

Notes of the Waste Strategy Task and Finish Group meeting held on Wednesday, 28 September 2016

Present: Councillors D McCall, D Hopkins, V McPake, and M Petchey

Officers: D McKenzie (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)
A Hudson (Head- Environment and Waste)
D Proctor (Waste Contracts Manager)
D Carr (Operational Customer Service Manager)

Apologies: Councillors D Hosking and A Webb

Welcome & Introductions

Councillor D McCall welcomed Members and officers to the meeting.

Disclosure of Interest

None

Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Task and Finish Group held on 6 September was approved with the below amendments: -

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- *“Serco has the existing contract for the Council’s collection, cleansing and grounds maintenance”* replace *“Serco has the existing contract for the management of waste”*.
- *“Serco has the existing contract for the Council’s management of waste”* replace *“This contract is also currently up for renewal and the contractor’s performance will be reviewed by the service”*

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- *“Members”* be added to Community views to be taken into account.

Scoping Document

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- *“Development of the Strategy will also incorporate any potential for the Council to sell waste services to other local authorities so as to generate income”* be added to the Background.

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- *“Review of the Council’s potential capacity to sell waste services to other local authorities and generate income”* be added to the Proposed Terms of Reference.

Report- What customers want and think of waste services (Evidence of a pilot and satisfaction surveys)

The Chair outlined that the focus of this meeting was to identify what customers in Milton Keynes wanted of waste services. Also outlined was that data possessed and provided by the Council's waste service contractor; Serco, Customer Services and feedback from a pilot would be useful in the meeting's discussion.

Dwight McKenzie introduced the Report, and provided Members with a broad overview of its contents. He pointed out:-

- Achieving customer satisfaction in waste service provision had always been important to the Council as evidenced by the Zero Waste Strategy Refresh 2013.
- Waste service provision was strongly guided by legislation, and development of a new Waste Strategy should help in ensuring that the Council's actions are in keeping with legislative changes and developments.

Following this overview, Members queried of officers whether waste was separated upon collection as required by the Waste (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2012. Particular concern was raised as regards the collection of glass items. Officers informed that the regulation obliged this to be done by the Council when it was technically and economically practical (TEP). In applying the TEP test, the Council was meeting its legal obligations in waste collection. Members were also informed that to make possible the easier separation of waste, waste service providers had together launched a campaign for waste recycling which encourages the public to recycle items, including separating items being disposed.

RESOLVED:

- That the Waste Service's separation of waste when collected be monitored by the Council.

Members also queried whether legislation guiding waste collection was underpinned by Europe Union (EU) regulations and the potential impact of Brexit on the current and future mode of operation for the Waste Service. Officers advised that UK legislation for waste recycling was influenced by many EU regulations and laws which the government would have to unpick in going forward with Brexit. However, as the UK was currently a member of the EU, the Waste Service would remain guided by current legislation and its underpinnings.

Members asked of officers for an explanation of the apparent contradiction in the use of pink sacks in the Report. It was pointed out that page 18 of the Report had indicated households were not putting out pink sacks and instead putting out many black sacks, whereas on page 19 of the Report reference was made to a "decline in the number of black sacks put out" in the pilot. Officers explained that their efforts in encouraging recycling was not restricted to the use of pink sacks, and so other things such as the use of green bins was also taken into account in reporting household behaviour and whether there was a decrease or increase in recycling rates.

Members considered the robustness of the pilot survey methodology. In providing

to Members an explanation of the methodology that had been used in the pilot survey, it was pointed out:-

- The area in which the survey was conducted had been chosen by the Cabinet member
- A second survey was not undertaken because development of the new Waste Strategy required Service personnel resources and had to be given priority.

There was some concern by Members that the pilot survey had only a 20% response rate with 44 households responding. The Chair however pointed out that in survey research a 20% response rate was not unusual, a view that was shared by officers, and as a result the pilot response rate was a good return. Members accepted that there was often a challenge getting responses in public surveys.

Beyond the methodology, Members sought to understand what the survey had in fact revealed and whether the pilot variation in bag distribution and collection had resulted in an increase in rat infestation. In response officers advised:-

- There had been no noticeable increase in rat infestation in the survey pilot area
- In volume terms, survey feedback was that 2 bags were adequate for households

Notwithstanding the results of the pilot Survey, Members encouraged caution in generalising the survey's results. Members indicated for example that they would have desired information as to whether the social demography of an area had an impact on waste recycling in that area.

Customer Service- Waste Service contacts and statistics

Deborah Carr (Operational Customer Service Manager) provided Members with a snapshot of public contacts received by Customer Service in 2015 regarding the waste service, and how they were processed and resolved.

It was pointed out that:-

- Customer Service had a very good completion rate for contacts, with the majority resolved at the first point of contact. Only those which required further investigation and action were left open by the Service.
- Thermstat had replaced CERM as the new customer interface system. This allowed the Service to collect more qualitative data.
- A high volume of contacts is received for Public Realm on a whole including waste service contacts, with approximately 6,500 during the month of July 2016. However, only 3.8% were escalated which was an indicator of the Services good performance in resolving such contacts. August 2016 had 2.86% escalation rate and September's results would be analysed and known in the very near future.
- A significant issue faced by the Service is not being able to determine the effective resolution of a complaint (though contractor feedback) once it had been escalated and referred to the Waste contractor (Serco).
- Customer Service was desirous of improving its resolution rate as regards

abandoned trolleys.

In the resultant discussion about customer contacts, Members referenced a blue bin campaign by the Council which had in the past been successful. However, one of the problems which had affected the campaign was bins being stolen when they were delivered to households, before householders had a chance to take possession. It was suggested that theft could be a potential contributor to complaints regarding recycling bins. Waste Service officers are reviewing the problem of theft of bins, but separate to the development of the new Waste Strategy.

Members asked of officers whether incidents of refuse sacks being collected but litter or waste litter still left behind by contractors was prevalent, and how this was managed. Officers informed that both Customer Service and the Waste Service were working together to see how best this problem could be addressed. Ms. Carr informed that data for this type of complaint is held by Customer Service, and would be provided to the Group for the period April 2016.

RESOLVED

Customer Service to provide data to the Waste Task and Finish Group for waste left behind after collection.

In discussion, Members identified flytipping as an issue of particular concern. Members asked officers whether there was comparative data available on the level flytipping before and after the Council started to impose a charge for bulky waste collection. Of concern was whether by imposing this charge, the Council was incurring costs brought about by increased flytipping. Waste Service officers committed to obtain this data including using "Flycapture" (National database) and provide it to Members but assured Members there had been no noticeable significant increase after the charge was introduced.

RESOLVED

- Waste Service provide flytipping data to the Waste Task and Finish Group comparing the period before and after the bulky waste charge was introduced.
- Waste Service provide flytipping costs incurred by the Council before and after the bulky waste charge was introduced.
- Customer Service provide data for flytipping complaints differentiated by those received from the public and those received from Council Service areas such as Housing.

The activity of a number of Resident Associations in organising area clean ups was identified by Members as a potentially valuable source of flytipping data. It was outlined that information from these clean-ups could reveal whether fly tipping had increased or decreased in the borough before and after the bulky waste charge was introduced.

Officers informed that "kangaroo runs" are currently done by the Council such as in Wolverton, where waste service vehicles visit areas on particular days to collect bulky waste. This was funded by Town and Parish Councils. Members commended this action on the part of the Waste Service, but consider whether this service

should not be provided free to the public. Officers advised that this would be problematic as whereas the cost of waste pick up could be absorbed by the Council, there was a significant cost incurred in actual disposal of waste collected.

Members raised the issue of litterpicking and whether this has led to increased complaints. They were however re-assured by officers that this had not lead to an increase in complaints.

Ms. Carr advised that because there was a restriction on what people can report, this had impacted data collection. Customer Service so as to ensure the strength the robustness of data collected through complaints a verification process had been introduced. This meant individuals had to first raise an issue for example missed bin collection with the relevant service area before the matter was recorded by the Service as a complaint.

Waste Service

Andy Hudson (Head- Environment and Waste) and David Proctor (Waste Contracts Manager) lead officer discussion with Members on the Waste Service's performance. Members focussed much on Milton Keynes performance in waste collection and recycling relative to other local authorities and neighbouring boroughs. Concern was expressed that Milton Keynes's performance might have been declining over the years. Officers cautioned that there were limitations in the extent to which local authorities could be compared in waste collection due for example to the employment of different contractors who collect waste in different ways. Data for recycling could however be compared as more "like for like". In this comparison officers assured Members that the Council's recycling performance was very good relative to other local authorities, and from data available such as from Serco which has numerous waste service contracts with other local authorities, Milton Keynes's performance in waste recycling was the best.

Members discussed whether lessons could be learnt from how waste was managed in other countries such as Germany. It was pointed out that Germany for example has MBT plants with which they specifically treat compost. There were however cultural differences between Germany and the UK which had to be taken into account in any lesson learning.

Members outlined that any waste recycling campaign by the Council should have a strong educational component. This would for example teach the public about how to use green bins. The example was given of Monkston Ward which currently has a "silver caddy" campaign. It was recommended that schools especially primary schools be included in such a campaign, and that Sarah Spicer would be a good resource person for this activity. Officers pointed out that schools are currently visited to educate them about waste management and recycling, and further an educational drive is planned by the Waste Service which will cover issues such as littering

RESOLVED

The new Waste Strategy should incorporate public education

Members expressed concern that rotation of Serco staff and potential industrial action might affect waste service provision and satisfaction in the borough, and enquired of officers whether this was the case. Officers advised that there was no data currently available to suggest an impact on services.

The freedom which the Council had to change the terms of the waste contract was explored by Members. Officers advised that the Council had this ability however this had potential cost implications for the Council. Information was sought from officers as to whether bi-weekly bin collection would incur a cost, to which officers confirmed that the Council would incur a cost with such collection.

Members enquired as to the reliability of vehicles currently used in waste service collection, and whether they should be changed before their optimum had time had passed. The reliability of vehicles was assured by Officers, and further that Serco was cooperative in implementing changes when required by the Council.

The Chair concluded the item discussion by thanking officers for their contribution to the meeting.

Work Programme

The Group agreed the below Work Programme for the remainder for the financial year:-

- **26 October 2016-** Future trends/demand predictability (what will waste look like in 5 years), what happens elsewhere in waste service management such as with other local authorities, and the impact of the new waste recycling treatment plant on the waste stream.
- **23 November 2016-** November shortlist with the varied options/pilots considered in development of the new Waste Strategy broken down into costs, benefits, medium term financial plans/projections.
- **January 2017 (Proposed)** - Strategy direction based on evidence gathered and particular option(s) chosen.

For this meeting Councillor McCall will liaise with Dwight McKenzie to determine a suitable specific date for the Council's last meeting.