

**Minutes
Environment Scrutiny Panel**

**21 October 2008
5.30 p.m.
Mayor's Chamber, Town Hall**

Present: Councillors Simpson (in the Chair), Colledge, Crooks, Kelly, Mavin, Mitchell, Wilkinson, Wolstenholme and Wynn.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Howarth, Kellett, Marsden, Robinson and Stoddart.

Mr Chris Tomlinson – Environment Services Manager

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Martin, Rae and Turnbull.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 September 2008

- 2.1 The Minutes of the meeting held 3 September 2008 were confirmed as a true record.
- 2.2 Councillor Kellett raised the issue of the potential to attract vermin in relation to the issue of the University of Durham composting kitchen food waste from University kitchens (Min 3.10, 3 Sep 08 refers). The Environment Services Manager noted that the University would likely be using a large sealed vessel for composting (anaerobic digestion) and the design of this would negate the possibility of attracting vermin.
- 2.3 The Environment Services Manager informed Members that that the issue as regards dog foul bags being provided by the Council was resolved. The Environment Services Manager noted that there had been a misunderstanding in relation to an instruction to "ration" bags whilst the Council awaited the receipt of the next order of the dog foul bags. Once the new supply had been received, there was no longer an issue but unfortunately, some of the distribution points were not fully aware that stocks had been replenished. This matter has now been resolved.

3. Scrutiny Topic – Kerbside Recycling Scheme

Witness in attendance:

Chris Tomlinson – Environment Services Manager, City of Durham

- 3.1 The Environment Services Manager gave Members a brief overview of the background leading to the current recycling contract with Greencycle Plc.
- 3.2 It was explained that there was a European Union Directive on Landfill that specified that there must be a reduction in the amount of biodegradable waste being sent to landfill. This was in an effort to reduce the amount of methane, a greenhouse gas, being released into the atmosphere. This was reflected in the UK by an introduction of Landfill Tax of £5 per tonne in 1995.

It was noted that now in 2008, this is £35 per tonne, and there would be a further incremental increase to £48 per tonne by 2011. Accordingly, it was thought that by increasing the cost of diversion of waste to landfill above that of the cost of recycling then Companies and Authorities would be encouraged to recycling from a financial perspective as well as from the environmental perspective. Local Authorities have the option to trade “landfill credits”, i.e. if Authorities have surplus credits they can trade these with Authorities that are struggling to meet their targets. Durham County Council (DCC) as the Municipal Waste Authority would likely not meet target as regards landfill diversion targets. One contributing factor is the closure of the Aerobic Digester at Thornley Crossings, near Shotton Colliery which took a percentage of waste out from the landfill waste-stream.

- 3.3. The Environmental Services Manager explained to Members that DCC operated a contract with Premier Waste Ltd. for the kerbside recycling within the Durham Districts until April 2008. Initially it was intended to extend the contract up to 2009, but it was decided by DCC Legal Services that this was not possible and that the contract for the kerbside recycling scheme should go out to full tender. Accordingly, four District Authorities, Chester-le-Street, City of Durham, Easington and Sedgefield, conducted a tendering process, via OJEU with financial background checks. Greencycle Plc. came out not only as the cheapest option per tonne, but also they provided an opportunity to recycle additional types of waste including card and plastics. Greencycle also scored highly with their commitment to the scheme with investment in new vehicles, equipment, TUPE transfer and recruitment of additional staff. Also Greencycle operate a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) which separates the waste into the separate recycling streams. It was noted that the Council had looked into which companies would take the recyclable goods from Greencycle, to ensure these companies were reputable and that the items would not in fact end up back at landfill in the long run (as had happened in some cases in schemes operated by some Local Authorities).
- 3.4. Members were reminded of the initial teething problems that were experienced by Greencycle, with two factors being considered to be the major cause of backlogs. These were an initial overwhelming response to the new scheme. There was a 70% increase in the rate of recycling in April 2008 in comparison with April 2007. The second factor was that separation of the recycling into individual types was being conducted at the kerbside resulting in some collections continuing on until 9.00 p.m. in some cases. District Authority Officers suggested to Greencycle that it may have been more efficient to sort the waste at a MRF via a “picking belt”, and Greencycle responded accordingly by putting two such belts in operation at their TurSDale site and the new scheme is now operating efficiently.
- 3.5. The Environment Services Manager gave Members sight of half-year figures showing various statistics relating to the amounts of various items being recycled. These were figures obtained from Greencycle which included figures for the other three partner Local Authorities. Residents of the City of Durham district were shown to recycling the most, a credit to the positive message given by the Authority. As DCC pay a £46 per tonne subsidy to district authorities for waste diverted from landfill, the Greencycle cost of £54 per tonne leaves only a net cost to the City of Durham of £8 per tonne which is very cheap. The figures for the half-year show the total amount of recycling from the city of Durham district to be 3500 tonnes.

The “break-even” tonnage quoted by Greencycle within their business case was for 17,000 tones per year across the four Districts operating the scheme. The half-year total across the four Districts was approximately 12,000, well on target. A potential risk however, is the overall global economic climate that decreasing prices for recyclables could adversely affect the profitability and viability of recycling schemes in general.

Note: Councillors Marsden and Robinson left the meeting at 6.10 p.m.

- 3.6 Members were keen to know whether Greencycle would operate environmental grants for local projects in a similar vein to Premier Waste. The Environmental Services Manager explained that this would not be the case, as Premier Waste was technically operated by DCC which is the Waste Authority and the grants were made in this capacity. Greencycle merely operate the kerbside recycling scheme on behalf of the District authorities. However, it was noted Greencycle were keen to donation a portion of their profits to charity as a good will gesture.
- 3.7 The Environment Services Manager asked Members to note that the increased recycling percentages across the four districts was helping to negate the drop in diversion from landfill caused by the closure of the Aerobic Digester, but noted that previously mentioned it was unlikely that diversion targets countywide would not be met.
- 3.8 In response to Members’ concerns as regards Students “living out” within the City being unaware of how to use the Council’s new recycling scheme, the Council’s Neighbourhood Wardens had issued leaflets to the City Centre student areas at the beginning of term. Also information would be disseminated via Durham City News, stickers for waste and recycling bins and through additional content on the City of Durham website. In addition, fridge magnets with recycling and waste collection information had been provided for distribution to Students. The Environment Services Manager commented that there would be an option to issue a Section 46 Environmental Protection Enforcement Notice to households that were not recycling, but that this would be a last resort.
- 3.9 A Members asked whether it would be possible for the green waste scheme as piloted in some areas to be expanded across the whole District. The Environment Services Manager explained that prior to Local Government Reorganisation; it would have been the intention for the expansion of the scheme over the coming years. However, financially it would not have been possible for the City of Durham to expand the scheme in the short term. However, it was noted that DCC would intend to roll out the scheme countywide in time and draft reports were being produced in respect of this. The Environment Services Manager reminded Members that the most environmentally friendly solution to green waste was home composting and a scheme for households to purchase a home composter at a reduced rate was already in place, available via a DCC scheme.
- 3.10 The Panel thanked the Environment Services Manager for an informative presentation and his and the Department’s hard work in relation to the matter.

4. Any Other Business

- 4.1 The Environment Services Manager informed members that, after speaking to the Managing Director of Greencycle, it would be possible for Members to visit the Greencycle MRF at Tursdale to witness first hand the separation processes. Members would be canvassed as regards their wishes in this matter.
- 4.2 Members asked whether it would be possible to be given some information as regards Resident having bonfires within their gardens, the Environment Services Manager would speak to colleagues within the Environmental Health Department and forward information to Members via the Clerk.
- 4.3 The Chair made members aware of a document published by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) that he had received as Chair of the Panel. He noted that he would make the document available for Members via the Members' Room and the Clerk would investigate the possibility of enabling members to access the document electronically.

5. Actions for the Next Meeting

- 5.1 To consider the draft report of the Panel in relation to the Council's New Kerbside Recycling Scheme.

The Meeting terminated at 6.25 p.m.

DRAFT REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

**SCRUTINY TOPIC – KERBSIDE RECYCLING SCHEME
SIX MONTH REVIEW**

1. BACKGROUND

The City of Durham, along with several of the District Councils within County Durham, had in place an existing contract that provided a household kerbside recycling scheme, known as the “Kerb-It” Scheme. This contract terminated on 31 March, 2008 and consequently, the contract to operate a household kerbside recycling scheme on behalf of the Council was put out to tender. Following a joint tendering process by Chester-le-Street District Council, City of Durham, Easington District Council and Sedgefield Borough Council, a contract with Greencycle Plc. was entered into, with the new scheme commencing 1 April, 2008. The scheme as proposed by Greencycle provided an opportunity for cardboard and plastics to be included as recyclable items which increased the scope of recycling for Residents.

2. AIMS

It was the remit of the Panel to consider information from the appropriate Council Officers to gain insight into the first six months of operation of the new kerbside recycling scheme. In addition, the Panel also felt that as Durham City was home to a large population of Students, representatives from the University of Durham should be invited to attend Panel meetings to give Members information on how the University and its Students recycled.

3. ACTIONS

3.1 University of Durham – September 2008

Representatives from the University of Durham attended a meeting of the Panel to give Members information as regards the internal operations of the University’s Environmental Policies. In addition, insight was given as to how the University liaised with its Students via individual College Representatives to spread information about various environmental issues, not merely recycling. It was also brought to light the existing working relationships between the University of Durham and the City of Durham Council in respect of both operational issues relating to waste and recycling from large Student halls of Residence, but also in activities in order to promote a heightened awareness of environmental and sustainability issues.

The University of Durham contract BIFFA Waste Management to collect the recycling from University buildings and some of the Colleges. Some purely residential colleges have their recycling collected by Greencycle via the Council’s scheme.

Representatives from the University of Durham made it clear that often, the Student populous were actually keener to recycle than perhaps facilities would allow, and that if many of the Students “living out” in private accommodation were given sufficient information, uptake of the kerbside scheme, amongst other methods of recycling and reuse, may indeed increase.

The University of Durham conducts a "Green Move Out" in order to attempt to reuse or recycle items that may be thrown away at the end of the University year. At these times, there may be need to have additional provisions to ensure the additional waste generated is cleared swiftly.

3.2 City of Durham, Environment Services – October 2008

The City of Durham's Environment Services Manager attended a meeting of the Panel to give Members an overview of the progress that had been made over the first six months of the new kerbside recycling scheme. Estimates of volumes of recycling that may be generated when the new scheme came online were based upon a similar scheme operated in Congleton. However, due to an increase of over 70% in comparison to the April 2008 period, there were problems in the collection of recycling from households. Through investment in additional vehicles, equipment and staff by Greencycle, it is noted that initial teething problems appeared to have been overcome.

Initially, the recyclable materials were sorted at the kerbside into the individual streams. However, due to the larger than anticipated volume of recycling, this method of operation was thought to be too slow. Accordingly, upon suggestion from District Authority Officers, items were roughly sorted at the kerbside, with a final sort conducted back at Greencycle's Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) at Tursdale. At the MRF, the items that have been collected are fed on to two "picking belts" and the items are separated by material. The City of Durham had investigated the Companies that are taking the recyclable items from Greencycle, to ensure these companies are reputable and that the items would indeed be recycled. This was to ensure that material was not in fact ending up back at landfill as had happened in some cases via recycling schemes operated on behalf of some Local Authorities.

4. OUTCOMES

4.1 In relation to Students within the City

In response to the annual influx of students to Durham City, Environment Services Staff including Neighbourhood Wardens have issued leaflets to the City Centre Student areas. Also information relating to the kerbside recycling scheme and other environment issues would be disseminated via Durham City News, and by way of stickers on waste and recycling bins. In addition, fridge magnets with recycling and waste collection information have been provided for distribution to Students.

4.2 Enforcement

As a last resort in cases where there has been continued non-use of the kerbside recycling scheme and recyclable items are simply being put into the main waste bins, there will be an option to issue a Section 46 Environmental Protection Enforcement Notice to households.

4.3 Future options regarding recycling

As the current Aerobic Digester facility at Thornley Crossings is offline and the proposed Digester at Tursdale is only at the initial planning stages, the services provided by Greencycle are key in maintain progress towards stringent targets for diversion from landfill. Once technology relating to aerobic digestion has been verified as a viable option then it may be possible to return to all waste simply being collected by a single refuse vehicle and the materials being sorted after digestion.

These will be issues for the new Unitary Authority to consider in the near future with help from District Colleagues, and in much greater detail after amalgamation post April 2009.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel gained an insight into the work that has been undertaken by City of Durham Officers and appreciate that this work was not undertaken in isolation, but rather through working in Partnership with other Local Authorities. The current kerbside recycling scheme initially had difficulty in coping with the unprecedented uptake by the Residents of the four participating Districts. However, it is noted that now the scheme is operating very well and is helping to keep diversion from landfill statistics from being far short of target.

Therefore the following recommendations are made by the Panel:-

