

Cabinet

5 February 2009



Harmonisation of Household Waste Collection Policies Key Decision ENV/LGR/19/08

Report of Terry Collins, Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services Cabinet Portfolio Member for Environment – Cllr Bob Young

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To outline the current position regarding waste collection policies from across the seven existing Districts in County Durham.
- 2 To seek Members views on the adoption of a harmonised set of policies, effective from 1st April 2009 as part of a programme of work towards converged collection arrangements for the new Council.

Consultation

- 3 This report has been prepared by the Waste workstream drawn from all 8 Councils as well as “critical friends” from the Environment Agency and Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit. In considering the appropriate policies to apply, the workstream has drawn on best practice from a number of Councils. The Diversity and Equality workstream have been consulted and endorse the proposals relating to assisted collections. The Communication workstream have been consulted on the rough draft waste charter. Note should be made however that this Charter is provided for illustrative purposes only at this stage, and may be subject to substantial change, incorporating County Council colours and logo, with relevant contact details.

Background

- 4 The Durham County Council Blueprint has a commitment to consistent service levels and common standards throughout the county. In addition the bid for unitary status contains a commitment that “*Each household will receive the same collection and recycling services which accord with the requirements of treatment facilities*”.
- 5 At present each Waste Collection Authority (District/Borough Council) applies separate standards and policies relating to refuse and recycling. As a unitary council there is a need to apply as soon as possible a single and consistent set of policies including such areas as:
Assisted collections. All Durham Councils provide a service to pull out and return receptacles from within the curtilage of properties for residents who are unable on health grounds to do this themselves. There are approximately 14,000 households that currently receive this service. The qualifying criteria and details of this scheme does vary however (see **Appendix 3**).

Side waste. To encourage recycling all Durham Districts have adopted policies not to take additional bags left out, as it is considered that the existing receptacles for refuse are of sufficient size. Exceptions to this apply during the Christmas period.

Filling bins above the rim. Two Councils apply a policy of not accepting bins that are over-full, and lids open (“crocodile bins”). This is a measure to encourage more recycling.

Additional bins to Households. To encourage recycling, most Durham Councils allow only one refuse bin per household, with the exception (on request) of households of 6 people or more, or in exceptional cases where there is demonstrable need.

Time that containers should be left out. Most Durham Councils require residents to put out and return containers within reasonable limits. This reduces the risks of litter being spread about, and of wheelie bin arson.

Replacement of damaged/stolen bins. Most Districts will replace lost, damaged or stolen bins free of charge. One District does however apply a charge for repair or replacement.

- 6 It is felt that there is opportunity for Members to consider and implement for vesting day consistent policies in all of the above areas. In many instances the scale of change for residents would not be significant.
- 7 Subject to approval of harmonised policies, it is proposed to inform residents of the arrangements, coupled with a strong recycling message. This could take the form either of a stand alone waste “Charter”, or be linked with wider customer service commitments.
- 8 All Districts currently operate services for collection of bulky household materials, for which a charge can be levied. There is wide variation in current practice, and the harmonisation issues, including fees and charges are examined in future separate reports.
- 9 It is proposed that harmonising the size and colour of containers, recycling services and collection frequencies are outside the scope of this initial policy harmonisation. To harmonise these areas, the scale of change, investment and rationalisation required are considerable, and it is anticipated that detailed examination of these issues would be undertaken post vesting day, involving consultation with residents and other stakeholders.

Options Appraisal – Harmonisation of Policy

- 10 Members may decide to delay implementation of a harmonised policy pending a wider review of the nature of converged collection arrangements. Whilst this would have the advantage of a more comprehensive approach to these services, it would mean that the current policies, which vary in detail between authorities, would persist. Linked to this, there would be an increased risk of challenge and complaint from residents who in different parts of the County would be subject to different policies for the same service.

- 11 The Waste workstream has comprehensively baselined all existing policies from across all 7 waste collection authorities and undertaken an option appraisal around each policy area. The following table summarises the results. These points are covered in the draft charter attached in **Appendix 4**. When further developed, and linked to the corporate logo, and with the “golden number” would be circulated to residents prior to vesting day.
- 12 As can be noted, many of the proposed policies are a continuation of current practice. Attention is however drawn to assisted pull outs where the automatic qualification on the basis of age is proposed to be withdrawn, instead relying on qualification based on a self declaration of a person’s inability, temporary or permanent to perform this task themselves. These lists will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis (as at present), with new applicants required to make a simple self declaration, followed up if necessary by home visits. The turn around time for processing requests, is typically very fast, usually within 1 week, as needs be.
- 13 There does remain the option for Members to consider compulsory recycling (as practiced in some Councils such as Barnet), as well as a countywide “flat lid” policy, but these would be a departure from the practice currently exercised in most areas.

Table 1 – Household Waste Collection Policy Proposal Summary

Policy Area	Proposal	Reason	Implementation
Assisted pull-outs	Adopt a consistent countywide criteria for qualification for an assisted pull-out as detailed in Appendix 3 .	Assists vulnerable/infirm residents.	Retain all existing assist lists, and continue service to these households. Standardised qualifying criteria in operation from 1 st April 2009
No side waste	Continue current practice of not collecting side waste.	Promotes recycling	Continue current practice. Standardise to allow for side waste during the Christmas period.
Putting out receptacles for emptying	Standardise approach: residents should put their bin out between 6pm the night before and 7am on collection day, with a return to the property on the evening of collection day.	Reduces litter from spillages, as well as reducing risks of wheelie bin fires.	Implementation from 1 st April (already current practice in most Districts).
Additional residual bins to households	Additional wheelie bin provided free, (on request) for households with 6 or more, or other demonstrable need, including medical circumstances. Households, not qualifying, following recycling advice, can have the opportunity to purchase an extra bin for £20 and pay £30 collection costs per annum.	Recognises the different needs of households whilst promoting recycling.	Implementation from 1 st April. Scope for bin “amnesty” to households no longer requiring more than 1 bin. This will build up a supply of spares.
Bin replacement	Continue current practice in most Districts that bins replaced/repared free of charge unless it can be clearly demonstrated that it is due to negligence by the householder.	Pragmatic approach to wheelie bin replacement.	Continue current practice. This can be kept under review.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 14 Members are invited to adopt the proposed waste collection policies for the new Council.

Background Papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?)

Harmonising waste collection policies is considered to be a Waste Management Workstream “must have”.

Finance

There will be no significant impact on budgets due to these proposals.

Crime and Disorder/Legal

Under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Section 46), the Authority is required to inform all residents of any new waste collection arrangements. Whilst policy changes are minor in most instances, nevertheless it is good practice to advise residents of the Council’s services standards they can expect and what we can all do to help improve recycling.

The information leaflet could be the basis of future enforcement, for instance against bins left out in the street a week long. Any details of enforcement would however be subject to consideration of Members and development of appropriate procedures.

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Equality and Diversity / Localities and Rurality

Adopting a harmonised policy will enable a consistent service to be delivered to all communities within the County. Assisted collection policy is proposed on the basis of need rather than age.

Sustainability

None

Human Rights

None

Young People

None

Consultation

It will be essential for communication strategy to be developed in conjunction with communications team.

Health

None

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment for Key Decision

Risk Description	Potential Impact	Treatment (if not already in place, state implementation date)	Risk Owner
Conflict with stakeholders if proposed waste policies are not adopted.	Challenge from members of the public with regard to services and/or charges that vary in different parts of the County. This could lead to adverse publicity concerning differing waste policies across the County.	Prepare press releases and train staff with direct contact to members of the public on the desired response to challenges of this nature.	Oliver Sherratt, Head of Direct Services
Not implementing the recommendation may result in the failure to maximise value for money opportunities.	Delay in the harmonisation of waste services across the County.	Business as usual until a full review of all waste policies can be undertaken and considered.	Oliver Sherratt, Head of Direct Services
Confusion and / or adverse reaction of stakeholders.	Members of the public could become confused and/or react adversely to a number of changes being implemented all at one time. Although, in the main, changes are to existing services and no services are being removed. Some residents could feel that they have adversely being affected by the changes.	Prepare press release and delivery of leaflet to all households detailing the waste policies of the new council (see Appendix 4 for sample leaflet). Train staff with direct contact to members of the public on the desired response to challenges of this nature.	Oliver Sherratt, Head of Direct Services

Appendix 3: Criteria for qualifying for an assisted pull-out

CURRENT QUALIFICATION CRITERIA FOR ASSISTED COLLECTION

Authority	Qualification by Age	Qualification due to Infirmary / Disability	Other Qualification Criteria
Chester- le- Street	Anyone Over 65	Y	Short / long term illness
Derwentside	No Age Qualification	Y	Short / long term illness or infirm
Durham City	Anyone Over 65	Y	
Easington	No Age Qualification	Y	Short / long term illness, elderly, infirm
Sedgefield	Anyone Over 60	Y	Certain medical circumstances
Teesdale	Anyone Over 60	Y	Short / long term illness
Wear Valley	No Age Qualification	Y	Visibly infirm

PROPOSED STANDARDISED QUALIFICATION CRITERIA AS OF 1ST APRIL 2009

It is proposed that the new authority agree to provide an assisted collection service and that the criteria to qualify for assistance be based on an assessment that no one residing in the property is able to place the bin out for collection. This might be:

The customer is registered disabled and the nature of the disability supports the need for assistance.

The customer has a long or short term ailment/injury and the nature of the ailment/injury supports the need for assistance for a temporary period.

The customer is unable to place the bin out for collection due to infirmity.

Note should be made that it is not proposed to include an automatic qualification of age as currently the case in some Districts, but rather to base it on anyone, irrespective of age, who may have difficulty in placing their bin out.

It is proposed that these criteria should apply to new applicants only in the first instance, with changes to the assist lists being reviewed thereafter on a regular basis.

Residents are required to complete a simple application form and cases are considered on their merits. Home visits or telephone contacts may be carried out where necessary. Emphasis is given to self declaration as requiring the service. Experience from home visits reveals that in nearly all instances the request is genuine and it is not proposed to introduce a heavily bureaucratic system. Regular reviews do however allow residents who feel able to drop off the lists.

ASSISTED COLLECTIONS – CURRENT POSITION

Authority	Current No. of assisted collections
Chester- le- Street	877
Derwentside	2700
Durham City	2043
Easington	3583
Sedgefield	2141
Teesdale	756
Wear Valley	1875