



Guidance on weekly rubbish collections

This briefing provides a summary of the publication by the Department for Communities and Local Government in January 2014 entitled 'Guidance on weekly rubbish collections'.

Key issues

- Published guidance on how councils can and should deliver weekly collections by the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- Outlines 10 misconceptions about weekly collections
- Showcases case studies from the successful bidders to the Weekly Collection Support Scheme.

1. Introduction

In January 2014, the Department for Communities and Local Government published guidance on how councils can and should deliver weekly rubbish collections. It was entitled '*Guidance on weekly rubbish collections: delivering a frequent, comprehensive service*'. The guidance follows on from the Weekly Collection Support Scheme which made £250 million available to English authorities that want to retain or reinstate weekly collections. It aims to show that councils can not only maintain weekly collections of residual waste, but can innovate and identify ways of saving money at the same time.

The guidance outlines 10 misconceptions about weekly collections, identifies steps the government has previously taken and showcases case studies from a number of local authorities in England. This briefing paper is a summary of the guidance and the full document is available to download by clicking [here](#).

2. Summary of the guidance

2.1 Common misconceptions

The 'myths' which are listed in the report include the following:

- A move to fortnightly collection is the only way to improve recycling rates – a number of local authorities with weekly residual collections send 50% or more of their household waste for reuse, recycling or composting.
- Fortnightly collection schemes reduce the overall amount of waste produced – 3 of the 10 lowest waste generators are weekly collection authorities.

- In areas with low recycling rates, introducing a fortnightly collection is the only way to change resident' attitudes to recycling – instead, the Government is keen to support recycling reward schemes as a way of changing behaviour.
- The £250 million Weekly Collection Support Scheme would have a disastrous impact on recycling – the guidance states that all successful bids will deliver environmental benefits.
- People don't want their bins emptied every week – research has found that two-thirds of people think frequent and regular rubbish collections are the most important feature of the waste service.
- Other than inconveniencing residents, there are no other problems caused by a move to fortnightly collections of residual waste – problems with fortnightly collections cited in the report included flies, smells, maggots and rats. Also, government is of the view that local authorities with weekly residual collections are more resilient to winter weather as it's a lot easier for the council to quickly restore the collection service after the disruption.
- Local authorities can't commit to weekly collections of residual waste in uncertain times – the 82 councils that were successful in their bids to the Weekly Collection Support Scheme have committed to maintaining weekly collections for those currently in receipt of this service.
- Central government is urging all parts of the public sector to cut costs. Where waste management is concerned, the only option for a local authority is to move to a fortnightly collection of residual waste. The guidance argues that councils can not only maintain weekly collections of residual waste but innovate and identify ways of saving money at the same time, including improving productivity through better crew and vehicle utilisation.
- The introduction of a fortnightly collection will bring significant savings to the council and in turn therefore to the council taxpayer – councils with notoriously low council tax charges provide weekly collections of residual waste and a number of those that have frozen their council tax in recent years continue to provide weekly collections of residual waste.
- Traditional weekly rubbish collections must be scrapped to meet European recycling regulations – this is not the case.

2.2 What the Government has done

The guidance states that *"the Coalition Government has already scrapped bin taxes plans via the Localism Act; reversed Audit Commission rules which marked down councils for not adopting fortnightly rubbish collection; and abolished Whitehall targets which created perverse incentives to downgrade waste collection systems."* The document aims to spread best practice from the successful bidders to the Weekly Collection Support Scheme. Each example demonstrates how lower costs can be achieved in a number of different ways that do not sacrifice service quality and collection frequency. The guidance looks at the range of solutions under each of the following headings.

Theme 1: Optimising resources

This shows how tools such as route optimisation have led to cost reductions or how additional materials have been collected from the kerbside with marginal or no cost increases. Examples include:

- Ribble Valley Borough Council - integrated the collection of waste from commercial customers with collections from domestic households
- Bournemouth Borough Council and Southampton City Council - use a multi-skilled and multi-disciplinary workforce, which is helping to reduce costs by

reducing levels of overtime worked or the number of agency staff employed to cover planned and unplanned staff absences

- Eastbourne Borough Council and Cornwall Council - changing their collection methodology to allow the authority to generate additional income or lower collection costs from collecting the same material in a different way.

Theme 2: Creating capacity

Creating capacity is through utilising existing collection infrastructure to collect new waste streams at the kerbside at low marginal cost and by creating new commercial opportunities to collect and/or treat trade waste from other authorities or commercial customers. Examples include:

- Lewes District Council and North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council are collecting additional waste streams by re-configuring their collections services.
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is making minor changes to their collection vehicles to collect batteries from the kerbside.
- Milton Keynes Council is working with its disposal partners to share the financial benefits of creating additional treatment and disposal capacity that can then be made available to other authorities and commercial customers.

Theme 3: Working in partnership

This includes working with partners to deliver economies of scale through collaboration on collection contracts, commissioning new treatment capacity and involving communities in driving recycling improvements. Examples include:

- Eastbourne Borough Council, by joining with three neighbouring collection authorities, has been able to procure a new collection contract at a significantly lower cost.
- Bournemouth Borough Council has identified future opportunities to work with Dorset Waste Partnership to share depot facilities and collection vehicles.
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead will launch the UK's first incentivised food waste collection service in partnership with Recyclebank.
- Sandwell Borough Council has launched the Go Green Reward Scheme which supports local community projects by providing new funding, where neighbourhood recycling rates improve, community groups can apply for funding to support projects in their area.

Theme 4: Seeking innovation

These range from engaging residents and customers in designing future service delivery, the adoption of new technology to drive improved participation in recycling and seeking to introduce a degree of 'closed loop recycling'. Examples include:

- Bournemouth Borough Council has engaged local residents and its workforce to design and develop a new kitchen caddy insert to allow it to collect food waste efficiently without needing to re-schedule all of its collection rounds.
- Birmingham City Council is piloting two different forms of recycling service to test efficiency before considering how best to roll out service improvements.
- Milton Keynes Council is working with its collection and disposal partners to use the food waste it collects and turn into a new low cost fuel for its new fleet of collection vehicles.
- Southampton City Council is developing new forms of engagement using social media technology to target its student population.

3. Conclusion

Defra's Waste Policy Review for England in 2011 included a commitment to supporting weekly collections of residual waste. The Department for Communities and Local Government has pushed this through its £250 million Weekly Collection Support Scheme, to help local councils to provide a weekly waste collection service; which is the main focus for this guidance on weekly rubbish collections. Whilst a preference for weekly collections is being pursued in England, there seems to be a divergence of opinion with other countries in the UK; for examples, some councils in Wales are considering the introduction of monthly collections, to increase recycling rates and cut costs.

No one will dispute the importance of waste services to the public, including both households and businesses. However, the decision on whether to move to alternate weekly collections of residual waste or to retain weekly collections has to be a choice for democratically elected bodies to decide with their residents, rather than something imposed centrally. APSE believes that local authorities should be given the flexibility in how they achieve targets set in terms of waste minimisation, recycling and carbon reduction. Methods used by different councils will vary greatly according to local circumstances and demographics. Therefore there is no 'one size fits all' and fortnightly waste collections should be one of the tools available to local authorities should they wish to implement this.

In the same way, Government should not be dictating what methods local authorities can and should use to minimise waste and increase recycling. The Government is keen to support recycling reward schemes as a way of changing behaviour; which can be effective. However, this should not mean that other options available to local authorities such as changing collection methods or frequencies, or enforcement should be eradicated; this again should be a local decision.

What is particularly helpful in this guidance are the case studies, demonstrating what councils are doing to reduce costs and improve quality. Local authority refuse collection services are the subject to unprecedented cuts. APSE's refuse state of the market survey 2013 showed how 79% expect the refuse budget to change next year, with the majority of these (66%) expecting a decrease in revenue and some (31%) expecting a decrease in capital. Over the next 5 years, the majority of respondents expect to see a reduction in their service budgets of up to 5% or 10%.

APSE's refuse state of the market survey 2013 also showed how councils are looking innovatively at the way they do things in order to cope with budgetary pressures. A total of 44% of respondents have completed a service review, 29% have one under way and 21% will be doing so in the next one or two years. Measures being taken to meet efficiency challenges through these reviews include: route optimisation in 82% of cases; more efficient use of vehicles in 77%; service redesigns in 69%, reviews of rotas in 62%; and productivity reviews in 55%. Almost 30% are using 'systems thinking techniques' to improve efficiency and 55% are reviewing productivity, which includes work study. Efficiency measures have been accompanied by attempts to introduce new income streams via trade waste, green waste, developer contributions and maximising material re-sale. More than half of the managers surveyed have income generation schemes from waste services. For more information contact djohns@apse.org.uk

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