



**Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods**

**Inner North West Area Committee**

**Date: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

**Subject: Student Accommodation Change-over: Feedback from activities**

**Electoral Wards Affected:**

**ALL**

Ward Members consulted (referred to in report)

**Specific Implications For:**

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council Function

Delegated Executive Function available for Call In

Delegated Executive Function not available for Call In Details set out in the report

**Executive Summary**

This report provides detailed feedback from the recent student accommodation change-over initiative. It aimed to reduce the environmental impact of the annual change-over by getting students, universities, residents and local service providers to work together.

There have been positive results with regards to street cleaning of key hotspots, partnership working and communications. However, there continue to be considerable challenges across the student areas due to the large quantities of waste being cleared from properties and the lack of effort to dispose of this effectively by some students and landlords. The challenge posed by this volume of waste needs further consideration and activity by the Students in the Community group.

**1.0 Purpose of this Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Area Committee with an overview of the increased services in operation across the student areas from 20 June to 18 July 2008. In addition it provides feedback from partners, residents and landlords about the effectiveness of our response.

1.2 The Area Committee are requested to note the contents of this report and support recommendations for future development of this initiative.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Approximately 60,000 students live in the area with 20,000 new inhabitants each year. 37% of the area population are 16-29, nearly twice the citywide average of 21%. The annual accommodation changeover results in over 30,000 students moving out of their rented premises within the space of a few days. The students are usually required to empty their property in order to receive their bond back from the landlord. This results in massive amounts of waste being generated, which has to be disposed of including hundreds of pieces of bulky items such as sofas, TVs, mattresses etc which are no longer wanted. This creates pressure on the Council's environmental services in the area and it is necessary to divert resources from other parts of the city, creating a knock on effect on services. In past years it has taken up to 6 weeks to clear the extra refuse generated at this time of year.
- 2.3 Preparations for this year's changeover has been ongoing since February managed by the 'Students and the Community' group. This group also supports the coordination of Freshers' Week and other related issues. The group is chaired by Cllr James Monaghan and has representatives from both universities, both student unions, the community, Streetscene, the Police and Environmental Enforcement.

## 3.0 Main Activities and Issues

### 3.1 Communication

Additional work was undertaken to communicate with students and landlords about responsible disposal of waste and council services, including:

- **'Leave Leeds Tidy'** – a dedicated website for students created by Leeds University Union in partnership with the North West Area Management and Leeds Metropolitan University Union was updated with information for 2008 and Leave Leeds Tidy posters and leaflets were widely distributed.
- A **leaflet** was produced by Leeds City Council and delivered to students informing them what they should do with their waste during changeover and where the skips would be placed.
- **Leeds University Pro-Vice Chancellor** emailed all students to remind them of their responsibilities as local residents. In addition a **community guide** was produced and distributed to all students leaving University accommodation, providing practical help and advice about shared housing and a four page wraparound advert was put in the Leeds University Union newspaper with the skips map location.
- The **Accredited Landlord Team** undertook a series of communications to landlords about extra services and there was an amnesty on commercial waste for accredited landlords during the changeover period
- The **Unipol Tabloid** included information about what provisions were in place for changeover, including the location of the skips, information about collections, the green streets project and enforcement action. The tabloid has a print run of 25,000 and is delivered via the royal main to properties in the Private Rented Sector in LS6 and 4.

- **E-newsletters** were sent giving information about skips, recycling and green streets and what tenants can do with their rubbish and enforcement action for landlords and tenants was included in the E- Newsletter to owners which was e-mailed to around 300 Code of Standards Owners in Leeds.
- Numerous **press releases** were sent by the council and partners during the period.

### 3.2 Streetscene

The information below details the additional services that were provided over and above the level of core service activities, which includes 2 bulky waste collectors per day over 24 days, 4 operatives per day for 24 days and 2 refuse collection vehicles with 3 crew each for 24 days:

- 700 tonnes of domestic waste was collected from the servicing of wheeled bins, equating to 70 vehicle loads.
- Additional crew put on – 1 vehicle, 1 driver and 3 loaders - all for 24 days each.
- 70 tonnes of side/bulky waste cleared.
- Additional bulky waste crews in operation equivalent of 70 days and 140 days.
- 80% of PO3 and SO2 Streetscene Area Manager's time was dedicated to the area.
- Additional officer time – 5 weekend call outs
- Amnesty for accredited landlords disposing of certain types of commercial waste repeated.

The additional cost of the above resources on top of the core services already provided is £36, 673.

### 3.3 Enforcement

The WNW Environmental Action team (EAT) was newly formed in May 2008. It brought together the street scene enforcement officers and the environmental health staff who work on domestic and neighbourhood related issues. They undertook a number of initiatives during the changeover to help alleviate issues:

**Special Out of Hours noise and enforcement project** - This provided a high profile rapid response to both noise and environmental crime during the evening and night time of the weekend of the changeover. The following was achieved:

- 12 noise jobs were referred and visited including reducing the noise level at a party which will be the subject of enforcement action.
- 6 environmental health proactive visits were carried out
- 27 enforcement proactive visits were carried out. This included witnessing significant rat activity at the rear of takeaways.
- 1 fixed penalty for littering was served.
- Several drive- bys through Woodhouse Moor were carried out but all was quiet.
- The skips provided by area management and privately were visited, 5 were overflowing or had side waste, this was reported through to the day time crew to pass to street scene to collect the side waste.
- 2 loud parties were proactively visited.
- 4 section 47 notices were served (section 47 allows local authority to specify the way in which waste is collected from commercial premises).
- 2 litter clearing notices were served.

- 3 warning letters for untidy gardens were issued.

### **Daytime weekend working.**

This was the weekend of the changeover. Two Environmental Action officers were patrolling the streets and taking action as necessary throughout the weekend. The following actions were undertaken:

- Domestic properties inspected throughout Headingley, Hyde Park and Woodhouse.
- Enforced immediate removal of hedge clippings on footpath.
- Enforced removal of dog faeces left deliberately on doorstep of domestic residence.
- Responded to Cllr referrals.
- Dealt with a builder who was using a council skip for waste from a house renovation.
- Required the owner of a property to get a skip to contain waste from building renovations.
- Provided advice to a resident who had been the victim of criminal damage (graffiti).
- Checked waste carriers had appropriate licences.
- Liaised with street scene about problem areas around recycling bank, skips spilled and strewn refuse etc.
- Dealt with sounding alarm, probably caused by fire in skip adjacent.
- Provided advice to residents in the area about waste disposal.

### **Response to complaints and routine patrols by Environmental Action Officers**

The area was visited in response to complaints and patrolled during the run up to and the period after the changeover. Actions taken include:

- Domestic property inspections
- Dealing with refuse in gardens and bin yards
- Dealing with contractors putting waste in area management skips.
- Dealing with rodent issues around the Arc.
- Waste carrier checks
- Giving advise to numerous students about proper refuse disposal.
- Responding to complaints
- Dealing with fly tipping.
- Dealing with individuals removing waste from bins
- Liaising with street scene and area management
- Vehicle seized and taken away for carrying hazardous waste with no waste carriers licence in place. Offender has been interviewed and will be prosecuted.

Although significant amounts of waste and problems were observed by the officers, the only enforcement action which could be taken actually during the changeover, because of the need to put refuse out for collection by cleansing was in relation to bag slashers, and improper use of skips. However the liaison, PR and high visible presence of the officers is undoubtedly a valuable tool during this period.

## **3.4 Skips**

The provision of skips was tested out a couple of years ago, and although not without its problems it did help to clear over 50 tonnes of rubbish that would have otherwise been dumped on the street and/or in gardens. In 2007 skips were not provided and the changeover was deemed particularly bad. On this basis the Students and the Community Group agreed to run the skips provision again. The

locations were strategically picked to be within the more densely packed student areas.

11 skips were initially placed around the priority area, as advertised in the leaflet, from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> June until Friday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2008 and all were clearly labelled with a 'Leave Leeds Tidy' banner. There was a limited budget for skips but 33 skips were provided in total, with each skip being replaced the maximum limit of 3 times. There was scope for more frequent changes as the skips did exceed capacity. In total 50 tons of waste was cleared through the skip scheme, all of which was recycled, at a total cost was £3,600.

The skips were placed out on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, with each being monitored numerous times a day by area management, streetscene officers, enforcement officers and local Councillors. Whenever a skip was full it was reported to the skip hire company and they were asked to remove and replace as soon as possible. It has to be acknowledged that on occasion their capacity to respond, especially on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> was limited as they only work during the morning. When waste and items were being dumped around skips a streetscene crew was called in to clear, this crew was proactively patrolling all the skip locations anyway but was available to react to any specific issues.

The main issues occurred over Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>, when the skips company wasn't open and therefore they couldn't be instructed to remove skips until the Monday morning.

### **3.5 University of Leeds and Leeds University Union (including Green Streets)**

The Leave Leeds Tidy website was updated and Green Streets, a student led volunteering project that aims to reduce the amount of re-useable items going to landfill as a result of student changeover in Leeds, were in operation for 5 weeks. There main actions were:

- Phase 1 6<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> June – collection and sorting of reusable items from halls of residence that were then distributed via free shop.
- Phase 2 – 5500 green bags and leaflets were distributed around the Hyde Park and Headingley area and were collected between 28<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> July. Items went to the free shop and local charities (17 in total). All electrical goods were tested and sold on and items of furniture checked for fire safety certifications.
- Approximately £400 was raised from the free shops, where donations were requested, and will be used to fund the scheme next year.
- Total number of bags received was 916, with an approximate weight of 8244kg.
- Total amount of volunteer time was 775hrs, equates to 20 weeks for a full time post.
- Funding was received from Leeds University Community Initiative, £1077, and Cllr Monaghan and Cllr Hamilton £1000 from MICE Money.

The University in conjunction with Leeds University Union also undertook:

- A Community guide to promote responsible waste handling.
- Further promotion and publication of the Neighbourhood Helpline.
- Sending an email to all students to remind them of their responsibilities.
- Facebook monitoring.
- Regular web based advice for students about behaviour, respect and support.

Regular visits were made to the area and overall observations indicated responsible waste handling by the majority of student households.

### **3.6 Leeds Metropolitan University Union (CALM)**

The Annual Bargain Hunt event was held on 17<sup>th</sup> May in Hyde Park. The event aims to encourage students from both universities to recycle their unwanted items by selling them rather than throwing them away. The event has been running for a number of years now, with this year continuing to be a success.

### **3.7 West Yorkshire Police**

West Yorkshire Police PCSO patrolled the area during the changeover period but no significant problems were brought to their attention.

### **3.8 Neighbourhood Wardens**

Two Neighbourhood Wardens, the resource equivalent of three full days (23<sup>rd</sup> June to 27<sup>th</sup> June), patrolled Hyde Park and Headingley looking for areas of concern and checking on the skips that had been put out. They also delivered some letters in the Harolds and Thornvilles regarding the Neighbourhood Improvement Plan for that area.

### **3.9 Pickard Properties**

Over 600 tenants were sent out comprehensive information on the correct procedure for vacating properties, including information on waste collection and other council services.

### **3.10 Unipol Student Homes**

**Unipol Tenants** - Every Unipol property received a roll of black bags for bagging up their waste. This amounted to approximately 600 rolls of bags being distributed. New tenants receive 'bed-drop' packs when collecting their keys at the start of their new tenancy and these packs include information about what can be recycled in their bins.

**Property Management** - Inspection were carried out on every property by housing management staff, if gardens were found to be full of tenants waste, this was removed by a waste collection company, approximately 10 properties this year required waste removing from their gardens. About 1,800 Unipol tenants have Tenancy Agreements that do not finish until mid-to late July, this is to reduce the impact of changeover and allow these tenants a couple of weeks to move in to their new properties.

### **3.11 Residents**

A number of residents (including students) took numerous loads of recyclable 'rubbish' to charity shops, and spent a lot of time sorting and clearing rubbish in some of the streets. About 2 hours were also spent at the bottle bank by Burley Park station putting bottles in the hoppers, and many trips to the tip with excess bottles and rubbish.

## **4.0 Main Issues**

- 4.1 Although considerable effort had been made to promote responsible disposal of waste by students and landlords, there remains issues across the area in terms of volume of waste being disposed of in the peak time.
- 4.2 Normally placing waste on a foot path is a littering or fly tipping offence. However during changeover students are encouraged to do this to enable refuse collection to collect the waste and take it away promptly. This in itself however leads to problems as bag slashers slit the bags to retrieve any valuable items or paperwork, this results in refuse being strewn around the area. 'Bag slashing' across the area has exacerbated the scale of the challenge and highlighted the need to either remove waste immediately, or provide secure storage until collection.
- 4.3 Students often leave Leeds at the end of term, then come back for one or two days and have no time to sort/clear or recycle anything and it all gets dumped on the streets. Many students also leave waste in the gardens, often unbagged, this is both unsightly and can be a cause of vermin, odour and insect infestation. This problem can take longer to resolve as the incoming tenants do not see it as their responsibility and consequently do not clean it up.
- 4.4 This year 12 skips were placed around the area by area management for use by the residents. This was very successful in that the skips were well used. However there were some problems arising from their use
- the overflow caused by the skips being too well used, this was difficult and time consuming to clear by street scene.
  - when the skips were removed refuse continued to be placed in that location
  - some skips were burnt out, resulting in damage to street furniture
  - bag slashers were removing items and thereby spreading waste
  - builders and other commercial interests were depositing waste in the skips, rather than disposing of it correctly.
  - Skips provided were not caged to prevent landlord waste, labelled for students to identify or emptied frequently enough.
- 4.5 It was noted that Meanwood tip was actually closed for refurbishment the weekend of student changeover which caused further problems, bottle banks got full very quickly and the amnesty for accredited landlords was not in operation over the weekend.
- 4.6 Finally residents have made it known that although there have still been problems they are indebted to officers and members for the efforts they make to minimise the impact of the changeover this year.

## **5.0 Recommendations for next year**

- 5.1 That both the WNW Environmental Action Team and environmental services work more closely and build on current links during the student changeover.
- 5.2 That the problem of the changeover needs to be addressed from the time when students arrive to educate them throughout the year in relation to their legal and environmental responsibilities, for example, many students save their bottles for a whole year and many use the bin yard as refuse store throughout the year without emptying it. To achieve this a high profile approach to enforcement action should be taken in relation to bin yards and untidy gardens throughout the year.

- 5.3 There needs to be closer working with the universities to address the problems throughout the year and to educate the students when they arrive about their legal and social responsibilities. Also the information given out needs to be done earlier to capture the students as they leave for the 'first' time.
- 5.4 Further discussions need to be undertaken to look at how to solve issues around bag slashing and skips and making sure the resources that are already there area accessible, for example the bottle banks and household waste sites.
- 5.5 Residents identified that additional resources are particularly required in the Hessles, Chestnut Avenue, Richmond Avenue and the back of Regents Terrace, Grosvenor Road and Kensington Terrace.
- 5.6 The Landlord Accreditation scheme, and breach of those conditions, should be utilised as a tool for dealing with the accredited landlords.

## **6.0 Background Reports**

- 6.1 There are no background reports.

## **7.0 Recommendations for Area Committee**

- 7.1 That Area Committee is asked to: -
- a) note the initiatives undertaken and feedback received.
  - b) support the continuation of the student changeover initiative
  - c) support the recommendations for next year as outlined in paragraph