

## Appendix B



### Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday 12 December 2017

Item

Report of	Chief Operating Officer	Author	Ann Hedges 282202
Title	Review of Waste Collection Strategy		
Wards affected	All Wards		

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In December 2016 Cabinet agreed a series of very significant changes to the waste collection strategy. This report is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 This report sets out how these changes have been implemented and what the impact has been.
- 1.3 Prior to the changes our performance based on key indicators around the amount of residual waste and recycling, was one of the worst in Essex. We have seen immediate and very dramatic improvements in our performance. For the first full quarter since the changes our performance is:
  - Recycling rate for the quarter is 55% compared to 48% at the same point last year and a year-end performance of 44%
  - Reduction in residual rate for the quarter is 34%. This is a reduction of 2757 tonnes
  - Kilograms of waste per household for the quarter is 87.08 against an annual target of 395kg. A pro rata target would be 98.75kg. This means performance is nearly 12% better than target
- 1.4 Implementation of the changes was supported in a number of ways:
  - Communication of the changes in as many different ways as possible
  - Additional resources in our Zone teams to support education and ensure residents understood the changes
  - A new exemptions policy recognising that not all households would be able to meet the new requirements
  - New technology for the collection crews with in-cab tablets providing much better communication and information
- 1.5 Wheelie bins were introduced to around 12,000 properties and feedback generally has been positive.
- 1.6 There continue to be some challenges as the service settles down with missed bins still higher than we would like. Most residents are receiving the service as planned. A few further changes are now being considered to make sure the service is working for both residents and operationally.

## **2. Action Required**

- 2.1 To consider and comment on the information in the report which outlines the implementation process, the impact of the waste collection strategy and the next steps

## **3. Reason for Scrutiny**

- 3.1 The waste service is one of the few services that affects all residents every week and therefore it is important that we get it right. The changes implemented in June 2017 were very significant and this paper provides the Scrutiny Panel an opportunity to review the way in which it was implemented after six months as was agreed in the Cabinet report in December 2016

## **4. Detailed information**

### **4.1 Introduction**

We knew that making the scale of changes agreed to the waste collection service would be challenging. This is a service that impacts every household and makes 240,000 collections a week.

Before the new service:

- Recycling rate of 44% for the year ending 2016/17, one of the worst in the County
- A target of 400 kilograms (kg) of residual waste per household which we were failing to achieve with an outturn figure of 422kg for the year ending 2016/17

Having been one of the best performers on recycling in Essex a few years ago we had become one of the worst. The only way to improve was to make a change to the way we collected.

The key aims of the new collection methodology, as stated in the Cabinet report 20 December 2016 were:

1. To improve our performance, in particular reducing residual waste and increasing our recycling
2. To provide a waste and recycling collection service requested by residents

### **4.2 Performance information**

We have seen some very dramatic and immediate improvements in our performance. We have a full quarter of verified performance information since the changes have been made (July, August, and September). The figures below reflect this information:

1. Recycling rate for the quarter is 55% compared to 48% at the same point last year and a year-end performance of 44%

2. Reduction in residual rate for the quarter is 34%. This is a reduction of 2757 tonnes. We have some information about the numbers from the tip which are shown below but do not have the full 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter statistics. The information we do have shows that the increase at the tip is small in relation to the reduction we have seen. As an estimate (based on the figures we have been given by Essex County Council) 330 tonnes of additional residual waste has been taken to the tip. This is still a reduction of nearly 2,500 tonnes across the quarter, or 200 tonnes a week
3. Kg of waste per household for the quarter is 87.08 against an annual target of 395kg. A pro rata target would be 98.75kg. This means performance is nearly 12% better than target. Last year the target was 400kg per household that was not met with a year-end figure of 422kg

Individual recycling materials compared to the same period (quarter 2) last year are also largely much improved:

- Plastic – up by 46%, tonnage up from 438 to 640 (202 increase)
- Paper – up by 13%, tonnage up from 1640 to 1857 (217 increase)
- Cans – up by 35%, tonnage up from 156 to 211 (55 increase)
- Green waste – up by 14%, tonnage up from 2926 to 3322 (396 increase)
- Food waste – up by 81%, tonnage up from 750 to 1361 (610 increase)
- Glass – the only material where tonnage has decreased – 9% reduction, tonnage down from 1015 to 924 (91 difference). There might be some seasonal/weather related impacts. July and August the tonnage was down compared to last year but September saw a rise on last year of 16%. We probably still need to see a longer time period to get a true picture. We are one of only a few authorities that still collect glass direct from households

There have been questions about additional residual waste going to the civic amenity site at Shrub End. Essex County Council have provided some information (only up to the end of August) that shows the change with last year.

Month	2017 (tonnes)	2016 (tonnes)	Difference (tonnes)
May	442	475	(33)
June	485	462	23
July	586	482	104
August	605	481	124

While this does show an increase in the tonnage of residual waste being taken to the tip this is small in comparison to the reduction in the amount of residual waste collected directly from households.

Essex have also said that these figures need to be treated with caution as they made changes to their service in November 2016.

Compared to other Essex Authorities, if our performance is sustained, we would be third for the total amount recycled and second for the kg per household in the “league table”. This is based on the most recent verified

figures which are 2015/16. We are still waiting for the figures for last year. The data for 2015/16 is attached at Appendix 2.

#### 4.3 Essex and the Essex Waste Partnership

We have been talking to Essex about how they might support the changes we have made. One of the main benefits to the Essex community is the reduction in the amount of residual waste being collected and therefore a reduction in the amount going to landfill and therefore less paid in landfill tax. Every tonne of waste sent to landfill costs the Essex tax payer £86.

The changes support the Essex Waste Strategy. Their visioning and guiding principles document, agreed in October 2015 had a number of statements including:

- To provide waste management services that incentivise waste reduction and encourage higher levels of recycling
- Introduce alternate week collection of residual waste

We have been in correspondence with Essex County Council to share the early improvement in the performance figures and to see if they are able to support ongoing developments such as our planned work to look at how we improve our service to flats. The response from Essex County Council is included in the background papers.

#### 4.4 Education and Enforcement

The Cabinet decision in December 2016 was very clear that the focus of the first six months would be on education to ensure residents understood the new collection service. We put in place 3 additional zone wardens who started this work before we went live, using information from the waste crews where they saw households who put out large quantities of residual waste. The zone wardens were selected to have the right skills to have difficult conversations and generally got a positive response from residents they visited. Their role was centred on getting out and talking to people to give them guidance and make sure residents had the equipment they required.

We targeted these education visits on properties where there were:

- Too many bags out on their collection day
- Bags were out on the wrong day
- The wrong items were put out eg black bag on a green week
- Properties piling their waste in one central place

We have undertaken over 1400 Education visits and in the majority of cases these have been positively received. Many people did not understand how easy it would be to recycle, and we were able to provide containers to them during the visit. Follow up visits were put in place for anyone who needed additional advice. Many of the residents who were visited prior to the start date actually started recycling immediately.

An unanticipated outcome of these visits were the number of people we came across that needed additional support. These included families where English

is a second language, to disabled people struggling to remain independent in their home. All of which we were able to signpost to services that could help them.

In terms of enforcement we have used our existing powers to deal with fly tipping. These powers have been used to enforce against residents who have deliberately moved their waste and dumped it away from their property and where we can identify who the waste belongs to. 70 fixed penalty notices have been issued for black bag waste.

We have also started to look at households where they consistently put out too many black bags and do not take these back into their property. A cautious process has been put in place that starts with an Education visit and is followed up with two warnings before a fixed penalty notice is issued. So far 38 properties have received an Education Visit, with only 2 of those properties having progressed to a 1<sup>st</sup> Warning visit. We are taking care to use this only where it's clear that the household is just choosing to ignore the new system.

We do not have section 46 powers that would mean we could enforce for the wrong items being put in the wrong containers. So, for example if these powers were in place we could enforce where we found recycling in black bag waste. This could be considered as a next stage but we would anticipate only using it rarely.

#### 4.5 Exemptions and Assisted Collections

It was recognised that there would be some households that would not be able to reduce the volume of their waste to meet the requirements for residual waste. A new policy was implemented to allow these households some exemptions. The aim was to ensure that where people were recycling as much as they could but were still unable to reduce their residual waste that this would be accommodated.

In total we have had:

- 1812 requests
- 969 have been agreed
- 704 contacted us but then said they would try to contain their waste within the new limits

The majority of requests have been from 2 types of households:

- Those with children or disabled people using nappies/incontinence. These households have been offered either an additional black bag, a larger wheelie bin, or a weekly collection of an additional bag
- Large households

When the policy went live we started by visiting all households requesting an exemption. It quickly became apparent that this was not needed and the majority of cases were agreed over the phone.

The policy currently requires renewal every six months. One of the proposals is that this is extended to an annual renewal and we will simply ask households if their circumstances have changed.

Assisted Collections continue using the same criteria as previously. We have had some new requests, but not any great volume.

#### 4.6 Missed Bins

Our performance on missed bins over the last few years has been extremely good, with fewer than 90 misses a week. The target for this year was left at 95 misses per week and in retrospect it should have been amended as it was recognised that with such a significant change this was unlikely to be achieved.

In the first few weeks of the service, not unexpectedly we saw an increase. The highest level of missed bins was around 600 in the first two weeks. This dropped off over the following weeks and was at an average of 250 by week 12 and is now under 200.

We are reporting a half year result of an average of 218 misses per week. This covers the period from April to the end of September.

There are a range of reasons that collections are missed and these have been exaggerated by the changes:

- Crews getting used to new routes. We had to redesign all the routes to accommodate the changes and while we tried to match crews with routes that they would at least know in part, nearly every crew had some change to their route. In the first few weeks, while crews got to know their routes there was a rise in the number of bins missed
- Human error – we make 240,000 collections a week and inevitably there is an element of human error. Even with the higher rates of missed collections we have seen, the proportion is small
- Delayed collections – we do sometimes have to delay collections if for example we have a vehicle breakdown and are unable to get a replacement. Road closures also create difficulties for us. The priority is always given to residual waste and if collections are delayed we make every effort to return the following day for recycling
- Customer error – our customers also occasionally make mistakes or do not have the information to allow them to present their recycling and waste correctly

Given the frustration that missed bins cause our customers this has been a focus of our work and has been a high priority for the service. A number of additional actions, over and above the “normal” processes have been put in place to reduce the numbers:

- More detailed conversations with crews to show them where collections were being missed
- Duty managers reviewing collection routes
- Zone staff monitoring areas where there were higher levels of missed bins
- Use of the technology to ensure that the locations of unusual properties were clearer
- Trying to identify trends and then address them

- Continuing review of feedback from customers including site visits by operational managers where we seem to continue to get it wrong

#### 4.7 Complaints

From 20 June to 31 October we received 261 formal complaints compared to 48 for the same period last year. 115 of these were received in the first 4 weeks. In October the number had dropped to just 14 compared with 5 for October last year.

In terms of the issues that customers complained about the highest volumes are for:

- Waste policy changes – 83 with 75% of these received in the first 4 weeks
- Missed bins – 131 formal complaints

#### 4.8 Recycling Kit

We have given out an enormous amount of recycling containers which demonstrates that many households did not recycle. We are incredibly grateful to all the stockists who, for the first few weeks of implementation, were at times inundated with residents collecting containers and we tried hard to keep them with stock but this was challenging.

At the beginning we were taken by surprise by the volumes of containers that we were giving out. One of the communication tools we used was to run a series of roadshows to tell people about the changes and to give out recycling containers. Many of these were run in supermarket car parks and at the first ones we were overwhelmed with the number of people. Maybe we should have anticipated this with such low recycling rates

How many of each piece of kit we gave out:

1. Green boxes; just over 25,000
2. Garden sacks; nearly 45,000
3. Clear recycling sack rolls; just over 18,000
4. Food waste kitchen caddies; just over 11,000
5. Food waste external caddies; just under 10,000

A voucher system was introduced for white sacks as we knew that once these were free that demand would be high and we did want to put some control into the system. When these sacks had previously been free we knew a few people took advantage of this and we had the infamous picture of the donkey in Spain with a Colchester garden waste sack on its back.

We do need to consider if we need a similar system for other recycling containers.

#### 4.9 New technology

Our general way of working across all services is to encourage people to use online communication and to try and make information as accessible as

possible. While this was our aim with the changes to the waste service, because it was such a big change and impacted every household, we did take a slightly different approach and whenever we gave the web address we also gave the phone number to ensure people could access information.

At the same time we wanted to move the service on in terms of technology. The major change to our use of technology was to introduce an in-cab system. Previously much of the operation was based around paper and we knew that we needed to reduce that and also that in-cab technology would provide us with valuable management information. This technology, known as RouteSmart, does a number of things.

With the new technology we've undertaken a full re-routing exercise for the collection routes which has resulted in better, balanced routes and incorporates both sack and wheelie bin collections, as well as recycling and food waste. New features include:

- In-cab tablets which link to the software – a sat-nav system guides the driver round the route and alerts the crew to addresses with Assisted collections, Exemptions and HMOs.
- Drivers can report instantly (via the tablet) issues such as road closures, parked cars, contaminated bins/recycling and bins not out. Reports appear in real-time on the software which allows Customer Service Advisors to see any issues online and find out collection day information for customers. This enables quicker responses to customer queries
- The technology allows Duty Managers to track the collection vehicles in real-time, giving an estimated finish time and flagging up where extra resource may be needed on a route.
- For service planning: The software can calculate how adding additional properties to a route (e.g. new builds) will affect the service time and tonnage on that route.

The new technology has enabled the most efficient use of collection vehicles resulting in more balanced service times for each route and collection day. It has enabled the move from paper routes to digital routes so there is no need for drivers to work from paper lists or write issues down.

The web pages to support the new service were completely redesigned. This allows customers to access personalised information about their collection days, report issues and apply online. The aim has been to keep the pages simple and to use plain English.

When comments were received these were reviewed quickly and we made over 200 changes to the new site within the first month, responding directly to feedback from customers.

Our online offering has been well received. We have had over half a million page views, the proportion of missed bins reported online has increased by 10% and over 24,000 customers have downloaded their recycling calendars.



#### 4.10 Call volumes

We knew that in the first few weeks we would see high call volumes and put in place 2 additional advisors in the Customer Service Centre (CSC). The CSC did experience very high call volumes and at times the call wait times were longer than we would have liked. However, the high volumes fell off relatively quickly. Prior to the changes we received around 200 calls a week about recycling and waste. At the moment the call volumes are around the 350 level. For context the call centre receives around 2,000 calls a week in total across all the Council services.

We are doing further work to assess why volumes are still high compared to pre-change levels, capturing the type of enquiry. The two highest categories are advice on recycling and missed bins. We expect these to continue to fall as people continue to get used to the new system.

#### 4.11 Communications

Communication was always going to be a critical piece of the implementation and that there would never be enough whatever was done.

A comprehensive communications strategy was put in place that ran prior to implementation, throughout and for the months after the new collection method were introduced. It was regularly reviewed throughout the project to ensure maximum engagement.

Given the level of change we used a wide mix of communication mechanisms to try and ensure every household had information on the changes. These included:

- Recycling Calendars

A three-month recycling calendar was issued with the Council Tax main billing in March 2017, which gave customers information on the planned changes to collections, alongside their calendar. A ten-month recycling calendar was then posted to every household in June 2017. This gave residents personalised information on their collection day, the changes to blue/green weeks, their calendar and general recycling information.

Both recycling calendars were available as a digital download on the website at [www.colchester.gov.uk/recycling](http://www.colchester.gov.uk/recycling), alongside an audio version if required and a braille version could be requested.

- Talking Directly to Residents

Throughout the build up to the collection changes and afterwards we were consistently talking to customers face to face and on the telephone.

One of the most successful methods was roadshows. We held 20 roadshows across the Borough. These offered support ahead of the collection changes, giving residents the opportunity to speak to staff, learn more about recycling and collect any of the recycling containers they needed.

The Customer Service Centre had 2 additional dedicated recycling and waste advisors for a fixed term. The waste telephone number was issued on print

materials and press releases as it was known that a small number of residents do not have access to online facilities. The automated Interactive Voice Response (that interacts with callers and routes calls) was updated throughout the process to reflect relevant messaging.

- Interacting with Residents on Digital Platforms

With today's technology we can get in contact with a great number of residents online. We used several effective ways to interact and engage with residents to supply information and answer their questions. These included:

The Council's [www.colchester.gov.uk/recycling](http://www.colchester.gov.uk/recycling) pages were kept up to date and a new, easy to navigate, page format was launched. A main focus on the website was an area on frequently asked questions on the collection changes.

Social Media was an integral part of our digital communications. A well-placed and phased post can make all the difference to perceptions. We promoted messages across Twitter and Facebook. This is a two way conversation with residents as we answered questions and concerns about the collection changes.

In May 2017 we launched a recycling themed blog called Reece Cyler [www.reececyler.blog](http://www.reececyler.blog). The blog follows the fictional Recycling Zone Warden Reece Cyler, who offers followers friendly, personal and informative posts aimed at encouraging residents of the Borough to recycle more. The blog engages with residents and drives traffic to our website for further information. It's also a two way conversation as we answered questions and concerns about the collection changes.

Our Greener Living e-newsletters was a very useful tool, enabling us to share key messages to subscribers. Key messages on the collection changes were also issued in the Borough News e-newsletter.

An important myth we wanted to tackle was that the recycling we collect goes direct to landfill and 'is a waste of time'. Four videos were created, explaining what happens to food waste, glass and tins, plastic and paper recycling. These were launched on our YouTube channel and shared on the website, blog and social media. They will continue to be useful moving forward.

- Explaining Wheelie Bins

As this was the first time we have had wheelie bins in Colchester it was important to let residents, who were on a wheelie bin route, know what to do with their bin and when their first collection would be. We arranged for an A5 leaflet to be distributed with the wheelie bins.

- Supporting Our Staff with Key Messages

Our collection crews work hard and it was known that they would not have time to answer customer enquiries as they completed their routes. At key moments of the campaign, postcards were printed enabling them to give these to residents who had questions. This gave an outline of the changes and asked the resident to either go online or call the Customer Service Centre for more information.

- Media Engagement

We wanted to offer journalists and other media opportunities to understand the changes and talk to the Leader and Portfolio Holder directly. Two of these were held.

Regular press releases were issued on the run-up and after the collection changes were implemented.

Reactive media enquiries were responded to, as needed.

- Exposure of Messages

A large banner, supporting the 'collection changes are coming' was installed at the Shrub End Depot.

The recycling and waste fleet livery was updated after the changes had been implemented. This has a 'recycle as much as you can' message encouraging residents to recycle.

We accept we didn't get it right all the time and we have learned some valuable lessons and will take these forward for future projects.

#### 4.12 Wheelie bins

It was agreed that wheelie bins would go into a number of wards and in total 12,000 households now have their waste residual and garden waste collected from wheelie bins. The final decision on which wards would operate using wheelie bins was made following consultation with ward Councillors and no wards where a majority of Councillors objected to the introduction of wheelie bins have had these introduced.

In those areas where the majority of ward Councillors felt their residents would want wheelie bins, we worked with them to identify properties that were suitable.

We have not yet tried to do any analysis between wheelie bin areas and those that retained black sacks. This is not straightforward as the routes have all changed so a like for like before and after is not possible, and the routes are of different sizes (wheelie bin areas collect from slightly fewer households) so route to route comparisons are not possible. What will be possible (but complicated) will be to look at kg of waste collected per household. This work will be undertaken in the near future.

Generally areas that have had wheelie bins seem to have had fewer problems than those that stayed on black bags for residual waste and white sacks for garden waste. This may be that because the change was very clear residents understood the changes more easily.

Inevitably there are residents who have wheelie bins who would rather not and some who don't have wheelie bins that would prefer to have them.

There are no plans to extend the areas that have wheelie bins other than for new properties that are added to areas that already have them.

#### 4.13 Operational impact

All of this has had a very significant impact on the operations teams. We have asked a lot of our crews and are as ever, grateful for their hard work and commitment. They have been asked to learn new routes, understand and use new technology, implement restrictions on the amount of residual waste they collect.

In the first few weeks they worked longer hours as they got used to the new routes, however, this has settled down and they are now working normal hours.

The routes are now balanced and this will mean more equal workloads for all crews although they also support each other, so if there are issues, for whatever reason, they will support a crew that is not getting round their route in the expected time.

Overall less tonnage is being collected. This is a phenomena that other authorities have seen when they make changes to waste collections; residual waste falls and recycling increases but not to the total weight prior to changes.

#### 4.14 Some unexpected benefits:

There have been a couple of unexpected, but really helpful benefits:

1. Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) – as the changes went live we realised that we would need a different approach where there were HMOs. We have worked with landlords to find appropriate solutions for these houses. What we have also discovered is about 50 HMOs that were not registered. These are now being actioned which means that residents will have a safer environment to live in
2. Safeguarding – as the Zone Wardens have undertaken education visits they have had contact with households we did not previously know. This has raised a number of safeguarding issues which have been noted and actioned as appropriate. We have got to know some of our communities much better

#### 4.15 Next steps

We are starting to identify a number of actions that we need to take next in terms of consolidating the service and making sure it is workable going forward for both customers and the operational teams.

1. Tweaking and checking the last few issues of missed bins.
2. Starting to see more comprehensively the management information available from the new technology.
3. Continuing with education visits and starting some enforcement (with care).
4. Consider the introduction of section 46 powers.
5. Look at simplifying the exemption process and make it an annual renewal.

6. In the new calendar year we will also start a project to look at how we can improve the service to flats which have remained unchanged.
7. Consider voucher system for all recycling containers.

#### 4.16 Conclusions

In most places the new collection service has settled down and the performance around reducing residual waste and increasing recycling is being delivered. We continue to address the final issues

### 5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 5.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken for the implementation of the changes. This is available in the background papers

### 6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The proposals specifically support the Strategic Plan:
  - Welcoming – improve the sustainability, cleanliness and health to make the borough a place where people can grow to be proud to live.
  - Vibrant – work hard to shape our future, develop a strong sense of community across the borough by enabling people and groups to take more ownership and responsibility for their quality of life.

### 7. Consultation

- 7.1 Consultation was undertaken prior to implementation. Details are in the original Cabinet decision report available at Appendix 1.

### 8. Publicity Considerations

- 8.1 This service touches every household every week and the section on communications explains how we worked to get the information to everybody.
- 8.2 There have been numerous press releases since the changes both proactive and reactive.
- 8.3 It is expected that there will be public interest in this report as it is the first opportunity to review how effective the implementation has been.

### 9. Financial implications

The project costs are all within the agreed budget.

The capital spend has been lower than originally planned with the cost of wheelie bins significantly lower than anticipated. We also negotiated with our vehicle provider and they swapped vehicles over so that there was no additional cost to convert vehicles for the wheelie bin collections. A saving of £268k against a predicted £856k capital budget has been made, meaning the capital cost is £570k.

We expect to be able to make some savings in the next financial year in the service. This will largely be because the routes are more balanced. In addition, overall we are collecting less tonnage. It is a strange phenomenon that other authorities have also seen, that when collection methods are changed some waste “disappears”. While some tonnage transfers from residual waste to recycling, the overall tonnage has reduced even when we include the increase of waste going to the tip which is comparatively small.

## **10. Community Safety Implications**

N/A

## **11. Health and Safety Implications**

N/A

## **12. Risk Management Implications**

12.1 N/A

## **Appendices**

1. Cabinet report 20 December 2016
2. Recycling and composting performance – Essex Waste Partnership 2015/16

## **Background Papers**

1. Letter from ECC
2. Exemptions policy [Link](#)
3. Assisted Collections policy [Link](#)
4. Equality Impact Assessment