



ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

SUMMARY OF THE PANEL'S FINAL REPORT ON RECYCLING

Purpose - The aim of the Scrutiny investigation was to investigate the Council's involvement in recycling in the context of the overall trend of increased waste generation, to examine national developments and consider the possible development of a strategy for green waste.

Findings - The panel heard that approximately 400 million tonnes of waste are produced in the United Kingdom each year. The amount of waste produced in England is growing at a rate of approximately 3-4% per year - one of the fastest rates of growth in Europe. It is estimated that this figure could double by 2020. As a consequence, the associated cost of managing this growth is anticipated to double - to around £3.2 billion per annum. Furthermore, it has been established that, nationally, over 50% of household waste sent to landfill sites or incinerated could be diverted from these disposal methods by recycling and composting. Action is needed - and recycling is one way of addressing some of the issues associated with increased waste.

The following terms of reference were approved for the review:

- a. To gain an understanding of the issues of the national waste strategy.
- b. To gain an understanding of the Council's current recycling initiatives.
- c. To investigate the targets that have been set for recycling levels in Middlesbrough and to establish if the Council is meeting those targets.
- d. To investigate how the Council could develop a strategy for green waste.
- e. To investigate how the Council could encourage recycling amongst its residents

Evidence was gathered via discussions with the relevant Portfolio Holder, officers from Environment, Performance and Policy, Middlesbrough Environment City, Darlington Borough Council and a site visit to the Haverton Hill Energy from Waste Plant.

Conclusions

Based on evidence considered during the investigation, the Panel concluded that Based on evidence considered during its investigation the Panel concluded that:

1. Action is necessary to address the increasing levels of waste being produced nationally.
2. Local policy and waste reduction and recycling targets are governed by national policies and directives. This has resulted in the current recycling regime being driven principally by the need to meet Government targets and performance indicators.
3. Waste minimisation is the optimum means of reducing levels of waste for disposal but, as producing goods from recycled materials uses less energy than using raw materials, recycling is also important and should be supported.

4. Due to a focus on reducing landfill by the use of waste incineration, Middlesbrough is not meeting recycling targets. However, expansion of the kerbside recycling scheme will increase recycling rates.
5. The Council is in a strong position to act as a “recycling champion” to promote recycling locally and deliver a clear message to the public on the benefits of recycling.
6. The Council should aim to set an example on recycling - although recycled materials from Council Buildings etc cannot be included in recycling targets, every effort should be made to recycle this material.
7. Although nationally the aim is to encourage recycling to reduce levels of landfill from an average of 80% of waste disposed of via that method, Middlesbrough currently disposes of less than 20% of waste via landfill due to use of the energy from waste incinerator. Materials recovered from incineration at the energy from waste plant cannot currently be included in recycling rates even though a high volume of materials from the incinerator is recycled (although this may be subject to change/clarification depending on the content of the forthcoming Waste Strategy 2006).
8. A number of good recycling schemes and initiatives are already in place in the borough but additional facilities are needed to increase recycling rates. It is anticipated that the extension of the kerbside recycling scheme across the Borough will achieve this.
9. Every effort should be made to maximise participation rates in the kerbside recycling scheme – education, promotion and publicity will be key elements of this and of increasing recycling rates in general. Participation and collection rates will need to be closely monitored.
10. Recycling rates could be increased further by the introduction of a Green Waste Strategy - although an assessment would need to be made of costs and benefits.
11. The cost-effectiveness of increasing recycling rates will also need to be considered - there is a need to ensure that a balance is struck between expenditure and increasing recycling rates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Council endorses the objectives (as contained in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Waste Hierarchy) of waste minimisation and re-use as the best waste management options but also recognises and promotes the environmental benefits of recycling.
2. That these objectives are supported principally on environmental grounds and not solely due to the need for local authorities to meet Government targets/performance indicators on recycling.
3. That a targeted, borough - wide education programme is established to promote these objectives.
4. That the importance of recycling, and also all local recycling schemes, is/are publicised via all appropriate means, including the Council's website, Middlesbrough News, press releases, posters and leaflets.

5. That the impact of extending the kerbside recycling scheme on recycling levels and participation rates is assessed before determining whether the introduction of further recycling initiatives (including a green waste strategy) are necessary to meet Government targets, or whether other measures to increase recycling rates should be considered.
6. That detailed options for dealing with green waste - including potential costs - are considered following action at 5. above.
7. That the forthcoming DEFRA Waste Strategy 2006 is awaited, together with any resultant changes in the recycling regime. Following this, and if necessary, representations be made to DEFRA regarding the fact that waste materials which are recycled from the Energy From Waste incinerator cannot currently be included in recycling targets even though such use (for example the use of bottom ash in the construction industry) reduces the need to exploit natural resources.
8. That the possibility of developing a programme to maximise waste recycled from Council buildings and services is examined.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN COLE
CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**