



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

27th JUNE 2006

SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT:LITTER BINS POLICY

Purpose:

The aims of the scrutiny review were to investigate the Council's litter bins service - including policy and provision, budgets, operational arrangements, maintenance and repair arrangements and associated issues.

Terms of Reference:

The terms of reference of the scrutiny review were as follows:

- To gain an understanding of the Council's responsibilities, service provision and operational arrangements in terms of litter bin provision.
- To examine existing budget provision and any associated maintenance, repair and replacement issues.
- To investigate the issues relating to advertising on litter bins.
- To examine existing inter-departmental arrangements and costings regarding litter bin siting/erection, repairs and replacement.
- To examine any existing litter bins policy and future strategies or programmes.
- To examine existing methods of recording/mapping litter bin locations.

Findings:

Evidence was gathered via discussions with the relevant Portfolio Holder and from officers from Environment.

The panel heard that The Council is currently responsible for over 600 litter and dog waste bins throughout Middlesbrough. The bins are important in supporting the Council's vision of raising hope, which includes a clean, safe, environment as one of its pillars. A number of key issues were identified in relation to each of the terms of reference above and these form the basis of the scrutiny panel's conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions:

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

- 1) Litter bin and dog waste bin provision is an important Council service which has a positive effect on improving Middlesbrough's environment.
- 2) The existing budget provision is inadequate in that it is not possible to provide a service that adequately responds to demand or to repairs and maintenance requirements. The annual budget is usually spent in full within a few weeks of the beginning of each financial year. This restricts the Council's ability to deliver its pillar of a clean, safe environment as part of the Raising Hope vision.
- 3) Although the capital funding bid of £30,000 which has been approved for 2006/07 illustrates that budget problems have been recognised at least in the short term, a longer term solution is needed. The service cannot rely on the success of annual capital funding bids.
- 4) The costs of installing new litter bins, or removing existing bins for repair, represent a significant call on an extremely limited budget. The use of a "dummy cover" in place of a litter bin which has been removed would avoid costly re-instatement works in relation to the concrete base and existing bin fittings as well as ensuring public safety.
- 5) Budget constraints have meant that it has not been possible to develop and implement a Council litter Bins Policy - despite this having been agreed as an appropriate course of action by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in September 2002.
- 6) The existing mapping system for litter bins is inadequate given their number and value as a Council asset and also in terms of civic amenity.
- 7) The use of plastic, post-mounted litter bins containing advertising is of limited value in terms of their capacity, durability and generally low impact on reducing levels of litter.

Recommendations:

As a result of the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

- 1) That the litter bins budget is increased to an annual level which can respond adequately to a much higher level of the demands made on it; which can respond to repairs and maintenance requirements; which allows a pro - active provision of bins, together with a stock of spares; and which reflects the Council's commitment to achieving a clean, safe environment in Middlesbrough.
- 2) That an achievable and sustainable Litter Bins Policy is developed which reflects the points raised at 1. above.
- 3) That, in order to avoid costly re-instatement works to a litter bin site when a bin is removed for repair or replacement, the possibility of using a "dummy cover" in its place be investigated.
- 4) That a modern mapping system, such as a geographic information system (GIS), is used to record litter bin locations. This would facilitate improved maintenance and repairs and also ensure that an up to date record is maintained of a valuable Council asset.
- 5) That the use of plastic, post-mounted litter bins in Middlesbrough is discontinued.
- 6) That as a result of 5. above:
 - (a)The Council withdraws from the existing contract with a private company to supply plastic, post-mounted litter bins containing advertisements and;
 - (b)Officers investigate alternative arrangements of using litter bins for advertising which may be more beneficial to the authority in terms of the type and location of bins provided and level of income.

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



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

27th JUNE 2006

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL FINAL REPORT: INVESTIGATION INTO THE COUNCIL'S LITTER BINS POLICY

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the findings of the Environment Scrutiny Panel's review of Litter Bins Policy.

BACKGROUND/AIMS

2. The Council is currently responsible for over 600 litter and dog waste bins throughout Middlesbrough. The bins are important in supporting the Council's Vision, which includes a clean, safe, environment as one of its pillars.
3. The aims of the scrutiny review were to investigate the existing litter bins service - including policy and provision, budgets, operational, maintenance and repair arrangements/issues.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The terms of reference for the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
 - To gain an understanding of the Council's responsibilities, service provision and operational arrangements in terms of litter bin provision.
 - To examine existing budget provision and any associated maintenance, repair and replacement issues.
 - To investigate the issues relating to advertising on litter bins.
 - To examine existing inter-departmental arrangements and costings regarding litter bin siting/erection, repairs and replacement.

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- To examine any existing litter bins policy and future strategies or programmes.
- To examine existing methods of recording/mapping litter bin locations.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

4. The Scrutiny Panel undertook a fairly short but in-depth review and met formally on three occasions between 3rd March and 18th April 2006. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Performance and Policy co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
5. A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
6. This report has been compiled on the basis of information, which was gathered via detailed officer presentations and the submission of written evidence.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

7. The membership of the Scrutiny Panel was as follows:
Councillor J Cole (Chair); and Councillors G Rogers (Vice-Chair), G Clark, M Heath, JA Jones, E Lancaster, J McTigue and R Regan.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

8. The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of each of the terms of reference are set out below. As it was found that the first two terms of reference contained areas of overlap, the issues raised and investigated are dealt with together.

TERM OF REFERENCE: "To gain an understanding of the Council's responsibilities, service provision and operational arrangements in terms of litter bin provision" and "To examine existing interdepartmental arrangements and costings regarding litter bin siting/erection, repairs and replacement".

9. The Council is currently responsible for approximately 550 litter and 80 dog waste bins across the Borough. Service provision involves the emptying, repair and maintenance of existing bins and siting new ones as appropriate.
10. For the purposes of this report, the term "litter bin" includes both dog waste bins and standard litter bins.
11. The scrutiny panel considered detailed information on:

- Different types of litter bins
- Service provision, maintenance and sustainability
- Siting considerations

Litter Bin Types

12. There are two main types of litter bins in use in Middlesbrough. These are post-mounted and free-standing. The use of post mounted bins has generally declined in recent years as they are generally of low volume and, as they are usually made from plastic, not as durable as metal bins. Plastic bins are particularly susceptible to vandalism, particularly fire damage, which can create safety issues relating to wiring of the lighting columns on which the bins are mounted. Where the Council provides new litter bins these are all of the free-standing, metal variety.
13. Plastic, post-mounted litter bins are however still being erected in Middlesbrough. A long-standing contract (from the 1990s) allows a private company to sell advertising space on these bins, which are supplied, at no cost, to the Council. The Council then takes on emptying and maintenance responsibilities. The issue of advertising on litter bins was considered in detail by the scrutiny panel and is covered at paragraphs 38-41 of the report.
14. Various types of free-standing litter bins are currently in use in Middlesbrough. Owing to problems of vandalism - which have been severe in some areas - the Council now only purchases hard wearing bins which are reasonably easy to repair and maintain. The bins vary in capacity between 90 and 240 litres. An advantage of the largest bin is that it can accommodate a standard size wheelie bin and, due to its construction, is easy to clean and maintain. Its large size does mean, however, that there can be problems in finding suitable locations for the bin.
15. Although the most attractive, most hard wearing and highest quality litter bins are the stainless steel variety which are located throughout the town centre, these have proved difficult to keep clean due to the construction material. In terms of long term value against cost and overall durability, the smaller 90 to 100 litre bins have been most effective.
16. In addition to standard litter bins, the Council also erects, maintains and empties approximately 80 dog waste bins (known as "dog bins") throughout the Borough. This number is likely to increase further through improved awareness and a general greater use of dog waste bins. Although plastic post-mounted bins were originally used for dog waste, only free-standing metal bins are now used due to issues relating to capacity and vandalism. Special emptying arrangements are needed for dog bins as their contents are required to be treated as clinical waste and disposed of accordingly.

Service Provision, Maintenance and Sustainability

17. Litter bins are emptied based on street cleansing frequencies, which vary between locations. Town centre bins and those located near to shopping centres are generally the most well used and are emptied more frequently than those at less well used locations.

18. Emptying frequencies vary from virtually continuously (at least six times daily) in busy town centre areas to daily at smaller shopping centres and monthly at the least used locations. In addition to scheduled emptying, litter bins are also emptied in response to reports from the public, street wardens etc. Dog bins are emptied on a weekly basis.
19. The existing street cleansing works contract is used to fund the emptying of litter bins and the disposal of contents. There are no major budgetary issues arising from the operation of the cleansing contract.
20. There is a separate annual budget that is used for the purchase, repair and maintenance of litter bins. The scrutiny panel considered detailed information relating to the budget and associated costs and this is covered separately in the report, from paragraph 28 onwards.
21. Damage and vandalism to litter bins is an ongoing problem, particularly given the budget position. Vandalism can range from minor damage to locks or hinges, which is easily repaired, to the destruction of a bin through arson. In the case of minor or limited damage, bins are repaired on site. Otherwise a damaged bin is removed for repair by the manufacturer. On cost-effectiveness grounds, these bins are collected by the manufacturer in batches of six to eight. This can delay the repair/replacement process and mean that a location can be without a litter bin for several months.
22. At any one time there are typically 40 to 50 bins out of service from a total stock of approximately 630. Of these, approximately ten will be beyond repair and will be scrapped. This is usually in the case of severe vandalism or damage such as road traffic accidents.
23. The removal, replacement or original siting of a litter bin is undertaken on a chargeable basis by Council staff within Environment at a typical cost of £200. This can include the cost of remedial works to make sites safe, such as and removing raised bolts which are a tripping hazard. The panel noted that as the Council does not stock any spare litter bins (due to the budget position) it is necessary to remove and then re-install bolts as a replacement, or repaired, bin becomes available. Removal/installation costs are therefore double those which would be payable if spare bins were available.

Siting Considerations

24. The siting of litter bins is an important issue. Bins should generally be located in areas where they will be reasonably well used or which have been previously identified as having a litter problem (or potential litter problem). Officers monitor issues such as new housing developments, routes taken by children on the way to and from school and locations of fast food outlets in an effort to ensure that bins are located at optimum sites. In addition, members of the public, local businesses and ward councillors also submit requests for litter bins to be sited at new locations. Dog bins are sited at the boundaries of popular open spaces that are used to exercise dogs.
25. A number of factors are taken into account in determining the location for a litter bin, as follows:
 - Availability of funds
 - Access issues, including pavement width and the size of bin which can be accommodated
 - Volume of waste expected

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- Proximity to dwellings
- Routes to school
- Ease of maintenance
- The views of highways officers
- The views of the person making the request (where appropriate)

26. Following officer assessment of the suitability of a new location, all requests for new litter bins are dealt with in chronological order, as funds become available.

27. Different arrangements apply in the case of siting plastic, post-mounted litter bins that carry advertising. These are covered separately in the report, from paragraph 38 onwards.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine existing budget provision and any associated maintenance, repair and replacement issues”.

28. The 2006/07 budget for litter bin service provision is £6,991. The scrutiny panel found that this sum has increased marginally over the last five years, as follows:

<u>Financial Year</u>	<u>Annual Budget/£</u>
2002/03	6,433
2003/04	6,594
2004/05	6,720
2005/06	6,854
2006/07	6,991

29. Although the budget was originally established to fund the purchase, installation and maintenance of only litter bins, it is now also required to fund the provision and maintenance of dog bins.

30. The panel was provided with examples of current litter bin costs. These illustrate that the 2006/07 budget could be used to purchase between eight and 14 new bins at a cost of £300 - £800, depending on size. However, as the charge for removing and/or installing a bin is £200, the total cost of removing an old bin and purchasing and installing a new, large bin (at £800) in its place would be £1,200. Replacing one litter bin can therefore utilise over 17% of the entire year’s budget.

31. The limited budget means that it is not possible to hold a stock of any new bins for siting in new locations or to be used to replace damaged or scrapped bins. There are generally 40 to 50 bins out of service at any one time, together with a “waiting list” of locations for new bins (at 20 to 30 sites). The annual budget is therefore usually spent within a few weeks of the start of each new financial year.

32. Following the Mayor's election in May 2002, and based on one of his identified priorities of improving the environment, a one off sum of £70,000 was provided specifically for litter bins. This additional funding was used to carry out all outstanding repairs and maintenance at that time and to establish bins at all locations on the waiting list.
33. Excluding this one off sum, the budget has remained at £6 - 6,900 per annum. Due to this relatively low level of funding, alternative means of litter bin provision have been explored and utilised. Middlesbrough Town Centre Company has funded eleven bins at a cost of £800 each and some community councils have funded the provision of additional bins for their area. In these cases the Council is consulted regarding location and becomes responsible for all servicing and maintenance costs following installation.
34. Given the Council's commitment to increasing recycling rates, the possibility of introducing alternative types of litter bins with separate compartments for cans and bottles has been explored. It is considered that this would prove to be of particular benefit in the town centre. Due to funding constraints, however, it has not been possible to pursue this further and at the present time there is no facility to sort/recycle any materials collected from litter bins.
35. In view of the recent by law that prohibits drinking in the street in the town centre, the police have indicated that they will fund the provision of "bottle bins". These will be used to dispose of bottles and cans confiscated by the police in the case of people contravening the by law. Although it would be possible to recycle these materials, the current budget means that these bins could not be replaced in the event of damage.
36. Officers have estimated that an annual budget of £60,000 would be needed to adequately fund the demands of litter bin provision and all repairs and maintenance. This sum would also fund a limited stock of bins to replace those which were removed for repair or disposal.
37. Given the scale of increase that an annual budget of £60,000 would represent, there may be a need to strike a balance between the current budget and an increase which would improve service provision. This could be through a significant increase in the annual budget, or via a "one-off" cash injection plus a smaller increase in each year's budget. Late in the scrutiny review (May 2006) the scrutiny panel was advised that a successful bid had been made for additional funding as part of the 2006/07 capital programme bidding process. The sum of £30,000 will therefore be available in addition to the 2006/07 budget of £6,991. This illustrates that the budget issue has been recognised, at least in the short term. However, a longer term solution will be required if issues identified by the scrutiny panel are to be resolved.

TERM OF REFERENCE: "*To investigate the issues relating to advertising on litter bins*".

38. In Middlesbrough there are currently over 100 litter bins bearing advertisements. These are all of the plastic, low capacity, post mounted variety. The Council has had a contract with Posters Direct Ltd, the company that sells the advertising space on the bins, for over ten years. The company supplies and erects the litter bins at no cost to the Council. The Council then takes on responsibility for emptying and maintaining the bins. The Council receives no income from the use of advertising on litter bins.

39. The location of, and advertisement on, each litter bin is subject to the Council's approval. Plastic post mounted bins are not allowed in the town centre. The company does not necessarily locate the bins in areas where they will be well used but where advertisements will be seen by high volumes of vehicular traffic, such as on main roads. As such, in some cases the plastic post-mounted bins have had a minimal impact on reducing local litter levels. In addition - and as has been indicated earlier (paragraph 13) - plastic litter bins have been particularly problematic in terms of vandalism and, in general, are not replaced if damaged or destroyed.
40. At the time when the Council entered into the contract it was envisaged that the arrangement would be beneficial in that a number of litter bins which could otherwise not be provided due to budgetary constraints would be provided free of charge. However, in the light of experience, it may now be opportune to review existing arrangements. The scrutiny panel was informed that the contract requires a notice period of six months from either party for cancellation. In the event that the contract was to be terminated, Posters Direct Limited would be entitled to remove the litter bins which it has supplied.
41. Although no alternatives have been examined by officers, there may be other sources of litter bin advertising which could be investigated. It may be that different arrangements could provide improved, or additional, litter bin facilities and/or increased income for the Council.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “*To examine any existing litter bins policy and future strategies or programmes*”.

42. In September 2002 the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) approved an action plan on small shopping centres. This followed a review undertaken by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel on this topic.
43. Part of the action plan approved by OSB related to reviewing litter bin policy. At that time it was envisaged that, subject to adequate funding being secured, a future policy could be developed to cover issues including how requests for new bin locations would be dealt with; timescales for dealing with such requests; and operational matters such as frequencies of emptying etc.
44. Following the decision of the OSB, the Environment and Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Panel (now the Environment Scrutiny Panel) was subsequently informed that the policy had proved difficult to implement due to a limited budget. As is indicated at paragraph 28 onwards the budget has increased only marginally since 2002. It has still therefore not been possible to implement any form of litter bin policy in full.
45. Any litter bins policy would currently be of limited value owing to the existing budget position, as highlighted by this report. For the same reason, the development of any future strategies has not been possible.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine existing methods of recording/mapping litter bin locations.”

46. Litter bins are currently recorded in a register, which is a paper based manual system showing litter bin locations on maps. The system, which has been in use for a number of years is not always fully up to date in that it does not generally show locations where bins have been removed for maintenance or repair. In addition, new locations for bins are not always added to the register immediately.
47. Panel members referred to the system of numbering lighting columns throughout the Borough, which facilitates easier reporting, repair and maintenance. Existing litter bin arrangements mean that if a report is received in respect of a bin in a particular street, the location of the bin is not always clear.
48. The scrutiny panel was advised that although it had been hoped to include litter bins on the Council's geographic information system of mapping (GIS), this issue has not yet been progressed.

CONCLUSIONS

49. Based on the evidence gathered throughout the scrutiny investigation the panel concluded that:
 - 1) Litter bin and dog waste bin provision is an important Council service which has a positive effect on improving Middlesbrough's environment.
 - 2) The existing budget provision is inadequate in that it is not possible to provide a service that adequately responds to demand or to repairs and maintenance requirements. The annual budget is usually spent in full within a few weeks of the beginning of each financial year. This restricts the Council's ability to deliver its pillar of a clean, safe environment as part of the Raising Hope vision.
 - 3) Although the capital funding bid of £30,000 which has been approved for 2006/07 illustrates that budget problems have been recognised at least in the short term, a longer term solution is needed. The service cannot rely on the success of annual capital funding bids.
 - 4) The costs of installing new litter bins, or removing existing bins for repair, represent a significant call on an extremely limited budget. The use of a “dummy cover” in place of a litter bin which has been removed would avoid costly re-statement works in relation to the concrete base and existing bin fittings as well as ensuring public safety.
 - 5) Budget constraints have meant that it has not been possible to develop and implement a Council litter Bins Policy - despite this having been agreed as an appropriate course of action by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in September 2002.
 - 6) The existing mapping system for litter bins is inadequate given their number and value as a Council asset and also in terms of civic amenity.

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- 7) The use of plastic, post-mounted litter bins containing advertising is of limited value in terms of their capacity, durability and generally low impact on reducing levels of litter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

50. Following the submitted evidence and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

1. That the litter bins budget is increased to an annual level which can respond adequately to a much higher level of the demands made on it; which can respond to repairs and maintenance requirements; which allows a pro - active provision of bins, together with a stock of spares; and which reflects the Council's commitment to achieving a clean, safe environment in Middlesbrough.
2. That an achievable and sustainable Litter Bins Policy is developed which reflects the points raised at 1. above.
2. That, in order to avoid costly re-instatement works to a litter bin site when a bin is removed for repair or replacement, the possibility of using a "dummy cover" in its place be investigated.
3. That a modern mapping system, such as a geographic information system (GIS), is used to record litter bin locations. This would facilitate improved maintenance and repairs and also ensure that an up to date record is maintained of a valuable Council asset.
4. That the use of plastic, post-mounted litter bins in Middlesbrough is discontinued.
5. That as a result of 5. above:
 - (a) The Council withdraws from the existing contract with a private company to supply plastic, post-mounted litter bins containing advertisements and;
 - (b) Officers investigate alternative arrangements of using litter bins for advertising which may be more beneficial to the authority in terms of the type and location of bins provided and level of income.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

51. The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of its investigation and who have assisted in its work. We would like to place on record our thanks for the willingness and co-operation of the following:

- Councillor Bob Kerr - Executive Member for Environment
- Ken Sherwood - Waste Services Manager
- Peter Salt - Service Delivery Manager, Streetscene.
- Colin Brown - Highways/Becks/Lighting Service Manager

**COUNCILLOR JOHN COLE
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19th June 2006

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- (a) Report to Overview and Scrutiny Board - 19th September 2002 “ Executive Board Feedback and Action Plan”
- (b) Minutes of Environment Scrutiny Panel meetings - 3rd March, 3rd April and 18th April 2006.