



AGENDA ITEM: 8

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD
18 NOVEMBER 2008
CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY REVIEW

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To inform the Overview & Scrutiny Board of a proposed scrutiny review which has been requested by a member of the public.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Board considers the appropriateness of commissioning a scrutiny review into the suggested topic.

PROPOSED SCRUTINY TOPIC

3. To consider undertaking an investigation into aspects of the Council's recycling activities.

BACKGROUND

4. The suggested scrutiny topic arose following the submission of a complaint to a ward councillor. The complaint related to the condition of the area around a recycling facility, with banks for paper, glass, cans, clothes, shoes and 'Tetrapak' drinks cartons.
5. During the course of correspondence between the ward member and the complainant, concerns were raised about the overall condition of the site. The complainant's particular concern was that previously reported problems had not been satisfactorily resolved and that the ongoing costs and time involved in tidying the site negated any recycling benefits.
6. Aside from the issues of complaint, the following specific queries were raised, with the member of the public requesting that these should be the subject of a scrutiny investigation:

- (a) What is the value of recycled material after expenses associated with its recovery are accounted for?
 - (b) What is the cost of constantly having to remove fly tipped waste, its disposal and cleaning up operation?
 - (c) State in terms of profit and/or loss the usefulness of recycling facilities.
7. Following the ward member's referral of the complaint to Environment, a response has been received from the service area. The response also potentially addresses the issues associated with the possible scrutiny of the areas identified above.
8. Environment indicate that the service was already aware of the problems associated with the recycling site, particularly that a minority of residents had begun to dump rubbish there. A further issue related to the fact that the site, which is adjacent to a small shopping parade, is not owned by the Council but is on private land. The agents managing the site had previously been made aware of the reported problems, together with the site owners' responsibility for removing/clearing any waste, litter or dumped materials.
9. In view of the ongoing problems associated with the site it was agreed to re-site the recycling facility to a nearby Council-owned car park. This site will allow better monitoring and control of any potential problems. Accordingly, the recycling containers were removed from the original location at the end of October 2008.
10. In response to the specific issues raised at (a) - (c) above, Environment has responded as follows:
- (a) There is no charge to the Council in terms of recycled materials from Council sites. Private companies are involved in collecting and processing the materials, with associated costs being recovered by any income which they receive from the processed materials. Income which the Council receives from the sale of materials covers the majority of costs for paper, glass and cans collected from Council sites. There is, however, a unit cost not related to the tonnage of materials collected, to cover transport and supply of the specialised recycling containers. Overall there is no income to the Council - though it is important to remember that each tonne of material recycled is a tonne less for the Council to dispose of. The use of recycling sites means that the Council therefore incurs less disposal costs and landfill tax.
 - (b) The service does not have costs identified for this specific location. Any litter in the streets is covered by the main street cleansing budget, which is not broken down to individual locations. As clearance of this site has been undertaken by the selling agent who controls the site, the associated costs are not known to the Council.
 - (c) The recycling service is not run on a profit and loss basis and a number of factors determine service provision. These include the need to meet national performance indicators; the Council's commitment to offering a range of options to residents to recycle; and demand from residents to recycle more of their waste. Although much of the recycling tonnage is generated from doorstep collections, there continues to be a number of items which continue to be recycled through local "bring sites." The nature of the materials and/or the amounts of materials produced are such that "bulking up" the waste at these sites continues to make them workable.

11. The suggested Scrutiny topic should be considered against the following criteria:

- (i) Does the issue affect a group of people living within the Middlesbrough area?
- (ii) Does the issue relate to a service, event or issue in which the Council has a significant stake or over which the Council has an influence?
- (iii) It should not be an issue which Overview & Scrutiny has considered during the last 12 months.
- (iv) It should not relate to an individual service complaint.
- (v) It should not relate to matters dealt with by another Council committee, unless the issue deals with procedure.

12. Although this issue was originally raised as a service complaint (as per (iv) above), it is considered that wider issues are raised in terms of overall recycling provision and possible scrutiny. It is therefore for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider the importance of this suggested scrutiny topic in the light of the current work programme.

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