performance of service is the best in the County. However, we do have some concerns regarding the costs and more specifically, how the costs are calculated by each authority as we found it very difficult to find a true comparison. Therefore we strongly support officers in discussing this further with Worcestershire County Council who collated the cost data.
- Other differences were also discussed although the majority did not appear in our final recommendations. For example, we looked at the possibility of introducing food waste collections but we found that it was questionable whether this would be a value for money service as: the volume of food waste is relatively small; a different style vehicle and specialised containers would be required which would increase costs; and there is also the issue relating to the disposal of food waste as the necessary machinery is not available in the County. We do, however, feel it would be worthwhile to monitor the on-street recycling trials of other Councils such as Wyre Forest District Council, to see if there is anything we can learn in terms of VFM.

- The refuse and recycling collection service is the one service used by all residents and consequently, it is not surprising that it is often used to judge the performance of the Council. Therefore, we were very encouraged to find that customer satisfaction levels with the service have increased this year compared to last year and by implementing approved recommendations contained within our first report, together with the change to a co-mingled service by 2010, we believe that customer satisfaction is likely to continue to increase.
- The main area of the service where savings could be identified is what is already planned which is the move to providing a co-mingled collection service. With compacting vehicles and a reduction in the workforce, savings will be seen in future years. Furthermore, through shared working with Redditch Borough Council, more savings could be found.
- We believe the best level of service that could be provided by the Council based on the current budget is: a co-mingled recycling service; a chargeable green waste collection available to all residents who have been able to use the current green waste collection service; and a fortnightly refuse (grey bin) service. What would further improve the service would be to increase the types of materials that could be recycled, but unfortunately, this is not something that this Council has direct control over. However, the Task Group is confident that officers will continue to regularly communicate with the County Council and other neighbouring authorities as stated in this report and recommended in our previous report (which was approved).
- With regard to an improved or extended level of service that could be achievable through greater spending, we believe one viable option would be to allow residents the ability to request additional green wheelie bins for an additional charge which is why this is included as a recommendation within this report.

It should be pointed out that the contents of this report are in line with two of the Council's Objectives which are Improvement and Environment and it is also in line with the Council's existing priority on recycling.

We believe our findings during our second piece of work show that the Council is already moving in the right direction in making sure it strikes the right balance between cost and performance of the refuse and recycling service and we believe this is reflected by the low number of recommendations contained within this report. Therefore, we would like to thank Street Scene Officers for all their hard work as all Members of the Task Group agree that they are doing an excellent job in trying to ensure we provide excellent value for money services to our customers.

REVIEW

The Refuse and Recycling Task Group will reconvene in 12-18 months time to carry out a review of the outcome of both of its reports including whether or not recommendations were approved and implemented and the impact of these actions.

Councillor C. R. Surrell
Chairman of the Refuse and Recycling Task Group

Contact Officer

Name: Della McCarthy

Email: d.mccarthy@bromsgrove.gov.uk

Tel: 01527 881407

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Task Group’s Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 – A List of those the Task Group consulted

Appendix 3 – Worcestershire Districts Collection Summary Data

Appendix 4 – Extract from SNAP Survey - 2008

Appendix 5 – Extract from Appendix to SNAP Survey - 2008

Appendix 6 – Extract from SNAP Survey - 2007

Appendix 7 – Extracts of comments made by local residents

REFUSE AND RECYCLING TASK GROUP
SECOND INVESTIGATION – VALUE FOR MONEY

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference below was approved by both the former Scrutiny Steering Board and the Refuse and Recycling Task Group.

General Area to be Scrutinised:

A Value for Money analysis of the Refuse and Recycling Service.

Specific Subject to be Scrutinised:

The Task Group is requested to carry out a benchmarking exercise and therefore investigate the following and make any appropriate recommendations for improvement:

- The level, performance and cost of service currently provided by BDC
- The level, performance and cost of service provided by other local authorities similar to BDC to enable a like for like comparison. (This should include both a selection of neighbouring authorities and similar local authorities higher up in the recycling league table.)
- A comparison of the data in bullet points 1 and 2 above which should include identifying the underlying reasons for differences in levels of performance and costs of the service between BDC and other local authorities
- A comparison of customer satisfaction levels year on year to find out whether or not they are increasing, decreasing or remaining the same.
- Any areas of the service where possible savings could be identified
- The maximum/optimum level of service that could be provided by BDC based on the current budget
- An improved/extended level of service that could be achievable through greater spending (to include costs)

(BDC = Bromsgrove District Council)

A List of those the Task Group Consulted

External Witnesses:

Public:

- Consulted via a press release and the Council's website. A total of 26 emails and letters were received and these were reconsidered by the Task Group.

Parish Councils:

- The Task Group revisited comments received from Parish Councils who were asked to complete the "Waste Matters" survey during the first investigation.

Other Local Authorities:

- Daventry District Council
- East Hampshire District Council
- Redditch Borough Council
- St. Edmundsbury Borough Council
- Stroud District Council
- Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
- Tumbridge Wells Borough Council
- Worcestershire County Council
- Wychavon District Council
- Wyre Forest District Council

Experts:

- Dr. Andy Johnston, Head of Centre for Local Sustainability at the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)

Internal Witnesses:

Portfolio Holder:

- Councillor Mrs. M. A. Sherrey JP, Portfolio Holder for Waste Management and Recycling

Street Scene and Waste Management:

- Mr. M. Bell, Head of Street Scene and Waste Management
- Mr. K. Hirons, Street Scene and Waste Manager (attended all Task Group Meetings)
- Ms. A. Wardell, Waste Policy and Promotions Manager

All relevant officers were made aware of the recommendations and were given an opportunity to comment.

As with all overview and scrutiny reports, all financial implications were checked by the Head of Financial Services and all legal implications were checked by the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services and/or a Senior Solicitor.

Worcestershire Districts Collection Summary Data

Worcestershire Collection Costs 2007-8 Actuals															
Ref	Description	Bromsgrove DC		Redditch DC		Malvern Hills (excl trade)		Wyre Forest DC (excl trade)		Worcester City Council		Wychavon DC		Total Gross Costs	* Average %
		Costs (£'000's)	% of Gross Total	Costs (£'000's)	% of Gross Total	Costs (£'000's)	% of Gross Total	Costs (£'000's)	% of Gross Total	Costs (£'000's)	% of Gross Total	Costs (£'000's)	% of Gross Total		
Refuse Collection Costs 2007/8 Actual Costs															
1	Salaries and Wages	1005.4	33.51%	545.6	33.46%	576	33.46%	1114.8	44.80%	851	44.80%	1050	42.42%	5142.8	38.01%
2	Agency Costs	127.9	4.26%	121.1	7.43%	213	7.43%	116.6	4.69%	32	4.69%	225	9.09%	835.6	6.18%
Transport															
3	Contract Hire/Leasing	85.5	2.85%	72.6	4.45%	174	4.45%	23.3	0.94%	Zero	0.94%	375	15.15%	5978.40	44.18%
4	Fuel	181.9	6.06%	130.4	8.00%	174	8.00%	203.5	8.18%	139	7.36%	300	12.12%	556.4	4.11%
5	Maintenance	196.9	6.46%	122.7	7.52%	150	7.52%	214.6	8.62%	107	5.66%	300	12.12%	11288	8.34%
6	Insurance	53.4	1.78%	9.4	0.58%	33	0.58%	32.9	1.32%	8	0.42%	75	3.03%	1091.2	8.06%
7	Other (small misc)			1	0.06%	44	0.06%	5.3	0.21%	20	0.21%	75	3.03%	211.7	1.56%
Supplies and Services															
8	Recycling Gate Fees					42	2.06%			10	0.53%	n/a	n/a	3133.4	23.16%
9	Replacement Bins	48	1.60%	56.3	3.45%			96.8	3.89%	13	0.69%	n/a	n/a	52.0	0.38%
10	Other (including communication and other misc)	61.1	2.04%	37.9	2.32%	220	2.32%	89.7	3.60%	60	3.18%	75	3.03%	214.1	1.58%
Overheads															
11	Staff related, including payroll, HR and finance	935.1	31.17%	435	26.68%	414	26.68%	240.6	9.67%	395	20.91%	2475	n/a	734.8	5.43%
12	Capital Charge	305.2	10.17%	98.7	6.05%	181	6.05%	350.2	14.07%	254	13.45%	2475	n/a	2419.7	17.88%
13	Total Gross Costs (£000's)	3000.4	100.00%	1630.7	100.00%	2047	100.00%	2488.3	100.00%	1889	100.00%	2475	100.00%	13530.4	26.67%
Gross Costs Per Household (excl income e.g. grants, recycling credits, bulkywaste income)		£76.93		£48.21		£62.43		£56.50		£44.74		£49.50		£	55.94
		39000		33824		32791		44042		42219		50000		241876	
Cost/Property excluding overhead costs		45.13		32.43		44.28		43.08		29.37		49.50			
Recycling percentage approx		43%		33%		26%		28%		35%		29%			

* Note this total excludes £522k costs from Wychavon - detail unavailable from Focsa

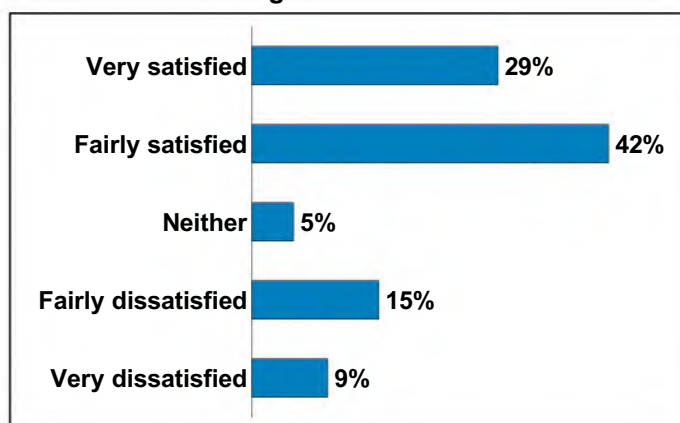
Extract from SNAP Survey - 2008

7.4 The refuse collection service

Residents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the refuse collection service. 71% said they were satisfied, while 24% were dissatisfied. Older respondents tended to be more satisfied than younger respondents:

- 60% of 18-34 year olds were satisfied
- 61% of 35-54 year olds were satisfied
- 75% of 55-74 year olds were satisfied
- 92% of those aged 75 or over were satisfied.

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the refuse collection service in general?



Base: All respondents (603)

The findings for different areas are shown in the table below. The differences are not statistically significant.

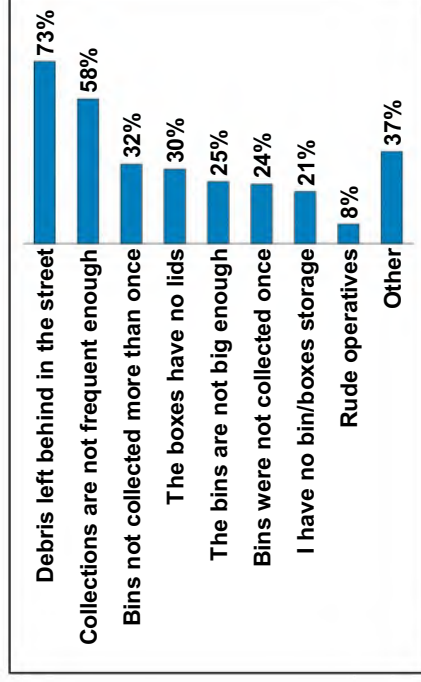
<i>Satisfaction with refuse collection service</i>	Urban 1	Urban 2	Rural 1	Rural 2
Very satisfied	27%	34%	25%	36%
Fairly satisfied	44%	37%	43%	34%
Neither	5%	4%	6%	7%
Fairly dissatisfied	16%	19%	10%	14%
Very dissatisfied	8%	6%	15%	9%

Appendix 4

Respondents who were dissatisfied with the refuse collection service were asked if they had experienced any problems with their refuse collection service, and were given a list of possible issues to choose from.

The main issue was debris left in the street (73%), although 58% felt that collections were not frequent enough. There were few differences between subgroups, with the exception of respondents in Urban 1 being significantly more likely than residents in Urban 2 to say that they have had debris left behind in the street (82% of Urban 1 compared to 47% of Urban 2).

Have you ever experienced any of the following issues with your refuse collection service?



Base: All respondents who are dissatisfied with the refuse collection service (142)

Respondents were given the opportunity to list other problems that they may have experienced with the refuse collection service. A selection of these are shown below, and a full list can be found in the appendix.

"7 a.m. on Saturdays!"

"Bins and boxes left blocking pavement and driveways."

"Bins missed on more than 15 occasions - we give up! My husband takes waste to commercial bins himself. Any chance of reduction in Council Tax?"

"Insufficient recycling, no cardboard, metal, etc."

"Other people's wheelie bins left in my drive."

"Recycling should be weekly."

"Recycling boxes not big enough."

"The bins advertise that they take textiles, but textiles left behind."

"This service is generally very poor, it needs dynamic improvement."

Extract from Appendix to SNAP Survey - 2008

Q31. If you are dissatisfied with the refuse collection service, please indicate whether you have ever experienced any of the following issues with your refuse collections – Other

"7 a.m. on Saturdays!"

"Appalling service for both grey and green bin collection."

"Bin collections can be a day or more late."

"Bins and boxes left blocking pavement and driveways."

"Bins are always left haphazardly on footpaths causing extreme life threatening situations for the elderly, disabled and young children."

"Bins are not left outside my property, always left further up the road and not even left tidily or with consideration for other path users."

"Bins are not left outside your house."

"Bins collected after 4 p.m. and not always on the correct day. You never know why or when."

"Bins left all over the place. White marks painted on bins and I do not know why."

"Bins left because not exactly in right place. We are not encouraged to recycle by charging us and give small boxes, emptied fortnightly."

"Bins left far away from property or blocking driveways."

"Bins missed on more than 15 occasions - we give up! My husband takes waste to commercial bins himself. Any chance of reduction in Council Tax?"

"Bins routinely left obstructing the pavement, hazard for motorized buggy users and mothers with small children. If a car is parked on the pavement, I understand it is an offence. What about bins?"

"Blocked pavements, having to walk in road but advised that the Council have insurances in case we are injured."

"Boxes are no good on windy days, have to keep putting boxes back, they blow over. When at work all day this causes recycling to be blown around."

"Boxes are not big enough."

"Boxes frequently broken and scattered around the street by the bin men."

"Boxes not big enough (consider small bins)."

"Boxes not big enough, need more boxes."

"Broken boxes (council damage) are not replaced."

"Completely unreliable, kerbside bins and boxes obstruct pavement."

Appendix 5

"Difficulty putting out heavy bins when ill or infirm."

"Grey bins and boxes STINK in warm weather."

"Have not been issued with a wheelie bin, birds frequently getting into black bin bags."

"I am not offered any recycling service, refuse only permitted to be 'household' waste. No definition given. Refuse left without explanation at the time."

"I do not appreciate walking up and down the length of our road looking for our bin."

"I have two people in this house using incontinence pads, so the bins smell awful at the end of two weeks, even if wrapped up."

"I live next to bin cupboards, we have flies and it smells."

"I take all my own waste to the tip - we live too far from the end of the lane where the collection takes place. Bins are now making all areas look scruffy."

"If bin is a little overfilled, not emptied at all, so yet another two weeks to wait."

"If windy, empty boxes and bins being blown I road could cause an accident."

"Insufficient recycling, no cardboard, metal, etc."

"Introduction of green bin fee is disgraceful."

"Lorries block the road and don't pull over so you can pass."

"Losing the green bin collection within Council Tax payment."

"Need back door collection, bins on pavement are a hazard for wheelchairs, pushchairs, blind people, etc."

"Neighbours putting out waste the day before collection and local children spreading it around the area. Also, some neighbours not collecting their bins/boxes for anything from a few days to a week."

"No chance to recycle as there is no collection."

"No consistency with collections."

"No opportunity to recycle."

"Often away meaning bin left out drawing attention to an empty house."

"Operatives sometimes do not return bin. I am registered for assistance."

"Other people's wheelie bins left in my drive."

"Papers left in bottom of red box."

Appendix 5

"Recycle bins for paper, tins and plastic, etc., are not big enough. Also, our driveway is on a slope so when it's windy the bins are blown down the driveway to the road."

"Recycle capable items being left behind!"

"Recycling boxes not big enough."

"Recycling should be weekly."

"Selective operators who decide what to collect and what not to collect."

"The bins advertise that they take textiles, but textiles left behind."

"The recycle bins are inadequate & unwieldy. Our drive is over 50 metres long & because we are conscientious at recycling, we have 8 boxes to manoeuvre. This is ergonomically unsafe, need wheelie bin."

"They leave stuff behind."

"This service is generally very poor, it needs dynamic improvement."

"Too fussy about what is recycled and don't take enough."

"When my bins were not collected I was unable to speak to anyone about it, my phone calls were not returned and rubbish was not collected, which meant 1 month before collection. This is not acceptable."

Extract from SNAP Survey - 2007

9 STREET SCENE AND WASTE MANAGEMENT: REFUSE COLLECTION

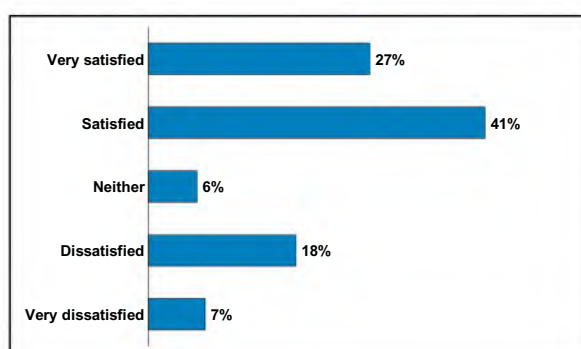
9.1 Introduction

This section of the report looks at residents' satisfaction with the refuse collection service.

9.2 Satisfaction with the refuse collection service

7 out of 10 (69%) were satisfied with the Refuse Collection Service, ranging from half (50%) of under 35s to three quarters (75%) in the 55 or older age group, and from 63% in workers to 75% in non workers.

Satisfaction with the refuse collection service



Base: All respondents (428)

9.3 Reasons for dissatisfaction with the service

Weekly rather than fortnightly collection of domestic refuse, especially during the summer months was a commonly stated reason for dissatisfaction. Residents felt that collection of green waste should be continued throughout the winter, or at least resume earlier in the season and collected weekly in the summer. The service levels of binmen was also raised.

Bin men very careless when collecting refuse, they leave a trail of rubbish behind them, and do not make any attempt to pick any up

Bins are not replaced by my house. Litter is often left. Collections take place too early, so bins have to be put out the night before and are vandalised

Bins full in one week, maggots in food waste bags, smelly in summer!

Excellent scheme ruined by abandonment of year round green bin collection

Fortnightly rubbish collection too long to wait, bring back weekly and green bins earlier. The garden season is longer than the bin collection times

Green bin collection restarted too late into the growing season, needs to be 6 weeks earlier. Grey bins need to be emptied every week.

Green bin collection stopped in the winter, would welcome weekly green collection in summer

I think two weekly collections of household refuse is not enough, particularly in summer.

Below is a selection of extracts of some of the comments made by local residents in response to the Refuse and Recycling Task Group requesting their views:

“We find these services (Refuse and Recycling) very good. Having, in the beginning, doubts about the use of these large wheelie bins we have been won over completely.”

1. Recycling is **THE** major success of BDC and from our UK travels and UK holidays is one of the best in England.
2. We have had **NO** problems with our grey bin – even when we were a family of 5.”

“I would like to say that we are very happy with the fortnightly system and have adjusted to it without any problems.”

“We need to review your barmy and disgusting decision to leave festering food rubbish around for up to two weeks.”

“I should like to express my support for and approval of the current waste collection arrangements.”

“As far as I am concerned there are two main areas of concern, namely the insistence that the collection is every fortnight for household rubbish which, to my mind, is unhealthy. The second issue is that, although the Council are prepared to congratulate themselves on the amount that is recycled, there are omissions to the types of material that can be dealt with.”

Appendix 7

“Thank you very much for a reliable and regular Rubbish Collection.”

“Please bring back weekly collections. Food waste, no matter how well wrapped, is encouraging rodents.”

“I think it requires a return to the weekly collections...”

“My experience is that the current provision of the boxes for paper and plastic waste for recycling and a large green wheelie bin for garden waste – does not reflect our particular needs and we have to dispose of potentially recyclable material in the black wheelie bin.”

“I’m all for the recycling service – but when are we going to get it??!!”

“I write to applaud the current bin collection service with alternative collections on a weekly basis.”



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