

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

18 APRIL 2011

REPORT OF SCRUTINY OFFICER

REVIEW OF WORK

Reviews carried out prior to 2007 but monitored

- Waste Management 1 2004/5 final monitoring update October 2009
- Cemeteries 1 March 2007 still monitoring

Reviews carried out since May 2007

- Cemeteries 2 October 2007
- Waste Management 2 March 2008
- Rats and Pigeons June 2008
- Customer First November 2008
- Animal Welfare/Dog Fouling April 2009
- Carbon Management

Waste Management 1 (04/05)

Scope

The Environment and Regeneration Select Committee examined the Council's Waste Collection Policy, with particular emphasis on the need to encourage residents to produce less waste.

The review aims were:

- To promote waste reduction through examination and amendment of Stockton Borough Council waste collection policies
- To make recommendations in terms of measures to help improve community participation in recycling and waste minimisation schemes

Findings

Seven key waste management policy issues were identified and examined to inform possible future policy changes:

- Alternate week collections of waste
- Collect-all policy
- Wheeled bin replacement / distribution of 2nd wheeled bins
- The bulky waste collection service
- Compulsory recycling
- Variable charging
- Waste reduction kits for new homes

Residual waste (any waste that could not be recycled) was collected on a weekly basis by Stockton Council's Care For Your Area teams, via 140 or 240 litre wheeled bins. Alternate weekly collections were seen as a cost-effective way of managing both refuse and recycling services, utilising the same staff (and sometimes vehicles). This was proving to boost recycling performance in areas where it has been implemented, as householders were shown to strive to reduce the residual waste they produce in order to free up enough space to last two weeks.

The policy of collecting a 'reasonable' amount of side waste, defined as 1 or 2 additional refuse sacks collected along with the wheeled bin, was popular with residents providing peace of mind in terms of guaranteed collection service of most, if not all, waste generated by the average household.

Replacement wheeled bins were provided free of charge on demand with an annual budget pressure of £68,000 per year, equating to 3500 – 4000 containers per year (4% of properties). Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland Councils charged £10 for replacements.

Bulky waste was defined as waste that would not be accommodated by wheeled bins due to its size/weight, etc. Any items not normally be taken in a removal van during a house move would not be taken by the service free of charge, e.g. doors, floorboards, kitchen units, DIY debris etc. Other less permanent items such as furniture, carpets, electrical goods would be classed as genuine household waste and be collected free of charge. Approximately 26,000 requests for bulky household waste collection were made by householders, an increase of 275% in 4 years.

Compulsory recycling was available following initial trials in the London Borough of Barnet. The Council was able to use Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to promote the use of recycling containers (as opposed to wheeled bins) for recyclable waste. Barnet reported that participation had risen to 81% after 4 weeks of the trial, with an 18% increase in tonnage. The lack of evidence on a long-term basis meant no recommendations were made for its implementation.

Variable charging for waste theoretically can either be volume or weight based. The Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 45, made it 'a duty of every Waste Collection Authority to arrange for the collection of household waste and states that no charge shall be made for the collection except in cases prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State. This duty was the main barrier to many types of charging scheme. Although supportive of the concept, there was too little evidence of the success of the scheme on a long-term basis to warrant making any recommendations for its implementation.

Waste reduction kits were considered as a way to make an impact for the insistence on/provision of waste reduction in new homes. The kits would comprise:

- smaller 140 litre wheeled bin
- recycling box and bag
- composter
- information leaflets promoting home composting and recycling/waste reduction techniques, locations of recycling facilities and CFYA services

House builders are not normally required to supply wheeled bins to new properties and are not legally obliged to do so. This was an issue which could be developed further via the planning route, with planning applications being granted subject to receiving agreement that the developer will supply wheeled bins to the property.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- No plans at present to implement Alternate weekly collections.
- The levels of bins being returned to the Council continues to increase with many residents no longer having a use for multiple bins following the introduction of the no side waste policy.
- A procedure has been established for the charging of 240ltr and 360ltr bins with reconditioned bins being issues in cases where bins have been stolen.
- A standard charge exists for all bulky waste collection requests over and above the existing charging regime.
- Waste reduction kits are being issued to all new residents via CFYA and the Waste Awareness Team

Waste Management 2 (March 2008)

Scope

The scrutiny review of waste management (2004/05) identified further work for the Select Committee to undertake including a review of the outcome of the kerbside plastics and cardboard recycling trial. The overall aim of this review was to achieve real improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of waste collection and disposal services and to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill sites, whilst maintaining or improving customer satisfaction in the service.

Findings

In order to meet the requirements of the National Waste Strategy, the Tees Valley Joint Waste Management Strategy was developed. The Strategy focuses on the management of the municipal waste stream and aims to provide a sustainable future for the Tees Valley. Individual local authorities developed implementation plans to support the delivery of the Joint Strategy.

Waste was collected weekly via a 240 litre wheeled bin edge of property collection system. Approximately 5000 properties remained on the plastic sack system due to access difficulties. Assisted collections were made from around 2% of households. Second wheeled bins were issued to larger families and side waste was collected. Glass, aluminium foil, cans/ tins and paper/magazines were collected for recycling on a fortnightly basis in recycling boxes and bags and a trial took place between November 2006 and July 2007 for fortnightly kerbside collection of plastics and cardboard from 14,000 properties.

Satisfaction with waste collection and recycling services in Stockton was high. In 2006/07:

- 93% were satisfied with the current waste collection service
- 75% were satisfied with the current recycling service
- 84% were satisfied with the current civic amenity sites

Extensive public consultation took place as part of the review primarily through the "Start Talking Rubbish" campaign which highlighted the following:

- The overwhelming majority of households (94%) would like to recycle more.
- They would like this recycling to be collected from home.

- There was a strong demand for a recycling collection of plastic and cardboard.
- 75% of households did not support variable charging based on the quantity of waste collected.
- 92% of households thought that the council should encourage waste reduction.
- There was no consensus on the optimal combination of containers / bins to be provided for waste and recycling.
- 70% of households did not support fortnightly waste collection, the main reasons being insufficient capacity and health and hygiene concerns (including smells and concerns about vermin).
- 58% of households did not support a withdrawal of side waste collection, the main reason being insufficient capacity for larger families.
- Given the opportunity to make any comments about waste collection and recycling in the Borough, 966 (54%) of respondents who replied volunteered a positive endorsement of the current service.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- Analysis of collection practice has confirmed that the current practice of sorting different materials at the kerbside is the most efficient practice. Continual monitoring of Bring sites is undertaken to ensure that they are being used effectively as identify potential new locations and extensions to existing sites.
- The plastic and cardboard collection service has been well received by residents, with a marked increase in participation of this service as well as the blue box collection service.
- Full consultation on the use of the receptacles confirmed that residents were happy with the plastic and cardboard bag. The process was useful in identifying alternative receptacles for back lanes / properties with access difficulties which resulted in the procurement of plastic sacks and smaller boxes for some locations. Residents are also able to procure home recycling units from the Environment Centre via a range of suppliers.
- The introduction of the no side waste policy was established as all properties in the Borough now have access to a full range of recycling collections. The only exception to this policy is over the festive period where collection of a reasonable amount of side waste over 2 weekly collections is made.
- All planning permissions must make adequate provision for adequate waste management obligations, including the provision of waste and recycling collection points in larger developments.
- Anaerobic digestion plants being considered by a number of organisations for processing green waste and food waste but remains outstanding and will do for the foreseeable future due to lack of disposal facilities and financial constraints.

Cemeteries 1 (March 2007)

Scope

To assist the development of an improvement plan and long term strategy for the provision of cemeteries within the Borough:

- Ensuring that there is adequate provision for future burial needs in the Borough

- Identifying improvements to existing cemeteries for inclusion in the 5 year improvement plan
- Developing the range of burial options available
- Introducing measures to reduce the incidence of unsocial behaviour at cemeteries

Findings

Although there is no legal requirement for a council to provide burial or cremation facilities, the Council acts as a burial authority providing five cemeteries and legal responsibility for the maintenance of all or part of nine closed churchyards within the Borough.

Viewpoint Panel Members revealed a desire for more flexibility in respect of funeral booking times, particularly at weekends. In addition, Funeral Directors and Faith Groups were in favour of extending funeral times on Friday evenings, particularly during the summer months and commented that any process to speed up the registration of a death would be welcomed.

There had been vandalism to headstones, particularly in Durham Road Cemetery. The problems had worsened in Durham Road following the demolition of the cemetery lodge in 1995. As a result CCTV cameras had been installed in Durham Road Cemetery which resolved the problem.

Cars were permitted within cemetery grounds but there had been problems with congestion and people driving/parking on grassed areas and even grave spaces. Most problems arise when drivers are unable or unwilling to manoeuvre without staying on the road.

The maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries is provided by Care for Your Area. In recent years there has been a significant improvement in the maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries. In particular, improvements have been made to grass cutting, floral displays and bulb planting. The service also has the ability to provide assistance to other front line services.

The Council's cemeteries can be affected by localised flooding problems, particularly at Thornaby Cemetery which would benefit from improvements to the back filling and reinstatement of graves to reduce "sinking" and improve presentation. Support was also given to further development of a "green" approach to the maintenance of cemetery grounds.

The Council's chapels were being used to provide storage and essential facilities to staff working within each cemetery. Should consideration be given to alternative usage for the chapels, then alternative facilities would need to be made available.

Burial space within the Borough was rapidly decreasing.

- Durham Road Cemetery – without extension into the adjoining open space (issue unresolved), 12.5 years. The closure of Oxbridge Lane would increase burials in Durham Road and decrease the life expectancy.
- Oxbridge Lane Cemetery – 5.5 years
- Thornaby Cemetery – without extending into undeveloped land, 25.5 years. With extension 137 years.
- Billingham Cemetery – without funding for drainage of 'C' Section (quotation July 2006 £40,000) 6.5 years, with drainage works – 31 years.

- Egglecliffe – full, no new graves available – re-open/previous solid purchase graves only.

Consideration should be given to using remaining grave depths to offer residents more choice of burial locations and to extend the “life” of existing cemeteries. It would also be prudent to excavate graves, as a matter of course, to allow for 3 interments.

Local burial needs were not being catered for in parts of the Borough and there were several cases where cremated remains were being stored by families owing to Egglecliffe Cemetery being full. This requires an investigation into alternative, space efficient ways of interring cremated remains which might overcome the problems of lack of space at Egglecliffe.

A family may donate a bench to the cemetery on the understanding that it is the responsibility of the family to supply, install and maintain the bench that they have donated. The placement reduces efficiency of maintenance programmes and therefore adds to the cost of maintaining cemeteries.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- A comprehensive fees and charges review for the service was undertaken as part of the service planning process and new fees were put in place from 1 April 2008, with annual review.
- Funding was secured through the Capital Programme at £150k for 2 years ending March 2011 to deliver the existing five year Improvement Plan for cemeteries and closed churchyards.
- Out of Hours arrangement now in place for death registrations/burial requests & death-bed weddings.
- Satellite Office at North Tees General Hospital fully functional.
- Bereavement Services have established a ‘Supporters Group’.

The Management of Memorials (Cemeteries 2 – October 2007)

Scope

The second phase of a review of the Council’s Cemeteries and Memorials was to ensure that the Council was providing a safe environment for everyone visiting the Council’s cemeteries and to ensure that the Council’s policies were up to date and enforceable.

Findings

The practice of planting and placing of unauthorised items and kerbing / edging on the full grave space presented a serious health and safety problem for those working in or visiting the Council’s cemeteries, particularly in the lawned areas of cemeteries which had no pathways between rows of graves.

The condition of some of the cemeteries older kerb sets was extremely poor and unsightly.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- The Council's regulations were enforced in respect of all unauthorised memorials following an extensive publicity programme and after giving grave owners a period of notice to remove unauthorised items from graves.
- Best practice has been adopted to enable improvements to the way graves are reinstated following a burial to reduce grave sinkage and improve memorial stability and the appearance of the grave immediately following an interment.

Rats and Pigeons (June 2008)

Scope

To ascertain whether there is evidence of an increased number/reported problems of rats/pigeons within the Borough; and if so, identify what are the factors influencing such increase in numbers; and what action can be taken to reduce/control these factors.

Findings

Rats

The numbers of reported sightings/complaints regarding rats within the Borough has remained consistent despite a slight decrease from 1228 in 2005/6 to 1033 in 2007/8.

The presence of food source from discarded food, incorrectly stored commercial/domestic waste, and garden activities such as home composting and feeding of birds offer an incentive to attract rats out into the open.

Public awareness of the availability of food sources that directly lead to an increased presence of rats needed to be raised.

Budget responsibility for pest control treatment can vary within Service Groups, with some having a dedicated budget set aside for such costs, and others dealing with the issue as and when it occurs, seeking to identify available funding when required. This can delay the response to treat the issue.

The FLARE system records the address of the complainant, and the ward but does not identify specific hotspots where problems have been identified, which can assist officers in identifying trends and carrying out appropriate action in a concentrated area, rather than on an individual ad hoc basis. The purchase of available software would allow that connection to be made.

Pigeons

There are high numbers of pigeon population within Stockton Town Centre, with particular concentration on and around derelict buildings, and in the vicinity of fast food, café or bakery outlets.

The harmful effects to both the town centre fabric, shoppers/visitors, and to pigeons themselves are as a result of feeding on human food rather than seeking food from elsewhere, such as in local parks, gardens or in the countryside.

In order to demonstrate to the public and retail/business sector the Council's commitment to the success of the campaign, it is necessary to ensure that each of the Council's buildings, and particularly those within the town centre, have appropriate proofing measures in place to discourage pigeon infestation.

A key element of any successful campaign is likely to be focused around a comprehensive and well directed education, publicity and media campaign.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- A bid for funding a sustained campaign to reduce pigeon numbers was unsuccessful and not included in the medium term financial plan. Measures have been taken where possible within existing budgets, but the outstanding recommendations remain unachieved. Bids for funding will be made for this campaign as and when appropriate, however in the current financial situation this is not anticipated in the near future.

Customer First (November 2008)

Scope

Undertake an assessment of residents' experiences of service delivery, a review of published service standards, an assessment of whether the Customer First scheme needs to be further developed – especially in relation to the Cabinet Office Customer Services Excellence Standard, and arrangements for spreading a customer focus throughout the organisation.

Findings

Stockton Borough Council adopted the Cabinet Office's new Customer Service Excellence Standard corporately.

Stockton Borough Council Councillors to have the opportunity for increased involvement, for example by supporting Council staff involved in mystery shopping exercises or as customer service champions.

To assist customers presented with a voicemail message when contacting Council officers by telephone the existing service standards and guidance for the use of voicemail be enhanced and promoted.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- Stockton Council is one of just 6 Councils nationally to hold Customer Service Excellence at a corporate level.
- It is anticipated that improved voicemail arrangements will be in place by the end of February 2011.
- "Bright Ideas" staff suggestion scheme launched 1st July 2010.
- Surveys and customer focus groups identified a demand for toys/books in areas where customers with children may have to wait. Toy units were ordered for Municipal Buildings, Gloucester House and 16 Church Road. These are suitable for transfer to the new Stockton multi-service centre when it opens. Costs have been met from existing budgets.
- All services have reached the Customer First Stage 2 Standard.

Animal Welfare/Dog Fouling (April 2009)

Scope

To respond to public concern regarding:-

- the amount of dog fouling occurring within the Borough (with approximately 350 formal complaints received each year);
- public demand on the Animal Welfare Service (with an estimated 2,300 requests for service each year);

and whether or not service improvements can be introduced within both areas.

Findings

Legislation is in place to assist the Council to deal with irresponsible dog owners who do not remove the mess made by their pet.

There are 200 dedicated dog bins located in popular dog walking areas. There is no legal requirement for local authorities to provide dog bins but this has proven to reduce the amount of dog waste placed in litter bins by responsible owners wanting to dispose of their pets waste in a safe manner.

A Dog Control Order can be made in respect of any land which is open to the air and to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access.

Fixed penalties for offences under dog control orders may be issued by employees of primary and secondary authorities who are authorised for this purpose including Police Community Support Officers or any person authorised by an authority in writing to do so.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 transferred all responsibility for stray dogs from the police to local authorities creating a huge increase in work for the Council and charity organisations all of whom are becoming overstretched.

The Committee learned that Stockton Council is different to many of the other local authorities because it has its own animal welfare department.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- All dog fouling bins now logged on GIS on SBC website.
- Dog fouling cases can be logged on GIS system to provide mapped information on location of complaints.
- Lamp post number used when identifiable address not provided, but will be superseded by use of GIS when LAGAN connector in place.
- Dog Control Orders for specified areas including enclosed children's play areas and associated public seating areas implemented as a voluntary scheme.
- Biodegradable pavement painted stencils used in known areas of dog fouling to act as an additional reminder to dog owners to act responsibly.
- School fields and playing fields given priority for inclusion in Proactive Dog Fouling Patrol Programme since 21/09/09.
- Continued use of responsible dog ownership education packages in schools.

Carbon Management (November 2009)

Scope

To identify options for future strategy / policy / service provision that will deliver efficiency savings and sustain / improve high quality outcomes for SBC residents.

- Public leadership and how effective the plans we have will be on impacting upon carbon emissions. The Council needs to play an effective social leadership role if it is to have the credibility to influence external partners and champion carbon reduction.
- Examine the opportunities to reduce the costs of our energy.

Findings

Stockton Borough Council is part of the Tees Valley Climate Change partnership, which aims to tackle climate change in the most efficient way through sharing resources and efficient sub-regional collaboration on cross-boundary issues.

Stockton Borough Council accounts for 2 per cent of carbon emissions in the borough which although not a significant percentage overall is considered high as the Council is not a manufacturing organisation. A target of 25% carbon saving by 2013 has been adopted.

10 schools in the Borough were progressing against targets to improve their carbon footprint. With approximately 80 schools in the Borough questions were raised regarding the actions of schools not identified as it gave an impression that nothing was being done to contribute to reducing CO₂.

9,000 computers were within Stockton's schools and an audit of these would help to identify where savings were most likely to be made.

Stockton Borough Council has developed an energy centre but it was felt that public awareness of it is poor.

ICT has been used to automate many functions and processes within the Council and this has helped to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of our services. The challenge now is to reduce the relatively large carbon footprint by implementing measures aimed at improving the ICT environment so that it is managed in a more ecologically friendly way.

More modern technologies can now be implemented to consolidate and virtualise the Council's servers into a much smaller number of larger devices.

Separate data centres are used to accommodate Stockton and Darlington ICT systems. Both are older 'traditional' type data centres which are no longer fit for purpose.

There were a large number of individual printing devices in use. The aim is to replace these with a much smaller number of high-capacity Multi-Function devices which will be strategically placed at suitable points within main Council offices.

Xentrall ICT is examining the feasibility of using video conferencing facilities at key locations within Stockton BC offices. Video conferencing was of interest to Members particularly to reduce the amount of travelling to and from conferences which tend to be placed in the south of England. Advances in video conferencing should also

benefit home workers to allow video links between the home workers home and the office.

Key Outcomes/Impact

At present the general view of carbon offset schemes is that these are not a viable way of reducing carbon. A decarbonised energy supply for the Council operations through a Power Purchase Agreement model (or similar) is now being pursued to achieve the carbon savings required.

Service transferred to Municipal Buildings reception area, including sale and distribution of "green" goods.

Signposting is in place from TIC and staff there have had some basic training on energy advice.

Sustainable construction policy adopted for all significant council funded construction projects. Applicable to new projects from April 2010.

Upgrade of Kingsway is taking account of the need for energy efficiency. Voltage Regulation at municipal Buildings installed 20 November. At least two high electricity demand schools to be identified to receive VR.

Production of press releases and news articles on energy efficiency improvements as part of the carbon management programme and delivery of the climate change action plan.

Core Strategy implemented and planning applications reviewed accordingly.

Video conferencing being progressed as part of the successful RIEP bid with Redcar & Cleveland Council. Assessment of suitable facility underway (Conf 2 in Municipal Buildings likely). Second presence being considered for Billingham site which may form part of the RIEP.

New server arrangements will improve the viability of increased home working and is part of a three year ICT strategy being developed.

New server arrangement with Darlington will result in energy savings.

Three year ICT strategy being developed.

Survey of printers and other peripherals carried out. Joint procurement with Darlington planned for introduction of Multi Function Devices.