

# **REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

## **SCRUTINY OF RECYCLING WITHIN THE CITY OF DURHAM AREA**

The Panel was tasked with reviewing the Council's approach to Recycling.

### **1. BACKGROUND**

The City of Durham was the pilot Authority for the "Kerb-It" Recycling Scheme in the County and the Panel wished to see how the scheme was progressing and whether there was anything the Authority could do to increase its already high recycling rate.

### **2. AIMS**

It was the remit of the Panel to consider the issue of Recycling and to see if current practise was felt to be working well in the City of Durham area. Also to see if any further ideas could be generated to help increase the uptake of recycling by Residents of the District.

### **3. ACTIONS**

From the various panel meetings and submissions from the relevant Officers and Organisations, the following information was obtained:

#### **3.1 Overview**

##### **3.1.1 Kerb-It**

In 2000, the City of Durham was the pilot Authority for what was to become the "Kerb-It" scheme that has since been adopted by four of the seven District Councils within County Durham. This allowed for the expansion of the City of Durham pilot, with the remaining 12,000 households being issued with the kerbside recycling boxes. The percentage of waste recycled was initially 3% in 2000, 10% in 2003, with the current figure being around 20%, which is above the set targets (18% by 2006).

The Local Public Service Agreement (LSPA) funding was linked to achievement of a stretched target for recycling and composting. Also funding has been secured by joint working and also from DEFRA. New targets from DEFRA and the County Council's new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham (to be finalised) would need to be considered to ensure the City of Durham's own strategies and procedures were aligned for maximum benefit.

##### **3.1.2 Promotion**

Various methods of promotion of recycling have been tried in the City of Durham, such as radio, posters, events (such as Prize Draws similar to those being currently operated by Easington District Council) and advertisements on buses etc. but they have all proved to have little impact upon the uptake and rate of recycling.

One method that registered a dramatic increase in uptake was the placement of a sticker on to the wheelie bins of Residents which gave details of the "Kerb-It" scheme and collection times. Within 3 weeks of these stickers being placed, there were 3,000 requests for "Kerb-It" boxes. There was tonnage increase of 17%, with the overall recycling rate increasing from 17% to 20%.

### **3.2 Responsibility for Service**

There are clear divisions for the varying responsibilities regarding recycling between the County and District Council as set out below:

<b>County</b>	<b>Districts</b>
Strategic Sites	Household Waste Collection
Household Waste Disposal	Kerbside Recycling
Recycling Centres	Supermarket Recycling Points
Treatment of waste	

### **3.3 Bulky Collections Service**

The Council's free bulky items collection service collects a large number of items which has increased significantly since the County Council introducing a permit system at their Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). At present, in excess of 15,000 bulky items are collected per annum, with over 3,000 white goods per annum on top of this figure. Many other Authorities charge for bulky collections and this may be necessary and will be looked within the Environment Services Business Plan. It therefore could be beneficial to identify and involve a relevant Partner company to help reduce the cost of collections for the City of Durham.

### **3.4 Links to Fly-tipping**

There is a noticeable increase in waste in the City Centre at the end of term-time not only from students but also from landlords carrying out refurbishment. There is a code of conduct (Memo of Understanding) between the University and Landlords within Durham regarding this amongst other issue. If the waste is not disposed of correctly, then it can become wind-blown and spread out across an area, giving the impression of fly-tipping having taken place.

Within the City of Durham area, there has not been an appreciable increase in the number of incidents of fly-tipping since the introduction of the permit scheme for tipping at HWRCs. However, there has been a pronounced increase in the number of requests for the removal of bulky items (see 3.3 above).

### **3.5 Green Waste Bins**

Due to the County Council reviewing it's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham, it may be that the green waste collections as currently operated could be made superfluous if household waste is sent for digestion which can provide useful by-products and can prove effective (via other sorting processes) at extracting the various recyclable materials.

### **3.6 Types of Recyclable Material**

Currently the "Kerb-It" scheme allows for the recycling of paper, glass and cans. Other bulky materials such as cardboard and plastics are not collected due to their inherent volume to weight ratio, requiring a large vehicle to remove a small tonnage of recyclable waste. Also the returns for the recycling of these types are poor in both monetary terms and in helping to meet percentage tonnage recycling targets. It should be noted that the types of waste chosen for the "Kerb-It" scheme were such to ensure that the Councils involved could meet the various targets as set by DEFRA.

### **3.7 County Council - Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham**

#### **3.7.1 Review of Countywide Waste Strategy**

The new Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham is being developed in conjunction with the District Councils and indeed the City of Durham's Environment Services Manager is a part of the team. The existing waste strategy was published in 2002 and was developed in conjunction with the Environment Agency, the District Authorities including Darlington Borough Council. The current strategy is funded by review funds from DEFRA, and is to be completed by the end of March 2006.

The current waste disposal contract with Premier Waste is for the period up to 2008, when this would need to be re-tendered.

#### **3.7.2 Waste Minimisation**

There are 4 options as regards measures for waste minimisation, following what is known as the "waste hierarchy".

- To minimise waste at the point of production – though this more for central government to shape on a whole. Waste minimisation at the output is measured by Performance Indicator BV84 which has been reduced for the County. The HWRCs have had a role to play in this matter, as has the new permit system that is in place.
- Recycling / Composting – As well as the "Kerb-It" and "Green Box" recycling schemes operated by the District Councils, the HWRCs provide facilities for recycling as does the Landfill Site at Coxhoe. In addition there is the Aerobic Digester at Thornley Crossings Industrial Estate, near Shotton Colliery, that processes waste to sift out useful metals and plastics and digest the remaining waste. To cope with municipal waste, a treatment plant with approximately ten times the capacity of the Thornley Crossings facility would be required. It therefore maybe more sensible to have many smaller scale plants in local communities which also cuts down on transport costs.
- Treatment of residual waste – via various methods including mechanical biological treatment such as Anaerobic Digestion which produces waste gas that can be used to fuel the treatment process. Also thermal treatment (modern terminology for incineration) where waste energy can be collected and utilised / recovered. To this end, DEFRA awarded £15,000 towards carrying out a Health Impact Review. Technologies that may be utilised in the future include aerobic and anaerobic digestion, thermal treatment, autoclaving (to reclaim useful material), gasification and pyrolysis. The latter option however, is not yet shown to be effective for treating municipal waste.

Incineration is a very good approach that unfortunately has low public opinion based on old technological models. Unfortunately, any proposed incinerator could potentially take between 8-10 years to come on-line, and the nearest (at Billingham) is already operating a waiting list, as they are at capacity already.

- Landfill – This is considered the last option within the waste hierarchy and is undertaken if other options are not feasible. Currently within the County, there are only 2 landfill sites, one at Todhills, Bishop Auckland in Wear Valley District and the other at the Coxhoe Joint Stocks site in City of Durham. Both are scheduled to come to the end of the current operational permits in March 2007, with Todhills site being retired. The Coxhoe site however, still has large capacity and a planning permission until 2040, though a new permit from the Environment Agency would need to be granted. This is currently in the balance, as the Coxhoe site may require a large investment to line the site to prevent groundwater from potentially becoming contaminated. This could lead to a situation whereby the County would have no landfill sites of its own, and therefore would have to rely on Contractors providing sites, possibly outside of the County, leading to increased costs associated with transportation. If such a permit for operation at Coxhoe is granted, the requisite liner would too increase costs in this regard. Combined with an increase in Landfill Tax, the cost of landfill could potentially jump from £35 per ton to £75-100 per ton. As Premier Waste have a landfill site at Blaydon, and are contracted until 2008, they could take waste to landfill at this site however, this could only be a temporary solution.

### **3.8 Reuse and Refurbishment**

#### **3.8.1 Bulky Items for Reuse**

The term “Bulky Items” refers to items such as fridges, cookers and furniture. Whilst fridges must be disposed of correctly to ensure no chemicals are released during disposal, furniture currently goes to landfill.

As furniture is currently sent to landfill the only suitable vehicle is a conventional refuse collection vehicle. It may be that furniture reuse companies could be contacted to see whether they wished to collect the furniture (subject to the quality, condition fire regulation compliance etc.)

Liverpool City Council run a successful furniture/white goods recycling and reuse system in conjunction with partner companies such as “Bulky Bob’s”. Apprentices are utilised, and therefore not only do many items become refurbished (and are sold at a sufficient price to recoup the costs involved, though not a profit), but also a number of educational targets are met.

#### **3.8.2 County Durham Furniture Forum**

This Forum was in place until 2 years ago when it ceased operating. Durham County Council suggested to the District Councils to revive the forum and this was agreed. The County proposed to be the facilitators for the first few meetings until the Forum was fully operational. This Forum will hopefully provide solutions to help divert furniture from the waste stream for reuse and recycling.

### **3.9 Looking to the Future**

In the near future it will be possible to extract useful energy from waste and that therefore waste should be looked at as a resource and not a by-product. There are examples in Sweden that have shown that communities can provide much of the material and energy they require by reuse, recycling and through energy production from waste.

#### **4. OUTCOMES**

The Panel discussed the information gathered on the topic and noted the following:-

The cost for stickers placed on wheelie bins to promote recycling was £3,000 which represents extremely good value for money. It is thought that an annual sticker campaign would be an excellent method of proven promotion for the "Kerb-It" scheme.

An alternative to including cardboard and plastics within the "Kerb-It" scheme would be to provide suitable recycle "bins" at prominent sites (such a supermarket car parks) to allow for member of the public to recycle these materials in addition. Such large recycling bins are currently being sourced for this purpose.

If the City of Durham was to provide an additional vehicle for the purpose of collecting the reusable furniture there would be an associated cost of the purchase of the vehicle and the associated running costs. These costs could not be recouped by the resale of the collected goods (at this time) and therefore the existing procedure should be adhered to. Also as the refuse vehicles are used for household wheelie bin collections only 4 days out of 5, the use of the vehicles on the "spare" day is cost effective as the vehicles are already in place, with only the cost of fuel being required.

The Environmental Services Manager is scheduled to attend Liverpool City Council to look into the possibility of implementing similar schemes within the City of Durham area, albeit on a smaller scale.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 is a piece of legislation which covers a wide range of issues which the Environment & Leisure Services Department deal with. There may be an opportunity to use new or extended powers set out within this Act in connection with Recycling. However, it must be ascertained whether any new approach is suitable for the City of Durham and aligns with any approach taken by Durham County Council.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Panel identified that the subject of Recycling (and that of increasing the rate of recycling) within the City of Durham area is not only intrinsically linked to the County Council and their Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham, but also with the education of the public as to the opportunities to recycle and reuse.

Therefore the following recommendations are made:-

1. That the kerb it scheme be promoted by an annual sticker placed on the household waste bins, stating refuse collection times, including details of the kerb-it scheme and relevant contact details at the City of Durham to find out more information regarding recycling.
2. That Residents are made aware of the other options regarding recycling (besides Kerb-It) available within the district i.e. recycling points available within supermarket car parks, facilities available at the County Council Household Waste and Recycling Centres, furniture reuse / refurbishment, home composting and the minimisation of the amount of an individuals own of waste in order to change peoples behaviour towards more environmentally friendly practices e.g. reusing sturdy shopping bags rather than taking plastic carrier bags from supermarkets, buying products that are packaged with relatively easily recyclable materials such as glass and tin.

3. That the provision of a free collection service for bulky items be maintained, subject to further information regarding the on-going viability of these collections being obtained. This recommendation could then be reviewed accordingly by Members.
4. That there is greater communication between the City of Durham, Student Landlords and the University of Durham as regards the extra volumes of waste created at the ends of terms and semesters when students move out and landlords maybe n the process of redecoration and refurbishment. There may be an opportunity via the newly revived County Durham Furniture Forum to set up links that would benefit both landlords (cheap furniture) and Local Authorities (a diversion of the furniture from the waste stream) and to the University (good PR for students is few and far between!).
5. That the City of Durham's align their plans for the green waste collection with the County Council Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham to ensure that there is no conflict and unnecessary expenditure of resources. Notwithstanding, the City of Durham reaffirms it's commitment to an increased provision of green waste recycling across the district.
6. That the possibility of increasing the number of types of waste that can be collected via Kerb-It is investigated to determine whether:
  - a. The public wish to see cardboard and plastic to be included.
  - b. Whether the inclusion of these types of low density, bulky items can be collected at a sufficiently cost effective means to justify their inclusion.
  - c. Whether including these types of material could help to increase recycling rates as a percentage across the district to meet future targets or whether they would not yield sufficient percentages relative to the resources required.
7. That the City of Durham takes full advantage of any opportunities to help shape any new contracts for the provision of the recycling within the District (currently Premier Waste) that may be included within the County Council's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for County Durham. Also to ensure the City of Durham is prepared to utilise any facilities that the County Council may provide for disposal / treatment of waste in the future in order to minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill.
8. That the City of Durham supports the Reuse and Refurbishment of furniture and white goods wherever possible within the constraints of limited resources, whether that be by the instigation of schemes similar to those ran in Liverpool, or that is not thought to be viable, by support of the Durham County Furniture Forum.
9. That the Council looks to utilise within its own working practices the best systems to ensure as much non-confidential waste is recycled as possible and that waste is treated wherever possible as a potential resource rather than a by-product of function.
10. That the City of Durham's Environmental Services Department research how best to implement any requisite legislation on Recycling contained within the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and that the Panel report back to Cabinet as soon as possible.