



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 15 JANUARY 2008**  
**FINAL REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL ON**  
**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL'S WASTE SERVICES**

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the findings of the Environment Scrutiny Panel following its investigation of Middlesbrough Council's waste services operations.

**AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

2. The principal aim of the scrutiny exercise was to provide an elected Member input into a review of waste services being undertaken by the Executive Director of Environment.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

3. The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
  - To provide an elected member input to the review of waste services being undertaken by the Executive Director of Environment.
  - To examine the background relating to the Executive Director's review.
  - To assess the impact of the National Waste Strategy and any other relevant national guidance, including performance requirements, in the context of the scrutiny review.
  - In the light of performance requirements and anticipated recycling targets, to investigate existing service provision and policy options for:
    - domestic refuse collection
    - trade waste activities
    - street washing
    - back alley cleansing
    - junk jobs
    - side waste
  - To examine how efficiencies can be made in service delivery.

- To investigate how other local authorities have improved waste services and increased recycling rates and to consider examples of best practice in relation to this topic.
- To consider any relevant external reports or policy documents that are appropriate to the scrutiny review.

## **METHODS OF INVESTIGATION**

4. The Scrutiny Panel investigated this topic over the course of five meetings between 3 August and 3 December 2007. 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). This can be accessed via the Council's website at [www.middlesbrough.gov.uk](http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk).
6. A summary of the methods of investigation is outlined below:
  - (a) Reports and presentations from Council officers.
  - (b) The submission of evidence from external bodies and agencies.
7. The report has been compiled on the basis of evidence gathered at scrutiny panel meetings using the methods above. Background information has been obtained from the documents listed at the end of the report.

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL**

8. The membership of the Scrutiny Panel was as follows:

Councillor J Cole (Chair); Councillor G Clark (Vice-Chair); and Councillors D Davison (with effect from 28.11.07), B Hubbard, JA Jones, E Lancaster, J McTigue, G Rogers and J Walker.

## **THE PANEL'S FINDINGS**

9. In terms of the scrutiny panel's terms of reference, attention is drawn to the following two elements of the panel's investigation:
  - *To provide an input to the waste services review at member level.*
  - *To examine how efficiencies can be made in service delivery.*
10. It should be noted that these terms of reference were not explored as discrete elements of the scrutiny review but were fundamental to the panel's work and therefore cut across all of its findings.

11. The panel's findings in respect of each of the remaining terms of reference are as follows:

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “*To examine the background relating to the waste services review being undertaken by the Executive Director of Environment.*”**

12. When considering its work programme for 2007/08, the Environment Scrutiny Panel was advised that the Executive Director of Environment had begun a review of waste services, including recycling, as a matter of priority. At that time the Executive Director had welcomed the opportunity of involving the scrutiny panel in the review exercise and had indicated that the officer and member reviews would run in tandem. The scrutiny panel's views would be fed into the process and would be used to inform any policy decisions relating to waste services. The scrutiny panel agreed to proceed with its investigation on that basis.

13. The scrutiny panel heard that the pressure to review waste services is derived from three main sources.

14. Firstly, the increasing demands upon waste services in respect of Government targets are a significant challenge to both the service and the local authority. This is particularly the case in respect of waste reduction, recycling and composting. It is therefore an appropriate time to revisit the policies and procedures within waste services to address these issues. Although the Council has not yet reached its statutory recycling targets it is thought inevitable that, with the current concerns in respect of climate change, these will become even more stringent.

15. Secondly, there is a need to examine the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the service in order to ensure value for money - Middlesbrough's cost of waste collection per household is in the bottom quartile nationally.

16. Thirdly, the recent change to an area care-based approach for street cleansing and horticultural activities has transferred a significant amount of resource from waste services to area care. This will require a new approach to environmental management and a review of the structures remaining in waste services is necessary to ensure that they are appropriate and sufficiently integrated to complement the area care approach.

17. Given the above pressures, **the objectives of the Executive Director's review** of waste services were outlined to the scrutiny panel as follows:

(i). To review recycling policy and operations and make recommendations in the light of government recycling targets.

(ii). To ensure that waste services delivers with regard to relevant Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and other key performance requirements.

(iii). To examine how efficiencies can be made in service delivery.

(iv). To review the operation of trade waste activities and make recommendations as to its future.

(v). To review the operations for waste services, and to consider the option of moving towards an area-based approach for refuse collection.

(vi).To review the policy and support requirements of Waste Services.

(viii).To review the associated operations which are undertaken by waste services e.g. street washing, back alley cleansing and junk jobs.

18. The scrutiny panel noted that virtually all aspects of the work being undertaken by the Executive Director of Environment as part of his service review were reflected in the panel's agreed terms of reference for its investigation. This was with the exception of (ii) and (vi) above. In terms of (ii), details of the relevant BVPIs were submitted to the scrutiny panel but it was agreed that their detailed consideration would be beyond the remit of the panel's investigations. In terms of (vi), the panel considered that all structural aspects of the waste services review should be dealt with by the Executive Director of Environment as part of the normal management process.

19. In summary, examination of this term of reference clarified why a review of waste services is necessary and outlined the approach that is to be taken in implementing the review.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “To assess the impact of the National Waste Strategy and any other relevant national guidance, including performance requirements, in the context of the scrutiny review” AND;  
“To consider any relevant external reports or policy documents that are appropriate to the scrutiny review”.**

20. As the above terms of reference were found to contain areas of overlap, they are dealt with together in the following sections of the report. Evidence was considered by the scrutiny panel in relation to the following:

- Background information in respect of the Government's Waste Strategy for England and Wales 2000.
- The Government's Waste Strategy for England 2007.
- A House of Commons Select Committee Report - “ Refuse Collection.”

#### **Government Waste Strategies of 2000 and 2007**

21. The Government's first “Waste Strategy “ was published in 2000. The strategy was published in response to the demands of the European Landfill Directive and set out the Government's views on the future of waste management in England and Wales. Targets were included for reducing the landfilling of industrial and commercial waste, together with targets - set for the first time - in relation to recovery of municipal waste and its recycling and composting.

22. Since 2000, significant progress has been made nationally, as follows:

- Recycling and composting of waste has nearly quadrupled since 1996-97 and reached 27% in 2005-06.
- The recycling of packaging waste has increased from 27% to 56% since 1998.
- Less waste is being landfilled, with a 9% decrease between 2000-01 and 2004-05.
- Waste growth is also being reduced with municipal waste growing much less quickly than the economy at 0.5% per year.

23. This progress has been driven by significant changes in national policy. Sharp incentives have been introduced to divert waste from landfill, such as the landfill tax escalator and the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS). Additional funding for local authorities, including a private finance initiative, has led to a major increase in kerbside recycling facilities and new waste treatment facilities. European directives are targeting sectors including vehicles, electrical and electronic equipment and packaging and new national delivery arrangements have helped to drive the strategy, including the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP).
24. It is recognised internationally that the crucial threat to the planet is from dangerous climate change. It has been calculated that if every country consumed resources at the rate of the United Kingdom we would need three planets to live on. Accordingly, the Government's goal is to make the transition towards 'one planet living'.
25. Reducing waste is an important contributor to this goal. Each year, we generate about 100 million tonnes of waste from households, commerce and industry. Most of this still ends up in landfill where the biodegradable part generates methane (a potent greenhouse gas) while valuable energy is used in extracting and processing new raw materials. The Waste Strategy indicates that the aim must be to reduce waste by making products with fewer natural resources - ie to break the link between economic growth and waste growth. Most products should be re-used or their materials recycled. Energy should be recovered from other wastes where possible. For a small amount of residual material, landfill will be necessary.
26. The key objectives of the 2007 Waste Strategy are to:
- separate waste growth (in all sectors) from economic growth and put more emphasis on waste prevention and re-use;
  - meet and exceed the Landfill Directive diversion targets for biodegradable municipal waste in 2010, 2015 and 2020;
  - increase diversion from landfill of non-municipal waste and secure better integration of treatment for municipal and non-municipal waste;
  - secure the investment in infrastructure needed to divert waste from landfill and for the management of hazardous waste; and
  - get the most environmental benefit from that investment - through increased recycling of resources and recovery of energy from residual waste using a mix of technologies.
27. Implementation of the Waste Strategy will have implications for all sectors - namely producers, retailers, consumers, local authorities and the waste management industry. **Local authorities** will have to commission or provide convenient recycling services for their residents and commercial customers and give advice and information on how to reduce waste. They will also have to work with their communities to plan and invest in new collection and reprocessing facilities.
28. In addition, higher national targets than in 2000 have been set for:
- recycling and composting of household waste - at least 40% by 2010, 45% by 2015 and 50% by 2020; and
  - recovery of municipal waste - 53% by 2010, 67% by 2015 and 75% by 2020.

29. The Government has indicated that it intends to review the above targets for 2015 and 2020 in the light of progress made to 2010 and future forecasts. This will be to see if the targets can be made even more ambitious.

### **Parliamentary Select Committee Report on Refuse Collection**

30. Evidence from the above document is contained in the following section of the report owing to its overlap with that term of reference.

31. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the important role which local authorities will play in achieving the objectives of the National Waste Strategy 2007 and the stringent recycling targets that are likely to be faced by authorities.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “To investigate how other local authorities have improved waste services and increased recycling rates and to consider examples of best practice in relation to this topic.”**

32. Information in relation to this term of reference was obtained from:

- Officers of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
- A Parliamentary Select Committee Report on Refuse Collection

### **Information from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council**

33. The scrutiny panel had agreed that it would be useful to hear information from a local authority that has increased its recycling rates in order to find out how this has been achieved in terms of service provision and waste services operations. The panel was advised that Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council had managed to increase its recycling rate from 12% in 2004/5 to 36% in 2006/7 (as compared to Middlesbrough's current rate of approximately 17%), which means that it is the second most improved local authority in the country and the best in the north east region.

34. Accordingly, arrangements were made for Simon Dale, Head of Environment and Michelle Burnett, Environment Development Manager from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council to attend a scrutiny panel meeting. The officers made a detailed presentation on this topic to Members and information was obtained as follows.

35. The officers advised that changes to the service had been necessary in response to Government recycling targets and a target of 27.6% by 31 March 2006, which had been included in a local Public Service Agreement. This target had been exceeded (31%) and current targets were on course to also be exceeded, with April 2007 figures showing 49% of waste being recycled against a target of 41%. The target for waste sent to landfill was 0%.

36. Redcar and Cleveland had decided to move onto alternate weekly collections (AWC) of household waste, which their officers indicated was the principal reason why recycling rates have been increased so significantly. It was explained that, despite public perceptions, AWC did not represent a lesser or worsened service but meant that waste is collected in a different way. Refuse is, in fact, still collected every week but different waste is collected in different weeks. Recycling is collected in one week and “normal” non-recyclable household waste the next. A key point is that this system encourages the public to produce less waste and to recycle more.

37. The Council also successfully piloted a green waste collection in 2003/04 and has received two DEFRA grants totalling £897k for green waste bins. The green waste

collection service has operated very successfully since that time and has made a significant contribution to reducing waste levels.

38. In terms of the operation of its recycling scheme, Redcar and Cleveland is achieving household participation rates of around 87%. Plastic and cardboard is removed from the residual waste stream and there is a kerbside collection of paper, glass and cans. Extensive publicity and community engagement has assisted in increasing public participation. This has included area committees and forums, a grant from WRAP (the national 'Waste Reduction Action programme') which funded a Community Waste Liaison Officer post, community newsletters, production of a recycling calendar, library and supermarket surgeries, road shows and events, a web site and establishment of a call centre. In addition, waste audits have been undertaken in respect of over 3000 individual households. These are on request and involve the provision of advice on waste reduction/minimisation.
39. Household waste collection arrangements have also been revised and re-structured. Collections now take place over 4 days, with collections from Tuesday to Friday. This has resulted in less disruption for the public at Bank Holidays and Christmas.
40. As a result of its revised waste and refuse collection arrangements, collection costs per household in Redcar and Cleveland initially rose - from £31 to £58 per household. This was, however, principally as a result of the extra volume of materials collected and costs have now been reduced to approximately £46 per household.
41. A further aspect of waste services which was referred to by Redcar and Cleveland was the fact that a free junk jobs service (ie collection of bulky waste) has been re-introduced by the Council. Although junk job numbers have increased by 75% as a result, there has been a significant reduction in levels of fly tipping and dumping throughout the borough.
42. The scrutiny panel was interested to hear of any lessons which Redcar and Cleveland considered have been learned through revisions to its waste services. In response, Members were advised as follows:
- Alternate weekly collections (AWC) of waste have proved to be unpopular with some residents, who fear vermin and bin contamination. There has, however, been no evidence to suggest that these fears can be substantiated. Current recycling levels would, however, have been unachievable without AWC.
  - Different areas require different approaches - for example terraced properties require different collection arrangements to modern, open plan estates; as do urban and rural areas. A flexible approach is required to accommodate the variety of properties within the borough.
  - Cross-party support is needed from Members to ensure that any revised arrangements are a success.
  - Collection systems need to be simplified as much as possible. There is a particular need to keep recycling receptacles to a minimum.
  - There is a need to constantly remind the public of the recycling message to maintain (and hopefully increase) participation rates.

43. The scrutiny panel was also advised that, following a pre-election manifesto commitment by the now ruling major political group in Redcar and Cleveland, weekly household waste collections are to be re-introduced on an eight week trial basis. The costs of weekly refuse collections will be ascertained, as will those of weekly recycling collections.
44. It was indicated that Redcar and Cleveland's ruling political group had decided to introduce the weekly collection trial prior to the Council being informed of its latest recycling targets. These are 40% in 2010 and 50% in 2020. As the decision to run the trial included a proviso that weekly refuse collections should not reduce recycling levels, a decision will need to be made about the future of AWC - taking into account costs and the implications for recycling levels - following completion of the trial.

### **Parliamentary Select Committee Report on Refuse Collection**

45. The scrutiny panel was informed that the primary purpose of the select committee's investigation was to identify how the ways in which local authorities collect household refuse can help reduce the amount of waste produced nationally and, in particular, the proportion sent to landfill.
46. The select committee's report was found to contain useful information in respect of a number of issues relating to refuse collection.
47. The report identified that refuse collection is one of the most routine activities of local government and is probably the single issue that generates most public interest. In fact the public may regard it as the most important universal service that most households receive and pay for through their council tax. Despite the fact that the average cost of refuse collection per council tax payer is £75 per year, there is a public perception that the service accounts for a substantial part of their council tax bill. (NB: although costs per council tax payer were not available for Middlesbrough, the panel was informed that the cost of refuse collection *per household* is approximately £58.)
48. There are wide disparities between local authorities nationally in terms of the timing and frequency of refuse collections and in relation to the types of materials collected and the types of materials recycled. European landfill restrictions (which are designed to combat climate change) have driven a shift towards greater recycling as councils seek to avoid substantial fines. The position in Middlesbrough differs, however, in that, in general, refuse materials that cannot be recycled are not sent to landfill but are burned at the Energy from Waste (EFW) incinerator at Haverton Hill. An increase in recycling rates will, however, be needed to meet government targets.
49. In 1997 only 7% of English waste was recycled; in 2006 it was 27% and the Government intends that figure to reach 50% by 2020. In 1998/99 82% of municipal waste was sent to landfill, with this figure being reduced to 62% in 2005/06. Despite this reduction, the UK still sends a higher proportion of waste to landfill than all European Union countries except Ireland and Greece.
50. About 40% of English waste collection authorities have adopted a scheme of "alternate weekly collections" (AWC) for refuse. This has proved controversial and has wrongly been classified as fortnightly collections of waste. In fact, collections still take place weekly but alternate between recyclable materials and waste requiring disposal. The scheme is meant to encourage householders to better sort their waste and to encourage greater participation in recycling.



51. In some areas of the country, alternate weekly collections have worked well - recycling rates have risen and there has been little public opposition. In other places it has worked less well. The parliamentary select committee identified areas where councils have “blundered into” AWC without adequately informing local people. While the Minister for Waste has confirmed that 19 of the 20 English authorities with the best recycling rates have adopted AWC systems, this does indicate, however that one authority is achieving the highest rates of recycling is still operating a weekly refuse collection system. The select committee concluded that an absolute link between AWC and increased recycling is unproven. This is because its introduction is nearly always as part of a package of measures and publicity that would probably have increased recycling levels anyway. The committee further concluded that local councils are better placed than anyone, including central government, to know what will work best in their area and that any decision should be based on local circumstances.
52. AWC is clearly not suitable everywhere. For example in cities and urban areas congestion and limited storage space rule against it. Controversy has also arisen in relation to food waste, with householders concerned about vermin and public health implications. Research has, however, found no public health risk - though wider research is still required to convince the public.
53. The public has become confused by changing collection systems and an enormous variety of recycling schemes. The select committee recommends moving towards a clear, understandable definition of what the public may expect.
54. The select committee makes reference to the fact that municipal waste represents only 9% of total waste nationally. The strength of reaction that this rubbish inspires may therefore be regarded as disproportionate to its true significance. It is considered that, ultimately, far more can be achieved by reducing, recycling and reusing commercial, industrial and construction waste products. Accordingly, the report recommended that the government gives increased emphasis to the commercial waste sector.
55. The report also examined how waste collection is financed nationally - identifying that the UK spends 0.6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on waste management, compared to 1% in Germany and 1.2% in Holland. This equates to about £120 per household in the UK compared to a European Union average of about £200 per household.
56. Reference was also made to the possibility of introducing financial incentives and/or charges to householders as a means of encouraging the production of less waste and increasing recycling. The select committee examined a number of possible schemes and concluded that: the government should clarify how any financial incentive schemes would interact with council tax (and whether this could mean reductions in council tax); that charging schemes could provoke widespread disapproval; that incentive schemes could increase fly-tipping or people attempting to reduce costs by filling neighbours’ bins; that clarification was needed on what would happen if householders refused to pay any additional charge; and that the possibility of receiving a financial incentive of £20 or £30 per year would outweigh the negative impact of additional charges.
57. The report also included a section on the possibility of local authorities forming joint waste authorities to promote joint working with a view to improving cost efficiencies and sharing examples of best practice; and refers to the impact of a likely increase in the number of incinerators (to divert waste away from landfill) on planning policies and controls.

58. The Parliamentary Select Committee report contained 30 detailed and fairly lengthy conclusions and recommendations. These are summarised at **Appendix 1** of this report.

59. The panel's investigation of this term of reference illustrated how some local authorities have achieved improvements in waste collection arrangements and significant increases in recycling levels. The strengths and weaknesses of some of the revised arrangements that have been implemented were also highlighted.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “ In the light of performance requirements and anticipated recycling targets, to investigate existing service provision and policy options for the service areas identified by the scrutiny panel.”**

60. In considering this term of reference the scrutiny panel agreed to examine the following services:

- trade waste
- street washing
- back alley cleansing
- junk jobs
- side waste
- domestic refuse collection

61. As the scrutiny panel undertook a detailed investigation of recycling during 2005/06, it was not intended to revisit the issues that were examined and highlighted at that time. However, as waste collection levels are closely linked to recycling, recycling is a major aspect of the current scrutiny topic. The panel did therefore consider some information on current recycling arrangements. These were summarised as:

- a household waste recycling site
- a kerbside blue bag collection scheme for paper
- a kerbside black box collection scheme for glass, cans and textiles
- “bring sites” where the public can take recyclable materials.
- Middlesbrough Environment City's home composting scheme
- a green waste scheme - where grass cuttings and garden waste are collected from households for composting.

62. There are approximately 90 public recycling facilities in the former Cleveland County area. All four local authorities have a network of public recycling facilities (“bring sites”) which accept mainly waste paper and glass bottles. In addition, textiles and books can be recycled at deposit facilities operated by charities and there are four oil recovery tanks.

63. The Council continues to be involved in a number of local and national initiatives to promote waste awareness and environmental education through its posts of recycling officer and waste awareness officer.

64. The scrutiny panel questioned officers about current participation levels for recycling and were advised that:

- Recycling tonnages are measured and compared to the number of households on each round. Results vary quite significantly from area to area.

- Levels can also vary in that, in some areas for example, all households will put out recycling boxes which are half full. Other areas might involve only half of the households participating in the scheme but putting out full boxes.

65. It was confirmed that the Council hopes to undertake detailed analysis of collection rounds with a view to increasing and maximising recycling participation rates and addressing issues such as those highlighted above. In addition, work has already been undertaken involving WRAP (the Government's "Waste Reduction Action Programme") to undertake a doorstep survey of households in relation to participation of recycling.
66. In addition to the kerbside recycling scheme, there has been a good level of participation in the green waste collection scheme. Collections currently take place fortnightly, although an analysis of the level of waste produced by the winter collections is to be undertaken to ascertain whether the service should be continued on an all-year basis.
67. When considering the issue of recycling, the scrutiny panel referred to the review of that topic which it had undertaken in 2005/06. At that time the panel had been concerned that waste materials which are recycled from the Energy from Waste (EFW) incinerator at Haverton Hill cannot be counted towards recycling targets. This was despite the fact that some of the residue materials from the incineration process are re-used (for example bottom ash is used in the construction industry), thereby reducing the need to exploit natural resources. Although the scrutiny panel included a recommendation in its final report to the effect that this issue should be pursued with the Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) following publication of the Government's 2007 Waste Strategy, it is understood that the position remains unchanged.
68. Details of the scrutiny panel's findings are included below for each of the service areas highlighted at paragraph 59.

### **Trade Waste**

69. In October 2007, the panel's views were sought on proposals to seek an Executive decision that month on whether to withdraw provision of a Council trade waste service - ie the chargeable collection of waste from commercial premises. The scrutiny panel was advised that a decision was required prior to completion of its full review of the whole topic of waste services. This would allow sufficient time to withdraw the service with effect from the end of the 2007/08 financial year, should that be the Executive's agreed course of action. It would also allow time to notify existing customers of its withdrawal so that they could make alternative waste collection arrangements.
70. Under these circumstances, the scrutiny panel agreed that the Executive should proceed with a decision on this aspect of the waste services review, subject to the panel's views being fed into the decision making process.
71. Members heard that the trade waste service operates at a substantial loss and is forecast to continue to do so. The loss for 2006/2007 was £205,849 and is anticipated at over £180,000 for the 2007/08 year end. The panel considered a detailed breakdown of these costs.

72. In addition, new pre-treatment regulations relating to waste (effective from October 2007) indicate that no landfill site can accept any waste unless it has been treated. This means that a proportion of the waste must be sorted for recycling. This process would increase trade waste costs even further as, if a local authority provides a trade waste collection service, it is required to provide a sorting and pre-treatment facility.
73. The panel was informed that in the event of withdrawal of the Council trade waste service, commercial organisations would need to engage a private sector trade waste company. There are a number of such companies operating locally, with some charging less than the Council for their services due to the current level of competition. It was envisaged, therefore, that given adequate notice, organisations currently using the Council trade waste service would have no difficulty in obtaining alternative service provision.
74. The scrutiny panel was also advised that the losses associated with the trade waste service also impact negatively on the relevant Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), including those measuring the cost of household collection per household and measuring the cost of waste disposal per tonne of municipal waste.
75. Two options were to be put forward to the Executive. These were submitted for the panel's consideration, as follows:
- **Option A:** To continue providing a trade waste collection service, which would operate at a loss and pose a significant financial risk to the Council. BVPIs would also be adversely affected.
  - **Option B:** To withdraw from providing a trade waste collection service.
76. The scrutiny panel was advised that Option B would create potential savings for the council of £180k per annum, based on current budgets. In addition, the relevant BVPIs would be improved. The potential costs of withdrawing the service would be absorbed within waste services budgets and Council-owned assets, such as skip loaders and waste containers, could be sold to the best available market, or put to alternative use within the service area.
77. Under the circumstances, the panel agreed to support Option B above as the best way forward and this view was reported to the Executive. On 31 October 2007 the Executive Member for Streetscene had subsequently agreed to withdraw the trade waste service from 1 April 2008.

### **Street Washing**

78. Street washing is now undertaken as part of the Council's 'area care' approach to environmental services. The service operates using one large vehicle, which was purchased via three year funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). A new vehicle is to be purchased so that the service can be continued.
79. The street washing vehicle operates on weekdays and normally begins work in Middlesbrough town centre before moving on to other areas of the Borough with high levels of pedestrian usage.

80. The panel noted that, due to the vehicle's size, it is not possible to use it in some of the smaller shopping precincts in the out of town areas and questioned whether this issue has been examined. Members were advised that, in order to address this gap in service provision, investigations were ongoing to determine whether some of the Council's small, street sweeping vehicles could be adapted for street washing use.
81. Officers are also in the process of examining the possibility of developing a programme of street washing in areas of high pedestrian usage - for example around pubs/clubs and smaller shopping areas.
82. As the street washing service currently operates only on weekdays, the scrutiny panel questioned whether consideration could be given to introducing a weekend service in the busiest areas.

### **Back Alley Cleansing**

83. Back alleys were recognised some time ago as being in need of concerted action. Some were consistently problematic in terms of their condition of cleanliness and the levels of waste and refuse which were being left or dumped in them. Consequently, a "complete clean" approach was introduced to deal with these areas, which are mainly the gated alleys in north and central Middlesbrough. This approach means that refuse and junk jobs are collected on the same day with recycling collected separately. Where refuse or items for disposal are left out on any other days, enforcement action is taken.
84. The scrutiny panel heard that there is currently a very low volume of recycled materials being collected from back alleys and that this mainly consists of paper. All properties have bags for recycling paper but not all properties have been issued with boxes to recycle other materials. Ways of promoting and increasing more recycling in these areas are to be examined. Solutions might include (for example) the provision of large communal bins for glass, cans etc.
85. A further issue relating to back alley cleanliness relates to the continued use of black plastic sacks (as opposed to wheeled bins) in these areas. For logistical reasons, including problems associated with bin storage and collection, black bags are still in use in terraced areas of Middlesbrough. Although this system works well in some areas, others suffer ongoing problems associated with open bags, spilled rubbish, bags scavenging dogs and a general unsightly appearance. The panel was informed that these issues are well known and that there is to be an examination of the operation of the "complete clean" approach to determine how the approach to back alley cleansing can be further improved.

### **Side Waste**

86. Side waste is additional waste material that is left out alongside wheeled bins or black sacks for collection by the Council's domestic refuse service. Although the Council's long standing policy is that side waste is not collected, the position is that it is picked up by some refuse crews and left by others. This has effectively led to a situation where such waste is collected in some areas of Middlesbrough but not in others.
87. Officers accept that the current position is inconsistent and that clarification is needed. The panel was advised that the favoured approach is to move to a definitive policy of no side waste. While it is recognised that this could potentially lead to an increase in fly tipping/illegal dumping, it is considered that, with appropriate publicity, education and enforcement, this could be minimised. It was suggested that the position should be reviewed following the implementation of revised refuse collection rounds (see

paragraph 89 onwards). This would help to ensure that the new rounds are working as effectively as possible and that recycling participation levels are maximised before the enforcement of any 'no side waste' policy.

### **Junk Jobs**

88. The Panel was advised that the Council's junk job service - that is the collection of unwanted, bulky household items (for example furniture or electrical goods) - is provided free of charge for Middlesbrough residents. Junk jobs are now recycled where possible, for example refrigerators and cookers. There are no plans to change existing junk job arrangements.

### **Domestic Refuse Collection**

89. The scrutiny panel considered details of existing domestic refuse collection arrangements, together with outline proposals for the future.

90. Refuse collection rounds are currently split into four zones across the Borough (ie north, south, east and west) with all collection crews working in one zone on a particular day. Collection crews begin work at 7.30am each day, Monday to Friday, and undertake 11 rounds. There are no collections on bank holidays. Where collections would normally fall on bank holidays they usually take place a day later. Although revised collection dates following bank holidays and public holidays are publicised, there is still sometimes confusion among the public. This can lead to refuse being left out too early or too late and to missed collections. The Council is continuing to introduce wheeled bins to as many areas as possible and the objective is for 95% of households to be using these, or wheeled communal bins in the case of some back alleys, by the end of 2008. Where it is not possible to use wheeled bins (eg in the case of some back alleys or flats), black plastic sacks will continue to be used.

91. There has been no scientific or measured approach to developing the Council's refuse collection rounds. These have evolved over the years as new housing has been built, road schemes have developed and traffic levels have increased. Officers have determined that better planned and better organised rounds would be likely to provide a more efficient and effective service. The scrutiny panel was advised that the Executive Director of Environment has had discussions with a firm of consultants which specialises in the development of refuse and waste collection rounds. This is done through the use of computer mapping to maximise the efficient use of vehicles and crews to ensure that planned workloads are achievable and that collection tonnages from rounds, including recycling and green waste, are maximised.

92. During the discussion, Members referred to the fact that recycling and refuse is not necessarily collected on the same day. It is considered that this leads to confusion for residents and may detrimentally affect recycling participation. In response the panel was advised that this situation has arisen because a private company is responsible for the recycling collections. As the recycling contract will soon be due for renewal, officers intend to ensure that the new contract will align recycling and refuse operations.

93. The scrutiny panel was informed that revised refuse collection rounds are being examined as part of an overall examination of how the refuse collection service is organised. The Executive Director has examined how refuse collection services can be revised to provide a more efficient and effective service. Although proposals are still to be finalised, the panel was informed that the following points will form the basis of revised collection arrangements:

- A four day week collection. Crews will work longer hours (6.45am to 4.30pm) over four days to maximise vehicle usage and lead to less public confusion regarding collection days following bank holidays.
- Realignment of recycling collections to fit in with the revised refuse collection rounds - ie to ensure that both are collected on the same day.
- Back alley collections to be undertaken as part of normal refuse collection rounds.
- Alignment of cleansing with area care arrangements.

94. It was confirmed that there are no proposals to introduce alternate weekly collections of domestic refuse.

95. Examination of this term of reference highlighted the diverse range of services covered by 'waste services'. It also illustrates the scale of the task in ensuring that these are managed and co-ordinated to maximise efficiency and effectiveness while satisfying the necessary performance requirements.

### **Additional Information**

96. The following section deals with additional information which arose as part of the panel's investigations but which was not covered directly by the terms of reference of the scrutiny review. This relates to management arrangements in Environment/Streetscene services.

97. The Panel was advised that changes had been made to the management structure of Waste Services and that a briefing note was to be circulated to all councillors. The changes were outlined as follows:

- Refuse collection to be made separate from waste policy.
- P Salt, Senior Area Care Manager (Waste Services).
- L Wellburn, Places and Spaces Manager - relocated to Lloyd Street but to maintain overall responsibility for Area Care.
- K Garland, Area Care Manager.
- K Sherwood, Waste Policy Manager.
- A Walker, Waste Manager for South and West Middlesbrough.
- M Thomas, Waste Manager for North and East Middlesbrough.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

98. Based on the evidence gathered throughout the scrutiny investigation the panel concluded that:

1. The Government's Waste Strategy for England 2007 makes it clear that stringent waste reduction and recycling targets will continue to be imposed on local authorities. The Council needs to move towards providing the most efficient waste collection service possible while encouraging the reduction of waste and the maximisation of recycling collections. The Executive Director of Environment's ongoing review of Waste Services is being undertaken as a result of these factors.
2. Changes to service operations and management arrangements are imperative to continue to improve the Council's recycling levels and to meet future targets. The proposals to collect refuse and recycling on the same day are particularly welcomed - although it is imperative that this also happens following bank holidays.

3. The Executive Director of Environment's review of Waste Services is ongoing - for example the target date for the introduction of new refuse collection rounds is during the first half of 2008. The scrutiny panel can therefore only comment on the information which has been supplied to date.
4. Nationally, 19 out of the 20 local authorities which have the highest rates of recycling utilise alternate weekly collections (AWC) of refuse. However, the Parliamentary Select Committee which examined refuse collection nationally concluded that an absolute link between AWC and increased recycling is unproven. This is because its introduction is nearly always as part of a package of measures and publicity that would probably have increased recycling levels anyway. The scrutiny panel notes the select committee's conclusion that local councils are better placed than anyone, including central government, to know what will work best in their area and that any decision should be based on local circumstances.
5. There are still problems concerning back alley cleansing. These include co-ordination of refuse collection and cleaning, dumping, the use of communal bins and overall cleanliness. In this light, proposals to examine back alley cleansing arrangements are welcomed and supported by the scrutiny panel.
6. Proposals to alter refuse collection rounds and crews' working arrangements, and also to examine street washing arrangements - both with a view to improving service provision - are also welcomed and supported by the scrutiny panel.
7. Given the information submitted to it in respect of the trade waste service, the scrutiny panel is satisfied with the decision of the Executive to discontinue the service from 31 March 2008. The panel does, however, wish to place on record the fact that the report on this issue was already finalised and scheduled for submission to the Executive prior to its consideration by the scrutiny panel.
8. Problems relating to side waste collection need to be resolved and the position in regard to the council's policy on this requires clarification. The Council's existing 'no side waste' policy is inconsistently applied with such waste being collected by some refuse crews but not by others.
9. Following the scrutiny panel's 2005/06 review of recycling, unsuccessful representations were made concerning the fact that recycled materials from the Energy From Waste Incinerator cannot be included in the Council's recycling targets. The panel concludes that this issue is of such importance that it should continue to be pursued - including these materials in the targets would ensure that current recycling targets are met.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

99. 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 Executive notes that, owing to the timescale associated with completion of the Executive Director of Environment's review of Waste Services, this report has been produced on an interim basis.



2. That the Executive Director of Environment's finalised proposals on the review, including alternative options available, are considered by the Environment Scrutiny Panel prior to submission to the Executive.
3. That any future proposals to alter waste services operations - for example any changes deemed necessary to increase recycling levels - are submitted to the scrutiny panel for consideration and comment.
4. That regular monitoring reports on the Council's recycling targets and rates are submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Panel, together with details of work being done to maximise public participation, particularly in areas where low returns are currently achieved.
5. That arrangements are made to ensure that, wherever practicable, street cleansing takes place after refuse collection and not before.
6. That, subject to revised refuse collection rounds being implemented and working effectively, the Council's 'no side waste' policy is reaffirmed and appropriately publicised and enforced.
7. That further representations are made at a national level to the effect that recycled materials from the Energy From Waste Incinerator should be included in Council recycling targets.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

100. The scrutiny panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of this investigation and who have assisted in its work. Panel members would like to place on record their thanks for the assistance of the following:

Councillor P Khan - Executive Member for Streetscene  
I Parker - Executive Director of Environment.  
G Field - Policy and Performance Officer, Environment.  
K Sherwood - Waste Policy Manager, Environment.  
S Dale - Director of Environment, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.  
M Burnett - Environment Development Manager, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

101. The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:
- (a) Minutes of Environment Scrutiny Panel Meetings: 3 August, 10 September, 12 October and 19 November 2007.
  - (b) Waste Strategy for England and Wales 2000.
  - (c) Waste Strategy for England 2007.

(d) Parliamentary Select Committee Report - "Refuse Collection."

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

9 January 2008

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**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON WASTE SERVICES**

- (i). The Government's intention to include measures on waste in new local government performance indicators is endorsed.
- (ii). The autonomy of local authorities, in determining appropriate local solutions, is endorsed.
- (iii). The Government is recommended to develop best practice guidance on the provision of information to householders.
- (iv). As householders each throw away food to the value of £400 a year (up to a third of food is thrown away), the Government is recommended to set specific targets for food waste reduction.
- (v). Further research is required if the public is to be convinced that there is no appreciable health risk associated with alternate weekly collections of refuse.
- (vi). Sealable containers (eg wheely bins) are essential for food waste where AWC systems are introduced.
- (vii). The Government should encourage local authorities to adopt separate food waste collection and at least weekly food waste collection.
- (viii). The legal position on additional charges for refuse sacks should be clarified.
- (ix). The Government is recommended to discuss the creation of statutory recycling targets with local authorities.
- (x). The continuation of statutory recycling targets, rather than a shift towards residual waste targets, would help drive more training of local authority recycling officers and the development of greater expertise.
- (xi). Although the development of a standardised, national recycling scheme is not feasible in the short term, the government should evaluate the means of achieving more public co-operation and understanding by reducing random and unnecessary differences in recycling.
- (xii). Alternate weekly collections (AWC) are not appropriate to all areas, especially urban areas characterised by much shared accommodation. This is a matter for local choice. Also, it is unproven whether there is a causal link between increased recycling rates and the introduction of AWC.
- (xiii). There is no single collection system suitable to all authorities.
- (xiv). The phrase "alternate weekly collection" is bureaucratic and confusing. Local authorities should find a more straightforward description of their own arrangements.
- (xv). The Government should agree a core definition of what households should expect from refuse collection.
- (xvi). Councils need to develop education and information programmes to encourage the public to produce less waste.
- (xvii). "Revenue neutral" financial incentive schemes aimed at improving recycling will raise no money for councils and would not be "cost neutral" due to administration costs. These costs would do nothing to help manage waste budgets in the face of rising costs.
- (xviii). Residents who produce high levels of waste and are then faced with a "financial incentive" bill will see this as a tax or charge.
- (xix). It is difficult to see why a council would set up a charging scheme that earns it no money and risks widespread disapproval.

with council tax and should explain why these should not be accompanied by reductions in council tax. (xxi). Further work is required, together with guidance for local authorities, to ensure that new financial incentive schemes do not result in increased fly-tipping or rubbish being put in neighbours' bins, thus causing disputes and blighting areas.

(xxii). The Government's recognition that groups such as large families or those on council tax benefit should not be disadvantaged by financial incentive schemes is welcomed.

(xxiii). Clarification is needed on what happens if householders refuse to pay additional charges.

(xxiv). Financial incentive reward schemes proposed by the Government offer householders little reward for good behaviour. Breaking the link with council tax and establishing refuse collection as a separate utility might have the radical change that is required.

(xxv). The power for local authorities to form joint waste authorities is welcomed.

(xxvi). The move towards joint working will be even more welcome if it brings about cost efficiencies and a more standardised approach to collection systems.

(xxvii). Substantial waste infrastructure developments will be necessary to meet waste diversion targets. There will be a need to balance the desire to simplify planning processes with the objections of local people - including the desire to boost energy from waste production from 10% to 25%.

(xxviii). Authorities investing in energy from waste will need to develop strategies to ensure that only non-recyclables are incinerated and to use the landfill allowance trading scheme to trade incineration capacity with other authorities who are looking to reduce landfill.

(xxix). The audit of London authorities should be prioritised because of the higher than average of non-household waste collected there.

(xxx). The bulk of England's waste is far beyond the control of councils. The government should investigate the means of improving financial incentives to reduce commercial, industrial and construction waste. A programme of affordable recycling is recommended for businesses.