

Environment Sub-Committee

7 January 2015

Present: Councillor B Burdis (Chair)
Councillors J Cassidy, C Johnson, M Madden and P McIntyre.

E25/1/15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors G Bell, L Bell, W Lott, G Madden and D Ord.

E26/1/15 Substitute Members

Councillor M Madden for Councillor G Madden

E27/1/15 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

E28/1/15 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2014 be confirmed.

E29/1/15 Development of a Waste Collection Strategy Post 2017

Consideration was given to a report which provided details of how a number of local authorities in the area had addressed the issue of improving recycling and reducing costs associated with waste collection. The report also provided a response to issues raised by members in relation to:

- the development of energy from waste at less carbon cost;
- the future of garden waste collection;
- the development of the reuse of waste;
- possibilities for the integration of food waste with sewerage; and
- the development of the sale of specific waste materials.

As part of the introduction of the North Tyneside Waste Management Strategy consultants had been engaged to assess the environmental and cost benefits of a range of waste disposal options. At that time Energy from Waste and in particular Energy from Waste with heat take off had been judged to be the most environmentally sustainable and deliverable technology. North Tyneside Council was in a long term waste disposal contract with SITA which provided that non recyclable waste was transported to the Energy from Waste plant on Teesside. There was the potential to make use of the heat generated from the plant although at present there were no viable outlets for the heat generated. SITA had recently obtained planning permission for a further extension to the plant and it was anticipated that this would make use of the excess heat generated.

Reference was also made to the collection of garden waste in the borough. Garden waste was collected between March and the end of November. It made use of the existing refuse collection vehicles when they were not used for the collection of household waste. The collection crews were employed on a separate contract and the use of the existing refuse collection vehicles minimised collection costs. It was explained that there were around 70,000 households in the scheme with around 50,000 active participants who generated around 8,500 tonnes of garden waste material a year.

As the collection of garden waste was a discretionary service many authorities had introduced a charge for its collection and those authorities had reported that it had proven to be a significant source of income. There was no evidence that the introduction of a collection charge had reduced the amount of garden waste collected or led to an increase in general waste collected. Reference was made to the subscription charge for the collection of garden waste which had previously been introduced in North Tyneside and subsequently withdrawn. It was explained that the take up of the service had been significant and there had been minimal public resistance to the introduction of the charge.

Consideration was also given to the development of facilities for the reuse of waste within the borough. It was noted that the authority currently supported a number of charities to collect certain waste items from the household waste recycling centre for recycling and also issued them recycling credits for the value of the materials diverted from the waste stream. In addition the authority was also working with Groundwork, an environmental charity, on a waste awareness campaign which included the principle of waste prevention and reuse.

It was noted that there was a market for items which could be reused. A number of trials of a "pop up" shop to make reuse of household goods had been undertaken at the waste transfer station. It was explained that further investment would be required to progress this scheme so that it operated on a permanent basis. A bid for funding was being developed for a project for the development of a household goods reuse collection and sorting facility at the waste transfer station along with an awareness campaign.

Consideration was also given to the possibility of introducing a weekly food waste collection service. This waste could be dealt with along with sewerage by anaerobic digestion. It was noted that Northumbrian Water operated an anaerobic digestion facility at Howdon. Whilst there were clear environmental benefits from the collection of food waste there were a number of practical and financial issues which would need to be addressed. It was explained that there would need to be weekly collections of food waste which would then lead to a reduction in general waste. Residents would need a separate container to collect the food waste and there might be some resistance to having a 'slop bucket' in their houses. It was also noted that the collection of food waste from peoples homes could also lead to a reduction in food waste as people could see for them selves how much food is wasted, this would result in people buying less which would be an issue if the material required for the anaerobic digestion was not able to be provided. The introduction of a separate food waste collection service would also require the acquisition of an additional collection vehicle.

Reference was also made to whether consideration had been given to the development of the sale of specific waste materials. It was explained that the current waste disposal and recycling contracts included the transfer, separation, treatment and sale of the waste materials. There were a few examples of authorities in the region who directly marketed their waste materials and those who did own their own transfer and sorting facilities. If North Tyneside wished to go down this route there would need to be a capital investment or it would need to be negotiated as part of the re-procurement process. It was also noted that the market for the sale of waste materials could be very volatile.

Consideration was then given to the waste collection policies in neighbouring authorities. It was noted that 10 out of the 12 north east authorities have moved away from weekly collections. Only Sunderland and North Tyneside currently operated a weekly collection, each having secured funding under the weekly collection support scheme.

The Sub-committee heard from Tony Gibbon, Service Manager, Local Services at Newcastle City Council. He explained that the authority had not been successful in obtaining funding under the weekly collection support scheme and had also had to deal with significant budget cuts. As part of the communications process with residents the authority had undertaken a three month consultation process in relation to the budgets which also included proposals to move to weekly alternate collections. It was also explained that there had been a significant communications programme with residents to encourage them to reduce the amount of general waste and increase the amount of recycling. A number of areas had been identified which had proven to be challenging, including high rise developments which had limited storage areas. The authority had also involved its staff in developing the collection routes to make best use of the resources available. As a result of the changes the number of collection vehicles and teams had been reduced.

Bob Cummins, Waste Manager at South Tyneside Council explained that the authority had introduced alternate weekly collections for both environmental and financial reasons. The authority had agreed to a trial being introduced in the Whitburn area of the borough which involved around 1600 properties. Prior to the introduction of the trial ward councillors and residents groups were consulted. In the run up to the launch of the trial the authority wrote to all of the residents in the area to advise them of the scheme and giving contact details for any issues. The Authority also had staff available in the area to respond immediately to residents concerns and issues. After 3 months it was noted that recycling in the area had increased by 14% and the collection of general household waste had reduced by 69%. There had also been few complaints received.

The scheme had been rolled out across the borough based on the day of collection and a gap had been introduced between the roll out to allow the changes to each area to bed in and to allow any issues to be resolved. Two weeks before the roll out of the scheme to a particular area the authority had written to all the residents in the area to advise them of the changes being introduced and the reasons for the changes. Again members of staff had been on hand in each area to address concerns and resolve issues. A web based Frequently Asked Questions page had also been provided to respond to residents concerns.

The scheme had been re-evaluated after 6 months operation and it was noted that residents had generally responded in a positive way to the changes. It was also noted that since the introduction of the new collection routes collection vehicles had covered 100,000 miles less than in the previous year and fuel consumption had been reduced by 60,000 litres. There had also been a reduction in general waste collected of 31,000 tonnes.

Members outlined a number of concerns regarding a change to the current collection frequency including smells from the bins due to less frequent collection, particularly during the summer months, an increase in fly tipping and larger families needing one or more bins to store their general waste.

It was explained that the current bins had been designed to keep any smells within the bin itself and that bagging the waste before it was put in the bin would eliminate most smells. Facilities currently existed for larger families, i.e. 6 family members in one household, or those with specific medical conditions, to be allocated a larger waste bin although it was explained that increased recycling levels could reduce the amount of household waste which needed to be disposed of through the waste stream and therefore the need for a larger waste bin. It was also noted that both authorities had not seen a significant increase in fly tipping as a result of the change in collection practices.

It was noted that there were a number of options that could be considered if a weekly collection could not be sustained in the future. An alternative collection frequency could be trialled in a particular area of the borough or within new developments. This would provide useful data which could be used to inform future decision making. The introduction of communal waste storage facilities could be trialled in areas of high density housing and consideration could also be given to the introduction of a weekly food waste collection service.

The chair thanked the officers for their presentation.

It was **agreed** that the report be noted.