

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 7 March 2016

Subject: Response to Reference from Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Results of wheeled bin pilot

Lead officer: Chris Lee, Director of Environment & Regeneration
Lead member: Councillor Judy Saunders, Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking
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Recommendations:

- A. That the Cabinet consider the details within the report
 - B. That the recommendations of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel are agreed.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. On 15 February Cabinet received a report from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny panel setting out the Panel's conclusions of the wheeled bin trial initiated in Lavender Fields ward between April and September 2015.
- 1.2. This report examines those conclusions and recommendations and provides a response with respect to the practicalities and opportunities identified by the Scrutiny Panel. .

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. At its meeting of 19 January 2015, Cabinet approved proposals to carry out a trial wheeled bin waste collection service covering approximately 1,200 households within the Lavender Fields Ward for a period of six months. Cabinet also resolved that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider an officer report setting out the findings of the pilot and to ask Scrutiny to assess whether it offers opportunities to improve street cleanliness and ensure value for money for council tax payers.
- 2.2. The trial service commenced on 2 April 2015 and was concluded in September 2015. On 11 November 2015 the results of the trial were reported to the Scrutiny Panel for consideration. The report is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.3. The key findings of the trial were that:
 - There were significant improvements in standards of cleanliness of the roads within the trial area through less wind blown litter and reduced risk of animal attack and spillage from sacks;

- There were positive environmental impacts through increased recycling resulting from increased container capacity for recyclables;
- There was a slight increase in residual waste being collected during the trial period (0.7 tonnes per week);
- Improved street scene appearance: neater curtilage with single bin rather than multiple boxes;
- Improved recycle quality resulting from protection from adverse weather
- Improved working conditions for collection operatives (less heavy lifting, manual handling and limited hazards from sharp objects in black sacks).

2.4. In addition to the monitoring of cleanliness and impacts on waste diversion, the service commissioned an independent survey of residents living within the trial area. The detailed findings are set out in Appendix 1. However, the key highlights include:

- 89% of residents were happy with the wheeled bins
- 95% found them easier to use than the current sack and box collection;
- 81% of residents felt that the streets were cleaner as a result of proper containerisation of the waste.

2.5. On the basis of the findings of the trial and the discussions held at the Scrutiny Panel meeting in November 2015 a report was presented to cabinet setting out four key considerations that the Panel would wish to be addressed in advance of any roll out of wheeled bins across the borough:

- That Cabinet undertake a more detailed analysis of detailed costs and projected savings of the wider roll out of the scheme before making a decision;
- That should the scheme be rolled out, Cabinet considers choice for residents in the size of wheeled bins and if they wish to participate in the scheme;
- That Cabinet considers the impact of wheeled bins outside homes on the street scene;
- That Cabinet consider the impact on disabled users if wheeled bins are used in terms of accessing pavements and homes.

2.5.1 The costs set out in the findings of the trial did not include the potential benefits of improved standards of street cleanliness leading to greater cleansing productivity and consequent savings. Furthermore, the costings did not provide any estimates of potential waste disposal savings through increased recycling and food waste capture. Nor did the trial explore the potential impacts of diverting waste to the most appropriate and cost-effective treatment solution through possible changes in collection frequencies of the various waste streams.

2.5.2 These potential additional benefits require further consideration and it is accepted that further detailed analysis of costs and projected savings will be necessary to inform any future decision on rolling out wheeled bins further.

2.6. The size of wheeled bins

2.6.1 It is recognised that the approach to waste collection cannot necessarily be a “one size fits all” approach and that different container types and sizes may be most appropriate depending on household types and sizes. However, in order for collection processes to be as lean and efficient as possible standardisation will be required to a large extent and any variation from the standard process would require justifiable reasons. Acceptable criteria to vary from the “norm” should be agreed in advance of any service being rolled out. In terms of a wheeled bin service it is important that the bin is of an appropriate height to be lifted by standard bin lifting equipment at the rear of the collection vehicle without the need for any repetitive re-adjustments to the bin lifting equipment.

2.6.2 The officer report to the Scrutiny Panel referenced recent research from the Waste Resources Action Programme that has found direct links between the restriction of residual waste capacity and increased capture of recycling and food waste. Restricting capacity through limiting residual waste bin sizes or frequency of collection will be a key determinant in delivering any waste treatment/disposal savings.

2.6.3 On this basis it would be advised that whilst some flexibility be provided in terms of bin size that these are confined within strict parameters and geared towards reducing the overall levels of residual waste being produced by householders.

2.7. Impact of wheeled bins outside of homes

2.7.1 Again it is recognised that the approach to waste collection cannot be a “one size fits all” approach as detailed above. Houses with restricted front gardens (or no front gardens, including flats above shops that cannot have communal waste storage bins) or with access issues such as steps or steep inclines will require an alternative approach. Research has shown that special sack collections are most likely to be suited to these types of households in order to minimise the impact on public footpaths.

2.8. Impact on disabled users in terms of accessing pavements and homes

2.8.1 It is advised that any service rolled out utilising wheeled bins would maintain the current curtilage collection approach rather than introduce a kerbside collection system in order to address this issue. The former requires householders to set out waste bins within the confines of their property as close to the edge as possible. The latter requires bins to be set out on the pavement by the kerb. A key issue with the former approach will be to monitor and maintain high collection standards from waste crews with respect to returning waste containers back to the curtilage of properties in good order.

2.8.2 The council has a policy to provide assisted collections to residents with identified needs in this respect. This would help to prevent access problems when entering or exiting properties through the front gate. It is not envisaged that any potential service change would impact on existing policies.

2.9. Further research and considerations

2.9.1 In order for a wheeled bin waste collection service to be cost effective and deliver savings against the current methodology it would need to ensure that a net reduction in cost could be achieved through:

- Reduced operating costs
- Improved street cleaning and associated efficiency savings
- Improved diversion of recyclates and maximisation of recyclate value
- Improved diversion of food waste to deliver further waste disposal savings
- Improved staff welfare and attendance through reduced sickness absence

2.9.2 The high cost of Merton's current collection systems is that it provides a weekly collection of all waste streams; does not restrict capacity for residual waste (accepts unlimited numbers of black sacks) and the processes are not designed to encourage residents to use the most appropriate option.

2.10. Summary

2.10.1 All matters requested by Scrutiny for Cabinet consideration before any decision to roll out wheeled bins are appropriate and practicable and would be necessary for the development of a suitable cost effective wheeled bin service that would ensure value for money for council tax payers.

2.10.2 71% of waste collection authorities now provide an alternating weekly collection of residual waste and recyclables. This approach is generally supported by the provision of a weekly food waste collection service. Whilst alternate weekly collections are now being seen as the financially optimal solution a number of authorities are now seeking further savings through implementing three-weekly residual waste collections.

2.10.3 The highest performing borough in London with respect to recycling is Bexley (55% recycling rate), a borough providing both wheeled bins and a collection regime based on alternating collections of waste streams, again supported by a weekly food waste service.

2.10.4 Over the past five years in London there has been a further shift towards wheeled bins and now two-thirds of London authorities use wheeled bins for residual waste collection. The more recent introductions of wheeled bins has been facilitated by the move to alternate weekly collection schemes supported by a weekly food waste collection. This has reduced overall costs of waste collection. Other boroughs such as Ealing are due to introduce new collection regimes on this basis in the near future.

2.10.5 There is a wide variety of options in terms of container types, sizes, optimum collection frequencies and combinations of waste streams that can be collected co-mingled or separately. Further detailed research and modelling will be required to ascertain the optimum solution for Merton based on its household types, socio-demographics and waste composition.

- 2.11. In November 2014 Cabinet resolved to enter into a joint procurement exercise with the South London Waste Partnership boroughs. This procurement exercise covers a range of services currently provided in-house including waste collection, street cleaning, winter maintenance and fleet management (Lot 1) and Grounds Maintenance (including parks, open spaces, arboriculture, grass verges and cemeteries) (Lot 2).
- 2.12. Cabinet also resolved that Competitive Dialogue be the procurement route for this project. Competitive Dialogue enables the Partnership to explore with the market a variety of options with respect to collection and cleansing methodologies. The key objectives of the project remain:
- Reduce spending and maximise efficiency on services across the Partnership and increase revenues on commercial services
 - Maintain a high quality service with high levels of customer satisfaction
 - Deliver environmentally sustainable, carbon efficient services with scope for innovation
- 2.13. The recommendations of the Scrutiny panel have been factored into the procurement process through the competitive dialogue process and the developing service specification. With respect to the likely costs/savings the business case for the Phase C procurement sets out required saving of at least 10%.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. None

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. The initial trial service included an independently commissioned survey of residents in the trial area.
- 4.2. The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel were invited to comment on the findings of the trial and have subsequently informed Cabinet of their conclusions.
- 4.3. With respect to the on-going procurement process and competitive dialogue referred to above, it is anticipated that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be engaged in the pre-decision process in advance of the Preferred Bidder award in July 2016.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. Not applicable at this stage

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. None for the purpose of this report

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None for the purpose of this report

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix 1: Report to Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel: Wheelie bin Pilot Waste and Street Cleansing Service

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. Held by Cormac Stokes, Head of Street Scene and Waste