

WIRRAL COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 5 SEPTEMBER 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

RESPONSE TO PETITION TO RETURN TO WEEKLY RESIDUAL WASTE COLLECTIONS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In May 2007, the Wirral Globe launched a “Bin Campaign” in order to gather signatures from Wirral residents to urge the Council to return to a weekly residual waste collection service. This report acknowledges the concerns of petitioners and provides the latest information on Wirral’s new waste collection service.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Technical Services have received 1794 signatures on individual cut-out slips, printed over several weeks in the Wirral Globe Newspaper. The campaign ran less than a month after the launch of the second phase of alternate weekly collections had been introduced to 72,000 households.

The Slips were addressed to the Council Leader and stated:

“I want you to register my objection to Wirral Borough Council ending out weekly rubbish collections and emptying our bins fortnightly.

I urge you to return to providing a weekly collection service in the interests of the health of your council tax payers.”

Lead petitioner Councillor Gerry Ellis presented the petition to the Council in June 2007.

3.0 RESPONSE

3.1 Clarification of Wirral’s Waste Collection Frequency

The wording of the petition states that Wirral Council collects rubbish only once per fortnight.

Officers of Technical Services would like to point out that all residents still receive a weekly collection of rubbish. The new alternate weekly collection service requires residents to sort their rubbish into recyclable and non-recyclable waste streams. The vast majority of households with gardens (103,000) also receive a collection of garden waste,

meaning these households receive three collections of household rubbish every two weeks for most of the year.

The wording of the petition may have misled some petitioners as to the service the Council actually provides. This is more likely to be the case with residents living in the areas of the Borough that had not yet received the new scheme, and therefore did not have all the Council's information. Three times as many signatories were from residents living in Wallasey than any other area (**see Appendix 1**) and Wallasey had yet to receive direct and detailed information about the new recycling service.

However, the Council assumes the Petition was referring to the restoration of weekly residual bin collections, and will address the Petition as such.

3.2 Timing of the "Bin Campaign"

The Wirral Globe's "Bin Campaign" was ran at a time when the waste collection service was experiencing a number of challenges. The Council had transferred over half the population onto a completely new service, as well as making significant changes to 95,000 households receiving a garden waste kerbside collection. The Streetscene Call Centre was under pressure from unprecedented high call volumes that were a combination of customers requiring clarification about the recent changes and customers reporting missed collections due to round changes or not receiving the correct information in a timely manner.

This meant that many residents struggled to get through to the Call Centre and in many cases gave up trying to report their problems until days later.

Wirral Officers believe that the "Bin Campaign" was launched at a time when disruption to waste services was at its peak. Therefore more residents may have been inclined to sign the petition, especially if they had experienced collection reliability problems around this time.

3.3 Assessing the Health Impacts of Alternate Weekly Collections

- 3.3.1 The petitioners objected to alternate weekly collections as they were concerned over the health risks that they may be subject to as a result of collecting residual waste less often.

In February 2007, Cranfield University and Enviros Consulting Ltd carried out a health impact assessment of alternate weekly collections services, where biodegradable waste such as food waste was collected fortnightly.

The research found no evidence of adverse health impacts with alternate week collections compared to weekly collections. The report concludes that common-sense measures, such as keeping waste

tightly wrapped and bin lids closed, can help to deal with any potential increases in odour, insects, or other nuisance that could be associated with alternate weekly collections.

The survey was carried out in the winter and repeated in the summer to compare experiences. The report is titled 'Health Impact Assessment of Alternate Week Waste Collections of Biodegradable Waste' and can be accessed at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/index.htm.

3.3.2 Technical Services offer routine advice to residents who have reported problems with odour or pests. We have received around 100 calls to date. Most of these calls were received during the Tranche 3 roll-out, when the local media were covering maggot related stories. Many of the residents who contacted us also had to wait over two weeks for their first green bin collection on the new service which would have increased the likelihood of maggot infestation.

Problems can be significantly reduced by undertaking some simple steps:

- Keeping bin lids closed at all times;
- Double wrapping or bagging waste, especially waste that may cause problems such as meat or fish;
- Keeping bins, wherever possible, out of sunlight as this will cause the contents of the bin to heat up, increasing the speed at which the waste breaks down;
- Spraying insect repellent around the lip of the wheelie bin;
- Periodically cleaning your bin with disinfectant after it has been emptied;
- Reporting damaged bins to Streetscene for repair or replacement.

Most residents who contact us are happy to take this advice on-board and do not report further problems.

3.3.4 We also offer to visit any resident who is experiencing problems with maggots, or who are unable to reduce the amount of waste they produce so that it can be all contained within their bin. Recycling Officers can even carry out in-depth waste audits on residents' waste in order to offer them the very best possible support and advice.

Officers have found that a main reason that residents experience maggot problems is due to a build up of old detritus in the bottom of the bin where flies often lay their eggs. This detritus could be several months, or even years old. Even though most residents are adequately bagging their waste, the container also needs to be free of organic residue.

3.3.5 Technical Services recognise that household waste fly-tipping may increase as residents failing to comply with the new service choose to dump residual waste illegally. Streetscene has not experienced an increase in fly tipping removal requests from the public since the

Borough moved over to alternate weekly collections, and the amount of calls received for all fly tipping removal requests in alleyways, and “black bag” type flytipping has reduced by 47% in the 2007 April to July period compared to the same period last year. Officers are monitoring the type, volume and locations of fly-tipping closely on a monthly basis as part of our BV199d performance monitoring. Environmental Health have also provided figures related to pest control requests. Demand for this service will vary considerably depending on seasonal variations and weather. It is too early to make any assumptions as to the reasons behind rises and falls in service demands at this time. The number of requests for pest control services were 14% lower in 2006/7 than in 2005/6 despite the introduction of alternate weekly collections to 24,500 households in November 2006.

- 3.3.6 In anticipation of the risk of increased fly-tipping, Technical Services is about to launch Operation **JOKER** (Joint Operation to Keep Entries free of Rubbish). The project is part-funded by NRF monies and aims to tackle household waste fly tipping in 100 of Wirral's most heavily affected entries. In addition a further 30 well-know grot spot locations have been identified as part of the project. Greater awareness, monitoring and enforcement, along with effective engagement with the public who live next to these locations will take place from September 2007 onwards. Baseline monitoring is currently being undertaken. If the project is deemed to be successful, consideration will be given to expanding this approach into other areas after April 2008.

3.4 Alternate Weekly Collections and the Benefits to Wirral Residents

3.4.1 Financial Benefits

Local authorities have been set stringent targets to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and increase the amount of waste recycled, as set out in Defra's recent Waste Strategy for England 2007. The government expects local authorities to be collectively recycling at least 40% of its household waste by 2010. Those authorities who are not able to stay within their landfill allowance face severe financial penalties of up to £150 per tonne which could impact on Council Tax payers. Due to Merseyside's poor recycling history, the Waste Disposal Authority has already had to purchase landfill tax credits from better performing authorities, in order to reduce our exposure to these fines. This has impacted adversely on Wirral Council's waste disposal costs.

To maintain weekly refuse collections, whilst also introducing the necessary recycling collections to meet our targets, would be at great financial expense. It is estimated that the cost of maintaining weekly refuse collections for Wirral residents would be in the region of £3m pa.

If the Council reverts to a weekly rubbish collection, then residents who are reluctant to recycle will no longer have to. More waste will then be sent to landfill. By 2011 Landfill tax costs will have doubled to £48 per tonne and will continue to rise by £8 per year. Landfill site charges are also likely to increase as viable sites across the country become scarcer, and waste has to be transported further afield.

3.4.2 Environmental Benefits

Recycling is a vital part of our battle against dangerous climate change as landfill gas is one of the main contributors to the greenhouse effect. Landfill space is also running out across the UK. There are now no landfill sites within Wirral and any waste generated has to be transported outside of the Borough for disposal. By maximising recycling in the Borough, we also provide valuable resources for making new products which reduces energy consumption during the extraction, transportation and processing of raw materials. Detailed information on the environmental impacts of waste can be found in the Waste Strategy 2007 published in May by DEFRA.

3.5 Assessing the Success of Alternate Weekly Collections

3.5.1 Recycling Performance

The first quarter 2007/8 recycling performance has almost doubled (27%) from the 2006/7 out turn of 14% (**see Appendix 2**). Recycling figures continue to rise as residents get used to the grey bin scheme, and become more aware of which household waste items can be recycled at the MRF (Materials Recovery Facility). Improvements in MRF productivity will also increase the amount of waste captured for recycling.

In June 2007, Wirral residents recycled 35% of their household rubbish, (20% of it from the grey bin scheme).

This far exceeds Waste Disposal Authority predictions and demonstrates the popularity of the new recycling scheme amongst the public.

Wirral Council and Liverpool City Council have both introduced a co-mingled 240 litre wheeled bin for recycling glass, cans, plastic, paper and card. Liverpool City Council are collecting their residual waste weekly and Wirral are collecting it on alternate weeks. All material is being taken to the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) at Bidston. Wirral have not yet carried out any participation surveys, but data captured from Biffa through their Springboard system has recorded set out rates over 90% in areas such as Wallasey (92%) Egremont (94%) and Woodchurch (95%). Liverpool report participation in their co-mingled recycling scheme to be around 70%, increasing to over 80% in select areas. This indicates that Wirral has significantly higher participation levels than Liverpool as a result of moving to alternate weekly collections.

In July, Wirral delivered around 30% more waste to the MRF for recycling, despite a similar number of properties being on the scheme in both districts. However, it is too early to draw any firm conclusions from this data at this stage as both schemes are not operating in exactly the same way.

4.0 PROPOSED ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE PETITION

Officers from the Waste and Environment Team propose to carry out the following actions, in order to address concerns of petitioners and continue to demonstrate the value to the residents of Wirral of operating an alternate weekly waste collection service.

4.1 Proposed Amendments to the Existing Bin-allocation Policy

Households with seven or more occupants are currently entitled to an additional green wheeled bin. According to the 2001 Census information only 531 households had seven or more occupants. In the Census, Wirral had 1719 households with six occupants and 6647 households with five occupants. Technical Services propose to amend current policy to allow all households with six or more residents an additional bin. If every household with six occupants requested a second bin the maximum cost to the Council would be £34380, assuming the census data is still accurate. Technical Services have an annual bin replacement budget of £106000. This budget would have to allow for this growth should any future policy be approved. A full bin allocation policy review will be submitted to the next Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. Members' views regarding this policy are welcomed at this time.

Technical Services Officers are also distributing temporary (second-hand) additional bins to families with more than one child using disposable nappies. No households will be given additional provision until they have been assessed by the Waste and Environment Team and officers are satisfied that the residents qualify for additional storage and are actively recycling.

4.2 Consultation with Signatories

Technical Services intend to write to all signatories to highlight the benefits of alternate weekly collections and signpost them to this report. The residents will be given an opportunity to complete a questionnaire (**see Appendix 3**) in order to provide us with more information about their objections.

We intend to send the questionnaire out by the end of September. This has given each resident more opportunity to experience the new collection scheme, and has avoided the holiday period, when we may have received less returns.

4.3 Consultation with the General Public

In order for the Alternate Weekly Collection Scheme to work properly, the service must be reliable. Technical Services officers are working closely with Biffa to ensure standards of service delivery are maintained after such immense change. Although the number of missed collections has fallen dramatically, they are still too high. Technical Services has planned to set up three regular focus groups with residents in order to address issues with the new scheme and collection reliability. Their opinions on our communication material and methods will also be sought to help inform future awareness raising activity.

4.4 Raising Awareness

The Council has an on-going Communications Plan. A series of Roadshows are planned for the Autumn and a recycling "update" will be sent out to all households mid-September. Residents will also receive further support material early December, along with their 2008 calendars). The grey bin scheme is also due to be launched in schools

in January 2008, along with an education toolkit. Pilots and consultation with schools are progressing well. Two additional waste awareness officers are due to start work in October 2007 until July 2008. The posts are part funded through the European Social Fund, and income generated through non-performance penalties issued to our waste contractor. Technical Services will continue to seek external funding to expand waste communication activity across the district.

4.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

Wirral Officers intend to carry out detailed participation and capture rate surveys on households of different types of demographics from October to December 2007 once the holiday season is over. We have also approached Liverpool City Council officers in order to carry out joint evaluation. We intend to match rounds in both local authority areas in order to carry out a detailed comparison of both schemes. The Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) are also in the process of carrying out independent participation monitoring on Wirral.

5.0 SUMMARY

Technical Services considers this petition to be an opportunity to address genuine concerns of Wirral residents through follow-up information and further consultation.

Early indications that the scheme has been well received by the vast majority of residents is demonstrated by the significant improvements Wirral has made to its households waste recycling performance.

Officers accept that the changes are significant, and some residents will require extensive and sustained support through awareness and education initiatives, in order to reduce the impact of the scheme on Wirral's environmental quality.

Government findings state that alternate weekly collections of biodegradable waste poses no risk to health. Technical Services have implemented a number of procedures and allocated additional resources in order to advise and support residents reporting problems with their new waste collection service. As a result, any problems reported to us are resolved to residents' satisfaction in almost all cases.

The Waste and Environment team are now focusing their efforts on improving the reliability of the collection service, and identifying further recycling opportunities for residents. For example, five wax carton (e.g Tetra Pack) recycling banks have just been sited in Wirral, and another two are due to be sited in the next few weeks.

Technical Services strongly advises the Council to continue the alternate weekly collection service to all residents currently using a wheeled bin service, in order to help the district to achieve its landfill diversion targets.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial or staffing implications for carrying out the recommendations in this report that cannot be contained within existing budget provision.

7.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no equal opportunity implications arising from this report. The report supports altering the existing bin allocation policy to allow large families additional residual bin storage. Residents requiring additional residual bin storage for medical reasons are provided with as much capacity as needed.

8.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no planning implications arising from this report.

9.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

10.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no Human Rights implications arising from this report. The name and address of individual signatories have not been included.

11.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The recommendations in this report aim to maximise recycling performance on Wirral and therefore reduce the impact of waste on climate change. The report also aims to reduce the reliance on landfill disposal, therefore reducing the need to transport waste long distances.

12.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

12.1 This report and proposed residual bin policy is available to all members of the public, as are the government papers documented within it.

13.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no local member support implications.

14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 Members are requested to:

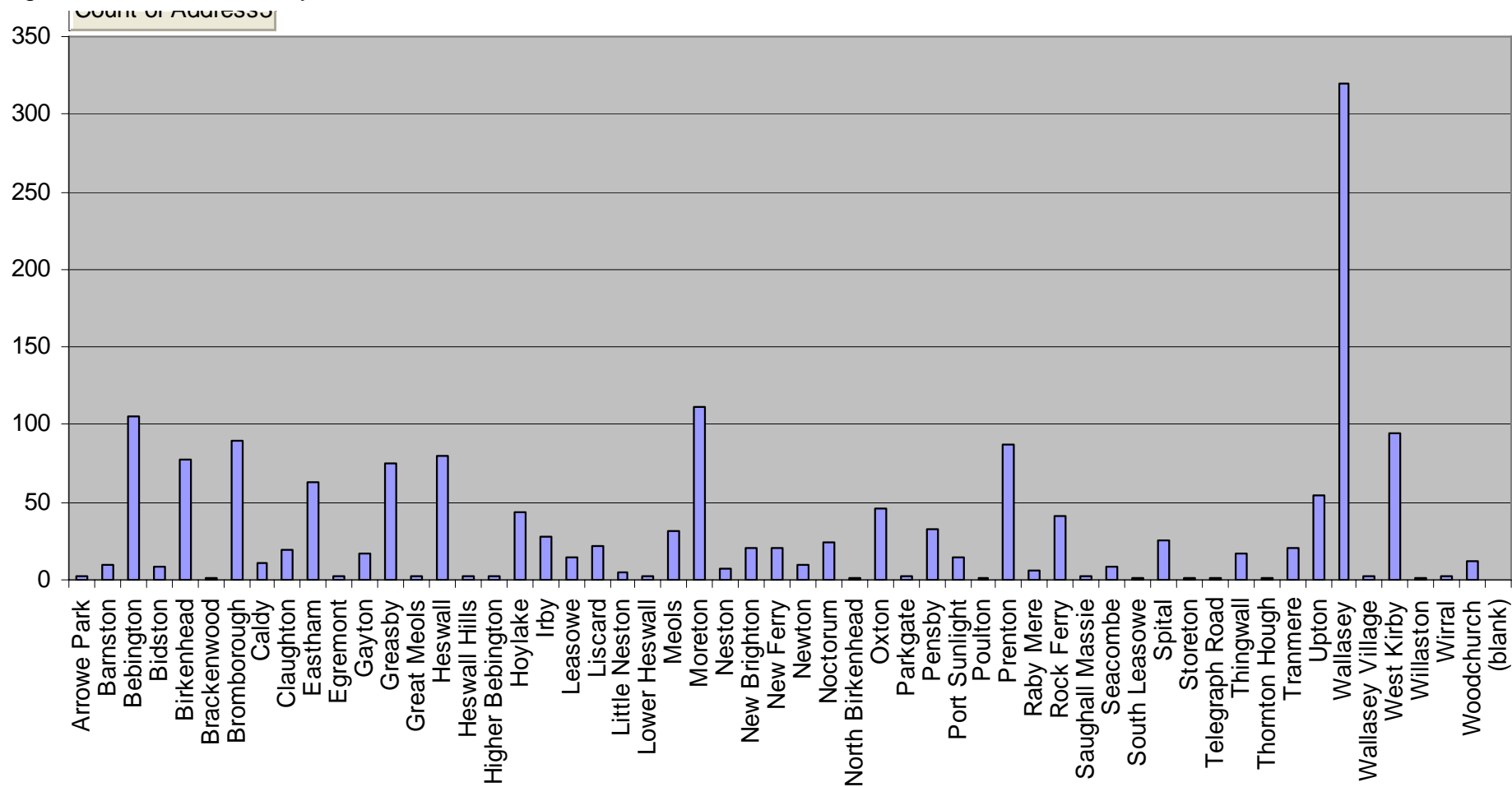
- (i) Reconfirm their support for Wirral's Alternate Weekly Collection scheme;
- (ii) Note the improvements to Wirral's recycling performance since the introduction of Alternate Weekly Collections;
- (iii) Endorse officers' intention to review the current bin allocation policy as suggested in section 4.1;

- (iv) Endorse officers' intention to carry out consultation with the signatories proposed in section 4.2 of this report and report back to the November Committee with their findings.

DAVID GREEN, DIRECTOR
TECHNICAL SERVICES

Appendix 1

Signatories: Breakdown by area



Appendix 2

BVPI Information (Waste and Recycling)

4.1 2006/7

Recycling: BV82a: 9.10%

Composting: BV82b: 5.05%

Percentage of household waste recycled and composted: Overall BV82: 14.15%

BV84: Kg of waste produced per head of population: 449 kg

4.2 2007/8*

BVPI	April	May	June
82a	11.27 %	14.07 %	20.12 %
82b	10.36 %	12.68 %	14.84 %
82 (total)	21.63 %	26.75%	34.96%
84	361Kg/head/year	398kg/head/year	332kg/head/year

**Unaudited figures*

Appendix 3 Signatories consultation questionnaire

New bin collection petition questionnaire

Name

Address

Rep3192

Please tick boxes unless otherwise stated

1) Please rate your level of satisfaction with the new bin collection system at the time of your completion of the petition slip (10 being the highest level of satisfaction) out of 10

2) Why did you petition against the new collection system? (Tick all that apply)
Concerned about bin smells and hygiene

Concerned about fitting waste into your green bin

Do not want to separate waste into different bins

Through reading, watching or listening to media reports

Concerned about fines

Other please summarise

3) Do you find that you can recycle more waste than you previously expected?
Yes
No

4) Do you know that Wirral Council can provide extra green bins to large families or properties with nappies in their bin?
Yes
No

5) Wirral Council recycled 14% of household waste in 2006/07, currently 27% of household waste is recycled or composted. In your opinion do you think this increase is due to the new alternate week collection system?
Yes
No

7) Wirral Council is not going to fine residents for placing small amounts of the wrong material into the wrong bin. Instead officers will educate residents. Did you know this previously?
Yes
No

8) The government commissioned a recent report in that concluded there were no health affects due to storing biodegradable waste in a bin for two weeks. Did you know this?
Yes
No

9) Has your level of satisfaction with the new bin collection system changed since you completed your petition slip in May
Please rate your current level of satisfaction with the new bin collection system (10 being the highest level of satisfaction) out of 10

Thank you for completing the questionnaire please return in the freepost envelope