

**NORTH LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY**

**REPORT TITLE:**

**THE COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
REFUSE COLLECTION INQUIRY**

**REPORT OF:**

**HEAD OF WASTE STRATEGY AND CONTRACTS**

**FOR SUBMISSION TO:**

**AUTHORITY MEETING**

**DATE:**

**27<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

**SUMMARY OF REPORT:**

This report provides members with an outline of the House of Commons Committee for Communities and Local Government Inquiry into refuse collection and provides a copy of the response from the Authority for noting. The response is set out according to the guidance provided by the Committee and as referenced at the end of this report. The draft response was circulated to all political group leaders for comments before being sent to the Select Committee, as agreed at the last Authority meeting.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Authority is recommended to note the response to the House of Commons Committee for Communities and Local Government Inquiry into Refuse Collection as approved by political group leaders and enclosed in Appendix 1.

**Signed by Head of Waste Strategy  
and Contracts**

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**Date:**

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 As reported at the last Authority meeting, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into refuse collection. The inquiry includes consideration of the following matters:

- The ways in which local authorities collect and measure waste.  
Topics which may be considered within this include:
  - **Collection methods:** the contribution made to waste minimisation by the timing, frequency and type of collection in both urban and rural areas and in areas characterised by differing housing types, such as flats.
  - **Joint working,** cost sharing and the potential for co-operation between waste collection authorities.
- The contribution collection methods may make towards waste minimisation, effective recycling and the reduction of waste going to landfill and incineration.  
Topics which may be considered within this include:
  - **Information programmes:** how the Department of Communities and Local Government and local authorities can contribute to reducing the amount of waste reaching collection through providing information to households, consumers and producers.
  - **Technology:** the contribution of collection technologies to waste minimisation, reduction and setting.
- How decisions taken by local authorities about collection/ disposal methods aid or constrain future collection methods and minimisation.  
Topics which may be considered within this include:
  - **Planning for future sorting, collection and disposal facilities.**
- Financing.  
Topics which may be considered within this include:
  - The **funding of waste collection**, including the implications of variable charging for waste collection.
  - Comparative evidence of how **charging** affects the minimisation behaviour of businesses who pay for removal of commercial waste.

1.2 The Committee invited submissions from all interested parties on these and related issues from interested organisations and individuals.

- 1.3 As the announcement of this Inquiry was made just two days before the finalisation of all Authority reports for the April meeting, it was not possible to consider the Select Committee's invitation, prior to the last Authority meeting, or to consider whether it would be appropriate for the Authority to prepare a submission.
- 1.4 At that Authority meeting however, Members agreed that officers should draft a response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry. It was agreed that this response should, in particular, advise the Committee of the Authority's concerns about the proliferation of materials in waste that councils are obliged to collect and the immense difficulty this creates in identifying viable markets for the genuine recycling of these materials.
- 1.5 It was also agreed that the draft response should be circulated to all political group leaders for comments before being sent to the Select Committee. This has happened since the last meeting, and the response attached is that which was agreed, and is therefore for noting. The response is set out in line with guidance from the Committee.

## **2.0 KEY ISSUES OF THE RESPONSE**

- 2.1 The response sets out the background to the Authority and then focuses on a few key areas:

### Collection Methods

- 2.2 The Authority believes this is principally a matter for our boroughs, but is concerned about firstly the proliferation of materials and the consequent complexity for recycling, and secondly the possibility of alternate weekly collections and the potential for increased contamination of recycling and composting streams if imposed by Government.

### Joint Working

- 2.3 The Authority has been doing this since 1986 as a consequence of its governance and funding structures, which now incentivise waste prevention.

### Information Programmes

- 2.4 The Authority supports national and regional programmes to support recycling, but believes more attention should be given to waste prevention.

### Future Facilities

- 2.5 The Authority would like a clearer view on how the Government proposes that the municipal and the commercial and industrial waste streams are managed more closely together, as there are real potential obstacles.

## Funding

- 2.6 The Authority believes that the Government should fund new duties and responsibilities it places on local government, especially with regard to the Landfill Directive, and that Producer Responsibility schemes should cover all associated costs when separate from such new duties.

## Charging

- 2.7 The Authority is concerned that the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme means trade waste collection services offered by councils are competitively disadvantaged in relation to those offered by private waste companies, and that this is contrary to the Government's desire for a more holistic approach and may be detrimental to local efforts to improve the quality of streets and public places.

## **3.0 RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 The Authority is recommended to note the response to the House of Commons Committee for Communities and Local Government Inquiry into Refuse Collection as approved by political group leaders and enclosed in Appendix 1.

## **4.0 COMMENTS OF THE FINANCIAL ADVISER**

- 4.1 The Financial Adviser has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no comments to add.

## **5.0 COMMENTS OF THE LEGAL ADVISER**

- 5.1 The Legal Adviser has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to add.

## **Local Government Act 1972 – Access to information**

### **Documents and Websites used:**

Communities and Local Government Committee: Press Notice, Session 2006-07, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007, PN21

Committee for Communities and Local Government:  
Note on submitting written evidence,  
[http://www.parliament.uk/parliament\\_committees?clg/CLGWrittenEvidence.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliament_committees?clg/CLGWrittenEvidence.cfm)

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## APPENDIX 1

Dr Phyllis Starkey MP  
Chairman of the Committee  
Communities and Local Government Committee  
c/o House of Commons  
7 Millbank  
London SW1P 3JA

15th June 2007

Dear Dr. Starkey,

### **THE INQUIRY INTO REFUSE COLLECTION MEMORANDUM RESPONSE BY NORTH LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY (NLWA)**

- 1.1 Thank you for providing North London Waste Authority (NLWA) with the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the above.
- 1.2 The Authority is one of the four statutory joint waste disposal authorities in London and was established in 1986 as a statutory waste disposal authority after the abolition of the Greater London Council. The Authority's prime function is to arrange the disposal of municipal waste collected by its seven constituent boroughs. These boroughs are:-
  - **Barnet**
  - **Camden**
  - **Enfield**
  - **Hackney**
  - **Haringey**
  - **Islington**
  - **Waltham Forest**
- 1.3 The Authority has a membership of 14 councillors, with each constituent borough appointing two councillors. A twenty year contract for the transfer and disposal of the Authority's waste was awarded to LondonWaste Ltd, a joint venture company between the Authority and SITA UK in 1994. The Authority manages just under 1 million tonnes of waste per annum and in tonnage terms is the second largest waste disposal authority in the country, Greater Manchester being the largest.
- 1.4 This Communities and Local Government Committee Inquiry into refuse collection is relevant to the Authority because the Authority has to provide the necessary services and facilities to manage the material collected by its constituent borough councils. The methods and frequency of collections used by the Authority's constituent boroughs therefore have an impact upon the Authority's operations and plans to minimise environmental impact, meet statutory targets and provide maximum value for money for the rate payers of North London.

- 1.5 The Authority has the second highest amount of municipal waste arising in its area of any waste authority in England and represents over 3% of the total English municipal waste arisings according to DEFRA's 2005/06 statistics, so decisions on waste collection services in our area (whether for re-use, recycling, composting, recovery or disposal) will have an impact on the country's performance against targets.

### **Collection Methods**

- 2.1 The Authority's constituent borough councils operate a variety of collection systems and collection frequencies. These include a three times per week pick up of material from households in one borough (two refuse collections and one recycling collection per week) as well as the more 'typical' twice per week collections (one refuse and one recycling collection per week). None of the North London boroughs provides an 'alternate weekly' collection, i.e. one collection of refuse in one week and one collection of recyclables the following week.
- 2.2 Principally, the method of collection is a matter for our constituent borough councils; however the Authority has two particular points to make on this issue:
- 2.3 Firstly the Authority is concerned about the proliferation of materials used by manufacturers that end up in waste that councils are then obliged to collect and the immense difficulty this creates in identifying viable markets for the genuine recycling of these materials. The Authority notes the steps that some retailers are making towards a reduction in the number of polymer types for rigid containers in particular and welcomes this move. However, it is imperative that pressure is exerted upon producers to take account of the impact of the myriad range of materials and mixed materials that they use in products and the associated onward impacts upon the costs of collection and reprocessing that this has for local authorities. The Authority recommends that producer responsibility legislation is extended to take account of this impact.
- 2.4 The second point on collection methods is that the Authority has noted the uptake of 'alternate weekly collections' of municipal and particularly household waste, elsewhere in the country as a way of increasing recycling performance and makes the following comments:
- 2.5 The Authority recognises that many authorities elsewhere have benefited from a move to alternate weekly collections and accepts that with sufficient time for planning the transition to alternate weekly collections, comprehensive management, and communication, that such systems can offer real benefits in terms of increased participation in recycling services and resultant improvement in recycling rates.

- 2.6 Compulsory recycling has been pioneered in the Authority's area, and food waste collections are now offered by nearly all our constituent borough councils, both of which are probably pre-requisite to a move to alternate weekly collections (but by no means an inevitable precursor to the same). However, if any of the Authority's constituent boroughs were to introduce such a system, our main points of concern would be the potential for increased contamination in the recyclables stream, as residents may seek to 'hide' particularly potentially odorous or otherwise inconvenient waste that should be saved for a refuse week within their recyclables container as a way of getting rid of it sooner.
- 2.7 The Authority believes that collection authorities should not be 'forced' to move to an alternate weekly collection system as the only option available to them to increase recycling rates and as such the Authority welcomes the recently announced Government consultation on incentives for householders to recycle.
- 2.8 The Authority would also suggest that the Committee notes the potential impact of climate change, with increasing mean temperatures potentially speeding up the process of decomposition of organic waste and therefore impacting upon what might be regarded in the future as the most appropriate collection systems.

### **Joint Working**

- 3.1 The Authority supports any encouragement that Committee wishes to give to joint working. The North London Waste Authority and its seven constituent borough councils have been working together since 1986, when the Authority was created. The Authority would be pleased to share its experiences of joint working with others.
- 3.2 In the North London authorities' case, the ease of joint working is reinforced by 'joined up' financial management, which is not the case in a 'two tiered' county/district arrangement where political management and finances are separate between the two tiers. Specifically, through a levy arrangement the North London boroughs jointly pay for the costs of running the Authority and the recycling, composting and disposal services it provides for the boroughs. Each borough now pays a share of the costs, based upon their most recently audited share of the tonnage of waste delivered, thereby increasingly incentivising waste prevention work too. The recently announced proposals for joint waste authorities in other parts of the country would seem to have recognised these benefits.

- 3.3 Finally, in the Authority's experience, joint working often makes sense on a practical, economic and environmental basis. In North London for example, the partner authorities carried out an assessment of the best method of achieving the municipal and household waste recycling, composting and reduction of waste to landfill targets that have been set by Government. This assessment, based upon the Environment Agency's assessment tool WISARD<sup>1</sup>, showed that a joint 'partnership approach', with relatively few shared facilities scored more highly than a 'borough led' approach, which was based upon each borough developing its own services and facilities independently and therefore needing relatively more facilities and operating with lower economies of scale.

### **Information Programmes**

- 4.1 The Authority supports the national 'RecycleNow' campaign and associated 'Recycle for London' campaign on the same basis and welcomes the work that the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has carried out to improve the quantity and quality of information available. Both the national and London campaign are important vehicles for ensuring consistency of messages across the country and for reinforcing messages to the public and business.
- 4.2 The Authority urges that such information programmes continue to be supported by central Government in the future, but it is also important that they focus messages upon the importance of minimal contamination of recyclable collections and the importance of the quality of recyclate for maximising recycling into the future.
- 4.3 The Committee may also wish to note that the Authority is currently leading a campaign involving four of the constituent borough councils which is promoting recycling to different communities in North London. This work involves sharing the development of materials and images to communicate messages about recycling in ten of the two hundred community languages spoken in North London and includes advertising on community radio stations, print advertising and community workshops. This programme is being funded through WRAP's Behavioural Change Local Fund.
- 4.4 Finally, the Authority would like to stress to the Committee the importance of messages about waste prevention. In many cases collection and disposal authorities do not provide a service for waste avoidance, reduction or re-use which can reinforce the written or verbal communication provided. So it is doubly important that as we focus attention further up the waste hierarchy, towards encouraging people to avoid waste production in the first place, to reduce what they throw away and to re-use things where possible, that comprehensive and motivating information is provided and extensive communication encouraged, backed up with real facilities and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Now updated and replaced by the WRATE assessment tool.

## **Planning for Future Sorting, Collection and Disposal Facilities**

- 5.1 The increasing need to recycle and compost higher proportions of our waste, and the ever closer relationship between the specification of waste collection services and various waste handling and treatment services means that the joint structures seen in areas such as North London and other joint waste authority areas are increasingly demonstrating an ability to deliver real service improvements to residents, particularly when the urbanised nature of our area is taken into account. The Authority suggests therefore that the Committee should recommend the Government actively encourages the creation of new Joint Waste Authorities, rather than just passively create the option for local authorities elsewhere.
- 5.2 Secondly, the new English Waste Strategy 2007 notes the importance of business waste, which can be four to five times the tonnage of municipal material produced in an area. In London, the London Plan (the spatial strategy for London) also requires London boroughs as planning authorities to plan for the spatial development of waste facilities to handle both municipal (local government collected household and non-household waste) as well as other types of business waste, and the London Mayor's emerging Business Waste Strategy appears to encourage local authorities to move in this direction too.
- 5.3 However, the new national strategy gives limited guidance on how local authorities might work more closely with the private waste sector to finance, build and operate facilities which process both municipal and non-municipal waste. It is not reasonable for waste disposal authorities to be forced in any way to take the risk of commissioning additional capacity for business waste if it we are not able to ensure that such waste is delivered to satisfy this capacity. But if the planning system was to be specified so that tenderers for waste disposal authority contracts could more easily gain planning permission for facilities that had a higher capacity than our needs in relation to the municipal waste stream, so that they could take the commercial risk on attracting the much larger quantities of local non-municipal waste, and waste disposal authorities (and our tax-payers) could then benefit from improved economies of scale, the Authority would support such change. Delivering change in this way would continue to keep commercial and industrial wastes predominantly in the private sector, and thereby ensure that increasing waste treatment and disposal costs for this sector do not migrate into public sector spending.

- 5.4 If local authorities are to provide new waste treatment facilities for commercial and industrial wastes arising in their areas, the Authority recommends most strongly that producers should be required to pay for all the associated costs.. Producer responsibility legislation for example will shortly (from 1<sup>st</sup> July) require electrical and electronic equipment (EEE) producers and distributors to finance the free collection and reprocessing of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) collected by local authorities at publicly accessible re-use and recycling centres (although this regime does impose additional collection and handling costs on local authorities). There is therefore no reason why the Government could not raise the necessary finance from producers and pass this finance on to local authorities to enable them to provide such services for other types of business waste, or keep it wholly in the private sector.

## **Funding**

- 6.1 Given that the Government committed the country to the Landfill Directive and accordingly committed local authorities to meeting the targets contained within the Directive, the Authority argues that in line with the New Burdens Protocol, these new burdens being placed by central government upon local government should be financed centrally. Accordingly, funding should be forthcoming from central government to expand the recycling and composting collection and reprocessing services required to meet the targets. It is unreasonable of the Government to impose new responsibilities on local government and require local government to raise this necessary money to finance these additional new services from local taxpayers.
- 6.2 Secondly, in relation to producer responsibility, the Authority urges the Committee to recommend that Government extend mandatory initiatives to require producers to fully fund the collection and reprocessing costs of products that they place on the market, as noted above in relation to WEEE producer responsibility legislation. Unlike the new WEEE regime however, the Authority recommends that collection costs are fully covered by producers too, as it is not reasonable to expect separate collection services for increasing types of waste to be established at public expense, nor for re-use and recycling centres to be expanded with only cash-limited private sector contributions.

## **Charging**

- 7.1 In North London, the Authority has been forced to add a 'LATS<sup>2</sup> premium' to its non-household waste charges to the seven constituent borough councils. Effectively this means that the constituent boroughs and their trade waste collection customers are paying for the disposal of their non-household waste, plus an additional charge for LATS. This is likely to make their services uncompetitive compared to private sector waste collection companies, which are not currently faced with landfill limits or fines for going over those limits. Therefore, there is an uneven playing field between the private sector business waste collection services and local authority trade waste services faced with the imposition of LATS. As LATS values rise this inequality will only increase, going against the Government's stated aim to encourage a more holistic approach to waste management by local authorities.
- 7.2 There is concern within our constituent borough councils too that any possible proliferation of small private waste collection companies might mean that the local authority is less able to manage its street scene (as waste would be left out for different waste companies at different times on different days). This would be detrimental to efforts to improve the quality of streets and public places.

## **Concluding Remarks**

- 8.1 The Authority welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Select Committee Inquiry. Should the Committee have any further queries, or require additional evidence, then please do contact me at the address above.

Yours sincerely,

**Cllr Brian Coleman AM FRSA**  
**Chairman, North London Waste Authority**

cc. Mrs Jessica Mulley, Clerk of the Committee

**Report Ends**

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<sup>2</sup> LATS – Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme. This is the scheme which allows local authorities with surplus credits for waste which has not been landfilled to sell these credits to authorities which are short of credits, i.e. the authorities which are in danger of going over their landfill limits set by the Landfill Directive.