

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board

Evaluation of Phase One Alternate Weekly Collections of Recyclable and Residual Waste

Introduction

1. The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board agreed to work closely with the Environment and Housing directorate in evaluating the Phase One roll out of alternate weekly collections (AWC) of recyclable and residual waste so that any lessons learned can be applied to Phase Two, which is expected to commence in November 2013.
2. In view of the timescale for commencing Phase Two, the Board agreed to undertake this piece of scrutiny work via working group meetings during July and August, to which all Board Members would be invited to attend.
3. An initial working group meeting was held on 24th July 2013 to enable Board Members to gain an understanding of the process in terms of the broad areas of evaluation that had been identified and to provide comment on the process at that stage.
4. A second working group meeting was held on 29th August 2013 to analyse performance outcomes relating to Phase One and identifying where lessons have been learned for Phase Two.
5. A final working group meeting was held on 5th September 2013 to provide an opportunity for representatives from the Waste Recycling Advisor/Waste Doctor Team to also share their views with Scrutiny around lessons learned during Phase One and the preparatory work for Phase Two.
6. This report presents the view of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board following this piece of Scrutiny work. The Scrutiny Board has requested that this report accompanies the report of the Director of Environment and Housing to Executive Board on 9th October 2013 around the Alternate Weekly Collections Phase One Evaluation. The Scrutiny Board will be considering a separate response from the directorate to its recommendations on 21st October 2013.

Observations, conclusions and recommendations from the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board.

7. As a Scrutiny Board, we remain committed to assisting the Waste Management Service in reducing and diverting the amount of household waste sent to landfill in line with the targets set out within the Council's main Waste Strategy.
8. In undertaking this piece of scrutiny work, we liaised closely with the Chief Officer, Waste Management Services and senior officers within Waste Management and Customer Relations associated with project managing the delivery of alternate weekly collections across the city.

9. We also welcomed the contribution of a refuse worker and GMB Union Steward in sharing his views openly with Scrutiny in terms of providing a frontline perspective. This approach was extremely helpful and will be taken forward as good practice in future pieces of scrutiny work.
10. We agreed to report on our findings and recommendations in early September in order to effectively inform the preparations for the Phase Two roll out. In doing so, we are mindful that the preparations for the Phase Two roll out are continuous, leading up to its anticipated introduction in November, which will include on-going analysis of performance data and briefings with relevant Refuse Crews and Ward Members.
11. As such, our observations, conclusions and recommendations are based on the evidence provided to the Scrutiny Board at the time of our review and are as follows:

Performance monitoring

12. In July, we considered the evaluation framework for Phase One in terms of agreed objectives/targets, measures and performance outcomes. At that stage, it was noted that a number of the performance outcomes were yet to be completed pending further analysis of performance information during August.
13. We requested that details of the performance outcomes linked to specific operational targets be made available in readiness for the working group meeting on 29th August. These targets related to an increase in recycling rates, a decrease in residual waste and a decrease in the amount of waste sent to landfill in relation to the Phase One AWC area. We also requested the performance data relating to missed bin collections for those households in the Phase One area.
14. The performance outcomes presented at our working group meeting in August related to the first twelve weeks of service. This showed that the new regime had resulted in the intended increase in recyclable waste collected from households in the AWC Phase One area (increase of 561 tonnes (42%) observed in the first twelve weeks) as well as a decrease in the overall amount of residual waste produced (950 tonnes (12%) observed in the first twelve weeks). We were particularly interested to note that in the AWC Phase One area, the service had also seen in total, a 23% decrease in the amount of waste sent to landfill.
15. Whilst such performance information provides an indication of the early success of the Phase One roll out of AWC in terms of implementation and meeting operational objectives, we would urge that further analysis is undertaken of any impacts on the volumes of residual waste arising at alternative means of disposal, such as Household Waste Sites. This is to ascertain whether the new regime is in fact motivating households to be more prudent in managing and reducing waste levels to the extent observed during the first twelve weeks of service and not resorting to alternative means of disposal instead.
16. The performance data we received in relation to missed bin collections in the Phase One area highlighted that 487 instances of missed bins were reported to the contact

centre in the first six weeks of service. In the subsequent six weeks, this figure had decreased to 309 instances reported. We learned that many of the calls were due to residents becoming familiar with the new service and primarily localised to specific pockets of the Phase One area. However, we requested a further breakdown of this performance data in relation to associated Wards and collection rounds, waste collection types and the reasons behind the service failures in order to be assured that such instances were not solely linked to the introduction of AWC that would indicate any failings with the route modelling processes.

17. In response to our request, we were disappointed to learn that the performance data relating to missed collections is not routinely disaggregated to this level of detail. Assurances were provided by the Chief Officer, Waste Management Services that service failures are dealt with dynamically by the service on a daily operational basis and that no significant issues had arisen in Phase One that had prompted a need to undertake this level of detailed analysis. However, it was agreed that this analysis would be undertaken to provide this additional assurance to the Scrutiny Board.
18. In anticipation of this information being provided, this prompted a wider debate around performance monitoring. We are mindful that issues surrounding the existing reporting systems used by the Waste Management Service have been previously raised by Scrutiny. Following its review of such systems during 2011/12, the Resources and Council Services Scrutiny Board concluded that the service was operating a number of different systems and processes that are labour intensive, paper based and could be prone to human error, thereby recognising the need for the rationalisation of existing systems and technologies.
19. Such issues were raised again as part of the recent review undertaken by the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board which focused on improving recycling through effective communication and education. However, as part of this review, we did acknowledge that a significant efficiency measure being progressed by the service is the introduction of an electronic Integrated Waste Management System to replace the outdated paper based communication systems currently being used by the service. This includes the provision of in-cab technology within refuse collection vehicles that will enable crews to immediately report any problems or service failures for the management staff to address.
20. In moving forward in rolling out AWC across the city, we recognised a need for the Waste Management Service to generate more regularised and detailed analysis of performance information that can be shared with Elected Members to indicate performance trends and also assist with the understanding of key issues arising by Ward and round and the speedy resolution of such issues.
21. Linked to this, we also acknowledge the new role of the Area Lead Members, introduced in May 2013 following the Council's review of area working. This role aims to provide a local "lead" perspective around particular agendas, which includes the environment agenda, to further facilitate local democratic accountability. A particular function of the Area Lead Member is to maintain an overview of local performance linked to their agenda roles and provide a link between Area Committees and the relevant Executive Member to ensure local needs are

represented, issues are highlighted, best practice is shared and to facilitate local solutions to any issues.

22. In producing more regularised and detailed analysis of performance information, we recognise the added value in the service also working closely with the Environmental Area Lead Members to explore appropriate reporting mechanisms.

Recommendation 1

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that more regularised and detailed analysis of performance information linked to the roll out of Alternate Weekly Collections is undertaken to indicate performance trends and also assist with the understanding of key issues arising by Ward and round and the speedy resolution of such issues. Also, that the service works closely with Environmental Area Lead Members to ensure that such performance information is shared with Elected Members through appropriate reporting mechanisms.

Route modelling

23. One of the key objectives of the Phase One roll out was to remove the need for remaining pro-active back up vehicles. In encouraging participation in a service, the reliability of that service is paramount and therefore we questioned the service's capacity to address any missed collections or vehicle breakdowns without the use of back up vehicles and whether this had been an issue during Phase One.
24. It was reported that this had been achieved through the route modelling process which was based on the principle that a vehicle would be assigned to a particular zoned area for six days. Based on guidance from the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP), we learned that a reasonable level of daily contingency had also been factored into the route modelling process. This provides the capacity for the service to operate a 'buddying' system whereby vehicles within neighbouring areas could be called upon when required, to assist, such as to cover vehicle breakdowns, and so facilitate as far as operationally practicable a collection for residents on the scheduled day. Alternatively this capacity enables any missed collections to be addressed the following day by the same vehicle as well as accounting for new builds and increased bin weights. We were also assured that routes had been modelled with capacity to enable additional tonnage that may result from accepting a wider range of SORT materials.
25. In relation to any planned service changes, we would emphasise the need for timely and effective communication with crews to ensure that such changes are clearly understood. However, it is clearly evident that a key factor to the successful approach adopted for Phase One was the direct involvement of collection crews during the planning stages and particularly the design of collection routes. Such input provided valuable local operational knowledge and experience around accessibility issues and appropriate tipping points that were factored into the route modelling process. We learned that collection crews also acknowledge the added benefits brought about by this close working relationship and that this approach is being replicated for Phase Two.

26. However, in acknowledging that the Phase Two area covers a significantly larger area of the city than Phase One (over 100,000 properties compared to 56,000 properties in Phase One) and is expected to include 'heavier' recycling locations, such as Wetherby, we did question whether the same contingency based route modelling principle can be applied effectively to the Phase Two area and therefore sought assurances from the service.

Recommendation 2

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that the contingency based route modelling principle applied to Phase One can be effectively applied to the Phase Two area, which covers a significantly larger area of the city and expected to include 'heavier' recycling locations.

Additional risk factors linked to the roll out of Phase Two

27. In acknowledging that the roll out of Phase Two is expected to commence in November, we also sought assurances that additional risk factors were being considered as part of the feasibility study for Phase Two, in particular, the potential for adverse weather conditions and the Christmas period. We also discussed possible disruption linked to the introduction of new in-cab technology.
28. As such, we would expect sufficient contingencies to have been incorporated into the route modelling process.

Recommendation 3

That the Director of Environment and Housing is assured that additional risk factors linked to Phase Two, such as the potential for adverse weather conditions and Christmas collections, have been considered and that sufficient contingencies have been incorporated into the route modelling process.

Assisted collections

29. We raised the potential for increased referrals for assisted collections given that fortnightly collections of residual waste bins will generate heavier loads. In doing so, we learned that this factor had been considered as part of the feasibility analysis for Phase One and would therefore also be considered in preparation for Phase Two. However, we were pleased to note that there would be closer working with crews and other agencies to gain a full picture of the assisted wheel out requirement for Phase Two.
30. We understand that the policy for assisted collections is applied across the city in that requests for an assisted collection can just be applied to a particular waste collection type. As part of our review, we noted that 235 of the missed collections reported in the Phase One area were full wheel out. Linked to this, we were interested to gain the view of the GMB Union Steward on this policy. In doing so, it was suggested that, to help alleviate confusion amongst collection crews, it would be more helpful if the policy was revised to apply automatically to all waste collection types linked to a property. We also share this view.

Recommendation 4

That the Director of Environment and Housing revises the policy for assisted waste collections for applications to apply automatically to all waste collection types linked to a property.

No side waste policy

31. The Scrutiny Board discussed the no side waste policy linked to the Phase One scheme and the impact this had on residents. It was highlighted that input from crews and Ward Members prior to the commencement of Phase One had helped to identify particular areas to target Waste Recycling Advisors to educate residents and support the implementation of the scheme. It was reported that there were only a small number of areas that had not to date fully engaged in AWC and that the incidents of side waste was generally low.
32. Following a 6 week amnesty period, a pragmatic staged approach to the issue was adopted. Initially one bag of side waste was put back into residents bins and further excess was taken, to provide residents, supported by Waste Advisors where needed, further time to adjust to this change. Any side waste is now put back into the resident's bin with a notice reminding the resident of the Council's no side waste policy. Such incidents are also recorded to help determine whether further input from Waste Recycling Advisors is required.
33. Overall, we acknowledge that the 'no side waste policy' has been successfully implemented in Phase One and support the continuation of this policy for Phase Two. However, we also believe that the Council should be moving towards a city-wide policy as quickly as possible, but appreciating the need for a planned staged approach in order to understand and address associated operational implications in taking forward this policy.

Recommendation 5

That the Executive Board supports the principle of adopting a city-wide no side waste policy for Alternate Weekly Collections and undertakes further work around the associated operational implications in taking forward this policy city wide.

Waste Recycling Advisors/Waste Doctors

34. As well as the collection crews, we also acknowledge the positive contribution made by the Waste Recycling Advisors/Waste Doctors during Phase One in terms of assisting residents to adapt to the new scheme. We understand that eight Waste Recycling Advisors were recruited for Phase One. Following inductions on 18 March 2013, the Waste Recycling Advisors were able to begin speaking to residents one month ahead of Phase One "Go live".
35. We acknowledge the significant benefits to be gained from utilising the same Waste Recycling Advisors for Phase Two in terms of the knowledge and experience gained during Phase One and the close working relationships now developed with collection crews. In addition, the Waste Recycling Advisors will also be able to begin communications with residents for Phase Two at a much earlier stage.

Despite this, we have raised concerns in learning that no additional Waste Recycling Advisors are to be recruited for the Phase Two roll out to cover a significantly larger area of the city, as well as remain accessible for those residents within the Phase One area that may still require support.

36. Whilst the roles of the Waste Recycling Advisors have been specifically linked to the effective delivery of AWC across the city, we do believe that their roles could be expanded further around the wider delivery of the Council's Waste Management Strategy and not just limited to AWC. As such, we would support a longer term commitment and investment given to such a valued resource and it is vital that the Council is able to attract and retain experienced and quality staff into such roles.

Recommendation 6

That the Director of Environment and Housing considers an increase in the number of Waste Recycling Advisors recruited for Phase Two and works with the Waste Recycling Advisor Team to establish resource needs.

Recommendation 7

That the Director of Environment and Housing considers the longer term employment of Waste Recycling Advisors to attract and retain experienced and quality staff.

Direct communication with residents

37. In relation to the Household Information Pack (HIP) and collection calendar to be circulated to relevant households, we were pleased to note that, following feedback, the calendar has been developed to be more user friendly and date specific without compromising quality assurance and minimising logistical issues. For Phase Two, the HIP will also be streamlined making information more accessible and the overall pack size smaller. The original contained a letter, calendar and two 8 page booklets. The new pack will contain a letter, calendar and one 12 page booklet.
38. In acknowledging that the collection calendar would include details of Christmas collection dates, we emphasised the importance of ensuring that such dates are finalised prior to the circulation of this calendar in order to avoid confusion.
39. During our review, we questioned whether there had been a rise in reports or complaints made by residents in the Phase One area in terms of environmental problems linked to their waste bins, such as infestations of flies/maggots or nuisance smells. Whilst the contact centre did not appear to be experiencing significant reports linked to such environmental problems, we would still urge that the service is proactive in providing advice to residents around how to alleviate such environmental problems as part of the Household Information Packs for Phase Two and that this is also made accessible on the Council's website.
40. In acknowledging that some areas within the Phase Two roll out are already in receipt of a fortnightly recycling collection along with a weekly residual, we also recognise that careful consideration is needed in terms of how the AWC scheme is articulated to such residents, as it may be perceived as a reduction in service.

41. Whilst acknowledging that the Waste Recycling Advisors had utilised libraries and public attractions to increase awareness and education of AWC during Phase One, the feedback we received from the Waste Recycling Advisors as part of our review suggested that such venues could be utilised more effectively for Phase Two.

Recommendation 8

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that the Christmas collection dates for the Phase Two areas are finalised prior to the circulation of the collection calendar with the Household Information Packs.

Recommendation 9

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that advice is given to residents around alleviating environmental problems (flies/maggots/smells etc) as part of the Household Information Packs and is also made accessible on the Council's website.

Recommendation 10

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that particular work is undertaken to effectively communicate the new Alternate Weekly Collections service to those residents already in receipt of a fortnightly recycling collection and a weekly residual collection.

Recommendation 11

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that public libraries and public attractions are utilised more effectively in terms of increasing awareness and education of the Council's Alternate Weekly Collections service.

Consultation with Ward Members and crews

42. Finally, having already acknowledged the significant benefits arising from the input received from collection crews and Ward Members in terms of maximising local intelligence and factoring this into the route modelling process for Phase One, we would like to reiterate the importance of replicating this process again for Phase Two, particularly in recognition of the significant increase in the number of areas and households involved in Phase Two.

Recommendation 12

That the Director of Environment and Housing ensures that Waste Recycling Advisors and other officers work closely with Ward Members and crews to gain local intelligence of the areas involved in Phase Two.