Services Select Committee
Household Waste, Recycling and Composting
Working Group Report
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FOREWORD

This report is an important addition to our knowledge of household waste, recycling and composting. The Working Group have examined the subject with great thoroughness, by visiting other councils and talking to experts and officers. They have set the issues raised in the context of affordability and the environment to come up with three options that allow the Committee as a whole to discuss the subject fully.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Working Group and Officers for their hard work and for producing such a comprehensive report.

Cllr. Bryan Harrod (Chairman of the Services Select Committee)

INTRODUCTION

A small working group was formed from Members of the Services Select Committee early in 2010 who commissioned a report on a wide ranging study of the current waste collection/recycling process.

Information obtained from a large number of local authorities has greatly helped the Group in their deliberations (see Appendix 3).

The Group were most fortunate to receive the help and guidance from a number of Sevenoaks District Council Officers including Richard Wilson, Charles Nouhan, Ian Finch and Ross Keatley. Paul Vanston from the Kent Waste Partnership and Officers from Staffordshire Moorlands District Council also provided information to build up the big picture. Without their combined help this report would not have happened.

I would also like to thank my fellow Members of the Working Group Cllr. Mrs Broomby and Cllr. Bruce and the Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Hunter for their positive approach and the hard work in making this report a very worthwhile effort of scrutiny.

Cllr. Richard J. Davison (Chairman of the Working Group)
TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Group agreed the following terms of Reference:

- To carry out an in-depth study of the Council’s collection and processing of household waste, recycling and composting within the District.

- To investigate what services other councils provide to achieve a higher rate of recycling and composting than Sevenoaks District Council, and;

- To report back to the Services Select Committee with avenues for future activity.
### METHODOLOGY

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**Meeting 4:** 21.04.10  
**Consideration of visit to SMDC**  
**Draft Report**  
**Richard Wilson – Head of Environmental and Operation Services**

**Meeting 5:** 11.05.10  
**Provisional end of year recycling performance.**  
**Analysis of recycling per activity – 2008/09 and 2009/10 comparison.**  
**Consideration of draft report**  
**Draft Report.**  
**Richard Wilson – Head of Environmental and Operation Services**

**Meeting 6:** 23.06.10  
**Discussion of proposed options to the Services Select Committee.**  
**Finalisation of report.**  
**Draft Report**  
**Richard Wilson – Head of Environmental and Operation Services**

**Meeting 7:** 04.08.10  
**Final questions to Officers**  
**Finalisation of report.**  
**Draft Report with all completed appendices.**  
**Richard Wilson – Head of Environmental and Operation Services**  
**Recycling Manager – Charles Nouhan**  
**Paul Vanston – Kent Waste Partnership Manager**
BACKGROUND

1 At the meeting of the Services Select Committee on 12 January 2010, the Committee agreed to establish a Working Group to consider options for improving the household waste, recycling and composting service.

2 The Council has a target to reach a recycling/composting rate of 37% of total waste in the Sevenoaks District as part of the commitment to the Kent Joint Household Waste Strategy and the Kent Agreement Public Service Local Area Agreement. These targets require a 42% recycling/composting rate across Kent by 2011/12. The National targets for recycling and composting of household waste are 40% by 2010; 45% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. The Kent Waste Partnership has agreed that every effort should be made to meet these National targets across the County.

3 In 2008/09 the Council achieved a rate of recycling and composting of 32.15%. This was a small decrease from 2007/8, the Council’s rate for 2009/10 was 31.62% (See Appendix 1). Significant improvement is, therefore, needed if the Council is to meet its target and to positively contribute to the national strategy targets.

Current Service – Weekly Collections

4 The Council’s standard waste and recycling service collects residual waste and dry recycling, (i.e. paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, cans and tins) from all households in the district once a week. This is provided free of charge. The Council delivers 20 black sacks every 20 weeks and 25 clear sacks every 20 weeks. Residents are able to purchase additional sacks from the Council’s main offices.

5 As well as the kerbside collection of dry recycling the Council also operates 50 ‘bring-to-recycle’ sites across the district (See Appendix 2). Residents can recycle glass bottles, jars, newspapers and magazines and cardboard that is too large for kerbside collection. There is also the provision to collect clothing, shoes, books, DVDs and CDs.

6 In addition, a fortnightly garden waste service is also operated by the Council which households pay for. Households have the option of buying 25 garden waste sacks for £11 or buying a permit for a garden waste bin, which costs £41 per annum. The Council currently has 5,342 (mid-August 2010) households signed up to the scheme and sold 98,400 sacks in 2009/10.

7 Owing to the capital investment needed to purchase new vehicles and additional bins for all households in the district and the on-going
revenue costs of providing the service the Council currently does not provide an organic waste collection service (garden and food waste) to all residents in the District.

Weekly Collections of Alternate Materials

8 In order to provide a service to collect residual waste, dry recycling and organic waste some local authorities have introduced a service of weekly collections of alternate materials (WCAM). This has enabled higher rates of recycling while still seeking to deliver the service at an acceptable cost to the public.

9 The service collects residual waste from households on week 1 and organic waste and dry recyclables on week 2. Residents concerns of food waste not being collected for two weeks can be overcome by giving residents the option of placing food in the residual waste collection on week 1 and in the organic collection on week 2 at the same time as dry recyclables are collected. Although the Sevenoaks district does not have a high proportion of multiple occupancy buildings, this option can be used to overcome concerns surrounding lack of storage facilities and those relating to hygiene and pests.

10 Similar services are currently in use across Kent by Canterbury City Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. All three of these authorities have recycling rates of 46%-47%. Further information on the service provided by these authorities can be found at Appendix 3.

11 The Council’s current policy is to retain weekly collections. The introduction of a WCAM scheme would have significant initial capital cost implications as each household would have to be provided with additional bins, and bin lift mechanisms would have to be fitted to the refuse freighters.

12 Information on potential costs to the Council are detailed in Appendix 4.

Organic Waste Collection and Home Composting

13 A fortnightly collection of garden and food waste could be provided to all residents. In practice some households would not make use of the garden waste collection service where, because of the type of residence (flats etc) the dwelling has no garden. Cardboard and paper can also be put into the garden/food waste wheeled bin. A 240 litre wheeled bin would be provided to all participating residents. Residents would be encouraged to wrap food waste in paper, and cover over with garden waste or cardboard to prevent odour and fly nuisance.
Residents who did not wish to wait for two weeks before a collection of food waste could still have a weekly collection of food waste by placing food in the garden/food bin one week and in the black sack/residual waste bin on the second week. A kitchen caddie (5 or 7 litre) would be provided to residents to store food waste indoors, for transfer to the garden/food waste wheeled bin. The garden/food waste would be taken to the Blaise Farm In-Vessel Composting Plant in West Malling where it is converted to a useable agricultural compost for local farm use. The disposal costs would be met by Kent County Council as the disposal Authority.

Financial Position

The Council budgets to spend £2.2m (net) from its revenue budget on refuse collection and recycling. In addition, vehicle replacements are funded through a separate fund, which is topped up annually from the fleet management account by depreciation charges for each vehicle purchased.

The Council has very limited capital receipts, so options for funding future investment are:

- Revenue Budget - through approval as part of the 2011/12 budget round;
- Borrowing – the costs of which (principal and interest payments) would fall on the revenue account; or
- A contribution from reserves – the Vehicle Replacement Fund only has adequate resources to fund existing arrangements, therefore any contribution would have to come from the General Fund Reserve.

The Financial Plan already assumes significant levels of savings in future years and that council tax increases for 2011/12 and 2012/13 are likely to be frozen. Any increase in revenue spending on this service is likely therefore to have to be matched by reduced spending elsewhere in the budget.

Kent Waste Partnership

The significant financial, performance and environmental issues facing SDC are similar to those faced by all 13 Kent councils. Whilst acting individually the 13 councils can make some inroads to solving problems, there has been (and continues to be) significant merit in acting jointly to secure greater impacts and benefits. The Kent Waste Partnership (KWP) has developed a national reputation in the last two
It is noted that SDC has played an active and central role in supporting the development of the KWP to where it currently stands. However, it is also noted that the 'waste agenda' is having to change in response to the national deficit. This requires an approach from the KWP that closely matches the current and future needs of the 13 constituent councils and Kent taxpayers.

Examples of recent KWP activities that support SDC's interests include:

- Tackling the costs of dealing with waste through forging productive relationships with other sectors involved in waste (e.g. retail, packaging, and re-processing). A KWP project with key players in these sectors is going forward to see what taxpayer costs could be reduced if the sectors joined-up their activities more co-operatively.

- Securing potential funding from Marks & Spencer plc of £1.25 million over five years to support the Kent councils. This could include tackling 'infrastructure gaps' that could, if solved, reduce net revenue costs for councils.

- Influencing DEFRA through the KWP's membership on expert panels for waste reduction, food waste and behavioural change.

- Being a key player with DEFRA on influencing a revamp of the Controlled Waste Regulations. If this comes to fruition, as DEFRA has been persuaded to take forward, then councils across the country will reduce current net costs by millions of pounds, and avoid new costs, also of millions of pounds, that could otherwise have arisen.

- Provision of the KWP Service Improvement Plan (SIP) Fund in 2009/10 and 2010/11. SDC has already benefited from securing £21K to replace cardboard bring banks. There is also a current SDC bid for £269K to take forward the proposals on organic waste collections.

- Reducing costs through the provision of shared services including the sale of home compost bins (with Wrap); campaigning activities such as the Love Food Hate Waste programme that seeks to reduce amounts and costs of waste; and putting in place a Public Engagement Team for all 12 Kent district councils' (excluding Kent County Council) use in supporting recycling services.

The scale of current and future challenges, particularly those that relate to the national deficit, require a renewed focus on costs and efficiency. The KWP’s agenda has been swift to focus attention on these issues in
the interests of the 13 councils, including SDC. Councils are likely to be positioned between a 'rock and a hard place' in a very short time. As a minimum, therefore, there is a need for the 13 Kent councils to discuss potential decisions on waste issues consultatively, constructively and co-operatively.

22 The need for co-operation is especially important if there is a desire to avoid Kent residents being drawn-in to any unintended crossfire between councils that could make public decisions in isolation of each others' interests. The Group believes that the KWP and other such avenues of dialogues between the councils (whether informal or formal), could offer a way forward to helping to present a joined-up approach to the public on how the Kent councils are collectively managing the impacts of the national deficit.

23 In addition, the medium and long term impacts of the national deficit are likely to place restrictions on all services. This must include waste and recycling services as it is among the highest spending areas of local government as a whole after education and social services. Waste and recycling services are also often among the highest profile of all district council functions. Whilst SDC is able to directly influence its own net revenue on waste of around £2.2million, it has to be acknowledged that the greatest 'pot' of funding on waste of around £70million in 2010/11 is held by Kent County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA).

24 Currently, only KCC directly controls how that £70million is spent despite the collection of Council Tax from residents being administered by the district councils and that the Kent Taxpayer has to be placed front-and-centre of how decisions are made on services and funding, which requires a joint approach between the Waste Collection Authority (WCA) and the WDA. Thus, given the severe restraints on finances that are arriving, the Group believes that avenues must be explored whereby SDC is able to exert greater influence, and control, over all waste and recycling funds, including those held by the WDA, if the Council's and Kent taxpayers' interests are to be best served.

25 On the basis of the activities and achievements to date, and the potential to resolve the challenges facing SDC and the Kent councils more widely, the view of the Group is that SDC's interests are best supported by continuing to influence the direction of initiatives undertaken though the auspices of the KWP.
FINDINGS

Collection of organic waste

26 The potential to make the biggest impact on rates of recycling is through the collection of additional materials. A shift to the collection of organic waste from all households in the district would potentially push recycling rates to approximately 50%. An audit on residual (black sack) waste carried out on behalf of Kent Waste Partnership in December 2008 found that 35% (by weight) of material in the residual waste stream was food waste, the next highest was paper and card at 17%. All food waste could be composted in an In-Vessel Composting Plant.

27 In order for SDC to collect organic waste an additional bin would need to be provided to all households in the district to collect garden waste, cardboard and food waste. This waste could then be processed into compost material at Blaise Farm in West Malling. The purchase of new bins for all households would involve a one off capital cost as set out in Appendix 4.

28 The Council could no longer charge for the collection of garden waste if food waste was added. The current pre-paid service to 5,342 (mid-August 2010) households generated £226,232 in 2009/10 and £45,098 from the sale of sacks, this totalled £271,241 in 2009/10.

29 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) both operate a system of collecting organic waste from all households in their districts. This is done with their food and green waste on a fortnightly collection basis and the authorities had recycling rates of 47.25% and 46.23% in 2009/10 respectively (See Appendix 3).

30 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) had recycling rates of 61.9% in 2009/10. In their presentation to Members it was explained that 42.6% of their total recycled material consisted of organic waste. Before the introduction of a district wide service to collect organic waste from all households SMDC’s recycling rate was 35.19%. The cost to deliver the service by SMDC was £66.49 per household in 2009/10, compared with a cost for SDC of £44.09 in the same year.

31 The systems operated by TWBC and TMBC to collect organic waste are still relatively new schemes within these local authorities whereas the scheme in SMDC has been running several years and is much established. This could account for the difference in recycling rates, as the systems become more establishing in TWBC and TMBC it is expected their recycling rates will continue to rise.
32 Given this evidence, it is clear that the collection and recycling of food waste from all households in the district would significantly increase recycling rates. However, introducing a separate collection of food waste to approximately 48,000 households, whilst maintaining the existing weekly collection of black and clear sack waste, would have significant cost implications in relation to one-off vehicle and container provision, and potential interest costs from borrowing and annual running costs of operating separate collection arrangements for organic waste (See Appendix 4).

33 The Council decided not to bid for funding for a Food Waste collection scheme in 2008/09 as its current financial commitments meant that it was unlikely it would be able to continue funding such a scheme itself, once the short-term external funding had ended.

Switch of Service/Weekly Collection of Alternate Materials

34 To introduce a new additional service to increase the recycling/composting rate above the Council’s current levels whilst still maintaining the existing weekly collection of residual waste and dry recyclables would have significant cost implications for the refuse collection budget. The Group discussed potential changes to the service currently provided by SDC and looked at how the Council could seek to improve its recycling rates through the collection of additional materials, while still keeping costs at acceptable levels to residents.

35 Extending the existing fortnightly collection scheme for garden waste to all households who wish to participate could increase the overall recycling/composting rate significantly. Currently 8% of overall recycling in the district is achieved through the collection of garden waste from 5,342 (mid-August 2010) households. If this service was rolled out, district wide, to 48,000 households, with the addition of food waste collections, the Council could expect a rise of recycling rates of approximately 20%. This would need to be a non-chargeable scheme and food waste could be added to the garden waste for composting.

36 There is currently no budget available to fund any additional recycling services. As explained above some local authorities have sought to increase their performance on recycling and composting without significantly increasing their revenue expenditure through the introduction of a service of WCAM.

37 The authorities in Kent that currently achieve above a 45% recycling rate are Canterbury City Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. This is achieved without significantly increasing their collection costs as they have introduced this collection service, whereby residual waste is collected one week,
and organic waste the next, utilising the same vehicles and crews. Dry recyclables are collected fortnightly by a separate vehicle/crew.

38 A comparison of the costs to introduce a collection of organic waste alongside the current residual collection services against a change of service to a service of WCAM can be found at Appendix 4.

Sustainable/Environmental Recycling

39 As part of its review the Group discussed a number of sustainability and environmental implications that it felt were important to consider when making its recommendations.

40 The Group considered alternative measures to incinerating residual waste when it could otherwise be recycled/composted in a more environmentally sound manner. It was noted that the use of composting for certain materials was considered a more environmentally sound option as resources could be recovered. However the current disposal methods for the Council’s residual waste used the Energy from Waste plant at Allington, where all residual waste was recovered to energy [electricity].

41 Food waste was also a less suitable material for recovery to energy by incineration due to the high moisture content.

42 The Group were also mindful that the Council should only collect materials for which there was a viable UK market. It was considered important that materials were not stock-piled, for example the Council did not intend to collect low-grade plastics (yogurt pots, margarine tubs and meat packaging) as there was no UK market.

43 The issue of sustainable recycling was discussed in detail by the Group. They felt it was fundamentally important for the Council to have an audit trail of where all its waste and recycling was sent and processed.

44 Although members had been very impressed by the service provided by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and the communications work they had undertaken, it was felt that their processes raised some environmental and sustainability concerns that:

- SMDC had a waste contact with Viridor Resource Management who collected all dry recycling directly from their depot site in Leek and processed it for them. This included low grade plastics, which made up approximately 25% of all plastics collected. These materials were processed outside of the UK in Europe and the Far-East where the audit trail was uncertain. Although the plastics
were disposed of by a third party the Group did not feel this was an appropriate sustainable approach to recycling.

- Viridor currently transports all dry materials to the Crayford Material Recovery Facility (MRF) from the depot site in Leek, this was approximately a 150 mile journey. The Group felt that the distance of travel, the potential carbon footprint and environmental impact were not sound.

- Glass was also recycled at the kerbside and processed using the MRF, where it was then sent onto Aggregate and used in the production of asphalt. The Group felt that this was a missed opportunity as glass reprocessing was a more environmentally friendly process than the production of new glass from raw materials. Glass could also be recycled into new products time and time again.

Improvements to the existing service

45 The Group also considered what recommendations could be made to improve the existing service if no fundamental changes were made to the materials that the Council currently collected or the frequency and type of collection service provided by the Council.

46 The Group discussed improvements that could be made to the ‘capture rates’ for recycling across the District. A recent residual waste audit and investigation on existing participation and capture rates from the Council’s dry recycling service, indicated only very marginal improvements in dry recycling rates could be achieved. The step change to bring recycling/composting rates into the higher quartile could only be achieved by collecting organic waste [food and garden waste] from all households.

47 The Group acknowledged that residents generally participated well in the current recycling services provided by the Council and consideration was given to any improvements that could potentially be made to participation and capture rates. Some of these issues had already been investigated through a Doorstep public consultation carried out on behalf of KWP. It was also suggested that work could be done through the Citizens’ Panel, to further investigate the barriers which stopped residents recycling and look at what improvements could be made. There was also the potential to review the literature that was distributed to residents.

48 The Council had conducted a refuse collection round optimisation review in 2009/10 and found that the existing rounds were only 82% efficient. Detailed analysis to ensure collection routes and methods of
collection are fully optimised had enabled the Council to save one
collection round. Savings of £100,000 have been built into the Council’s
2010/11 budget as part of the work of the review.

49 The potential implications of making no significant changes to the
collection of materials include:

- The recycling rate will remain around 32%.
- This is below the National average.
- It keeps Sevenoaks in the medium to lower quartile within Kent.
- In the Organisational Assessment (December 2009) the Audit
  Commission drew attention to SDC’s recycling rate.

Thus there is the risk that we may be perceived by our residents, other
Kent local authorities and the Audit Commission as performing less
than adequately.

The counters to this view would be:

- The considerable cost required in making a step change in the
  percentage recycled.
- Kent does not need to take further action to reduce landfill as non
  recycled detritus goes to produce energy from waste.
- Our residents have indicated that they prefer the weekly collection
  of all materials and are largely satisfied with our service.

Public Opinion/Communications

49 The Group considered satisfaction rates from 2009 and noted that SDC
had satisfaction rates of 91% for residual waste collection and a lower
figure of 71% for recycling services, but both showed good satisfaction
amongst residents. SMDC had satisfaction rates of 79% for residual
waste and 82% for recycling services. Both SDC and SMDC were
above the national average rates of 77% and 70% respectively. The
Group agreed that it was important to maintain its satisfaction rates if it
were to undertake a change of service within the district.

50 The Group was impressed by the communications work undertaken by
SMDC’s during their change of service and it was noted that they had
won the “Best Local Authority Initiative” award at the 2008 National
Recycling Awards for its service launch and promotions in November
2008.
It was noted that work had been undertaken by SMDC, during its change of service to WCAM, at:

- 21 Road show events with a dedicated exhibition vehicle and example bins.
- Articles in the council’s monthly newsletter.
- Radio interviews in with Senior Officers.
- Press briefings and a feedback session on the new service after 6 weeks.
- A dedicated training event for elected Members to enable them to communicate the service to residents.
- Branding on all collection staff uniforms and vehicles.
- A detailed information pack was provided to all homes alongside the delivery of the additional bin
- A production DVD was played in the Council reception and at the Road shows.

It was acknowledged that this process had been resource intensive, with significant costs implications for SMDC.

The Group considered it vital to have the support of residents and work to ensure that they were communicated with at all stages of any changes to the service.

Prior to any change from the current method of collection, public opinion should be gauged further on this issue and a survey could be conducted utilising the Council’s Citizens’ Panel. Work could also be undertaken through ‘In-Shape’ the Council’s publication to all households in the District.
OPTIONS

54  **Option 1**: Introduce a fortnightly collection of food and garden waste from all households in the district.
   - Continue a weekly collection of residual waste
   - Continue to collect dry recyclables once a week alongside residual waste.

55  **Option 2**: Change to a system of weekly collections of alternate materials.
   - Residual waste is collected on week 1.
   - Food/garden waste and dry recyclables are collected on week 2.

56  **Option 3**: Maintain existing waste and recycling services in the district.
   - The Council could continue to make small increases to existing service, for example through increases to capture rates.

*Options 1 & 2 would be expected to deliver an increase to recycling of 20 percentage points which would raise the overall rate of recycling to over 50%, further information on costs can be found at Appendix 4.

**Option 3 maintains the Council’s existing service.
CONCLUSIONS

57 There are currently two critical factors which greatly affect the present operation of the waste collection/recycling service at SDC; namely current and future targets for recycling and the extremely tight financial situation.

58 In addition the government has announced it will be conducting a review of waste collection and recycling activities in the near future. The result of this could fundamentally change our strategy and operational processes.

59 SDC have already surmounted one major hurdle which has been at the top of the Government’s agenda for sometime; namely the reduction of residual waste to landfill.

60 If the Council is to achieve a step change in its recycling/composting performance then a focus would have to be placed on the collection of organic waste [food and garden waste] to significantly improve its overall performance.

61 Within the options section three possible future scenarios are set out and costed with the expectation that, sometime in the future, when external conditions change the Council can move forward to develop an improved system for waste collection and recycling. However the Group has agreed that prior to any change from the current collection service, public opinion should be gauged further on this issue.

62 Constrained by current, and possible future, external forces, it would not be sensible for this report to define a single preferred option for the Council to follow in the immediate future.