

<b>MAYOR AND CABINET</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Matters referred by the Sustainable Development Select Committee – A Scrutiny Review of Lewisham’s Dry Recycling Policy and Municipal Waste Management Strategy	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	Item No. 11
<b>Ward</b>	All	
<b>Contributors</b>	Sustainable Development Select Committee	
<b>Class</b>	Open	Date: September 6 2006

## **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 This report provides details of the Sustainable Development Select Committee’s review which explored dry recyclables - looking at the policies, structures and procedures in place to support recycling in the borough. As part of this work the committee also scrutinised the contents of the Municipal Waste Management Strategy. The review was undertaken within a short period of time in order to have some influence and impact on the strategy and also the dry recyclable materials contract currently out to tender.
- 1.2 The Sustainable Development Select Committee chose to carry out a review into recycling, as a result of concerns raised by a number of residents in the borough. Residents in the borough have voiced some concerns about what was happening to the materials that they put forward for recycling. Many residents are of the belief that waste was simply being incinerated or exported to other countries and there was also confusion voiced over whether recyclables need to be separated or not.

## **2. Scope of the Review**

- 2.1 At the Sustainable Development Select Committee meeting on 1 June 2006, the committee set out their work programme for the year ahead and in this meeting set out what the Committee's review into the council's recycling policy and procedures would focus on. The committee agreed to explore:
- what happens to residents recycling once it has been collected
  - What the rationale is for co-mingled collection
  - What kind of auditing and monitoring systems are in place for companies that hold a contract with the Council to ensure that

- recyclable materials are actually being recycled
- What contingency plans are in place for when people begin to recycle more

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 Following the Committee's review of the Municipal Waste Management Strategy and their visit to the Cleanaway/ Greenwich Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) the Committee came up with the following recommendations:

- i. The council should enhance its communication campaign to help residents differentiate recycling collection from refuse collections, signs could be developed to be placed on collection vehicles. The wheelie bins used by staff collecting recycling should also be clearly marked with signs as part of the campaign.
- ii. A public education campaign should be developed to inform people about what happens to their recycling and information could be provided on measures they could take to avoid contamination
- iii. The auditing and monitoring process should be maintained at all levels for the company that is awarded the contract for dry recyclables in order to enforce verifiable standards in terms of the quality of produce, tracking transport, manufacturing at the other end etc.
- iv. Having explored the issues, the Committee came to understand and accept that exporting sorted recyclable materials is better than land filling. However, the Committee feels that Lewisham working with the GLA, London Remade and other bodies should push for the development of reprocessing facilities in London and the domestic market for recyclable materials also needs to be developed.

### **4. Work Undertaken**

4.1 The committee's review was time restricted in order to prospectively have an impact on key decisions to be taken by the Mayor and Cabinet. The committee held a meeting involving key officers and external witnesses and also visited a MRF.

## 4.2 Sustainable Development Select Committee Meeting - 1 June 2006

At the Committee's meeting on 1 June 2006, the Committee received a briefing from the Strategic Waste and Environment Manager who outlined the details of the Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

Ellen Struthers – Senior Project Manager and Jim Perkins – Capital Projects Programme Manager of London Remade were also in attendance to provide evidence on the work of London Remade and to brief the committee on work taking place on the development side of new processing plants in London.

A number of questions were raised by the Committee and detailed discussions with the Strategic Waste and Environment Manager and colleagues from London Remade have been summarised below:

### The recycling process

- The Committee were briefed on the recycling process. It was explained that the materials collected in the green boxes / bins are taken to the waste transfer station in New Cross and are then bulked and transported to the MRF facility in Greenwich where it is sorted using various pieces of machinery including lasers and conveyor belts and sorted out according to the type of material. Once sorted, the material is bailed and sold on to different markets. The Officer explained that owing to business sensitivities, contractors do not inform local authorities of final destinations.

### Wheelie Bins

- A Member asked if the green boxes are to be replaced with green wheelie bins in order to increase capacity, and if the pilot scheme is going to be extended borough wide. A Member commented that 2 smaller bins would encourage people to separate their waste.
- The Strategic Waste & Environment Manager said that the 240 litre bins are gradually being replaced with 180 litre ones in view of encouraging waste minimisation. There will also be verbal communication of the minimisation message from door-to-door in a pilot area should funding be successful. In terms of capacity, the Officer explained that there is sufficient capacity at the MRF but in the longer term, the focus will be on waste minimisation. From the point of view of the residents, there has to be a flexible approach to meet different needs.
- A Member commented that wheelie bins are unsightly and impractical

in certain locations, and asked if there are any long term alternatives. Members heard that alternatives have been tried, for example, black bags/ pillar boxes/ underground options/ chutes. Underground options and chutes are installed in new developments and these are costly.

### Collection Vehicles

- The Chair expressed that many residents were confused about the collection vehicles for recyclables as they look identical to the refuse vehicles, and residents are of the opinion that the recycling waste is going into refuse vehicles leading them to conclude that recycling is of no use. The Chair suggested that simple measures, for example, applying signs on vehicles, or painting them in a different colour would help the public to see the difference. The Officer said that officers are aware of the problem and that options are being considered to rectify the issues.

### Co-mingled Collections

- The Chair questioned the practice of co-mingled collections whereby dry recyclables are compressed, and said that the public does not understand its value, as prior to this, the message was for people to separate materials for recycling.
- Jim Perkins explained that this is done for economic and environmental reasons as it requires less collection vehicles which are expensive to purchase and less collections. The other advantage from the point of view of local authorities is that it increases tonnage and makes it easier for people to recycle. Ellen Struthers commented that co-mingling is also particularly cost effective on estates as it uses less bins.
- The Chair reiterated the need to clarify the process with simple messages for the benefit of the public.

### The produce and market

- Members discussed markets for dry recyclables, for instance, glass, and heard that glass collected as co-mingled is used for the market of aggregates, and that this market does not turn glass back into glass. From the point of view of local authorities, the key driver is to achieve tonnage. A Member asked whether there is a specification on glass in the contract. The Committee heard that the MRF is able to recover plastic but the technology does not exist to recover the different colours of glass.

- A Member commented that glass has the most potential for re-use and the Councillor asked if there is the opportunity in the contract to push it up, rather than down, the waste hierarchy. Jim Perkins confirmed that it would be expensive to implement as it would require changing the collection system and the installation new equipment in the MRF. It is a national issue, which the Government would find hard to tackle.
- The Chair asked if the percentage of non-recyclables coming out of the MRF is known. The Committee heard that Greenwich/ Cleanaway MRF has a tolerance level of 94%/ 95%, with no waste going to landfill. Contamination is very small at around 5% and the Council receives monthly figures of the MRF's outputs.

#### Auditing Trail and contract terms

- The Chair reiterated the lack of public confidence in the system, particularly, in relation to the final destination of recycled waste. The Chair asked if there is a robust monitoring system in place and if the contracts give any guarantees.
- The Strategic Waste & Environment Manager said that the tendered companies are aware that there is an auditing process, and that they need to comply with it and provide the right documentation. The Environment Agency is the regulatory body and undertakes checks of MRF sites. Further clarification through the tender process will take place on final destinations. There is also a compliance scheme currently being developed with the Environment Agency, Defra and contractors. The compliance schemes should be in operation by the time the contract is awarded. A Member asked whether the terms of the contract will include performance incentives to ensure that targets are being met, and even exceeded. The Officer said that the intention is to achieve the National targets with a focus on waste minimisation.

#### Green Waste

- A Member asked if composted waste is weighed. The Strategic Waste & Environment Manager said that there is tonnage data for green waste but not separate data for home composted waste. A consultant at Defra is currently working on a methodology. It is estimated that 15% of a Lewisham resident's domestic bin is garden waste and 15% food waste. The Councillor expressed disappointment that there is no figure available for composted waste, in view of the high level of composting carried out by schools in the borough.

### Single Waste Authority

- A Member asked how much support there is to move towards a Single Waste Authority. The Strategic Waste & Environment Manager explained that a meeting will be held in August with the Planning Division to discuss the implications of waste planning in relation to the needs identified by the Mayor of London. This will then be incorporated into the Waste Strategy.

### Opportunities for Improvement

- The Chair asked colleagues from London Remade for their views and comments on the Municipal Waste Management Strategy. Ellen Struthers explained that she has examined Lewisham's figures and believes there is room for improvement, particularly in relation to kerb collection on estates. She cited examples from other authorities that have successfully increased their recycling rates through measures such as home composting, waste minimisation and various other options to increase resident participation.
- As a result of the discussion Members decided that a visit to the Greenwich/Cleanaway MRF would be useful to help inform the review.

#### **4.3 Visit to Cleanaway/ Greenwich Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) – 31 July 2006**

4.4 On 31 July 2006, the committee visited the Greenwich/ Cleanaway MRF. The committee went on a guided tour conducted by Lorraine Graham, Sales and Marketing Manager at the MRF. Members were briefed on the history of the MRF, including general facts such as:

- the Greenwich MRF produces 75,000 tonnes per annum at 12 tonnes per hour
- the produce is manually checked following automatic sorting
- the MRF features patented technology which includes a machine of which there is only one other in the world
- the MRF is amongst the few in London that sorts glass
- the welfare of the staff is very much taken into account and they reside in cabins with noise insulation, air conditioning and padded floors.

4.5 Following the tour discussions took place and the committee raised questions regarding the quality of produce and exports. The committee

were advised by the Cleanaway's Sales and Marketing Manager that the MRF maintained the highest quality produce and only dry recyclables and not waste is exported. The dry recyclables are compiled for shipping by staff at the MRF and checked at either side of the delivery. It was stressed that quality is kept at a high standard as the UK's recycling industry is a profit driven one.

- 4.6 The visit to the MRF provided Members with the opportunity to witness the operation of sorting dry recyclables at first hand. Members observed the conditions and standards maintained at the MRF.

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Committee although time-restricted have met the criteria and objectives they set out in carrying out the review. Clarity regarding a number of concerns was given at the meeting. The Committee's visit to the Greenwich/ Cleanaway MRF was particularly re-assuring and informative in helping to see what exactly happens to materials that residents put forward for recycling.

- 5.2 The clarity in the committee's objectives for carrying out the review, the line of questioning and the witnesses called to give evidence has been particularly useful in the development of the committee's recommendations. The Committee's view is that the recommendations they have put forward as detailed in section 3 of this report are practical, realistic and easily implemented.

## **6. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report, however subsequent financial implications arising from the recommendations of the select committee will be reported in the response of the relevant Executive Director(s) to Mayor and Cabinet.

## **7. Legal Implications**

The Constitution provides for the Select Committees to report to the Mayor and Cabinet and for the Executive to consider the report within one month of receiving it.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

If you have any queries on this report, please contact Fola Beckley, Policy and Research Officer, extension 49976 or Kevin Flaherty, Head of Business and Committee, extension 49327.