

<p><b>LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT</b></p> <p><b>Meeting of the Executive</b> <b>14 February 2005</b></p> <p><b>Report from the Chair of Overview Committee</b></p>	
For discussion	All wards

**Report Title: Increasing Household Recycling in Brent**

Forward Plan Ref: PRU -04/05-12

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings of the Overview Task Group which ran from July to December 2004. The task group was asked to consider how household recycling rates in Brent could be increased. Work has already been carried out on recycling, including an Overview Task Group on Waste Management which made recommendations in July 2003, and the ongoing high level monitoring on improving recycling in Brent, which is carried out by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.
- 1.2 The Overview Committee did not wish to duplicate work already undertaken, and asked the task group to concentrate particularly on ways of raising awareness in order to encourage recycling and increasing the take up of the kerb-side collection service. This report therefore makes recommendations relating to increasing residents' awareness, primarily by improving functions around publicity and marketing, education and cross departmental working.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Executive Committee is asked to consider the following recommendations.
- (i) To agree that Brent Council should secure the cooperation of other West London boroughs to jointly lobby West London Waste and address the over complex system of charging currently practised, thereby improving the recycling incentive for all boroughs.
  - (ii) To agree that the Council should pursue a bolder approach to marketing the message that 'Recycling saves money' via the following mechanisms:
    - a) Reinforcing the message that recycling brings savings to the Council and residents, in all appropriate Council publicity material.

- b) Linking the recycling message to a stated reduction in the Council Tax. Council Tax documentation would carry the message 'How to reduce next years Council Tax by £x'
- c) Using competitions with prizes for good recycling performance, where the prize is Council spend on improving facilities for residents.
- (iii) To instruct Streetcare to enlist the help of the Communications unit in the design of all promotional material.
- (iv) To instruct Streetcare establish stronger links with other departments and work together to improve recycling, in particular with:
  - a) **Education**; to increase recycling in schools, by increasing the contact from the current 19 schools (out of 80), encouraging school governors to lobby for recycling initiatives, and developing better education programmes with teachers which support the national curriculum.
  - b) **Brent Housing Partnership**; to provide welcome packs for new residents with recycling information and marketing messages. To provide publicity material for communal notice boards in flats.
  - c) **Parks Department**; To consider demonstration of composting benefits on allotments.
- (v) To instruct Streetcare to enlist support from the following outside organisations;
  - a) Letting Agents to promote information
  - b) Retailers who produce much package waste, to assist with its recycling.
- (vi) To improve facilities by introducing the following measures;
  - a) On street recycling waste bins outside stations
  - b) More facilities for recycling plastics.
  - c) Improve the appearance and signage of the bring sites, which will remain important elements of recycling infrastructure.

### 3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Brent has invested in recycling facilities and residents in the Borough now have reasonably good opportunities to recycle. Brent has, however, a lower recycling rate than many authorities with comparable facilities. The challenge now is to encourage the public to make full use of the facilities which exist.
- 3.2 The Task Group believes that the Council has now to give the public the bold message that recycling is a key way in which the public can help avoid big increases in Council Tax. The information pack which goes with the annual Council Tax demand should be used to promote this message.
- 3.3 There are a number of ways in which Streetcare can step up its publicity campaign:
  - By making full use of the Communications Team in designing publicity;
  - By working together with other departments, including Education, Housing and Parks;

- By enlisting the support of outside bodies, including letting agents and also the retailers who are the source of much of the waste.
- 3.4 The way that existing facilities are operated can also have an impact on residents' willingness to use them. It is therefore important to improve the appearance of the existing bring sites (for example, by ensuring that they are emptied frequently and kept tidy) and to ensure that kerbside recycling collections are reliable.

#### **4.0 The importance of improving public education on recycling**

- 4.1 Brent's targets are to recycle at least 18% of household waste by 2005/06 and 30% by 2010. Brent has a financial incentive to improve recycling and, perhaps more important, failure to achieve the recycling targets may result in heavy penalties in future. In 2003/04 Brent recycled almost 9% of its household waste and performance so far suggests that about 12% might be achievable in 2004/05. There is still a mountain to climb.
- 4.2 There is scope for a major increase in recycling. The waste audit conducted in Brent (a survey of the contents of a sample of grey bins) shows that substantial tonnages of recyclable materials are still being disposed of with residual waste. Paper and card, compostable waste and glass still make up approximately 70% of the contents of the average grey bin.
- 4.3 In recent years Brent has made a significant investment in improving facilities for recycling. Brent has 130 bring sites and a further 30 paper recycling sites are planned. Household recycling collections now cover most low-rise properties and are on target to cover 50% of high-rise by March 2005. A new amenity site has opened at Abbey Road. From the spring of 2004 some 30,000 households have had a fortnightly garden waste collection.
- 4.4 Brent residents have reasonably good opportunities to recycle. A review of experience elsewhere shows that at least some other authorities with similar facilities for recycling have been achieving much higher recycling rates. The Audit Commission has published performance indicators for 2002/03, a year in which Brent recycled 6.6% of the household waste collected. In that year the average recycling rate for the boroughs in the West London Waste Authority area was 11.7%. In 2002/03 a number of authorities achieved rates in excess of 20%. Eastleigh achieved the highest rate of 27.9%. There are indications that in 2003/04 other authorities have achieved even higher recycling rates, with Daventry claiming 42%.
- 4.5 There is evidence that improvement can be achieved rapidly as a result of good public education campaigns. Dacorum Borough Council recently won a UK National Recycling Award for best recycling communication campaign after increasing its recycling rate from 12% to 27% in just 12 months.

#### **5.0 The financial benefit of increasing the recycling percentage**

- 5.1 In 2003/04 Brent paid a fixed levy to West London Waste of £5.37m. This levy covered the first 83,700 tonnes waste which Brent send to landfill. The 83,700 tonnes is based on the estimated number of households in Brent with a theoretical waste generation of 15.5 kilogrammes per household per week. Brent paid a marginal disposal charge of £36 per tonne (£37 in 2004/05) for any additional "Section 52(9)" waste (which is waste in excess of 83,700

tonnes which Brent sent to landfill, plus dry recyclable waste collected by Brent). The costs of sending waste to landfill are expected to increase sharply. West London Waste has warned that the cost of landfilling biodegradable waste could rise to as much as £100 per tonne by 2006/07.

- 5.2 In 2003/04 Brent paid Onyx £5.15m for general waste collection. This price is not tonnage dependent, but if the tonnage increased Brent might face a price increase when the contract was next put out to tender. In 2003/04 Onyx collected 107,000 tonnes. This implies that in addition to the “basic allowance” of 83,700 tonnes Brent sent a further 23,700 tonnes to landfill at the marginal charge of £36 per tonne.
- 5.3 In 2003/04 Brent paid ECT £900,000 for collecting dry recyclable materials through the green box collection at the door. Payment to ECT is based on the number of households served. The net cost could be expected to fall if the tonnage increased because of the increased income from the sale of materials. In 2003/04 ECT collected 5,580 tonnes.
- 5.4 In 2003/04 Brent paid £20,000 to the contractors who collect recyclable waste from the bring sites. The tonnage collected was 2,140 tonnes. The cost per tonne of collecting through bring sites is much lower than the cost of collecting at the door.
- 5.5 Under the new system for collecting garden waste Brent is paying £450,000 (£280,000 for the bin service to 30,000 households and £170,000 for the sack based service). The payment is based on the number of households served. Brent pays the composting plant £29 per tonne of material delivered, but this payment is reimbursed by West London Waste.
- 5.6 In 2003/04 West London Waste paid a net credit to Brent of £6 per tonne for each tonne of recyclable material collected through the green box system or at bring sites. The financial gain to Brent of diverting a tonne of waste from landfill to recycling is the £6 credit plus the marginal landfill cost avoided, a total gain of £43 per tonne.
- 5.7 We understand that many years ago there may have been a rationale for the complex charging system adopted by West London Waste. The charging system survives because it cannot be changed without the unanimous agreement of the participating boroughs, and there is usually one which believes that it gains from the charging system. We consider that a system which simply charged a flat rate per tonne for any material sent to landfill would give a clearer incentive to all boroughs, and that Brent should seek to get the agreement of the others for such a system.

## **6.0 Recycling strategy and the recycling targets**

- 6.1 Brent’s Municipal Waste Strategy, considered by the Executive in September 2004, and recognises the importance of the “waste hierarchy”, which stresses that the most effective solution may often be to reduce the generation of waste. Roughly one third of the waste collected in Brent could potentially be composted in garden compost bins, and need never enter the collection/disposal system. Promoting the adoption of garden composting is a very effective way of reducing the costs of collection and disposal.

- 6.2 The recycling rates currently calculated take no account of materials that are composted at home, or of materials that are re-used. Garden waste that is put in the garden waste collection bin (and handled at the expense of the taxpayers) counts towards the recycling targets, whereas similar waste composted at home is ignored. The targets do not encourage optimum behaviour.
- 6.3 The Task Group has assumed that the Council will wish to follow the sensible course of minimising the real costs of waste collection and disposal, and will therefore give high priority to encouraging composting at home.

## **7.0 Information and education activities of the Environment Directorate**

- 7.1 Within Streetcare the Waste Management and Recycling Team has five staff and is responsible for managing recycling contracts and for education and promotion. The team can use the advice of a member of the Communications Team who is attached to the Environment Directorate. A member of the Council's Diversity Team is to be seconded to Streetcare for 10 weeks to help promote the recycling message among Brent's diverse communities. Communications activities include:
- Work with schools. There is activity with 19 schools which have recycling bins, and a leaflet has been produced describing how recycling could be introduced to the curriculum. An element of the strategy is to influence pupils, who might in turn influence their families;
  - Production of leaflets, including *Brent Recycling – Get Sorting* which is an introduction to the facilities available and has been distributed to households. The "Get Sorting" slogan aim to give the message that the public should separate recyclable waste from other waste;
  - The Council's website which gives information on facilities available;
  - Posters at 15 Adshel locations in the borough;
  - The Waste Awareness Campaign. A consultancy was engaged to carry out a door knocking exercise and contact 10,000 households in areas which have a low recycling rate. The project was carried out between June 2004 and November 2004. The aims of the exercise included
    - getting the recycling message over to households who have not been influenced by leaflets etc
    - market research (understanding why residents are not recycling)
    - Identifying households who need a recycling box or a green bin and arranging for it to be provided.
- 7.2 A preliminary report from the Waste Awareness Campaign is now available. The draft provides insight into residents' attitudes to the kerbside recycling collection and to the bring sites. The main conclusions are summarised in Appendix 1. The final report from the Waste Awareness Campaign was produced after the Task Group completed its work, and is available from the Streetcare Department.
- 7.3 Recycling rates vary in different parts of the borough. The Task Group has discussed the data with officers. The reasons for the variations are not obvious.

## **8.0 Lessons from the experience of other authorities**

We have reviewed the activities of other local authorities.

- 8.1 Hampshire has achieved generally high recycling rates and has beacon council status. There has been a high degree of co-operation between the county, the districts and the unitary authorities to implement a strategy "Project Integra" designed to achieve 40% recycling of household waste by 2005. A promotional campaign "War on Waste" was launched in 1996 and focuses on waste minimisation and recycling. There is a single Project Integra website which is linked to the websites of the various authorities. The website differs from that of Brent in that it promotes a recycling message, rather than just giving the facts on the facilities available.
- 8.2 The evidence from other authorities suggests that there is not one big answer to the problem of education and information. Successful authorities have used a number of channels and kept up the effort over a number of years.
- 8.3 Barnet, which currently claims a 15% recycling rate, has been delivering a more aggressive message to residents. It is using powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to legally require residents to use particular containers for different waste materials, and claims that there are powers to impose fines of up to £1,000. "Compulsory Recycling" has been introduced in four wards which already have high participation in the recycling box scheme. Street Enforcement Officers monitor which households do not participate in the recycling box scheme, and letters are distributed to households which do not participate. The scheme is publicised in Barnet's magazine. As a result Barnet claims to have received 4,000 telephone calls from residents and delivered 2,200 recycling boxes to households which have requested them. No-one has yet been taken to court.
- 8.4 The Task Group concluded that Brent should not follow Barnet's example – at least until there have been measures to step up publicity about recycling and there has been time to build up familiarity with the new facilities.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

### **9.1 The central message – recycling has a financial benefit**

- 9.2 Improved facilities for recycling are now in place and the Borough needs to become bolder in conveying to the public the message about how important it is to make full use of them. A marketing campaign succeeds by "selling the benefits". In this case the benefit is that better participation in recycling will be the equivalent of a stated reduction in Council Tax. The best time to push this message is with the 2004/06 Council Tax demand. The Council Tax documentation should carry the bold message "How to reduce next year's Council Tax by £x".
- 9.3 (If Brent were to achieve a similar improvement to that achieved by Dacorum, and increase its recycling rate from 12% to 27% in a year the benefit can be estimated, on the basis of current tonnages and charge rates, at approximately £800,000 per year. If landfill charges the benefit may be reasonably claimed as "equivalent to £10 off the Council Tax".)

9.4 The central message about savings which benefit all citizens should be reinforced wherever possible in publicity material. Competitions can help. One possibility would be a “prize” for areas with good recycling performance – where the prize is Council spending on improved facilities for residents. The objective of the exercise would be to make the point that the Council can provide better facilities if it makes savings on waste management.

#### **9.5 Make full use of the Communications Team**

9.6 We recommend that Streetcare enlist the help of the communications team in the design of all promotional material. The Brent Magazine should be used to promote recycling efforts.

#### **9.7 Departments working together**

9.8 The various departments of the Council now need to make greater efforts to work together to improve recycling. Potential appears to exist for co-operation in the following areas:

- Education.
  - At present only 19 schools (out of 80) are involved in educational activities on recycling. Unsorted waste generated by schools is commercial waste and the schools pay private contractors to collect it. The borough will provide recycling bins to schools, which should allow them to cut the costs of commercial waste disposal. Councillors who sit on school governing bodies should make sure that schools take advantage of recycling opportunities
  - Streetcare should enlist the help of the curriculum advisers on science and citizenship to design better education programmes for schools which support the national curriculum
  
- Brent Housing Partnership
  - Providing welcome packs for new tenants which explain and sell the benefits of the recycling facilities available locally
  - Providing publicity material for the communal notice boards in flats
  
- The allotments officer in Parks Department
  - other authorities have used allotments to demonstrate the methods and techniques of composting at home

#### **9.9 Working with outside organisations**

9.10 We think there is scope for Streetcare to enlist support from the following organisations:

- Letting agents, who could be asked to distribute promotional material to new tenants (a welcome pack)
- Retailers who are the source of much packaging waste (for example, the cardboard that comes with flat pack furniture) and should be willing to help promote its recycling

## **9.11 Further improvements in facilities**

9.12 The Task Group was not primarily concerned with facilities, but we considered that there were three potential improvements which would be particularly useful:

- On-street recycling waste bins. Some London boroughs have started to place bins for newspapers outside stations and we consider that this would be valuable at the busier stations in Brent. There may also be scope for bins designated for cans;
- More facilities for recycling plastics. Recycling plastics has not been a priority because plastic waste tends to be low density and is expensive to handle. There is, however, a demand by members of the public for facilities to recycle plastics. It is important now to improve public participation in recycling, and better facilities for recycling of plastics might help enlist public support;
- Improving the appearance and signage of the bring sites. This was a recommendation of the earlier Overview task group on recycling. The bring sites are a low cost way to collect dry recyclables. The report of the Waste Awareness Campaign consultants includes market research which shows that residents find these sites unattractive, especially when they are not emptied frequently or kept tidy.

## **Background Papers**

'Increasing Brent's Recycling Rates' – Action Plan

Waste Awareness Campaign, Final report

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Main findings from Preliminary Report from the Waste Awareness Campaign**

The consultancy team knocked on over 30,000 doors in areas which have a kerbside recycling collection (the green box) but where there was low participation. 10,000 questionnaires were completed.

#### **Kerbside recycling**

Two thirds of the residents had a green box. As a result of the campaign 2,800 additional boxes were distributed.

63% of residents (i.e. most of those with a green box) claimed to participate in the kerbside recycling scheme. Given the low recycling rate this is a surprisingly high figure. The Preliminary Report does not explore whether some residents participate only occasionally. The main reasons for non-participation given by residents without green boxes were:

- Did not know about the service (30%)
- Cannot be bothered or not interested (19%)
- Elderly and unable to participate
- Had just moved into the area
- Thought that the materials collected were not recycled.

Suggestions for improving the service included:

- Provide bigger boxes
- Provide lids for the boxes
- Collect plastics and cardboard at the door;
- Improve the reliability of the box collections.

#### **Bring sites**

Of the 10,000 residents responding to the questionnaire some 31% used the bring sites. Residents found the kerbside collection more convenient. Suggestions for improving the bring sites included:

- The sites should be emptied (or tidied) more frequently. When the recycling banks get full and untidy residents find them unattractive;
- The sites should be more local;
- Better signage is needed.

## **Garden waste**

Most of the areas surveyed received green wheelie bin collections. 78% of respondents separated garden waste. The green wheelie bin was by far the most important means of disposal. Seven percent of residents questioned composted, and some used the biodegradable bag service. Some participants in focus groups thought that the compost bins supplied by the Council were too big and intrusive.

## **Other ideas from focus groups**

Other ideas from focus groups included:

- The Borough should advertise the cost of waste disposal, and the financial benefit of recycling;
  - Some respondents proposed penalties for not recycling;
  - Supermarkets should be pressed to reduce the waste they produce;
- Education of children was seen as a way to getting the message to parents.