

REVIEW OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING IN HEREFORDSHIRE

**Report By: Chairman of the Household Waste Recycling
Review Group**

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To consider the further findings of the scrutiny review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire.

Financial Implications

2. The recommendations to the Cabinet Member (Environment) have some potential financial implications.

Background

3. The Committee received the report of the Scrutiny Review Group on Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire at its meeting in March, 2007. At that meeting as Chairman of the Review Group I recommended that the report be held over pending the results of the Government's review of the National Waste Strategy, which could have significant consequences on Herefordshire's management of waste services. The Committee endorsed this approach and agreed that a further report should be made following the outcome of the Government's review, with the original report also being resubmitted for consideration.
4. As the other members of the Review Group no longer serve on the Council the Committee at its meeting on 19th June agreed that Councillor PJ Edwards, and I review the original report and, following discussion with officers, prepare this supplementary report which takes account of the National Waste Strategy and other factors since the main review.

Commentary on the original Report

5. In making its original report the Group's key assumptions included:
 - that the waste collection contract would be relet in 2008.
 - that the success of any proposal for recycling and refuse collection would be dependent on the availability of processing facilities and that a Materials Reclamation Facility (MRF) facility to process waste would be operational when the contract was relet.
 - that the Government's target for combined recycling and composting would rise to at least 40% from 2010 and that it would therefore be prudent to adopt a

system that would enable the County to reach a 40% target with flexibility for further increases.

6. The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy is currently being revised which has nullified some of the time assumptions the Group worked to and specifically as a result of this the current waste collection contract has been extended to July 2009.
7. The development of the MRF facility in Worcestershire is proceeding and could be operational by July 2009. If the MRF was not operational by this time, recyclable materials could be diverted to another MRF.
8. As discussed below the higher targets for recycling and composting of household waste anticipated have been confirmed
9. Timescales aside I am therefore advised that the basis on which the Group reached its conclusions and made its recommendations to this Committee in March 2007 remains sound and the recommendations remain valid.
10. A copy of the scrutiny review report as of March 2007 is appended.

Supplementary Report – Implications of the Government’s Review of The National Waste Strategy

11. The National Waste Strategy, as anticipated, includes higher targets for the recycling and composting of household waste. The target increases from the present 21% to 40% by 2010, 45% by 2015, and 50% by 2020. Whilst these are national targets and the Government is expected to announce local targets later in the year, which may vary, linked to the Comprehensive Spending Review, as the Group previously highlighted, the collection systems need to be capable of reaching the national targets with flexibility for future increases.
12. The Strategy has a new focus on waste prevention. This will be recognised through a new target to reduce the amount of household waste, not re-used, recycled or composted. The Government has used 450 kg per person in 2000 as the benchmark. Their stated aspiration is to reduce this figure to 225 kg per person by 2020. Again, this is a national target and local targets are expected to be set by the Government and the required reduction is clearly significant.
13. There is also a push to remove the ban on household incentives for waste reduction/recycling. The intention is that there will be revenue neutral schemes to pay householders who recycle, funded by those who don't. This reinforces the Group's original recommendation that it is essential to microchip wheelie bins from the outset.
14. The landfill tax escalator is to be increased so that the standard rate of tax will increase by £8 per tonne of waste landfilled per annum resulting in a doubling of the tax from £24 per tonne now to £48 in 2010. Other major financial incentives include the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme which will penalise over reliance on landfill by a fine of £150 per tonne of waste.
15. There were various campaigns against Alternate Weekly Collection (AWC) around the time of the local elections in May 2007 and the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government produced a report on refuse collection on 16th July 2007. The following are extracts from the Select Committee report with regard to AWC:

“We recognise that research conducted to date into the health impacts of AWC has found no evidence of adverse health impacts. Given the strength of public concern, however, allied with the wealth of anecdotal evidence about increased populations of flies, maggots, rats and other vermin associated with AWC, we strongly recommend that the Government commission further and more detailed research if the public is to be persuaded that there is no appreciable risk.

If councils are to collect food and kitchen waste only every two weeks as part of an AWC system, Government guidance must stress the absolute necessity to provide householders with sealable containers, such as hard-sided wheeled bins or boxes.”

“The adoption of AWC in around 140 local authority areas in England has been accompanied in most of them by rapid and substantial increases in local recycling.”

“AWC is clearly not appropriate to all areas, particularly highly urban areas characterised by much shared accommodation. Whether a weekly or alternate system is best for a particular area is a matter for local choice.”

16. In relation to the final bullet point it is important to emphasise that local choice refers to the discretion of the local authority to determine whether or not to introduce AWC. In its review the Group stressed the need to plan the implementation of any changed collection system very carefully. I believe pre-planning remains critical to the success of any change. We can learn much from the experience of Worcester City and now Redditch Borough in this regard. In Braintree – the approach to educating the public about AWC was so effective that it was not even an issue in the May elections. Elsewhere of course it was a huge issue.
17. In relation to bins Worcester City Council found that it was desirable to adopt a flexible approach to bin sizes recognising the need to strike a balance between catering for family needs and increasing recycling. It is recognised that reducing bin size is a desirable objective from a recycling perspective. Flexibility does, however, have a cost implication and it is again important to recognise that there would have to be some criteria in place to manage requests. Bin storage is another issue as well as bin size. The Group recommended that wheelie bins be purchased with pre-installed identification chips. There is a further lesson from Chichester DC who did not buy the cheapest wheelie bins but paid a bit more for bins with proper clip-shut lids.
18. It is important to bear in mind the lessons we take from other Authorities who have trodden this path. It is also essential that Officers continue to work with WRAP to identify best practice and learn from the experiences of other authorities.

Summary

19. In summary the National Waste Strategy has confirmed the assumptions the Working Group made in producing its original report in terms of targets. However, the timescale has changed with the new waste collection contract not now due to come into force until July 2009. The new contract will need to take account of the increased targets for Household Waste Recycling in the National Waste Strategy. Equally whilst the remit of the review was to focus on household waste recycling it is important to recognise that recycling arrangements are part of the household waste collection arrangements as a whole.

Supplementary Recommendations:

- (a) That the recommendation in the original report that wheelie bins be purchased with pre-installed identification chips be reinforced and in addition careful consideration given to the level of flexibility which can be permitted in relation to the size of bin noting the balance to be struck between catering for family needs, encouraging recycling, the need for consideration of bin storage and the subsequent costs.
- (b) that the Council's discretion to introduce alternate weekly collection (AWC) in some areas and retain weekly collection in others needs to be exercised most carefully and accompanied by a planned thorough educational campaign.
- (c) acknowledging that whilst the remit of the review was to focus on household waste recycling it is important to recognise that recycling arrangements are part of the household waste collection arrangements as a whole.
- (d) the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) considers extending the current coloured bag recycling collections further into rural areas currently not covered by this service.

RECOMMENDATION

- THAT** (a) the Committee considers whether it wishes to agree the findings of the review of the original Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire and the supplementary recommendations identified above for submission to the Cabinet Member (Environment).
- (b) subject to the Review being approved, the Executive's response to the Review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive has approved its response;
 - (c) a further report on progress in response to the Review then be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further reports to be made.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None