

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM

A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF

WASTE COLLECTION

2005/2006

TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP (drawn from the Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel)

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Acknowledgements:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Four Members from the Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel formed a Task Group to undertake a review of Waste Collection in Merton. The purpose of this investigation was to present Cabinet with a set of recommendations for service improvement arising from the scrutiny review. The main focus of the review was around the specific areas of waste collection including: general refuse collection, recycling, garden and bulky waste. (Full scope and timetable for the review can be found in **Appendix A**). The Waste Collection Services were chosen for review by scrutiny for the following reasons:

- It is a high profile service that affects every resident in Merton
- Legislative pressures on the authority, including government targets for recycling and disposal of waste to landfill.
- Potential financial penalties on the authority if Merton fails to comply with legislative directives, in particular, under the Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003 where penalties of £150 per tonne of waste to landfill over agreed quota will apply.

The Panel decided that they would exclude the areas of waste disposal and the specific contract arrangements for waste management from the review. The waste disposal services are currently in transition with the two contracts for disposal of municipal waste coming to an end in 2008. More complex contractual arrangement will be required for disposal of waste in the future which is likely to involve partnerships with neighbouring boroughs and possibly wider. The Panel felt that at this time of transition their impact in this area would be minimal and therefore agreed to concentrate their energy on the public facing waste collection services.

The Task Group undertook the review over a five-month period, between September 2005 and January 2006, gathering evidence from a number of sources including:

- Consultation exercise with the public, interested organisations and community groups
- Results of residents surveys
- Advice and information from officers of waste management service
- Best practice from other local authorities, including site visit to Sutton
- Comparative performance data from across London along with previous service reviews
- Visit to reuse and recycling sites in the borough
- Meetings with front line staff including employees from Merton Link and the waste collection patch managers.
- Information on the local and national context in particular relating to the legislative drivers for change

A number of key findings and recommendations have been identified from the evidence gathered by the Task Group over the past five months. These are detailed in the following section.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mode of Collection – General Waste and Recycling

One of the key issues highlighted throughout the review was the mode of collection and its associated problems. Merton residents currently use the black bag system of collection for general waste and the box system for recycling as opposed to wheeled bins. The authority must increase its recycling whilst reducing the amount of waste going to landfill sites to potentially avoid millions of pounds in penalties. The task group were supportive of the aims to put more effort into waste minimisation and to increase recycling rates.

The mode of collection and means of disposal of recyclables was identified as an important issue in helping the authority to meet statutory targets and avoid disposal penalties. The Task Group agreed with the philosophy used by Sutton Council that the best way to increase recycling and reduce general waste is to encourage and engage local residents. Therefore if wheeled bins were considered as the most appropriate option for service provision, should residents be given the option to opt out, once they have been given all the relevant information.

The Task Group looked at a number of options for service provision in relation to general waste and recycling, including:

1. The introduction of two wheeled bins, one for general waste and one for recycling. With collections made on a weekly basis. Smaller bins given as standard (140 litre size) for general waste with larger (180 litre) recycling wheeled bins provided in order to encourage recycling. Larger bins issued upon special request.
2. Introduction of one wheeled bin for general waste and continue with the box system for recycling. Collection frequency as it currently stands.
3. Split vehicle collection, vehicles that can collect both general waste and recycling, using either wheeled bins or 9as currently) bags and boxes.
4. Service to remain as currently provided – to keep black bag system for general rubbish and boxes for recycling concentrating improvements on street cleaning following collections.

The task group felt that there was a strong argument for the introduction of wheeled bins, and in particular, the system identified in option 1. The main reasons for preferring this option were:

- Containment of rubbish and cleanliness of streets
Wheeled bins provide a much better containment of waste than black bags and boxes. They would result in less visible rubbish on the streets, the reduction in spillage by operatives, less wind-blown refuse and would eliminate the problem of bags being split open by animals. *‘Some authorities still use plastic sacks for domestic waste. These can increase littering by up to nine times over levels achieved by well-specified and operated wheeled bin systems’ DEFRA.*
- Health and Safety and employee conditions of work
Improvements in Health and Safety operationally with the introduction of wheeled bins, less lifting therefore resulting in less manual handling type injuries and containment of rubbish so fewer glass or sharp object injuries.

This should result in lower levels of sickness amongst staff. The wheeled bin is recommended by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as the refuse container of choice.

- **Best Practice**
Evidence from other local authorities show that wheeled bins are cleaner, safer and overall provide a more efficient mode of collection.
- **Increase in recycling and reduction in general waste**
The way to encourage more people to recycle and to increase Merton's recycling rate in the future will be to offer a system of collection that is easy and simple to use (as easy, if not easier, than to dispose of general waste). Introducing 180 litre wheeled bins for recycling and 140 litre for general waste residents will make it easier for residents to separate their recyclables and general waste making it especially convenient to dispose of recyclables into the one 'mixed recyclables' wheeled bin.
- **Public opinion**
Public opinion from the consultation exercise was quite mixed with many people strongly arguing for and some against the wheeled bin option. The task group agreed that this could be addressed with a full programme of education and information for residents, along with the option for householders to opt out.

Financial Implication of Wheeled Bin Introduction

A capital investment will be required alongside the ongoing revenue costs to set up a wheeled bin system, to purchase the wheeled bins and for conversion and purchase of vehicles with bin lift equipment (All current vehicles associated with domestic collection would need to be adapted). There will also be one off costs associated with the redesign of service delivery and information for the public.

An analysis of the potential financial implications of each individual recommendation contained in this report can be found in **Appendix C**.

It is recommended that:

- R1 *Option 1 to be considered as the preferred option by the Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel and that this is taken into consideration when the full analysis of options is being completed.***

Option 1

The introduction of two wheeled bins, one for general waste and one for recycling. With collections made on a weekly basis. Smaller bins given as standard (140 litre size) for general waste with larger (180 litre) recycling wheeled bins provided in order to encourage recycling. Larger bins issued upon special request.

- R2 *If a wheeled bin system is to be introduced, the following should apply:***

- (a) ***That residents are given the option to 'opt out' of having wheeled bins.***
- (b) ***That the use of a bag or other system for recycling and general waste is used in areas where wheeled bins are not suitable.***

- (c) That provision for assisting elderly and disabled people in the form of an 'assisted collection list' be made.**
- (d) That a full programme of educating and informing the public of the new system is completed.**

R3 That the possibility of external funding and sponsorship opportunities is investigated fully in order to assist with the introduction and ongoing costs associated with any new system of working.

R4 That all 'new build' planning applications are seen by waste management to ensure adequate facilities and space for waste bins, particularly recycling facilities and to ensure that they have appropriate access for collection vehicles.

Recruitment, Retention and Training of Staff

The issue of recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in the area of recycling collection, was highlighted as a key issue. It has been identified that up to 70% of recycling staff at any one time may be agency staff. The Task Group noted a number of concerns in relation to this situation:

- Difficult to ensure consistency of service provision, new and different staff each day with varying knowledge of the service and patch.
- Difficult to ensure adequate training not only in areas of Health and Safety but also in general service provision (particular issue highlighted throughout the review by those consulted 'the throwing of recycling boxes').

'Why do the collectors have to throw the recycling boxes across the ground and not just place them back on the pavement when they have emptied them.' (Merton Resident)

- The extra costs incurred by using agency staff.
- Morale of staff working within a service area where staff change daily.

It was identified by the visit to Sutton Council that the use of a wheeled bin system may help to address the recruitment issue by making the job much cleaner, safer and less physically demanding. The Task Group felt that it was important to reduce the number of agency staff and to ensure that there is a regime in place to inform and train staff effectively.

It is recommended that:

R5 Measures be put into place to closely monitor agency staff levels and targets set to improve the situation month on month.

R6 A communication system be introduced that enables drivers and operatives to feed up to date information to base is developed.

R7 Ways of attracting new permanent staff be investigated through for example: a recruitment drive and open days etc.

R8 The waste management service moves towards the introduction of single status as a matter of urgency.

Patch Working

The Task Group believed that the move to 'patch working' was a positive one and that the service has greatly improved since that time. They felt that the four Patch Manager posts are key to these improvements, helping to ensure that the service across the borough is running smoothly by carrying out 'special monitoring', by talking to residents and dealing with issues that arise, often face to face, and also importantly monitoring the link between street cleaning and waste collection.

Reuse and Recycling Sites

The Task Group believed that the service provided by the Reuse and Recycling sites within the borough was very good, particularly the new site at Weir Road.

The main issues identified were:

- The new site at Weir Road could be publicised more widely.
- End markets for recycling materials are very volatile and that income generated cannot be guaranteed.
- The Task Group recognised that some good work was being done in relation to the development of avenues for the re-use of furniture but that more work in this area was needed, particularly in developing partnerships with voluntary and community organisations.

It is recommended that:

R9 The authority develops more partnerships/relationships with organisations involved in the re-use of recyclable items including furniture and electrical goods.

R10 Consideration be given to extending the opening hours at Weir Road Reuse and Recycling Site.

R11 That a fresh publicity campaign for Weir Road be completed.

R12 Investigation is undertaken into the possibility and viability of recycling plastic carrier bags.

Garden Waste Collections

The Task Group considered that all in all the new system of collection of garden waste was working relatively well, but did identify the following as issues:

- Limited distribution and availability of bags: only available for purchase from libraries.
- Collection day does not follow the same collection timetable/routes as other waste services, causing some confusion for the public.

It is recommended that:

R13 Garden waste bags are made available at more outlets for members of the public to purchase.

R14 The collection days/routes for collection of garden waste be kept under review with a view to making a move towards a scheduled service.

Bulky Waste Collections

Members believed that the bulky waste collection service was working well, with high levels of customer satisfaction. The bulky waste survey did identify that residents would appear to be less satisfied with the charge associated with the service, although the Task Group felt that this was not significant enough to warrant reducing or removing the charge. The survey did identify that residents awareness of the service appears to be predominantly through word of mouth and that less than half the users surveyed knew of the service through specific communication measures i.e. My Merton, local press etc. This would imply that greater emphasis could be made on publicising the service and its benefits. (Publicity issues are addressed in recommendation 16).

The consultation exercise carried out as part of the review identified a particular issue in relation to communal skips in residential areas, giving the opportunity for householders to dispose of large items on a periodic basis. The task group discussed this issue but agreed that this system would only be viable if it were manned because in the past communal skips it had been misused by the illegal dumping of commercial and builder's mess.

It is recommended that:

R15 Subject to the evaluation of the current pilot scheme, a manned waste cart and caged vehicle for the purpose of collecting bulky items be introduced that will visit the whole borough on a periodic basis.

Consulting/Involving, Publicising and Communicating Services

The Task Group supports the current approach being used by Merton Council to communicate the waste collection services to the public but felt that a formal communication strategy needed to be developed for the service in order to provide positive engagement and involvement with the community. The strategy should build upon work that is currently being done and should include:

- Re-introduction of the Waste Quality Circle or similar body that meets to consult and to include interest parties.
- Publicise good news stories more (for example: opening of the Weir Rd Reuse and Recycling Centre, one of the 1st in the country).
- Develop a welcome pack in conjunction with other services provided by the authority that is sent out to all new residents and that this pack is sent out to residents as soon as they are identified as moving to the borough.
- Continue to develop links with schools and community groups to promote recycling and inform of the impact of waste on the environment.
- Pro-actively develop partnerships with interested groups and organisations to improve and provide recycling opportunities.

It is recommended that:

R16 A formal communication and consultation strategy be developed that builds upon the current work being carried out by the service. It should include:

- a) Re-introduction of the Waste Management Quality circle or similar consultation forum.**
- b) More pro-active publicising of good news stories.**
- c) Development of a welcome pack for new residents in conjunction with other council services.**
- d) Encourage pro-active development of partnerships with interested groups and organisation in order to improve and provide recycling opportunities.**
- e) Working with other departments in the authority in order to identify new residents so that information can be sent to resident after first contact with the council.**

BACKGROUND EVIDENCE

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROCEDURE FOR UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW

1.1 The Task Group met 8 times between October 2005 and January 2006. Councillors agreed that, wherever possible, they would hold meetings and undertake visits during the daytime.

1.2 Councillors agreed that they should seek evidence from relevant officers, the public, external bodies and interested community groups, in order to gain as wider a perspective as possible.

- Officers were asked to outline the legislation and key drivers affecting the service along with authority's strategy and process for waste collection.
- Members of the public were consulted and invited to give their opinions of current service provision and to put forward ideas for improvement.
- Front line staff were interviewed in order to gain a clear understanding of the issues that are actually raised by the public and how they are dealt with in the first instance.
- Visits to recycling centres were arranged, so that members could see first hand the facilities provided.
- The Task Group examined best practice from a number of authorities including making a visit to Sutton Council Waste Management Service.
- They also looked at a cross section of best value reviews for other London Boroughs to gain an understanding of the wider context.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF ISSUES INFLUENCING SERVICE PROVISION

2.1 Local Context

2.1.1 As a first step in providing a picture of the current situation, the task group were provided with detailed background information.

2.1.2 The domestic refuse service is delivered by an in-house provider, Merton Refuse and Cleaning Service (MRCS), and collects bagged refuse weekly from around 78,000 households. Household holders provide their own black sacks, some residents in flats are provided with communal bins. Free collection of garden waste is provided this includes the provision of the first two reusable sacks and then £1 for every subsequent sack purchased (bags available to buy from libraries across the borough).

2.1.3 Merton collects approximately 100,000 tonnes of municipal waste per year. Of this waste approximately 70,000 tonnes is household waste, including street litter.

2.1.4 The council provides a weekly recycling collection (kerbside) to approximately 70,000 households. The council also has a total of 119 bring

sites in schools, on housing estates, and others in various parts of Merton. A range of materials are collected at these sites including: glass separated into three colours, cardboard, coloured papers, cans, textiles and unwanted clothing.

2.1.5 The council collects up to five items of bulky waste for a charge of £15. This fee is reduced to ten pounds for those on low incomes and for pensioners.

2.1.6 Patch working was introduced on 26 July 2004. These changed collections for refuse and recycling, from being carried out on a 'wave system' with all crews working each weekday in a zone of one fifth of the borough. There are now seven patches covering the borough and each Patch is sub-divided into five sequential areas of work, which are completed on successive days of the week. The objective of introducing patch working at Merton was to align refuse and collections areas and to integrate work better between cleansing and waste collection services to make the borough neater and cleaner.

2.1.7 The council currently recycles about 23% of household waste. Legislative changes are forcing councils to reduce their reliance on landfill disposal and seek alternative methods. The Government has recently introduced statutory performance standards for waste authorities. Merton Council is required to recycle 27% by 2006. The amount of waste collected in London is increasing by over 3% each year. In effect, this means that Merton Council will have to double the amount of waste it recycles over the next four years.

2.1.8 There are a number of local issues that will affect the service in Merton in the future including:

- The population projected to increase by 12.5% from 187,908 in 2001 to 211,260 in 2020.
- Target for new homes: 8,810 by 2016 as set out in the London Plan.
- Size of households slightly declining resulting in growth in waste.
- Average household growth is 4% per year (national average is 3%).

2.1.9 London Strategy

The London Mayor published a municipal waste strategy 'Rethinking Rubbish in London'. The mayor's vision for waste in London is that by 2020, municipal waste should no longer compromise London's future as a sustainable city. The strategy states that lifestyle habits must change so that Londoners produce only the minimum amount of waste, and reduce the pressures on the environment and waste must be managed better so that its impact on the local and global environment is minimised. The strategy is led by waste reduction, reuse and recycling. The Mayor also wishes to see major improvements to the standard of cleanliness on London's streets, action to combat environmental crime and potential for recycling litter. The waste management strategy encompasses the Capital Standards programme – with a specific focus on litter, highlights problems of fly tipping and the linkages with bulky waste collections arrangements including maximising the opportunities for refuse and recycling.

2.2 National Context

2.2.1 Waste collection functions are highly visible front line services, being one of the few services that residents of the borough automatically receive, so remain high in public priorities both locally and nationally.

2.2.2 The waste services are guided by an increasing legislative and policy framework at a European, national, regional and local level. Designed to support the emphasis towards waste minimisation, reuse and increasing the recycling and recovery levels.

2.2.3 Some of the key legislative drivers for change include:

- EU Landfill Directive 1999

The EU Landfill Directive requires that by 2010 the amount of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill must be reduced to 75% of the total produced in 1995. By 2013, the amount must be reduced to 50% of the 1995 total and by 2020 to 35%. The amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill will be controlled by a tradable allowance system.

- Waste & Emissions Trading Act 2003

This Act established the principle of landfill allowance trading (LATS). The landfill allowances dictate the amount of biodegradable municipal waste that can be disposed of to landfill. The allowances were allocated in February 2005; these allowances can be banked, borrowed, sold or bought. Failure to comply will result in fines of £150 per tonne.

- Waste Strategy 2000

The Government has established through its Waste Strategy 2000, a series of national targets. These require at least 30% of household waste to be recycled or composted and the recovery of value from 45% of municipal waste by 2010 and 33% and 67% by 2015.

- Mayor of London Municipal Waste Management Strategy

The Mayor has indicated that London will aim to exceed the recycling and composting Best Value Standards for waste authorities set by the Government including any changes as a result of a review of the recycling targets. The Mayor will therefore seek to promote a 50% target for recycling and composting of municipal waste by 2010 and 60% by 2015.

2.2.4 A descending hierarchy of approaches has been identified to address the issues surrounding the sustainable management of waste in the future.

1. Reduction of overall consumption
2. Selective consumption – maximum use of secondary materials, durable, repairable and recyclable products
3. Waste minimisation
4. Re-use
5. Recycling (including composting)

6. Recovering materials and energy from residual waste
7. Disposal to landfill as a last resort on a minimal level

2.3 **Service Reviews**

2.3.1 **Best Value Review of Waste Management 2002**

A best value review of waste management was completed in November 2002. The council was assessed as providing a 'fair', one star service that had promising prospects for improvement. A number of recommendations arose from this review including:

- Update the Waste Management Strategy to provide an integrated improvement framework, which encompasses all waste management activities, including education and enforcement, and clearly links to the recycling plan.
- Develop a communication and marketing strategy to provide a clear framework to target resources: at promoting and educating residents on the need to recycle and minimise waste and ensures effective links with enforcement activities.
- Develop performance monitoring mechanisms to inform service delivery and improvement including:
 - Evaluating the use of compost bins and the contribution this makes to waste minimisation; and
 - Monitoring current and future kerbside collection schemes to assess participation.
- Promote and market service charters available in minority languages and signpost translation unit within the council.
- Develop targets to increase recycling for commercial waste; and to assist the service in reaching top quartile performance for missed bin collection.
- Review contract monitoring arrangements to ensure contracts are delivered effectively.
- Set internal waste minimisation targets and develop a co-ordinated action plan to deliver its stated commitment.

2.3.2 The Task Group looked at the Best Value Reviews of a number of other local authorities including:

Wandsworth - Good two star service with promising prospects
Greenwich - Good two star service with promising prospects
Sutton - Excellent three star service with promising prospects

The Task Group chose to visit Sutton as an example of good practice in order to see first hand how the service is provided.

2.4 **Performance Data**

A number of key indicators for waste management are used to measure performance; the results of these for the financial year 2004/5 are shown below:

BV 82a	Percentage household waste recycled	17.37
BV 82b	Percentage household waste composted	2.92

BV 82c	Percentage household waste used to recover other energy sources	0.00
BV 82d	Percentage household waste landfilled	79.68
BV 84	No. of kms household waste collected per head	396.2
BV 86	Cost of household waste collection per household	45.11
BV 87	Cost of waste disposal per tonne municipal waste	44.09
BV 91	Percentage of residents served by kerbside recycling	100.0

Comparison figures for other local authorities for 2004/5 were not available at the time of the review. Members therefore considered benchmarking information for 2003/4:

- **Percentage of household waste recycled:**
Greenwich 9.7%, Lambeth 10.2%, Croydon 11.9%, Merton 13%, Kingston 13.8%, Wandsworth 17.3%, Sutton 18.9%.
- **Percentage of household waste composted:**
Sutton 6.6%, Kingston 4.7%, Greenwich 2.3%, Croydon 2.2%, Merton 1.8%, Wandsworth 0.18%, Lambeth 0.3%.
- **Cost of household waste collection per household:**
Merton £25.4, Greenwich £29.7, Kingston £30.5, Sutton no info, Croydon £33.8, Wandsworth £39.8, Lambeth £44.3.
- **Percentage of resident served by kerbside recycling:**
Merton 100%, Kingston 93.8%, Sutton 80.3%, Lambeth 89%, Wandsworth 75.3%, Greenwich 70.8%, Croydon 23.7%.

2.5 Survey Results

A number of surveys have been completed that are directly relevant to the review including:

2.5.1 Merton Annual Residents Survey

The Annual Residents Survey 2005 confirms the trends identified in the previous survey, particularly in terms of residents views about the Council, its services and local concerns. In the 2004 Survey there was a sharp improvement in service perceptions. This year, most of those perceptions have broadly held suggesting that services, particularly street based services, have improved for residents of the last two years. Positive changes (of more than 5%) this year include perceptions about recycling services and phoning the Council. There has been a small drop of 5% in the perceptions about street cleanliness after collection.

- 6% increase in satisfaction with recycling facilities to 64%
- 4% increase in satisfaction with fly tip removal to 34%
- 7% less concern over litter therefore down to 31%
- 85% say good/excellent reliability of waste collection
- 60% say streets clean and tidy after collection

2.5.2 Bulky Waste Survey

A customer feedback survey specific to the bulky waste service was completed in November 2005. It took the form of two separate samples:

- (a) A random sample of residents who had specifically contacted the Council with a view to booking a collection;
- (b) A random sample of 1,400 residents taken from the Council's Council Tax database.

Of the total 2,800 questionnaires sent out 876 were returned. This represents an overall response rate of 31%. Key findings of the survey include:

- 63% of residents had used the bulky household waste service in the past 12 months. The predominant materials that had been collected were furniture (46%), fridges (11%), white goods (11%) and large electrical items (11%).
- Publicising the service – the majority of residents heard of the service through family members, friends or neighbours. Only 47% had heard of the service through specific advertising in the local press, My Merton or on the Council's website.
- Satisfaction levels with the service are high. However, levels for different aspects of the service vary. The lowest level of satisfaction is with the cost of the service, with 68% being either satisfied or very satisfied. Only 54% are satisfied with the additional charge of £3 per item (charge made over the initial 5 items allowed).
- Reasons for not using the service – Of those who had not used the service (36% of respondents), the majority either did not have any items to dispose of (35%), preferred to use Garth Rd (18%) or had not heard of the service (36%). 7.4% of respondents did not use the service because they felt it was too expensive.

Satisfaction levels do not mirror those found in the Annual Residents Survey. Awareness of the service appears to be predominantly through word of mouth and less than half the users found out about the service through specific communications measures. This would imply that greater emphasis could be made on publicising the service and its benefits.

2.5.3 London-Wide Survey

A London-wide annual residents survey is also undertaken by the ALG (this is distinct from the survey carried out by each participating authority). Results London wide are for 2004 and are therefore compared to Merton for 2004, they include:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Merton</u>	<u>London wide</u>
Concern over the level of litter and dirt on the streets	38%	18%
Opinion of refuse collection – excellent or good	65%	66%
Opinion of recycling – excellent or good	58%	53%

3.0 REVIEW SPECIFIC CONSULTATION EXERCISE

3.1 The Panel, as part of their review, wanted to consult with the community as widely as possible, seeking witness evidence from the public, councillors, staff and environmental and other community groups. The following consultation took place:

- Press release in local papers
- Article on public internet site
- Article on staff intranet site and plasma screens around the civic centre
- Poster sent to libraries and posted in Merton Link
- Poster/article circulated to members of the Area Forums including residents associations
- Poster/article sent to all Councillors
- Consultation with Environmental Groups through the Environment and Safety Forum

A total of 45 responses were received and they were from members of the public, staff (as residents of Merton), Political Groups, Residents Associations (***See Appendix B for full breakdown of responses***).

Members of the task group were circulated a copy of all responses and these were discussed in detail at the task group meeting on 17th November. The Task Group agreed that the comments were mostly as expected. The exercise did support the view that the general waste collection has improved greatly over the last couple of years particularly since patch working was introduced. The common themes and main issues identified by the task group from this consultation were:

General Waste Collection

- Container used for rubbish collection (black bag versus wheeled bin, there was a varied response to this issues with some arguing strongly for wheeled bins with some strongly against).
- Uncollected bags and missed collections
- Enforcement/follow up of persistent offenders (leaving rubbish out on wrong day, flytipping black bags by waste bins etc).
- Mess left on street after collection

'Dismayed to see Merton still has no wheelie bin system and residents are required to put out rubbish in plastic bags. The rubbish is systematically scavenged by foxes etc, the streets are then filthy. Why in this day and age do residents have to dispose of their rubbish in this dirty way'. (Merton Resident).

'Wheeled bins are ugly and not suitable for all areas. Black bag system seems to work best'. (Merton Resident)

Garden Waste

- Distribution and availability of bags, just available at libraries

- Charge for and quality of bags
- Collection day not working to same collection system as other waste services.

Recycling

- Recycling containers: size of boxes, idea of having lids
- Systems used elsewhere: bag system in Wandsworth, wheelie bins in Greenwich.
- Recycling management/supervision and behaviour of recycling operatives: in particular the throwing of recycling boxes across the garden or path after being emptied by operatives

'We would like to see recycling boxes put back not thrown back or left on the public pathway'. (Mitcham Village Residents Association)

- Mess left on street after collection

'It would be good if plastic bags were added to the recyclable material. We also have lots of other plastic materials that fill our bins up. Is there no way these types could be brought into the recycling scheme'. (Merton Resident, Morden)

- More types of items recycled and more collected from kerbside
- Recycling at blocks of flats and flats above shops
- How the authority influences/educates others (the public to recycle more, businesses and influencing nationally i.e.: use less packaging etc.)

'I visit the tip in Garth Road, very helpful staff, good arrangements'. (Merton Resident, Mitcham')

'Newly re-opened Weir Road Recycling facility – whilst the general feeling that the site has re-opened is of course very positive, there are 2 criticisms that I am hearing constantly – that the 4pm closing at weekends is far too early and there should be a facility here for normal rubbish'. (Wimbledon House Residents Association)

- Promotion and publicity of services (i.e. Weir Rd)
- Information available and awareness of services

'We feel that not enough is done to explain to the public the Council's plans and achievements in relation to the collection of waste and recycling'. (Merton Liberal Democrats)

Bulky Waste

- Charging
- Provision for elderly and disabled

A few years ago there used to be communal skips put up periodically where such larger items could be taken. I thought this worked very well and wonder if these skips could be re-introduced. (Merton Resident, Wimbledon)

- Locations available to dispose of items (including issues around suggestions for communal skips)
- Cost of bulky waste collection versus flytipping

'It is a shame the council allows motorists to dispose of unwanted furniture etc. free of charge while the more environment-conscious users of public transport are charged excessive fees for the collections of waste.' (Merton Resident, Mitcham)

- The link between waste collection, recycling collection and street cleaning
- Welcome pack for new residents should include information about all the waste services in Merton.
- Sponsorship and litterbins at bus stops

3.2 Residents Survey on Wheelie Bins

Siobhian McDonagh, MP for Mitcham and Morden, contacted the Task Group wishing to contribute to the review with a survey that she had completed earlier in the year with residents in 9 wards in Mitcham and Morden. They had been asked about the cleanliness of the streets, and were asked 'if they believe things might improve if we had wheelie bins'. The results to this question were:

Yes: 2,642 (76.4%) No: 814 (23.6%) Total responses: 3,456

The ward by ward results were as follows:

Ward	Yes Vote %	No Vote %	Total
Colliers Wood	78.5%	21.5%	512
Cricket Green	71.1%	28.9%	315
Figge's Marsh	74.8%	25.2%	302
Graveney	72.2%	27.8%	370
Lavender Fields	82.2%	17.8%	219
Longthornton	84%	16%	318
Pollards Hill	82.2%	17.8%	286
Ravensbury	76%	24%	350
St Helier	74.6%	25.4%	406

4.0 OPERATIONAL EVIDENCE

4.1 Front Line Staff – Merton Link

Three staff from Merton Link were invited to attend a task group meeting to discuss, from first hand experience, the issues that members of the public contact the call centre about and the operational matters that arise. A number of issues were raised including:

- Majority of calls/visits to reception in relation to waste collection and recycling are about missed collections. Calls are borough wide but there may still be a problem with collection in some streets.
- Staff were asked how the calls are handled:

- Caller is told that missed collection will be rectified in 24 hours
- Call is logged and identified as missed collection on the database
- Call/request is given an individual reference number, so that the issue can be tracked easily. Reference number is also given to the caller.
- The report is then pulled off the database at Garth Rd (twice daily) and scheduled for collection.
- Call centre staff are given waste collection situation reports letting them know of any problems.
- Some calls in relation to garden and bulky waste collections: reporting items/bags put out and then not collected on day promised, no 'we called' cards left.
- The waste services manager was asked 'what happens when an area where problems have been identified and allocated for special monitoring and the monitoring period finishes'. Monitoring stops but patch managers keep track of area.
- Call centre staff believed that patch managers have made a difference and really help when problems are identified in particular areas and when individual residents make complaints. Reassuring that patch managers will speak to residents face to face if there is an ongoing problem.
- Many complaints received in relation to recycling boxes being thrown across the garden and the selection collection of items. Also receive a lot of calls suggesting lids for recycling boxes.
- New residents when they register for recycling are pleased with the information given, but there is no automatic registration of new residents.

4.2 Waste Collection Patch Managers

The task group met with two waste collection patch managers at their base in Garth Rd, to discuss first hand the issues that arise in delivering a service on the ground. Patch managers answered a number of questions and the following issues were discussed:

- There are a total of four patch managers covering the borough.
- Problems are brought to the attention of patch managers by residents through Merton Link, from ward councillors and the mobile crews.
- If people persistently leave black bags out on wrong day, patch managers knock on door informing the resident of what they are doing wrong and if it persists they are referred to the enforcement team. Educating the resident can solve many of the issues that arise.
- Work closely with enforcement team especially in relation to fly tipping. Have used CCTV in the past to catch offenders. Good planning and design can help to 'design out' fly tipping.
- Have made special arrangements with residents of some properties with no frontage and narrow pavements, including using blue bags and collecting twice weekly.
- Patch managers were asked if crews carried equipment to clean up spillage, they said that each cart has a shovel and will clean up any mess that they make but if the mess existed before they arrived that would not be cleaned up by them and would be left for the street cleaners.

- Patch managers suggested wheeled bins because they cut down on the amount of mess and spillage. Although did agree that some areas/streets and properties not suitable for wheeled bins.
- Street sweep teams follow day after collection, not same day because timing would be difficult.
- Special monitoring – patch managers get daily monitoring sheets giving special monitoring areas. They go and check these roads and will contact appropriate teams to sort out any problems. Special monitoring of a street or area usually lasts for 6 weeks.
- It was felt that education is key and that all operatives should be part of this, i.e. cards through letterbox for properties where rubbish not collected explaining why.
- Throwing around of recycling bins by operatives was raised. Patch managers felt there is a need to educate the operatives. One of issues, especially on recycling rounds is heavy reliance on agency staff sometimes up to 70% of all recycling operatives staff, so difficult to have consistency.
- Issue of litterbins becoming a focal point for other rubbish and black bags. Patch managers are currently working with enforcement to put together flyers to be put on and around problem bin 'hot spots'.
- Patch managers were asked what the issues were that act as barriers to improving the service. Patch managers replied: staff morale, large amount of agency staff with people changing daily, poor pay and large staff turnover.

4.3 Reuse and Recycling Sites

The Task Group undertook visits to the recycling and reuse sites at both Weir Rd and Garth Rd:

Weir Rd Reuse and Recycle Centre

- Open Friday to Sunday 8am to 4pm and on Monday 12pm to 7pm.
- No general rubbish allowed
- Recycling a wide variety of items including: paper/card, plastic bottles, food/drink cans, mixed glass, hardcore and rubble, scrap metal, mixed textiles/clothes/shoes, wood/timber, furniture, electrical and green waste.
- Furniture storage area – take re-useable and repairable furniture, items collected and distributed by charities.
- Could promote site a bit more widely, i.e. leaflet information in community centres. Leaflets have been distributed to the northern half of the borough.
- Bid been made with London Recycling Fund for vehicle to move containers.
- Looking into using Weir Rd to store the dustcart used for the Wimbledon area. Staff would go straight to Weir Rd to start work saving the transfer time from Garth Rd to Wimbledon, which can be quite long when traffic is bad.
- CCTV fitted across whole site and panic buttons located around site for staff.
- Signage and general presentation of the site is very good.

- A need to publicise this site more, not only with the public, but also with the industry, as an example of good practice. Only five other sites like Weir Rd in the country.

Garth Rd

- Recycling similar items to Weir Rd but containers/skips are still front-loading but looking to move to step up containers, which are safer to use and distribute the contents more evenly.
- Trade waste is taken for £80 per tonne.
- Limit of a quarter of a tonne of general waste per quarter to stop traders from using domestic disposal. Number plates from vans kept and load taken logged and recorded.
- Only take general waste from people living in borough must show Council Tax bill or driving licence. Doing this has minimised waste disposal in the borough saving approximately £300K.

5.0 **WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING!**

5.1 The Task Group undertook a site visit to Sutton Council where they met with waste collection staff both managers and operatives. Sutton Council was chosen to visit as an example of good practice based upon their Audit Commission Best Value Review in which they received an 'excellent service with promising prospects for improvement' scoring. The task group received an overview of Sutton's services in relation to: wheeled bin collections, bulky household waste and collection of green waste. Members were then taken to visit a green and brown wheeled bin crew at work along with the flats recycling crew. The following issues were discussed:

(i) Wheeled Bin Collection

- Sutton moved to wheeled bins for both general refuse and recycling in 1999. The decision was made because the Council were concerned about: the constant amount of rubbish on the streets, bags ripped open by animal causing and spillage, high level of injury to staff (especially in relation to cut injuries from glass and manual handling type injuries).
- It was also felt that wheeled bins would not only address the issue of split bags but would focus the resident on recycling.
- The two-bin system of wheeled bins for both recycling (green) and general waste (brown) was based on a system introduced by Eastly Council. Site visits were made to Eastly, the two bin system was then piloted in Sutton in 3 areas totalling 1200 properties (1 whole round). Residents in these areas were then asked what they thought of the service. The only issue that arose was with the frequency of the general waste collection, which was at that time fortnightly (alternate weeks with recycle).
- Refuse fleet had to be changed and new vehicles brought in that have lifting gear. Average round covers 1200 to 1500 properties. Rounds are reviewed regularly.
- Cost saving in relation to reduced sickness levels particularly through reduction in manual handling type injuries and glass cuts injuries.

- MORI do satisfaction survey for Sutton every two years currently at 88% satisfaction with waste and recycling collection.
- Contamination levels with recycling high at first when collection was fortnightly, now that general waste is collected weekly this has reduced to about 11%. Where to place bins on property seems to have been a concern by residents. A leaflet was produced for all residents using wheelie bins advising them of storage possibilities and/or how bins can be disguised.
- An assisted collection service is available to elderly/infirm. Operatives enter property to pick up bin, empty, and return it to its storage place. A list of people needing assistance is kept.
- Resident is given the option of opting out if they feel their property is not suitable to house a bin. Currently only 2% of properties are opted out (they are provided with 52 clear recycling bags).
- Many people initially opted out but opted back in when they saw the benefits of using the wheeled bin, often when saw neighbours benefiting from use.
- There had been concern that wheeled bins for general waste would actually encourage more to be put to landfill because of their ease and convenience of use. This has not borne out to be true. Size of the bin issued is 140 litre brown bins to households as standard and only issue larger bins upon special request. Issue alongside green bin to make recycling easy also. Has not created more waste to landfill and has encouraged and increased recycling.
- All planning applications for new developments are referred to Waste Management to ensure they provide adequate storage for waste, particularly for recycling, including access for collection vehicles.
- Narrow Roads and parked cars – Sutton found that although this was highlighted prior to introduction of wheeled bins, did not bear out to actually be an issue. Bins tend to be easier to move for crews than large amounts of sacks, space can always be found to move wheeled bins through parked cars.

(ii) Flats

- Completed a pilot of 52 blocks of flats across the borough, working with management agents, housing associations and residents. The pilot worked well and now 9,500 flat residents are apart of the recycling scheme (external funding used to secure extension of pilot).
- Some concern originally with contamination but quality of material has been good.
- Dedicated vehicle and crew for collection from flats.
- All flats in scheme are leafleted quarterly.
- The council has to consult, negotiate with residents and be flexible about issues that may arise. This service is operated by the council so it is able to be more flexible without having to incur extra costs that a contractor may require as extra to contract.
- Suttons approach is to encourage and engage people to recycle. A range of leaflets have been developed to make the message clear and easy to understand. Result has been reduction in contamination, an

increase in the recycling rate and the satisfaction of service from residents improved.

- Keep a record of contamination, those who repeatedly contaminate recycling are contacted by officers if it continues they, as the last resort, remove the facility rather than engage penalties.
- Colour blindness can make it difficult for some people to distinguish between bins so a marker is put onto bin so the different bins can be identified through touch.

(iii) Collection of Green Waste

- Sutton operate a sack system similar to Merton. It is operated 30 weeks a year from April to October. They have been asked to extend this past October to cover leaf collections but difficult due to increased cost associated.
- 5,600 tonnes of green waste is now being diverted from brown bins. Bags are distributed in March along with information leaflet.
- Compost generated is given back to residents via recycling centres.

(iv) Bulky Waste Collection

- Sutton collect up to three items for £10 bookable fee. Service is provided via the call centre and customers are expected to pay in advance. All collections are made on a Saturday to maximise the use of the vehicles. Do on average 90 collections on a Saturday.
- Currently working with Croydon Arc and the Vine Project to look into reuse of TV's, computers, washing machines etc.
- The biggest challenge currently is trying to recover and looking to find ways to reuse items.

5.2 Desk based research on other Local Authorities

a) North Cornwall

Black sacks collected weekly (domestic). Recycling collected fortnightly using different colour bags includes: paper, cans, plastic bottles, textiles, glass, cardboard and brown paper. Recycling rate for 2004/5 is 21% recycling and 5.5% composting.

b) Hounslow

Black sacks collected weekly (domestic). Recycling collected weekly in green box for all recyclables except plastic. Green waste collected weekly. Recycling rate for 2003/4 is 14.2% recycling and 1.5% composting.

c) Daventry

Domestic waste collected weekly in wheeled bins. Recycling collected weekly in coloured boxes including: paper, textiles, cans, glass and plastic. Green waste collected fortnightly from brown wheeled bin. Recycling 14.9% and composting 30.15%.

d) Salford City council

Domestic waste collected weekly by wheeled bins. Recycling collected weekly using one box for tin, textiles, plastic, glass, cardboard and plastic

carrier bags. Recycling 12.15% and composting 0.71% (target for this year 35%). This authority were a poor performing authority and have turned the performance around although figures are quite low.

e) Bath and North East Somerset

Domestic waste collected weekly by plastic sack. Garden waste and cardboard collected together and mulched together prior to delivery to disposal site, fortnightly collection. Recyclables collected weekly in coloured boxes includes: paper, glass, cans, plastic bottles, foil, batteries, engine oil, mobile phones, toner/ink cartridges and spectacles. Recycling 20.2% and composting 11.5%.

f) Bexley

Domestic waste collected weekly by wheeled bin. Paper collected fortnightly bundled up, brown wheeled bin for green waste and some kitchen waste, from spring 2006 they will be able to put in meat and fish waste. Maroon box for dry waste and black box for glass collected fortnightly. Recycling 17.7% and composting 11.7%.

6.0 OPTIONS FOR SERVICES PROVISION

The waste collection manager supplied the task group with a detailed selection of options for different ways of providing a whole range of waste collection services (full list see **Appendix D**). From this members highlighted the following options for discussion:

Wheeled Bin Introduction

Reasons for:

- Better containment of waste - resulting in less visible rubbish on the streets, reduction of windblown refuse, stopping rubbish being spread across street by animals and reduction in spillage by operatives. (*Some authorities still use plastic sacks for domestic waste. These can increase littering by up to nine times over levels achieved by well-specified and operated wheeled bin systems' DEFRA*).
- Improvements in Health and Safety operationally with the introduction of wheeled bins, less lifting therefore resulting in less manual handling type injuries. Should result in lower levels of sickness among staff. Recommended by Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as the refuse container of choice.
- Evidence from other local authorities showing that wheeled bins are a cleaner, safer and overall a more efficient mode of collection.
- Disposal consequences are as per current arrangements

Reasons against:

- Initial capital outlay would be approximately £2.3 million to induction bins across the borough (240ltr).
- Initial capital outlay would be approximately £1.84 million to induction bins across the borough (140ltr).

- 240ltr size bin may encourage people to use capacity may be better to have larger recycling units (180ltr) and smaller general waste bins (140ltr).
- Some areas unsuitable for wheeled bins: lack of storage for bins in some parts of borough especially where no frontage and some flats etc, as well as the problem of narrow streets and tight parking situations. Different system will need to be employed for these areas.

Service Remain as Currently Provided

Reasons for:

- Minimal cost but extras monies required to strengthen cleansing services
- Satisfaction levels for general waste collection service are relatively high at 85% with the service improving significantly over last couple of years.

Reasons against:

- Little scope to improve service and recycling rate, limited to improving cleansing options. Satisfaction levels for collection may be relatively high but state of the street after collection satisfaction is only 60%.
- Health and Safety implications – difficult to reduce manual handling type injuries, staff sickness levels not likely to improve.

The Container

Any scheme that requires high rates of participation in recycling by householders needs to ensure that the container is easy to use. This means it must be easy, safe and convenient for the resident to store, carry or push, fill and secure.

'Having recently resided in the borough of Merton, I am disappointed by your inadequate collecting box. The box is not designed to cope with the volume recyclable items. Consequently, residents are more inclined to not use your system. If recycling is simplified, people will be more willing to recycle. (Merton Resident, Mitcham)

The Health and Safety Executive has carried out some very detailed research comparing bags versus wheeled bins and its conclusion was that wheeled bins were safer, it has yet to produce detailed guidance on the use of boxes but they do state that it is appropriate to consider some manual handling issues not just for the crew but for the resident. Advantages and disadvantages of different containers include:

Boxes

Advantages	Disadvantages
- Suitable for weekly collection of dry recyclables	- Boxes are easily diverted for other household uses
- Available widely	- Low to medium participation rates
- Popular for kerbside sorting	- Questions over Health and Safety issues related to lifting, carrying and

	sorting
- Low initial cost	- Usual size of 55 litres is often not large enough for all that needs recycling from a household
- High quality recyclable content, contamination is easily visible	- Carrying them with two hands makes them unsuitable for elderly and some users with a disability

Bags

Advantages	Disadvantages
- No specialist vehicle requirement	- HSE now advise against using bags, collectors can be vulnerable to items poking through
- No major capital outlay	- Ongoing cost for sack supply, depot storage and delivery costs
- Plastic bags for recycling are usually transparent, so easy to see contamination	- Need to avoid householders using them as alternative bags for refuse.
- Can be adapted to suit MRF sorting or vehicle sorting	- Generally low to medium participation rates
- Little problem with storage for householder	- Vulnerable to vermin and slashing by thieves seeking financial/identity information

Wheeled Bins

Advantages	Disadvantages
- Lower long term costs compared to sacks due to longer life	- Start up costs are higher
- Recommended by HSE and container of choice	- Difficult to spot contamination
- Reduction in litter	- Cannot be used for on-street or on-vehicle sorting
- Highest participation rates	- Vehicles must be equipped with specialist lifting gear
- Stored outside property	- Difficult for some properties to store bins
- Ease of handling	

Appendices

- A** Review terms of reference, scope and timetable
- B** Summary of responses from consultation exercise
- C** Cost Implication of Recommendations
- D** Options for Service Provision

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