

**REGENERATION COMMUNITY AND CULTURE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

29 MAY 2008

BLACK SACK TO BLUE BAG CHANGE OVER

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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Summary

This report sets out a response to the issues raised regarding the Council's decision to substitute the delivery of black refuse sacks with blue sacks for recycling. These are set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 5, Part 5, Paragraph 8) the Committee requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

2. Background

2.1 The Committee requested that an item on the decision to substitute the delivery of black refuse sacks used for collecting mixed residual waste with deliveries of blue refuse sacks to be used for the collection of dry mixed recycling. This question asked for consideration of the how and why the decision was made.

3. Director's comments

3.1 The Medway Waste Strategy 2005-2020 sets out a commitment to increase the level of recycling in Medway. This includes the adoption of a target of recycling or composting 40% of household waste in Medway by 2010.

3.2 Government has placed a requirement on local authorities to introduce kerbside recycling of at least two materials to 100% of households by 2010 under the Household Waste Recycling Act 2004. Medway's

Municipal Waste Strategy also made a commitment to reach a 40% recycling/composting rate by 2010.

- 3.3 In 2005/6 blue bags were introduced to supplement the blue box collection and combat issues associated with wind blown litter on recycling collection days. This additional capacity has increased the tonnages collected at the kerbside from 12,000 tonnes in 2004/5, to 14,000 tonnes in 2006/7.
- 3.4 There have been three deliveries of bags in November/December 2005, August/September 2006 and March 2007, at a cost of £90,000 per delivery funded by external government grants. The purpose of these grant payments are to stimulate changes in waste management and cannot be used for longer term revenue costs such as a regular delivery of blue sacks.
- 3.5 Blue bags are also available at the local offices and can be collected, one roll at a time, free of charge. From June to December 2007 over 16,600 packs of blue bags were issued this way.
- 3.6 In the November/December 2006 issue of Medway Matters, residents were asked to respond to the following question: *'To encourage even more recycling the council is keen to hear your views on a proposal that would see every household in Medway receiving more blue recycling bags instead of the black sacks'*. There were 81 replies of which 73%(59 people) stated they would prefer more blue bags then black sacks.
- 3.7 In conjunction a telephone survey of 500 residents was also undertaken regarding blue boxes/bags. One of the questions asked was: *If we were to provide only one type of sack free of charge, which would you prefer?*
- | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|
| Blue recycling bags | 266 | 53% |
| Black Sacks | 211 | 42% |
| No reply | 23 | 5% |
- 3.8 Black sacks are available at all local shops and supermarket, from as little as 30 bags for 74p. None of the local supermarkets supply blue bags (or an equivalent alternate colour that is not black, green or brown) and from discussions with them, they would not be interested in stocking Medway blue bags.
- 3.9 To encourage more recycling and reduce costs, it was recommended that Medway stop issuing black sacks free of charge.
- 3.10 Discussions were held with Veolia on changing supply from black to blue and they were very supportive of the change over. There has been a slight cost increase, £1.16 per 1000 bags, in the payment to Veolia as the blue bags are more expensive then black sacks due to the

nature of the materials they are made from (this amounts to approximately £11,500 to end of the contract in September 2009).

3.11 The swap over from black sacks to blue bags started on 28 January 2008 and is now complete as it takes three months to deliver sacks to the whole of Medway. Since the change over the council has introduced recycling facilities into an additional 1120 flats, with an additional 923 flats awaiting agreement from landlords on the new collection procedures. This would not have been possible in such a short period of time without the change over. Each block has been visited by our door stepping team to educate the residents how to use the new service and officers are working very closely with housing services, caretakers and private and public landlords to ensure the best service is delivered to the residents.

3.12 Linked with the change over there is an extensive media and promotions campaign including:

- Lunchtime learning for staff (including housing caretakers)
- Billboard and bus stop advertising
- Medway Matters pull out and feature in January/February issue
- Press advertising
- Veolia vehicle advertising on the six kerbside recycling vehicles
- On-street road shows
- Bag branding / inserted leaflets
- Door stepping work to educate residents that are using the bags incorrectly

There have been relatively few complaints/comments.

3.13 Calls to customer first logged under 'recycling comments' has only increased from approximately 140 from 28 January – 30 April 2007 to approximately 290 for the same period in 2008 (i.e. since the change over occurred).

3.14 Additionally, the waste services team have only received:

26 complaints about stopping black bags
3 comments/questions about what can be recycled
13 comments/questions about why the council is not doing more to assist in recycling e.g. wheeled bins
12 communications of praise on the service swap over

3.15 Considering the population of Medway, there have been relatively few incidences, 516, of incorrect use of the recycling bags reported via Veolia to the council's door stepping team. The issue of contamination in the recycling bags/boxes was not being monitored or tackled before the change over due to resource implications in the waste service team. All of these houses have been contacted either in person or by letter to educate them how they should be using the service correctly.

The costs of the 'Think Blue' campaign have been funded via a capital grant.

4. Financial and legal implications

- 4.1 There has been a marginal cost increase in the price of the sacks (£1.16 per 1000 bags) but otherwise the change is cost neutral.
- 4.2 The change will allow the Council to meet its statutory duty under the Household Waste Recycling Act 2004 by providing kerbside collection of two types of recycling to all properties prior to 2010.
- 4.3 The decision to substitute the delivery of black sacks with blue was first considered as part of the Council's budget setting process in the Autumn of 2006. However, the decision to implement this change was almost cost neutral and has had the effect of enhancing service levels. As a result the decision to change the types of sacks delivered was made by the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture under delegated powers. This was based in the information contained above.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Committee consider the report.

Lead officer contact

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Background papers

Medway Council Municipal Waste Strategy 2005-2020