

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 21 February 2011	Decision Taker: Cabinet Member for Transport, Environment and Recycling
Report title:		Food waste pilot next steps recommendation	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		East Dulwich, Nunhead, Peckham Rye, Rotherhithe, South Camberwell, Surrey Docks, The Lane, Village Wards	
From:		Strategic Director of Environment	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the existing pilot scheme should continue pending a decision later in 2011 regarding a possible roll-out of the food waste recycling service.
2. That any roll-out of the food waste recycling service should start in Autumn 2011 so that concerns relating to fortnightly refuse collections over the summer months can be addressed.
3. That food waste collections are trialed in a medium-rise block of flats and for schools within the pilot area.
4. That any roll-out of the food waste recycling scheme should occur at the same time as the planned move to co-mingled (mixed) recycling collections, so as to minimise the roll-out costs. The co-mingled recycling collections for all blue box properties are currently scheduled to start in Autumn 2011.
5. That households in the pilot area are automatically supplied with enough biodegradable bags to cover use of two bags per week, with additional bags available on request and that these bags will be supplied without handles.
6. That blue wheelie bins be trialed in place of blue boxes for suitable properties in part of the pilot area (to be selected) on an opt-out basis, and that a number are made available on request from April onwards for all households in the pilot area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Savings and additional revenue and capital costs to the Council

7. It is estimated that 887.5 tonnes of additional recyclable waste will be diverted from landfill in the first 6 months of the pilot scheme, saving over £75,000 in landfill costs. It is therefore anticipated that extending the scheme to street-based properties borough-wide could be viable, and could provide savings to the council, depending on the cost of providing the food waste recycling service. Negotiations on these costs are at an advanced stage with the council's Waste PFI partner, Veolia Environmental Services. Revised specifications for waste services are also being considered in order to deliver the level of savings required by the council's 2011/12 budget and it is anticipated that a decision on all these savings will be made in June 2011. This is to give time for robust financial checks before negotiations are concluded as changes to payments made through the PFI contract can have a sizable cumulative impact over the remaining 22 years of the contract.

Impact of pilot scheme in summer months

8. The pilot scheme began in October 2010 and so it has only operated, so far, during the colder months of the year. Feedback from some residents has indicated that there is a concern that fortnightly refuse collections and/or separate food waste collections might lead to smell or hygiene problems during spells of warmer weather. However, experience from other authorities demonstrates that this is very unlikely to be the case.

Including blocks of flats and schools as part of the service

9. In order to maximise the amount of food waste collected for recycling, the more properties and individuals that can be involved in the scheme, the better. However, for some property types this is not operationally viable. As the pilot collections have been running successfully for 10,000 street-based properties for some months, it may now be possible to include some blocks of flats in the scheme. It may also be possible to collect food waste from schools as well.

Reducing the cost to the Council of any future roll-out

10. Co-mingled recycling collections are to be introduced to all households using the blue box recycling scheme in 2011/12 as part of the Waste PFI contract. The pilot scheme has included a move to co-mingled recycling and it will reduce the costs of any roll-out of food waste recycling provision if this takes place at the same time as the move to co-mingled recycling.
11. As 62% of residents responding to the online questionnaire have told us they use fewer than four biodegradable bags per week, it may be more cost effective to reduce the number of bags delivered automatically to residents. This is likely to increase the number of requests for additional bags (which is currently very low) but will prevent the bags being supplied in excess to so many households.
12. Less than 1% of respondents to the online surveys report using the bags' handles in order to fill the bags. Biodegradable bags with handles are more expensive than those without handles; hence the recommendation to try using bags without handles in the pilot area. Of the authorities in London that provide a food waste collection service, less than half provide any biodegradable bags for their residents to use.

Resident requests for blue wheelie bins for recycling

13. Currently, blue wheelie bins are available for recycling at blocks (three or more properties) of flats where large euro bins aren't practical because of space constraints. Some residents in the pilot area have fed back that they would much prefer a blue wheelie bin for their recycling rather than one or more blue boxes.

RESIDENT FEEDBACK

14. Various methods of engaging with residents and collecting feedback have been used in the pilot area:
15. A series of 'food waste surgeries' at various locations between the 7 October 2010 and 1 November 2010 providing more detail on the scheme and an opportunity to ask questions.
16. The council launched an online survey at the start of the pilot October 14 2010, aiming to gather feedback on the following topics:

- Communications residents had received regarding the scheme
 - How residents recycle
 - Residents' thoughts on food waste recycling in general
 - The ease of use of the new food waste receptacles
 - The new mixed dry recycling service
 - Capacity for fortnightly refuse collections
17. 96% of respondents to the initial survey thought the recycling of food waste was a good idea. 69% said they now found it easier to recycle. There were nonetheless a number of issues raised particularly around receptacles for dry recycling (we received 31 separate comments from residents stating that the blue box was not big enough for its purpose anymore. The majority of these suggested a blue wheelie bin for dry recycling as a preferable alternative) and following analysis and feedback from other routes such as community forums, enquiries to the call centre and the experiences of our Recycling Support Officers out with the collection crews, a revised survey was launched on December 13 2010 which aimed to build on the initial questionnaire by looking more specifically at what we had found to be the key issues of interest for residents, namely:
- type and size of containers provided for organic waste, refuse and dry recycling
 - views on the communications received and if there has been enough
 - overall perception of the service and if improvements have been made
18. This survey has also been backed up by an engagement campaign in the pilot area in January 2011, which has included:
- Door to door surveys (with the same questions as the online equivalent)
 - Five "Talkaoke" interactive resident feedback sessions funded by WRAP, held between the 14 and 22 of January 2011 at various locations around the pilot area
 - Pedal bike media events funded by WRAP

Questionnaire results summary

19. Results from the revised questionnaire specifically asked participants to rate in order of preference the most appropriate container for recycling. In order these were:
- the current stackable blue boxes;
 - a separate wheelie bin for dry recycling;
 - converting the current 240 litre refuse bin into a recycling bin and being supplied a smaller 180 litre container for refuse;
 - single use sacks (similar to the idea of the clear bag recycling scheme for flats).
20. Other alternative suggested were one big bin with 3 sections, a smaller rigid bin to fit in to the bigger bins, changing the brown bin to dry recyclables bin and larger blue boxes.
21. Anecdotally, a small number of residents have expressed their concerns at having an additional container such as a wheeled bin and the space required to store it.
22. Outcomes from the first questionnaire are described in Section 15 above. 96 responses were received to the first set of questions, which were deliberately open ended so as to prompt as wide a range of feedback as possible. This meant the second questionnaire could be tailored to focus on particular areas of known concern.

23. 1221 responses have been received to the second questionnaire, representing 13% of the properties in the pilot. This is a good response rate and means we can have confidence that the responses are representative of views in the pilot area.
24. Again, 96% of respondents agreed that the recycling of food waste is a good idea.
25. In addition, 83% rated the new services as better or much better, with responses broken down as follows:
 - Much better 41%
 - Better 42%%
 - Has made no impact 12%
 - Services have got worse 5%

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Recycling performance and tonnage

26. Recycling performance in the pilot area is currently at 54%.
27. An average of 13.15kg per household (kg/hh) per month of organics waste was collected in the pilot area between October and December 2010. This represents an additional 9.06kg/hh per month when compared to the rest of the borough's garden waste service. It's worth noting however that the pilot areas were chosen in part to be places with high numbers of existing brown bins and so the amount of garden waste alone could reasonably be expected to be a little higher than average. Nevertheless, the very high relative tonnage of food and garden waste combined is very encouraging and suggests that significant levels of food waste are being collected; in line with, if not exceeding, the national estimate that 1.5kg/hh per week can be gained from separate food waste collections.
28. Appendix 1 shows the tonnages of garden waste collected through the garden waste collection scheme and the tonnages of mixed garden and food waste collected through the pilot scheme.
29. Differences in performance between dry recycling collections in the pilot area, and properties still on the existing scheme of source separated collections over the last three months suggest an additional 6.35 kg/hh per month has been collected in the pilot area for the period October to the December 2010. Appendix 2 shows this graphically.
30. The amount of refuse collected in the pilot area over the first three months is 11.58 kg/hh/month less than that collected elsewhere in the borough.
31. Based on performance so far, we expect to divert an additional 887.5 tonnes of waste from landfill as a result of the pilot (365.8 tonnes of additional dry recycling and 521.7 of organics). This equates to a saving of over £75,000 in landfill costs.

Participation

32. Surveys undertaken in the pilot area before the start of the new collections found that 66% of the properties surveyed were participating in the blue box collections service and 40% were participating in the garden waste service.
33. Repeat surveys were undertaken in November 2010 and 76% of the properties surveyed in November were participating in the blue box collections service

representing a 10% increase. 53% of the properties surveyed in November were participating in the garden waste service representing a 13% increase.

Contamination

34. Contamination of recycling and food and garden waste in the pilot area has not caused a significant problem.
35. 919 contamination cards have been issued since the start of collections. 95% of these have been issued for wrong materials being placed in the brown bin. This includes the use of carrier bags for disposing of food waste.
36. It continues to be the case that no recycling loads have been rejected at final point of disposal.

Container Requests

Kitchen Caddies

37. Information in the first letter that was sent to residents highlighted that if they ordered a kitchen caddy by the 17th September 2010 it would be delivered before the collections begin. 2,951 were ordered and delivered throughout the pilot area prior to the collections starting.
38. Since the collections started in October 2010 through to January 2011 an additional 643 kitchen caddies have been requested by residents. In total, just over 35% of the properties within the pilot area have requested kitchen caddies.

Small brown bins

39. Properties within the pilot area were assessed prior to the commencement of collections. Those without space for a large wheeled brown bin or where they may share a container (such as houses that are split in to flats) were provided with small 23 litre brown bins. 3,462 small brown bins were delivered prior to collections starting.
40. Since the collections have started in October 2010 through to January 2011 an additional 369 small brown bins have been requested by residents.

Blue boxes

41. Requests for additional blue boxes for properties in the pilot area peaked in September at 283, and October 2010 at 248 as the pilot was launched. The total number of requests handled through the CSC for additional blue boxes through to January 2011 in the pilot area is in excess of 1,000. Experience from other boroughs and similar schemes set up throughout the country does suggest that changing the frequency of collections for refuse (residual waste) does have an impact on recycling habits. The increased tonnage data for dry recyclables coupled with an increase in requests for recycling containers demonstrates that this has been the case in the pilot area.

Refuse bins

42. Only twelve requests have been made to the council for larger residual green bins since the pilot commenced. This equates to approximately 0.1% of households in the pilot area requesting a larger bin. Those who request the bins were contacted by the RSOs to understand their needs and offering hints and tips on minimising their waste before being supplied with a larger 360Litre bin.

Food waste bags

43. A total of 100 compostable food bags were delivered to all households in the pilot area. This equates to 3-4 bags a week.
44. Information in the communications materials produced encourages residents who want to request additional liners to contact the CSC who would then refer them to a Recycling Support Officer (RSO).
45. Only 7% of households in the pilot area requested more bags.
46. 62% of respondents to the questionnaire are using fewer than 4 bags per week.

Complaints and problems regarding the pilot scheme

47. Data recorded until the 20 December 2010 shows a total of 304 complaints, enquiries and issues have been managed by RSOs since the introduction of the organics and mixed recycling collection service. The main issues dealt with;
 - Contamination of bins (125)
 - Additional bag requests (111)
 - Storage space for dry recyclables and size of containers (40)
48. The council has received 8 enquiries since the start of the pilot over concerns with nappy waste, storage and frequency of collection. Residents are referred to a RSO to understand the nature of the enquiry and see what assistance can be offered. This includes advice on wrapping and storing waste and the promotion of the Real Nappies for London voucher scheme operated by the council. Wherever necessary a larger bin has been provided.
49. Since information about the pilot was publicised in early September 2010, 40 letters and emails specifically complaining about changes to the service have been received.
50. The majority of complaints were received very early on in the scheme. Concerns were raised over;
 - potential problems such as capacity of the blue boxes and refuse bins
 - requests for a larger container
 - hygiene regarding fortnightly refuse collections
 - the number of receptacles in front gardens

Street Cleaning

51. Observations undertaken and analysis of enquiries received regarding cleaning and fly tipping in the pilot area suggests the service has not had any impact on the street cleanliness.

Policy Implications

52. The recommendations support the Council's aim to increase recycling and to look for innovative ways to reduce service delivery costs.

Community Impact Statement

53. Collection and separation of waste already in place for those properties affected, the extension of the pilot scheme has no additional effect.

Financial And Resource Implications

54. The additional cost and resource requirements for the pilot scheme are now only running costs, e.g. those needed to cover the supply of biodegradable bags and information to households.
55. This can be met within the existing waste contract budget and, based on the results of the pilot so far, it is anticipated that these costs will be covered by savings as a result of a reduction in landfill costs.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance (SB022011)

56. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report, and the decision to approve the recommendations set out in this report falls within the scope of the areas of responsibility of an Individual Cabinet Member, and matters reserved to him/her for decision under Part 3D of the Council Constitution.

Finance Director (Env/ET/160211A)

57. The Acting Head of Sustainable Services has confirmed that any costs of implementing the recommended actions can be contained within his proposed budget for 2011/12. Therefore, there are no financial implications as a result of approving the recommendations set out in this report.

APPENDICES

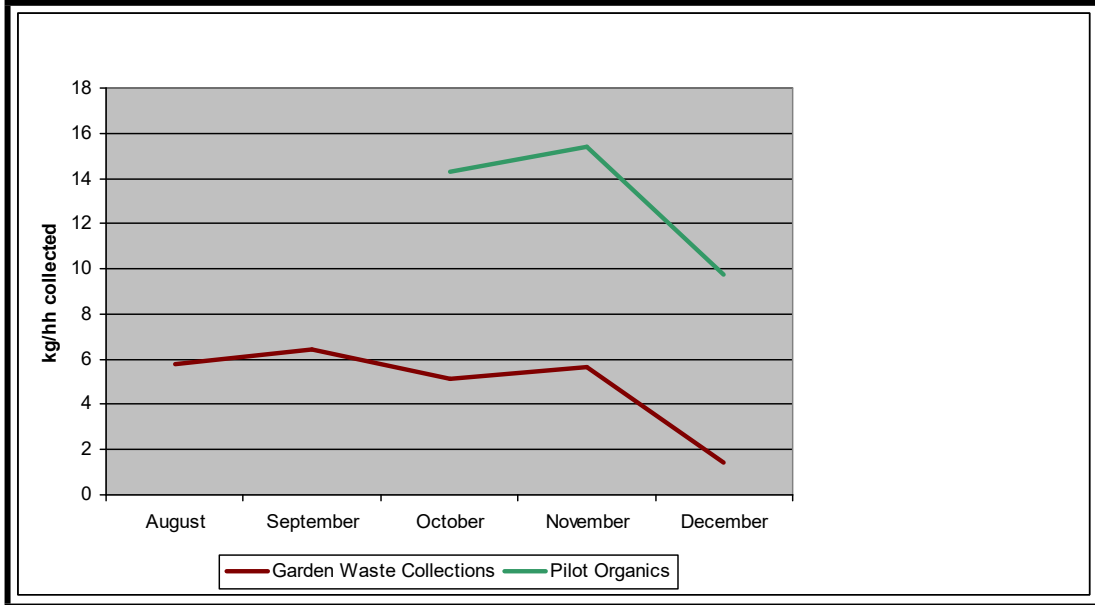
No:	Title:
1	Tonnages of garden waste
2	Graph of kg/hh collected

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Gill Davies, Strategic Director of Environment	
Report Author	Ian Smith, Acting Head of Sustainable Services	
Version	Final	
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Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Officer	21 February 2011	

Appendix 1

Tonnages of garden waste



Appendix 2

Graph of kg/hh collected

