

PLACE SELECT COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DOMESTIC WASTE COLLECTIONS, KERBSIDE RECYCLING AND GREEN WASTE

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste.
- 1.2 Levels of recycling in the Borough are amongst the lowest in the country. The cost of the weekly collection of general waste is increasing rapidly. Food waste collection will be a requirement in the coming years and a proactive approach could contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets. The collection of garden waste/green waste also benefits some communities more than others.
- 1.3 Overall, the Council's approach to waste reduction could be improved to reduce the financial and carbon cost. Therefore, this review aimed to consider the potential public resistance but also give appropriate consideration to the importance of the environment, the costs of service delivery, and the direction of national policy over food waste.
- 1.4 The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:
 - Nationally, due to the Resources & Waste Strategy & Environment Act 2021, weekly food waste collections will become mandatory by 2026.
 - As part of the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' reforms, the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) will also be introduced from October 2025. Local authorities will also be able to charge for the collection of green waste.
 - Locally, from 2026, the energy from residual waste gate fee is expected to double following the necessary procurement of a new residual waste disposal facility.
 - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) currently has the lowest recycling rate in the Tees Valley (25.2% in 2022/23) and the highest level of residual waste per household in the country. SBC is also one of a small number of local authorities to collect weekly residual waste in a 240-litre bin.
 - Therefore, SBC's waste management service must be re-evaluated to ensure it is sustainable and financially viable. This includes the frequency of recycling and residual waste collections.
 - An assessment of SBC's waste and recycling service by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has provided the Committee with additional data on the Council's current performance compared to similar local authorities.

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Scrutiny Review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste

- WRAP's review also included an assessment of 4 alternative collection scenarios. This included performance levels (percentage recycled and amount of residual waste), carbon impact, and revenue and capital costs.
- Scenario 3 (fortnightly refuse collection with a weekly 'multi-stream collection of dry recycling and food waste) resulted in the lowest levels of residual waste, the highest levels of recycling and the lowest level of carbon impact. This scenario had the joint highest level of projected number of staff.
- In a closed session, the Committee received information on the projected costs for each scenario. Scenario 3 had the lowest level of:
 - projected total revenue costs (excluding garden waste)
 - projected annual 'whole system' costs relative to the current baseline costs assuming 2026 and 2028 EfW (Energy from Waste) gate fee (the only scenario to achieve savings). However, container capital costs (vehicles included in projected revenue costs) also had to be considered for scenario 3.
- SBC has enjoyed high levels of customer satisfaction for its waste and recycling collection service. Material collected for recycling is also of a high quality with low levels of contamination. Both factors need to be considered when deciding on any changes to the service.
- A comprehensive communications plan on proposed changes is vital to ensure residents are sufficiently informed before changes are implemented. Following this community engagement would be required for a short time to help embed the changes. A project manager and ICT software would also need to be resourced.

Conclusion

- 1.5 Through this review, the Committee has evaluated the Council's current waste management strategy. It has been evidenced that the Borough has the highest level of residual waste per household in the country and the lowest recycling rate regionally.
- 1.6 Owing to several factors, the Council must implement an alternative waste management strategy which is both financially viable and reduces the Council's carbon impact. These include the introduction of national legislation on weekly food waste collections, the unprecedented financial pressures exerted on local authorities and the Council's commitment to carbon reduction to combat climate change.
- 1.7 Therefore, the Committee has considered four alternative collection scenarios and has concluded that weekly dry recycling and food waste collections and fortnightly residual waste collections is the most appropriate choice. The implementation of a comprehensive communication and community engagement plan to inform residents of these changes has also been recommended. Additionally, it has emerged that the Council's green waste collection service should be revaluated in light of the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' reforms.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend:

- 1) That the council adopt a fortnightly refuse collection service.**
- 2) That scenario 3 (fortnightly refuse collection with a weekly 'multi-stream collection of dry recycling and food waste) is adopted as the Council's new waste and recycling collection service, when considering timescales around national mandated services and local waste disposal arrangements.**
- 3) To review the green waste collection service in line with updated government guidance.**
- 4) That a comprehensive communications and community engagement plan on proposed changes is implemented to ensure residents are sufficiently informed prior to the enactment of any changes, and to help embed the changes, to the waste and recycling service.**