

**Independent Review
of the Implementation
of
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Borough Council's
New Recycling and Waste Collection
Service
on 4 July 2016**

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1. Background to report

I read significant quantities of background reports and papers (documented in Appendix B), looked at the publicity material and met or spoke with all the Group Leaders, several members of the Cabinet Panel, met with several of the relevant service managers and visited the depot to see that aspect of the service. On an unrelated personal visit, I also saw the service being delivered to residents.

Following significant problems reported by customers after the introduction of the new Recycling and Waste Service on 4 July 2016, the Leader of the Council committed to there being an independent review of the implementation.

This review is a joint commission with the findings being reported back to both the Leader and the Chief Executive.

The full briefing document is attached as Appendix A, with objectives being to:

- Determine objectively the problems which the council encountered when the new service was implemented.
- Identify the causes of the problems in the implementation of the new service which caused such a significant level of unfulfilled collections and adverse customer response.
- Assess what actions have been taken by the managers of the service to deal with these issues.
- Review further actions which are planned to ensure that the service meets its objectives and to assess the suitability of those plans.
- Assess whether there are any further actions which should be taken and to make recommendations accordingly.
- Provide assurance that the actions taken, planned and recommended will enable the service to realise the objectives which were set for it.
- Identify what learning lessons the council should take from the implementation of the new recycling and Waste service to apply to similar projects in the future.

The brief did not ask that the type of recycling scheme chosen for implementation should be reviewed nor would I expect that the legitimate role of locally elected Councillors in making such a decision should be questioned or usurped, except in so far as ensuring that they had been fully informed in sufficient detail and timeliness to enable them to exercise their judgement and make a sound final decision.

Further it is important to confirm that this review is concerned with the implementation of the council's new recycling service. In addition, the council continues to run collection services for residual waste and green waste. Issues relating to these elements of this service are outside the scope of this review.

2. Executive summary

An understandable and recurring question from Councillors through our discussions was whether the need for a higher level of resources to provide resilience at implementation should have been foreseen. It is my belief that, based on the 'corporate memory' of the last significant change to the service some 6-7 years ago, the extensive external visits undertaken by service managers and the Cabinet Panel, and the external advice provided by the Waste and Recycling Action Programme (WRAP), and against a backdrop of expected financial savings, reasonable judgement and careful thought were given, so that appropriate resources and planning were put in place.

I provide more detailed background to this view in the main body of my report as this is not to suggest that they were sufficient, but that the need for additional resources could only reasonably have been recognised with the benefit of hindsight.

The expected immediate uplift in recyclables after 4 July was also expected to rapidly reduce, so was not seen as a problem which needed urgent resolution but, rather, as a short-term issue.

Short term solutions were put in place but these were clearly not sufficient and, very soon, all experienced managers were simply chasing service failures rather than being able to stand back and take a view about what might be needed in the longer term to ensure a robust service for the larger-than-anticipated tonnages.

This did happen after about 6 weeks and, since that time, the service has gradually been placed on an increasingly sound footing, with further planned changes to the vehicle fleet and rounds which, I believe, will improve still further the long-term service resilience.

Despite the problems with the delivery of the service, there was widespread acceptance that:

- the council's new approach to recycling was the right one to have chosen and that it would meet all the council's objectives if delivered as hoped; and
- the staff were wholly committed, even when they found themselves under intense pressure during that first couple of months following implementation, to the extent that there was concern from Councillors and colleagues about their health, given the time and effort they were putting in to try to keep the service running.

It is clear that significant progress continues to be made with positive changes having been put in place, so that the Waste and Recycling team is now in a strong position to be able to deliver its new service, given the clear commitment from households to provide high levels of recyclable material.

It is my view (through my reading of significant background paperwork and my discussions) that the Councillors, through the Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel, were provided with opportunity and information to set the strategic direction of the new service. Indeed, their commitment in visiting a wide variety of other councils, the information provided by their officers and by WRAP (the Waste and Recycling Action Programme – the national, mainly Government funded, advisory body) is, in my view, an exemplar of Member involvement in such an important decision for, arguably, the council's most high profile service.

I feel that it is important to recognise that the council made several significant changes to the way the service was delivered at the same time as introducing a new style of recycling service.

Whilst related, each brought additional complexity to the nature of the preparation, communications and implementation.

As well as changing to a boxed system (with the need to clarify to customers which recyclable should be placed in which box) and alternate weekly collections (with weekly for food waste) the council, for legitimate reasons:

- changed the collection schedule (so many customers' collection day would change)
- ensured that collections would take place at the kerbside (so properties which had been used, by custom and practice, to their collection at their house rather than at their drive frontage, for example, would now have to put their bins/boxes at the kerbside).

All of these changes had to be communicated. Some were relevant to all customers, some were differentiated depending on street or area, and some were relevant to only specific properties/individuals.

3. Review methodology

The Review took 8 working days spread over October and early November 2016, with the final report being delivered to the Leader and Chief Executive, the joint commissioners of the Review, on Friday 11 November.

An initial desktop study was undertaken, reading through the last three years of relevant council papers including Agendas, Reports and Minutes of the Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel since its first meeting on 30 January 2013, and the specific reports and presentations to the Cabinet and the Council.

This also included the external advice given to the council and the information which was delivered to customers.

Three days were spent on site at Newcastle, having 1 to 1 discussions with Councillors and council staff to gain a full picture of the lead up to, and preparation for, the introduction of the new service on 4 July 2016, the problems with the implementation of the new service, the impact on the Council's customers and the lessons which had been learned from that implementation. I had hoped to be able to meet with a group of Service users but it was not possible to pull this together during the time available.

Further data-gathering, research and analysis was undertaken off-site.

This written report was then produced for presentation to the Leader and the Chief Executive. It reflects what I have heard, read and seen through my contact with Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council.

I would like to place on record my thanks to all those who were able to meet with me at such short notice, for their openness and for providing me with additional documentation.

4. The planning and preparation for the new service

The Council first started to plan for a new waste and recycling service in October 2012, looking at the options for delivery when its current recycling and waste strategy concluded in 2016, as did the contracts which the council then had in place for delivery of the services.

The key objectives of the new services were:

- Make the recycling collection service simpler;
- To reduce costs for residents;
- Achieve at least 55% recycling rate by 2020;
- Collect four separate streams of material for recycling.

The planning and preparation for the new service was overseen by a Cabinet Panel consisting of 7 elected councillors and these were drawn on a politically proportional basis. The Members of the Panel were:

- Cllr Beech (Portfolio Holder - Operational Services)(Chair)
- Cllr Bailey
- Cllr Fear
- Cllr Hambleton
- Cllr Loades
- Cllr Olszewski (until April 2013 meeting)
- Cllr Reddish
- Cllr G Williams (from June 2013 meeting)

In parallel, two officer teams were created consisting of:

Service Officer Team:

Project Director – Executive Director – Operational Services
Service Lead – Head of Recycling and Fleet Services
Recycling and Waste Service Manager
Transport and Transfer Manager
Collections Manager
Acumen Recycling Contracts Manager
Development Officer.

Corporate Project Officer Team

Head of Recycling and Fleet Services
Head of Communications
Head of Environmental Services
Head of Human Resources
Head of Operations
Audit Manager and Monitoring Officer
Head of ICT and Customer Services
Finance Manager
Principal Solicitor
Business Improvement Manager
Corporate Health and Safety Officer
Facilities Manager
Engineering Manager

Project planning for the new service

The planning and preparation for the new service started in detail in January 2013. A detailed project plan was prepared and as part of this review I have looked carefully at the Gantt Chart which summarised the actions which were planned and subsequently taken.

The magnitude of the changes to this service should not be underestimated and I recommend that anyone in any doubt at all should have sight of the Gantt chart which helped manage those changes.

The changes to the service involved several inter-related but separate aspects:

- the new recycling collection system to all 55,000 properties;
- changes to the collection day for some (but not all), so 5 days @ 11,000 houses per day required differentiated communications;
- collection from the kerbside/property threshold rather than, as had been custom and practice in some cases previously, collection vehicles travelling up driveways to make collections.

The changes also included a complete change of employer and terms and conditions for many staff, procurement of the new vehicle fleet, modelling and reconstruction of the depot, changes and delivery of the new boxes, reconfiguration of the daily collection routes, financial modelling and communications planning.

Technical analysis of new service

In addition, the Council commissioned the Waste and Recycling Action Programme (WRAP) to provide specialist technical advice on the planning and introduction of the new service. WRAP has more than 15 years of specific experience in the field of waste management and 90% of its funds come from central Government. WRAP has worked with the majority of Councils in England and also in the devolved administrations. Within the local government sector it is regarded as the 'go to' source for advice in all aspects of recycling.

As part of the preparatory work WRAP provided information and advice to the Council. It provided the Cabinet Panel with benchmarking information, a collection modelling tool and brought its considerable expertise, including its detailed understanding of the specific issues of new service implementation, to advise the Council on the vehicle and staffing requirements of the new service both in the short and longer term.

Evaluation of reference sites

As part of the work of the Cabinet Panel and as part of the preparatory work undertaken by the officer project team visits were arranged to a number of reference site where elements of the planned new service were already operational. Reference site visits included:

- Stafford Borough Council;
- Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council;
- Cheshire West and Chester Council;
- Wrexham County Borough Council;
- Somerset County and District Councils.

The form of the new service

As part of the preparation for the new service the Cabinet Panel and officer project team considered a number of options. In simple terms, there are two main types of collection scheme, kerbside sort in which materials are presented at the kerbside by residents sorted into a number of waste streams, and co-mingled in which waste is sorted into a number of large vessels (normally wheeled bins) the materials then being taken to a sorting centre for separation.

Having reviewed all of the information available and the advice which had been given by WRAP the Council opted for a kerbside sort system of collection. The kerbside sort system was that which had been adopted when the council introduced its predecessor service in 2010.

Before finalising its decision, the Panel looked at 12 collection models, assessing them against the government's TEEP (Technical, Environmental, Economic and Practicable) expectations and decided that the weekly boxed kerbside collection system fitted these criteria closest for the Newcastle under Lyme Borough area.

Transition from the old to the new service

In order to implement the new service, the council needed to make a number of significant changes.

Staffing

The previous service had been operated as a part in-house and part contracted service. Under the old service the recycling was performed by a contractor, Acumen and the council operated the residual waste, garden waste and every other week's food waste service itself. The new service was predicated on the service being run as an integrated whole and as an in-house service. The rationale for moving to a fully in-house service was considered by the Cabinet Panel, which felt that there would be greater flexibility and control of the new service if the management, staff and resources (plant, equipment and facilities) were in direct Council control.

Moving to an in-house service required all the former Acumen staff to be transferred over to the council's own staffing establishment and this process was managed by the council's HR team working closely with the Head of Service. This process, although time-consuming, appears to have been handled well and 36 staff were transferred from Acumen to the Council on 1 July 2016.

The size of staffing resource was determined according to the parameters of the WRAP model which was used by the council to plan the new service.

Waste handling

Under the old service the recycling materials were taken by Acumen to a waste transfer station which they operated and which was based in Stoke on Trent. The new service required the council to establish its own waste transfer station. This of itself was a large part of the new service transition planning and this was also part of the project plan referred to above.

The council has put in place a waste transfer station at its depot site in Knutton Lane, Newcastle. The waste transfer station has a capacity to handle tonnages 20% higher than the previous levels, allowing for predicted growth of the recycling volumes as well as housing growth within the Borough.

It was recognised that there are peaks and troughs in quantities, so contingency arrangements were put in place for contractors who buy and take away the recycled materials to collect the materials

unbaled as well as baled – this also provides for any downtime in the balers due to repair or maintenance and acknowledges the finite storage space within the depot.

Vehicles

The council planned as part of the new service to introduce a new fleet of recycling collection vehicles. This was an integral part of the new service as it was accepted that the vehicles which had been used to operate the old service were at the end of the operational life and needed to be replaced. Further, the new service was based upon a kerbside sort system which required operatives to collect materials presented and to load these into segregated receptacles on the vehicles. Again, a significant part of the new service was to source vehicles which could handle the range of materials. The council specified and procured a fleet of new recycling vehicles specifically designed for the requirements of the new service. The key considerations were to have vehicles which could hold the range of separated waste materials required by the new service and collect appropriate volumes to tie in with round scheduling and daily tipping expectations.

The vehicle specification and capacity was determined according to the parameters of the WRAP model which was used by the council to plan the new service.

The planning of collections rounds

As part of my review I have looked at the preparatory work which was done to plan for the implementation of the new service. One area of activity which was considered very carefully on the evidence of the project plan was the assessment of the new collection round pattern. At its core the recycling and waste collection process is a logistical issue. The task for any council is to optimise its rounds in such a manner as to ensure that the collection of materials from households is efficient in terms of the time required to perform the task, effective in ensuring that the anticipated volume of material is aligned to the capacity of the vehicles and economic in ensuring that all resources (vehicles and people) are utilised in the most cost effective manner.

From my review of the project plan it is evident that a prudent amount of time was invested in this and that a scheme of collection rounds was formulated which optimised the resources deployed. The general principles were that rounds were constructed with slightly lighter loads in the earlier and latter parts of the week, peaking in the mid-week. This was in order to ensure that all rounds could be completed in the normal working week and that some flexibility existed to ensure any unforeseen circumstances could be accommodated at the start and end of each week. To ensure vehicle runs were optimised the round pattern across the week was structured so that the northern part of the Borough was scheduled for the earlier part of the week, progressively moving south and eastwards to do the southern and south-western part of the Borough at the end of the week.

Having reviewed the plans and preparations which were made for the new service I conclude that:

- a. There was effective governance in place with a Cabinet Panel under the chairmanship of the Portfolio Holder and an officer project team under the leadership of the Executive Director Operational Services;
- b. The Council had made careful plans for the new service drawing on the experience of other councils which already had successful service in operation;
- c. The Council had sought technical advice from WRAP being the most reputable source of advice on recycling and waste services;
- d. The council had prepared an extensive project plan to guide the work concerning the implementation and delivery of the new service;

- e. The council managed the transfer of 36 staff from the previous contractor to its own employment effectively;
- f. The council planned and implemented the creation of a waste transfer station at its Knutton Lane depot site in a timely manner;
- g. The council procured a range of specialist recycling material collection vehicles in line with the requirements of the new service and in a cost-efficient manner.

5. The mobilisation of the new service

Introduction of the new service

The new service commenced on 4 July 2016. I have noted that there was not a break in service between the end of the old service and the introduction of the new service. Some residents, due to a change of collection day under the new service, had a longer period of days between the last collection under the old service and the first collection under the new service, but there was no break in the provision of the service in the changeover. This is potentially significant in that it meant crews moved from working on the old service rounds and the new service rounds 'overnight'.

Capacity at implementation

An understandable and recurring question from Councillors was whether sufficient additional capacity was built in to the service at the time of implementation to be able to cope with any potential teething problems.

There were two main aspects of that potential capacity need: the physical collection service both in vehicle and staffing terms, and the staffing of the council call centre.

Actions taken pre-commencement date

In preparing for the new service the council took a number of actions. These were many and various according to the project plan but the key areas of activity were:

Staffing and management

The new service required the bringing together of the councils existing waste and recycling staff and the staff previously employed by Acumen. As has been indicated above, the council integrated the Acumen staff with its own existing workforce and a significant part of the project was the creating of a single waste, recycling and fleet team consisting of 95 staff under the Head of Service. This work which was undertaken by the Head of Service for Recycling and Waste and the Head of Human Resources created a new team structure with new management and staffing structures. A copy of the new staffing structure is shown in Appendix C.

In the knowledge that there would be an increase in the quantity of recycled materials at the introduction of the new service, no leave was allowed for the first two weeks for those staff who remained in the council's employment and for four weeks for the recycling staff who were transferring.

In addition, contact was made with a local personnel agency who were engaged to provide additional agency staff should this prove necessary for any reason.

Training

In mobilising the new service a training programme was put in place.

Drivers had use of the new vehicles in advance of the contract change, and were involved in the route planning arrangements. And, in terms of formal training, all staff also completed one full day's induction, which included safeguarding, an overview of the Borough Council, details of their time-recording system, holiday booking, the practical use of the vehicles as well as use of the Bartec system and Health and Safety.

Vehicle preparation

The council took delivery of 13 new recycling vehicles in advance of the start of the contract (to cover the 12 pre-designed rounds with one additional as backup) and also purchased a small 'stillage' vehicle from the previous contractor to act as further backup (as recommended by WRAP) while assessment of any small vehicle need was conducted through operational use and the bedding-in of the new collection fleet.

Transfer station mobilisation

The council had commissioned a new waste transfer station facility at its depot in Knutton Lane. Before mobilisation of the new service on 4 July, the Council had:

- Procured a new weighbridge;
- Procured structural changes to the depot's large shed;
- Procured new storage bays and sorting equipment;
- Ensured relevant Planning and Environmental approvals;
- Ensured that appropriate changes to the Waste Permit were approved by the Environment Agency.

Communications

To prepare residents for the implementation of the new service on the 4 July the council engaged in an extensive public communications exercise. The key elements of this were:

- Articles and pull-out sections in The Reporter;
- Design and distribution of explanatory service leaflets and calendars of new schedules;
- Several Press releases leading to newspaper articles and radio interviews;
- Video clips to explain the new arrangements;

Mobilisation of the new service summary of findings

Having reviewed the plans and preparations which were made for the new service I conclude that:

- The Cabinet Panel and officers planned well and thoroughly for the detailed implementation of the new scheme, taking full account of the experience they had gathered, and the additional knowledge and expertise provided by WRAP.

6. The issues which arose in the new service operation

Delivery of new boxes

The new service required that households were issued with new collection receptacles. Each household on the new scheme has the following receptacles:

- One wheelie bin for residual waste (180 litres)(or 240litres where not yet replaced by a 180 litre bin);
- One wheelie bin for garden waste (240 litres);
- Three recycling boxes (each 55 litres) and one lid;
- One food waste bin.

A total of 110,000 additional boxes and 55,000 lids were procured for distribution across the Borough. These were, of course, the new red and green boxes as households already had blue boxes.

Once the new service commenced on 4 July, the council received requests from households for boxes to be delivered.

TABLE 1: Requests for Boxes/Lids/Caddies to be delivered.

Week Commencing	Blue	Red	Green	Lid	Green Caddy	Silver Caddy
04/07/16	105	136	320	790	65	20
11/07/16	175	176	157	443	73	68
18/07/16	121	159	123	352	69	61
25/07/16	94	131	95	310	44	45
01/08/16	109	103	80	295	45	52
08/08/16	96	71	61	277	54	50
15/08/16	79	98	64	289	54	50
22/08/16	88	96	78	274	50	50
29/08/16	64	66	45	211	34	35
05/09/16	93	83	66	237	62	61
12/09/16	69	76	63	241	57	48
19/09/16	92	89	79	257	72	84
26/09/16	57	64	57	189	34	38
03/10/16	56	66	51	186	36	34
10/10/16	55	55	46	181	33	24
17/10/16	40	37	36	144	28	28
24/10/16	39	43	34	155	37	30
31/10/16	53	60	57	164	41	46
	1485	1609	1512	4995	888	824

So, to clarify; during July, there were 602 requests for red boxes and 695 for green boxes. Some of these will have been requested because they hadn't been delivered in advance and some will have been requests for additional boxes. Whilst the figures do not accurately differentiate between these, as the original delivery was for both a red and a green box, it is reasonable to assume that the maximum number requested because of original missed deliveries is the lower of those two figures (i.e. households requesting a red AND a green box). This totals 551 (being 136+157+123+95) out of a total of 50,000 or so properties.

It is not clear whether this was as a result of a failure by the contractor employed to distribute the boxes or errors in the data provided to the contractor, but it clearly added to the immediate additional workload and the number of calls coming into the system.

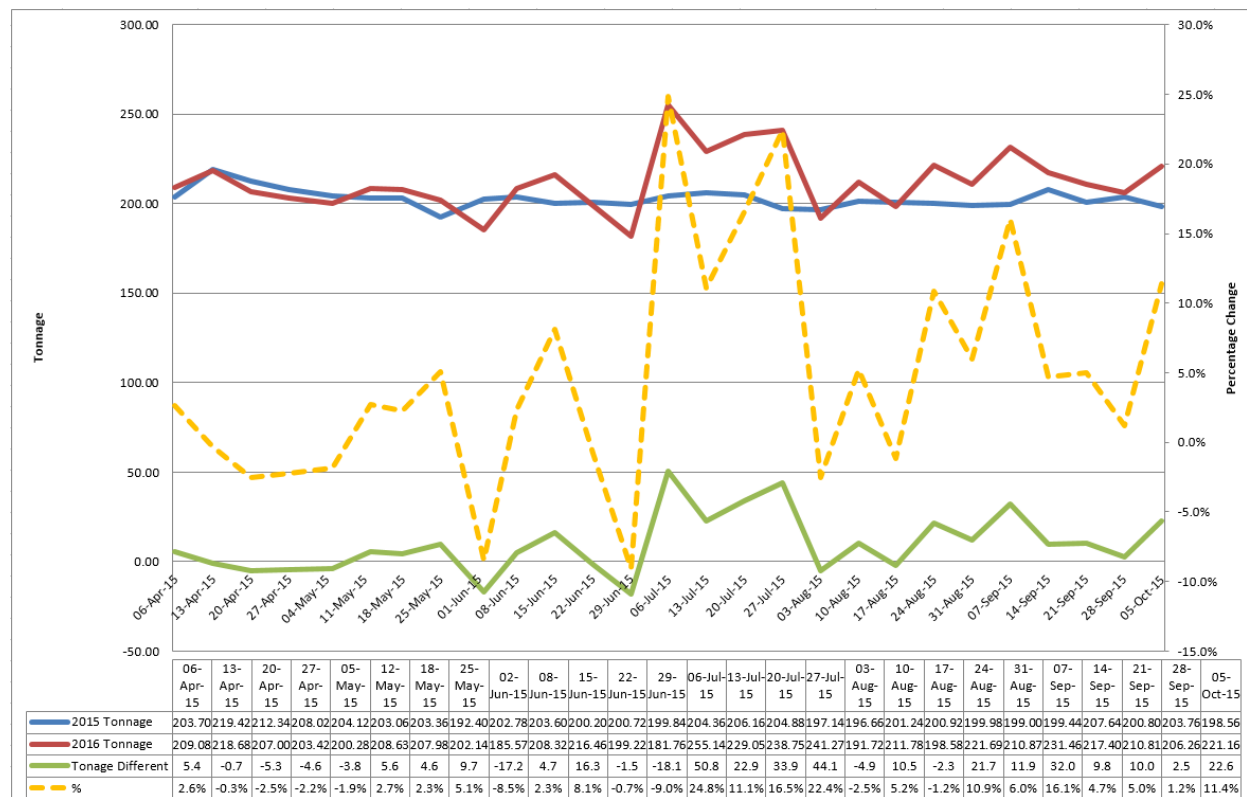
Material volumes

There was an expectation that the initial recycling quantities would be higher than normal, because of a gap in collection the previous week, through good publicity, and the use of the boxes. However, the quantity of material was far higher than expected (WRAP's modelling assumption of long term increase was up to 8% whereas the increases were 25%, 10% and 22% in the first three weeks).

Although this caused immediate problems which managers sought to resolve, they believed that this was a short-term problem which would settle down.

The table below shows the volumes of recycling material which Newcastle Borough Council had presented at its kerbside collections during the first months of the new service.

Table 2: Volume of recycled material collected April-September 2016 compared with 2015 figures



It had been anticipated by the council that recycling volumes would be higher in the first few weeks of the new services. This is because:

- a. some households may have chosen to hold back recycling material anticipating the introduction of the new service;
- b. some households will have gone more days without a recycling collection due to the date of collection under the new service as compared with the old service;
- c. the work put into the communications to promote the new service making households more aware of the need to recycle material. During the interviews I undertook, it was suggested to me that some households may have assumed that the separation of materials and the requirement to recycle under the new service was compulsory.

The council had deliberately timed the new service to commence at the start of July because trends in previous years had shown that recycling waste levels fall to a degree in the summer months as a larger number of households are absent due to being away for summer holidays. In the planning which had been undertaken for the new service it was expected that this trend would to some degree offset the additional level of recycling material which would be presented as a result of the new service being introduced; see bullet points above.

In practice, what occurred in the early weeks of the service was a far higher level of recycling material being presented than had been anticipated even under the planning assessments which had been made.

As can be seen from the table, the average level of recyclables during the period April/May/June 2016 was 203 Tonnes per week, with a maximum level of 219 tonnes. Every week in July had a significantly higher level than this at 255/229/238/241 tonnes (so 26%/13%/17%/19% above the previous average).

Where there had been a weekly increase previously this was a 'blip' which could be caught up but, given the ongoing increased tonnages, without the expected reduction after initial implementation, the service found the increased collection need being compounded week on week.

It is evident from the analysis which I have undertaken that it was the significant additional level of demand which was placed on the service in the early weeks of operation of the new service which led to the level of failed collections which was experienced.

Number of vehicles used in the operation of the service

I have set out above the basis upon which the council specified and purchased the recycling collection vehicles. A total of 14 vehicles were bought by the council to cover 12 rounds and provide back up. It was always expected that this was a sufficient number of vehicles for the number of collection rounds which were required by the new service.

It was a conscious decision made following WRAP's advice that the new service would be commenced with 12 rounds, with one full size vehicle acting as a backup and an additional small 'stillage' vehicle also as backup, given the assumptions which were made during the planning. This also meant that the new service would achieve the targeted level of saving of £500,000 per annum.

As the WRAP report highlights, the planning of such service delivery is sensitive to the round length, time taken to make collections and roadside sorting, the mix of recyclables, the distance of that round from the depot and so on.

Work undertaken by the Executive Director Operational Services and the Head of Service for Recycling and Waste and their technical staff with responsibility for the waste service and for vehicles has subsequently confirmed that, given the volume of recycling material which is being presented, an additional round does need to be introduced and a further additional full-size vehicle and one smaller vehicle have therefore been put on order. The smaller vehicle is scheduled for delivery in December whilst, at the time of the preparation of this report, the delivery day of the full-size vehicle had yet to be confirmed.

Temporary hired-in vehicles are providing additional capacity until the permanent vehicles are delivered.

Type of vehicles used in the operation of the service

There was a myth that problems were caused by the new vehicles being larger than the old ones resulting in them being unable to make some collections (although, without the council's detailed knowledge, it would appear that the previous contractor had been making greater use of additional smaller vehicles over time).

I have noted that the council received some adverse public and media reaction concerning the recycling vehicles used for the new service. There was a suggestion that the new vehicles were larger than those which has been used to perform the service previously under the old service. I have looked carefully at this matter to clarify the factual position.

Comparing the relative sizes of the main recycling collection vehicles used under the old service and the standard recycling vehicles under the new service, the latter are 50mm narrower and 500mm shorter than the former. It is therefore the case than in dimension the new vehicles are smaller. I have undertaken further analysis of the operational introduction of the new vehicles and have identified a number of key points:

-The recycling vehicle drivers were first given the opportunity to drive the new vehicles in advance of the new arrangements, when some of the new vehicles were brought in temporarily and 'live trialled' for two or three days by the drivers during the course of the previous contract. This allowed feedback from this to be fed in to the round design as well as allowing the drivers a short period of advance use of the new vehicles.

-As in any situation where a driver is less familiar with a vehicle they will properly err of the side of caution until fully familiar with a vehicle and its handling. Therefore, in the early days of the new service, drivers may have found it more difficult to access constrained locations than is the case now that they are familiar with these vehicles. This may well have slowed the pace at which rounds could be completed and had an impact on crews being able to complete rounds in the early weeks of the new service.

Recommendation 1: I therefore **recommend** that any new vehicles are used as a backup for a short period initially and to allow the new driver to get used to their new round before needing to collect from that round in a given timeframe.

Loading of vehicles

The new purpose-built recycling vehicles have the capability for operatives to load the vehicle through hatches which are mirrored on both sides of the vehicle. Some residents who contacted the council in the early weeks of the introduction of the new service asked why in certain locations loading was only from one side of the vehicle. I have looked into this issue and can confirm that this would have been as a result of either the practicality of operating in the specific location or, as a priority, for the health and safety of the operatives.

To clarify, it would not normally be appropriate for operatives to be transferring the box' contents on the 'outside' of a refuse vehicle with passing traffic behind them, so for their own and motorists' safety it would be entirely appropriate in these circumstances for more than one operative to be loading from the same side. This would normally follow a risk assessment being undertaken of each location.

Equally, there will be some locations where it provides better space for the operatives to load by the driver positioning the vehicle (between two rows of parked cars, for example) with the space on one side maximised and the other minimised rather than both being equal.

I therefore consider that the loading arrangements of sometimes using just one side of the vehicle and sometimes both sides are entirely in accordance with good practice.

Recycling vehicle capacity

As a consequence of the additional volume of recycling material presented, crews experienced some of the material compartments becoming filled more quickly than had been anticipated in the new service planning process. This was normally the cardboard compartment despite a degree of compaction taking place within that compartment. The result of this was that it was necessary for crews to return to the Knutton Lane waste transfer station to tip loads. When this first occurred, a process had not been formulated to optimise the speed at which vehicles could be offloaded and returned to resume their route. In the early weeks of the new service a significant amount of additional downtime was created through this in-day tipping process. In particular, offloading of all compartments took place when some may not have filled completely during the course of the day; so this caused unnecessary downtime.

It is my view that such caution is understandable whilst operatives were gaining an understanding of the makeup of the recyclables put out by customers and the capacity of each compartment of their vehicle.

A process and procedure has subsequently been put in place to optimise the efficiency of in-day tipping. However, the absence of such an efficient system in the early weeks of the service undoubtedly reduced the capacity of the service and resulted in less rounds being completed than should have been the case.

Recommendation 2: I therefore **recommend** that this in-day capacity issue is an important element of training for any new crews and, particularly, drivers.

Round sizing

As set out in the earlier part of this report, which deals with the planning and preparation of the new service, a considerable amount of work went into the planning of collection rounds and their routes. In summary and as stated previously, the size of routes was planned to be lower at the start and end of each week with the largest rounds in the middle of the week. The reason for this was to ensure that all rounds would be completed in any one week and to allow a degree of capacity at the start and end of each week to deal with any outstanding requirements. The other element of the new service pattern was for route sequencing to be optimised for each collection day and that the service would commence each week in the northern part of the Borough moving broadly north to south-west over the course of each working week.

As stated previously, the new vehicles were brought in for trial during the previous contract to allow preparation to take place but it is important to acknowledge the variables which had to be taken into account, and a number of assumptions made, which WRAP's report makes clear.

Recommendation 3: In the light of the higher volumes, it is necessary to review the round sizing and number and I **recommend** that this should be done as soon as practicable to allow the changes to be well communicated to any residents affected by a changed collection day.

Database of collection properties

The round planning which the council undertook before the start of the service used the existing database of properties held by the council. Reports of service failure made in the early weeks of the new service showed that in the process of taking information from the old to the new system approximately 200 properties were omitted. Whilst all of these properties were in the database at the time I undertook this review it took some time for this error to be recognised and corrected.

Recommendation 4: I therefore **recommend** that a failsafe system is put in place to ensure that all properties within the Borough are transferred when new computer systems are introduced as there should only be one 'Master' council database of 'place' which others should then duplicate from if that's needed.

Assisted collections

Assisted collections are a supported form of service which is tailored to the requirements of a particular resident. Assisted collections are normally provided to vulnerable residents who, due to a medical or similar condition, are not able to put their material out at the kerbside. Residents who have assisted collections are normally assessed by a member of staff through an assessment process who will agree with the resident an alternative means for their recycling and waste materials to be collected. In the majority of cases the waste operatives will collect the materials from a pre-determined location on the property and will usually collect and return the receptacles to a suitable location agreed with the householder.

Failure to collect recycling or waste will be of concern to any resident. However, in the case of assisted collections which by definition are provided to vulnerable residents, the failure to make a collection may prove to be particularly distressing and inconvenient.

In the early weeks of the new service a significant number of assisted collections were missed. I have looked into this matter with particular care and have identified the following issues:

For an assisted collection to be performed it is a requirement that the householder requests a visit from an officer and a suitable assisted collection is agreed with the individual which takes account of their particular circumstance, the nature of the property to be served and ability of the crew to adapt the service delivery in a practical manner. It is evident that under the old contract custom and practice by crews meant that in some situations a householder was receiving assistance with their collection which had not been part of any formal assessment process. As this information was not formally recorded anywhere it meant that this information was not available when the new services was planned. This was a significant anomaly and the crews working under the new service on new routes were simply not aware of these custom and practice informal arrangements. This resulted in a mismatch between the expectation of households which had previously received these informal assisted arrangements and the actual delivery of the new service.

In addition, any assisted collections which were properly logged in the Bartec computer system (the next section provides more detail on this) but were missed on their designated collection day, did not automatically transfer to the list for the following day's rescheduled collection because of a software anomaly. The problem and customer inconvenience then compounded day-on-day.

Recommendation 5: I therefore **recommend** that operatives are reminded that they should address any requests for an assisted collection to the Council's call centre (preferably by using the online form on the website).

In the course of gathering information I have noted that there appear to be examples, in the early weeks of the new service, of cases where assisted collections were reported as missed through the customer service team. There is then further contact from the resident that a promised fulfilment has not been met. I have looked specifically at these cases and it is clear that, despite honest commitments and their wish to deliver for the customer, sheer numbers of individual requests meant that they became increasingly delayed in delivering solutions.

Servicing flats and apartments

Within the Borough there are over 200 flat and apartment locations. Previously, each of these had a bespoke solution for their collection requirements to take account of the number of separate habitations, the layout of the property(ies) and access arrangements etc. The service is normally a fortnightly collection of dry recyclables from wheelie bins and a fortnightly collection of residual waste similarly. From my discussions it is clear that, during the service redesign, it was not planned to change the collection frequency from these properties.

However, the pressure on the service and the pre-launch publicity did cause issues and complaints from some of the properties. There appear to be two reasons for this:

- the focus of the new service was directed on kerbside households which had the greatest change of service and, as a result and because of the pressure on the service at the peak of

its new demand, collection resources which would normally have been used to collect from flats was sometimes directed to support the frontline kerbside service.

- the increased publicity about the revamped recycling service also encouraged residents in flats and apartments to recycle more (as was experienced generally), which in turn caused their own capacity issues meaning that some of those groups of properties required additional quantities collected than had been the norm previously.

From some of the correspondence I reviewed, it is clear that there were efforts made to communicate with these customers separately but this was after problems had occurred and when resources were already stretched.

The Bartec system

Under the old system the council used the Bartec system. Bartec is a computer system which contains information about all the rounds. This system provides a real-time information facility to crews in the vehicles and also enables the service managers to supervise the operation of the services from the depot. For crews, the Bartec system provides details of all the properties from which collections are to be made and also provides details of assisted collection requirements. For the service managers, it provides real-time information about the progress of crews on their rounds, including their current location, together with information about vehicle loads and performance.

The Bartec system was specified under the new service to be fitted to all the new recycling vehicles supplied to the council.

The new Bartec system was (and still is) being upgraded/amended to accurately support the council's collection system and enable information input by drivers to be more quickly available to call centre staff. In particular, assisted collections' details did not transfer to the following day if missed and there was a delayed reaction (because of the increasing service pressure in my view) to come up with a simple longhand 'work around'.

The introduction of the new fleet and rounds meant that years of experience had to be re-learnt quickly at contract handover, whilst the high levels of recyclables meant that all involved were very quickly under increased pressure.

As part of my review I have considered the use of the Bartec system and would make these observations:

- a. Bartec is a state of the art system widely used by councils and others to manage operational recycling and waste collection services;
- b. Crews know how to use the Bartec system and have had adequate training in its functionality and use. Crews and managers have a high degree of confidence in the Bartec system;
- c. Whilst fitted to all the council's own recycling vehicles, Bartec is not fitted on the vehicles which the council has had to hire in to provide additional capacity;
- d. In its configuration in Newcastle the Bartec system operates on the basis of a pre-determined round and route. One of the significant issues experienced by the council in the early days of the operation of the new service when a significant number of rounds were not completed on their scheduled day was that the Bartec system was insufficiently flexible to support crews making collections on unscheduled days. In order to develop a work around to use Bartec to support crews making rounds on unscheduled occasions data was exported

from the system on printed lists. There was a delay however in getting printed lists to crews working on unscheduled rounds and this had a detrimental impact on the delivery of the service during the early weeks of the operation of the new service.

As with many software packages, it is important to learn from other users' experience and then work with or challenge the software producer to deliver amendments and upgrades.

I specifically sought information about the council's involvement in such an arrangement and it is to the officers' credit that they helped establish a Staffordshire-wide user group about twelve months ago. Bartec are either present in person or dial-in to such meetings, which involve Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Lichfield Borough Council, Tamworth District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Recommendation 6: I therefore **recommend** that the council prioritises its membership of the Bartec user group to ensure that it receives the early benefits of any additional developments of the system as they are likely to be valuable in service improvements.

Enforcement of kerbside collection

Councils are expected under the provisions which govern their recycling and waste collection services to collect householders' waste from the kerbside. Specifically, this is set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Not unlike many councils, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council had developed, through custom and practice, arrangements to collect recycling and waste from locations other than the kerbside. This was particularly the case in certain rural and other areas which have long private drives. Whilst this may be of assistance to those households whose property is some distance from the curtilage, it is an added value service which is outside the statutory provisions and represents a cost to the general taxpayer which the council is not required to make.

The decision which the council took was to end these custom and practice arrangements when the new service was introduced. As part of my review I have looked in some depth at this matter as it is one of the factors which created a significant number of complaints to the council following the introduction of the new service. My analysis suggests the following:

- It is not appropriate for the council to provide a collection service to certain households which goes beyond the statutory provisions of a kerbside collection. The only exception to this being assisted collections to which I have made specific reference above.
- The council may not have adequately identified properties which had been in receipt of bespoke non-kerbside collections prior to the commencement of the new service and to advise these households that with effect from 4 July the service would revert to a kerbside collection. The council therefore missed the opportunity either to implement a compliant kerbside collection at an earlier point in time or alternatively to have communicated clearly to the affected households that an arrangement which they had previously enjoyed was to be ended and for it to be explained to them why this change was to take place.
- Further, the council may have failed to identify cases where households which were in receipt of a bespoke non-kerbside collection should have been receiving an assessed assisted collection service.

Recommendation 7: I therefore **recommend** that, at the earliest opportunity, the Council uses a specific article in The Reporter to clarify that it is now delivering a universal and equitable service to all households in the Borough except where an assisted collection has been agreed.

Separation of cardboard and glass

Under the new service glass and cardboard are collected in the same receptacle and then separated by the operative into separate compartments on the vehicle. Based upon experience in other councils this arrangement works effectively. However, observation by the service managers indicates that the separation task can be more time consuming, particularly where the volume of glass and / or cardboard is high. The service is currently considering offering two receptacles to households which have high volumes of glass and / or cardboard to make the collection process more efficient.

Recommendation 8: I therefore **recommend** that, whilst the decision about a preferred way forward is made without delay, very careful consideration is given to communication and potential implementation before initiating any change, especially as this may not be delivered universally.

Use of trolleys

The new receptacles have been designed to enable them to be stacked. One option which the service has considered in the light of experience during the early weeks of the new service is to offer households, which may find it convenient, trolleys so that the boxes can be moved together when moving them to the kerbside ahead of the collection. This may well be welcomed by some households but the imperative of the financial savings cannot be ignored so the Council will wish to consider whether charging for these is appropriate as part of its deliberations.

Recommendation 9: This is an outstanding decision which requires resolution and I recommend that this is dealt with speedily.

7. Customer complaints and complaint handling

For the reasons which have been outlined in the earlier part of this report there was a significant number of service failures during the early weeks of the new service. In this context, I define a service failure as a failure to collect the recycling materials from a household on the prescribed day.

Whilst undertaking this review I have considered a wide range of information including statistics from the council's customer service team; these are the frontline staff who handle all the calls and email messages sent to the council about service failures. I have also reviewed an array of emails sent to the council and this includes a file containing all the emails which were sent or copied to the

Leader of the Council in the period 8 July 2016 – 11 October 2016. I have also interviewed the managers of the council’s customer services team and the communications team.

Service failures reported to the customer service team

The table below shows the number of calls received by the council during the first three months of the operation of the new service compared with the numbers earlier in the year. Not all of these calls relate to the recycling and waste service and so the information is differentiated to separate these out.

TABLE 3: Details of Calls received by the Customer Services’ team

Month ending	Total Calls offered	Abandonment	Average Speed of answer (min/sec)	Recycling & Waste calls offered	Abandonment	Average Speed of answer (min/sec)
Jan-16	8704	3.40%	0.27	2509	2.90%	0.34
Feb-16	6759	3.70%	0.36	1799	3.00%	0.46
Mar-16	12992	15.10%	1.33	3726	11.70%	1.55
Apr-16	9728	14.10%	1.57	3088	17.60%	3.05
May-16	9253	7.60%	1.17	2969	7.40%	1.45
Jun-16	13910	9.80%	1.30	5768	9.10%	1.41
week ending	Total Calls offered	Abandonment	Average Speed of answer (min/sec)	Recycling & Waste calls offered	Abandonment	Average Speed of answer (min/sec)
08/07/2016	5492	33.90%	4.28	3611	39.90%	5.26
15/07/2016	4400	31.60%	4.45	2475	33.20%	5.30
22/07/2016	4207	31.80%	5.14	2337	31.90%	5.50
29/07/2016	4803	60.00%	12.24	2587	59.30%	13.47
05/08/2016	3205	37.80%	6.54	1291	26.20%	7.15
12/08/2016	2800	46.80%	7.27	956	35.00%	9.26
19/08/2016	2177	17.90%	2.24	791	8.60%	2.08
26/08/2016	2896	37%	5.56	1103	22.30%	5.58
02/09/2016	Bank holiday 1949	49.40%	8.48	695	33.50%	9.12
09/09/2016	2861	35.70%	4.58	1007	25.40%	5.36
16/09/2016	2441	12.80%	2.09	756	4.80%	1.53
23/09/2016	2409	10.00%	1.43	716	5.00%	1.49
30/09/2016	2283	20.40%	3.16	663	8%	2.56
07/10/2016	2312	9.80%	1.49	677	4.10%	1.37
14/10/2016	1842	16.90%	2.11	497	7.40%	1.55
21/10/2016	1190	7.10%	1.23	374	1.60%	0.47
28/10/2016	1796	6.00%	0.58	574	7.80%	0.55
04/11/2016	1948	9.10%	1.33	521	3.30%	1.13

Speed of Answering

The number of calls being made to the Customer Services team meant that answering times reduced significantly, leading to a large increase in the number of abandoned calls. The council's target for this service is 26 seconds and is one of the performance figures readily available on the council's website. The cumulative figure for September 2016 was 1 minute 36 seconds so it is clear that the service is moving back to normal response times.

Abandoned calls

Due to the very high volume of calls which the customer service team experienced during the peak period the number of calls which were not answered (technically referred to as 'abandoned' as the caller hangs up before being answered) rose to a level significantly higher than the council's normal service standard.

The council's Performance Target for abandoned calls is 8%. As the Table shows, the service consistently meets this target and, now that the peaks of July, August and September have declined, is essentially meeting the target again. In the peak of demand following the introduction of the new recycling service this reached a level of 60% in the week ending 29 July. At the same time, given that the number of calls increased from 7-8,000 per month (in Jan/Feb 2016) to 19,000 in July, this meant that the actual number of abandoned calls will have increased from approximately 300 per month to approximately 7,500 in July.

Whilst this was undoubtedly frustrating for residents who were trying to contact the council during that time, it is clear that the actions which were taken by the Customer Services Manager sought to bring the response time back into line with the council's target response times. These are detailed later in this section.

Planned process for dealing with service enquiries

The customer service team worked with the recycling and waste service managers in the run up to the introduction of the new service. During the course of my interviews it became apparent that the manager and a number of the senior staff in the customer services team had been with the council when the predecessor service was introduced and well-remembered the implementation of the new service.

Regular discussions took place between the recycling and waste and customer services managers through the whole of 2016 increasing in frequency as the implementation neared. I am therefore satisfied that there was thorough liaison between the two teams in the run up to the introduction of the new service which meant that the customer service team were prepared to handle customer enquiries relating to the new service.

Training for the customer services staff took place during April and May 2016 and there were regular meetings to keep these staff apprised of developments, including understanding of the integration of their Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system with the Bartec system. This training included temporary additional staff as well as those permanently on the team.

My assessment is that adequate planning and preparation was undertaken by the council's customer services team to deal with the anticipated number of customer enquiries based upon the expected additional demand which the introduction of the new service.

Dealing with the unplanned level of service enquiries

The previous Table indicates that as a result of the level of service failure which arose in the early weeks of the new service, this created a far higher than predicted level of customer contact with the council's customer service team. This was reflected in a much higher than predicted level of calls to the call centre and a very high volume of email contacts.

In order to cope with the far greater number of calls, the Customer Services Manager took a number of actions before and during July and August:

Additional staff cover had been introduced and leave was not allowed during July with a number of requests turned down over August too.

The Customer Services Manager also initiated a number of solutions to help her team to deal with the significantly increased volume of calls. These included using the interactive voice recognition (IVR) tool to help improve call handling flows. The council also made good use of its out of hours number to provide information to residents outside normal office hours.

Their planning for implementation extended their core customer service team to approximately double its normal capacity from various internal sources.

When it was realised that the numbers of calls were too great for the staff to handle and that information they were being provided with was not as accurate as it should have been, efforts were made to relocate staff close to the office-based service personnel in the hope that more timely information could be exchanged. Some members of the customer services team were specifically co-located with the recycling and waste managers in the office at the depot at Knutton Lane. This improved the flow of information between the customer services team and the recycling and waste service but the significant operational service team workload meant this didn't function effectively either.

Following implementation and the increasing problems, additional communication did take place between the Waste and Recycling Service and the Customer Services staff, with daily meetings to ensure that the messages were accurate but even these, clearly, could not keep up with the constantly changing and increasing problems.

Information provided to the customer services and communications teams

The ability of the customer service team to deal effectively with the number of service failure notifications which were being received both on the telephone and by email depended upon the information provided by service about the rounds which had not been completed.

From the interviews which I have conducted it is evident that there were some significant breakdowns in communication which resulted in incomplete information being assembled about locations where rounds had not been completed. The lack of a single overview of what had and what had not been collected hindered both the efforts of the service managers to deploy resources to correct these failures and of the customer services and communications team to give residents accurate information about service failure and corrective actions which would be taken.

It is also evident from the analysis which I have carried out that, in many cases, the same information was being reported to the customer services team from a number of different sources. This was particularly the case with information sent to the team by email, where this was often

copied by the resident to the customer services team and the operational team, and also often to elected Members and named officers. Whilst every case was different, the fact that the emails were being sent to multiple inboxes meant that the council found it very difficult to quickly assimilate the information about individual service failures and respond to these. Further, in many cases there was a time delay in information being sent to the appropriate person and this also compounded the problems which the council had in identifying and dealing with individual service failure reports. I have also seen evidence that this process consumed significant amounts of officer resource and increased the response time to deal with service failure reports.

With hindsight there should have been a much better system in place to gather accurate and systematic information about service failures. This information should have been provided to the customer service team dealing with individual resident calls and the communications team seeking to give general service update information.

The poor quality of information provided to residents was compounded since many elected Members who were also in receipt of service report failures from residents were also relying on the information on the council's website to give responses. Again, when this proved inaccurate it compounded the problems which the council faced in getting accurate messages about the service to the public.

My investigations have shown that there were occasions on which there was inaccurate information published on the council's website about streets from which there had been a failure to make collections. This information was relied upon by the public and the council's customer service team. This demonstrates the importance of rigour in gathering information about instances of services failure to ensure that correct information is provided to the public.

Whilst it is hoped that the council will not, in the near future, face a level of service failure which it saw with the introduction of the new service, nonetheless events such as severe weather mean that service disruption is something which can and should be anticipated.

Recommendation 10: I recommend that the council considers providing further resilience to its customer services team through a pre-planned mutual support arrangement with another council.

Complaints and complaint handling

In addition to considering the calls and emails which came into the council set out above, I have also looked specifically at those cases which became the subject of formal complaints to the council.

During the period covering June, July, August and September, the council received 149 formal complaints about the Recycling and Waste Service which were dealt with as Stage 1 complaints (i.e. investigated by the service concerned) within the Council's formal Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy. Of these, two moved to Stage 2 (i.e. investigated independently within the council) and were responded to on 16 August and 12 September respectively so all such complaints were dealt with some time ago. With this in mind, it is important to recognise that, despite the significant problems with the service, these formal issues have all been concluded.

Whilst the council needs to be aware of the extent to which service failures have had a significant impact on residents where these have become the subject of formal complaints the council has been attentive and responsive in dealing with them.

I am therefore not recommending that the council needs to make any changes to its corporate complaints procedure as a result of what occurred in relation to the introduction of the new recycling service.

Recommendation 11: however, I **recommend** that the council continues to see complaints as a key performance indicator which should be kept under review by elected Members and officers through the council's performance management reporting arrangements.

Service performance standards

I have set out above a definition of service failure for the recycling and waste function being a failure to collect the recycling materials from a household on the prescribed day. This is a very important performance measure for any council having responsibility for recycling and waste services. This has historically been a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in the days of the local government Audit Commission. In my view despite the demise of the Audit Commission this should remain a key performance indicator for any recycling and waste collection authority.

Whilst any service failure will be very significant for the household concerned, it is a practical reality that service failures will occur from time to time. These will happen for a number of reasons, but amongst the most common are:

Human error – an operative simply failing to pick up or empty a particular receptacle;

Severe weather – recycling and waste services are susceptible in times of extreme weather with snow and ice conditions placing particular challenges on service delivery;

Vehicle breakdown – accident or breakdown involving a collection vehicle will impact on service delivery event unless a replacement can be sourced promptly;

For these and other less common reasons, the Audit Commission accepted that a 100% service delivery rate would rarely if ever be achieved.

So, in the past, councils were obliged to collect significant amounts of data to allow national comparison. After the demise of the Audit Commission, it was up to councils themselves to decide what performance data they collected and how to assess it.

Up until the end of 2012-13, one of the elements of data which the council reviewed was the number of missed bins (as well as tonnage of waste taken to landfill and % of household waste reused, recycled or composted).

The council decided not to continue to compare the missed bins data as a corporate KPI but, given the recent issues, and given that the number of missed bins is probably the objective measure which reflects most strongly with the public on a week-by-week basis,

Recommendation 12: I **recommend** that the Key Performance Indicator "Measure missed bins collections on all our routes" be reintroduced as a corporate performance measure.

At its last report (Quarter 4 2012-2013), it was flagged that the target was to achieve less than 100 missed bins per 100,000 collections and the council was performing at approximately 40 missed bins per 100,000 collections. Given the significant changes to the service, the target and expectation would appear to be a sound restarting point for this measure.

The figures are not, at the time of preparing this report, easily downloadable from the Bartec system (although managers are already seeking to be able to generate a regular report so that any trends or issues can be readily identified) so this needs to be addressed with the software supplier and/or at the user group.

Complaints and communications summary

The number of complaints was significantly higher than expected and this was compounded by some complaints coming through the call centre and being logged into the computerised CRM software, whilst others (sometimes duplicating or partially duplicating those computer-logged) bypassed that system adding to both the complexity and the workload, creating a sense of chaos.

This problem was compounded by the numerous instances of repeat reporting of the same information coming from the various sources often with direct reporting by residents being reported again by elected Members.

Promises were given by managers, often through Councillors, about remedies to individual problems but even those were overtaken by events causing an increasing lack of confidence in the service, compounding the complaints and requiring ever-increasing resources to manage them.

Given the magnitude of the problems, I do not believe it was feasible for bespoke solutions to have been provided at that time in individual cases despite expectations.

When the expected reduction in recyclables did not materialise, managers had to continue to 'firefight' and seek short term solutions to try to get the backlog of material collected, even if this meant that the recyclables were not collected in the planned manner e.g. separated recyclables being put as mixed into vehicles and then efforts made to re-sort at the depot.

The lack of clear explanation of these and other matters compounded the view that the service was failing when, at least in some ways, some of the solutions were pragmatic ones to try to alleviate the immediate crisis.

Recommendation 13: I therefore **recommend** that, where the council is planning such a major service change in the future, a communications contingency strategy should be prepared before implementation.

Such a communications contingency strategy would highlight key messages which the council would put out in the event that the planned implementation did not go according to the initial plan. This would be designed to cope with a situation where widespread service failure resulted in significant information demands being made on the council. This would ensure that the council could provide accurate information to residents about the difficulties being encountered and what actions it is taking to deal with the matter without this diverting significant resources from managing the recovery of the service failure itself.

8. Actions taken to address service failures

Service delivery - immediate responses

At the time of implementation, it was known that there would have been a build-up in recyclables, so it was recognised that there would be additional pressure at that point. In preparing for the new service it was known from the experience of other councils that there is a surge in material being presented when the service is first introduced. From the work which the council undertook in preparing for the new service it was anticipated that the increase in recyclables would be up to 8 % additional material. In Newcastle-under-Lyme's case this launch surge proved to be a longer term increase in recycling material being presented.

In order to cope with the additional volumes of material the service managers put a number of contingency arrangements into place:

- Staffing resources were scoped at the launch of the new service to deal with a launch material surge lasting between 2 and 3 weeks;
- The service also had on standby some additional vehicles as highlighted previously: one full size full spec recycling vehicle and one smaller 'stillage' vehicle;
- As rounds were not completed within the same working week additional working took place on Saturdays during July, August and early September, collecting mainly dry recycling and garden waste. The number of vehicles and length of time varied with up to four vehicles collecting across both work streams. Once the additional recycling vehicle was in place and once the collections were being completed in-week, the amount of additional Saturday working was reduced appropriately;
- Casual staff were brought in to add capacity to the service.

When the volume of material continued to remain at very high levels after the initial 3 week period further contingency measures were introduced:

- Staff leave had been minimised through the initial weeks but some leave had been booked after that time. Discussions had taken place with a local personnel agency in advance and then, as early as 6 July, further discussions took place. Further additional staff were engaged w/c 11 July and this number gradually increased over subsequent weeks to cover some leave during weeks 3 to 5 and to staff the additional vehicles which were being used for collections.

Additional vehicle capacity was maintained and further additional vehicles were brought in. A fourteenth full-size and full-specification (although without Bartec) recycling vehicle was ordered for hire during the second week and this was put into service during week 3 and a further small vehicle was also brought into use.

Over the following eight weeks, these vehicles were kept in service and, through daily review, were used to provide greater collection capacity and allow the team to assess whether these would be needed over the longer term as part of the permanent fleet.

Some rounds were completed using additional general vehicles. Whilst this helped add capacity some of this material had to be mingled at the point of collection as the additional vehicles could not accommodate separated waste. I note that in some email correspondence with the council that this

caused some members of the public to question why recyclables they had separated had been mingled. This was a short-term contingency measure only.

Whilst the service took an appropriate decision to bring in additional staff resources through the use of casual staff this was not without its shortcomings. By definition, the casual staff lacked the experience and training of the permanent employees. Whilst the majority of these proved willing, in practice their productivity was generally lower than that of the permanent staff and therefore the output which was achieved was tempered accordingly.

Executive Members actively engaged with officers as soon as the scale of the problem became apparent. As well as phone calls and email exchanges, regular meetings took place between key officers and the portfolio holder and these are listed in detail in Appendix D.

On 25 July a meeting of the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chief Executive, Executive Director Operational Services, Head of Service for Recycling and Waste and the Customer Services Manager was held to review the position and to affirm the contingency arrangements which had been put in place. A recovery plan was also agreed and implemented with immediate effect.

This was followed by further specific meetings on 16 August and 13 September. The Chief Executive, Executive Director Operational Services and Head of Service for Recycling and Waste continued to meet on a regular basis during August and September to review progress with the recovery plan.

These meetings enabled the council to ensure that the response which was put in place was robust and coherent and addressed the needs for the service to rectify the shortcomings in performance, and for the customer services team to give precise information to residents about the actions being taken.

Service delivery – increased service capacity

As a result of those discussions the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder have approved the acquisition of one additional standard recycling vehicle. Further provision has been made for the purchase of an additional small vehicle which can access kerbside collection points in very constrained locations. These vehicles will also give additional capacity to the service to be able to respond to reported missed collections and provide some contingency capacity in the context of the level of recycling material now being presented.

Work is in hand to make minor amendments to the round schedule to take account of the learning from the early months of the service, the introduction of additional resources and to ensure that a long term sustainable pattern of collection rounds is implemented.

9. Actions which might have been taken

In undertaking a thorough and independent review it is appropriate that I should seek to assess whether I consider that the council took all of the appropriate steps to deal with the issues which arose during the early weeks of the new recycling and waste service. Whilst I fully accept that it is very easy to make such comments with the benefit of hindsight, nonetheless the council has as part of the brief specifically asked me to consider learning lessons for similar projects in the future.

Actions detailed in the project plan

As indicated above, I have reviewed the project plan which was prepared to plan and prepare for the implementation of the new recycling service. From this I note that more than 250 activities were identified and carried out leading up to the start date of 4 July. And, even then, many of these are generic headings ('specification development' for example) which will have required considerable different elements of background activity in their own right.

Contingency planning

I have reviewed and considered carefully the contingency plans which the council made in preparing and planning the mobilisation of the new service. Whilst I am satisfied that there were contingency plans clearly these were insufficient to deal with the problems which the council encountered particularly in view of the significantly inflated volumes of recycling material which were presented in the early weeks of the operation of the new service.

With the benefit of hindsight the council might have had contingency plans which:

- Had additional capacity built into them to deal with volumes of material in excess of the planned levels. However, as I have set out above it is likely that in the current period of considerable austerity in the public sector and given the requirements to meet the savings targets which had been set for the new service, the council would have faced considerable adverse reaction had it mobilised a service with considerable excess capacity beyond that which the WRAP forecasts suggest it should have made, had it not then needed to utilise them.
- My analysis shows that the council had planned for an additional volume of customer enquiries through its customer service team through both telephone and email contact and that this team had been resourced to cope with this. However, again the circumstances which prevailed in terms of material volume and the attendance level of service failure meant that the council faced a volume of impact on its customer service team which it could not reasonably have foreseen. Nonetheless, it is a tribute to this team that the measures that were taken enabled it to deal with a very significant level of additional demand during the most demanding weeks of the new recycling service.
- I have indicated above that the council should on this occasion and should in future put in place a contingency communications strategy to ensure it can give key customer service messages in such situations. The council's communications team has the skills to manage such crisis communications and requires the relevant services to ensure that appropriate messages are scripted in advance for emergency contingency situations this same information would also be used to give public messages through the council's customer services team.

Preparing a 'Plan B'

I have given very careful and considered attention to the matter of whether the council should have prepared a 'Plan B' to deal with the situation which arose in the early weeks of the introduction of the new recycling service. My starting point was to consider what measures the council took to assess the likely level of material which would be generated under the new service. Having looked carefully at the background papers it is evident that considerable efforts were made to predict the likely level of recycling material which would be presented under the new service both at the commencement and over the duration of the future service planning period. It is clear that the council sought the best advice available from the acknowledged experts in the field, WRAP. Further, in planning the mobilisation of the new service council officers were aware of the likely known surge of material presented at the launch of such a new service and also had planned and anticipated the increase in volume which was expected as a result of the collection method and the consequence of promoting the service ahead of launch. This being the case it is my assertion that the council did adequately plan for an increase in volume which took account of all the known data based on the experience of other councils. It is my view that the council could not therefore reasonably have foreseen the level of increased material presented since the service has been commenced. Further, I consider that the actions which have been taken by the service managers to deal with the additional volume of material is appropriate and places the council in a sound situation to manage the additional volumes moving forward.

10. Conclusions

In undertaking this independent review, I have been set some specific objectives. I wish to conclude by responding specifically to those objectives and drawing evidence from the narrative text of my findings set out in the earlier sections of the report.

- i. Determine objectively the problems which the council encountered when the new service was implemented.
 - In the early weeks of the new service the council encountered significant challenges in responding to the level of demand placed upon the new recycling service.
 - This resulted in a very high volume of householder calls and emails to the council's customer service centre with residents reporting service failures.
- ii. Identify the causes of the problems in the implementation of the new service which caused such a significant level of unfulfilled collections and adverse customer response.
 - The principal reason why the council had service failures was that the level of recycling material which was presented in the early weeks of the service was far higher, at up to 25%, than was reasonably anticipated when the new service was planned (long term increase up to 8%)
 - In parallel with introducing the new recycling service the council also enforced the collection of all householder material from the kerbside. This was a change of practice for some households which had previously enjoyed a bespoke service at a collection point within the property curtilage or other more convenient location.
 - Under the old service, a number of residents had received a bespoke service similar to an assessed assisted collection service. These arrangements had developed through custom and practice with individual crews and information about these informal arrangements was not known to the council when the new service commenced.
 - The very high volume of calls and emails which the council's customer service team received as a result of service failures was far higher than could reasonably have been planned for this resulted in a very high level of abandoned calls during the peak demand period resulting in unfulfilled customer service.
 - It proved difficult for the council to gather a comprehensive picture of service failure in the early weeks to the new service which resulted in some inaccurate information being provided to the public.
- iii. Assess what actions have been taken by the managers of the service to deal with these issues.
 - The initial recruitment process has been completed for both driver and operative roles, and a further process is being undertaken to permanently staff the new vehicles, which means that the requirement for the use of casual staff can be minimised.

- Changes have been made in the management structure of the waste service operation to clarify roles and accountabilities.
 - The council currently has on order one additional standard recycling collection vehicle which will increase the capacity of the standard collection fleet in line with the current and anticipated medium term recycling material volumes.
 - The council has on order one additional small vehicle which can be deployed to collect at locations which cannot be accessed by the standard vehicles.
- iv. Review further actions which are planned to ensure that the service meets its objectives and to assess the suitability of those plans.
- I have reviewed the actions which have been taken by the council in response to the problems which were identified in the early stages of the implementation of the new service.
 - Further I have reviewed the level of service calls to the council's customer services team
 - Some 5,500 calls received per week (at the peak level in the first week of July)
 - Compared with 2,000-2,500 calls per week normally (Jan/Feb 2016)
 - While undertaking my review, I have interviewed a wide range of elected Members and council officers and these enquiries indicated that the recycling service has returned to a normal standard of service.
- v. Assess whether there are any further actions which should be taken and to make recommendations accordingly.
- I have noted in Section 8 above the actions which have been taken by the council to increase capacity in the recycling service to deal with the additional amount of material which has been presented. This includes the purchase of one additional standard recycling vehicle.
 - Further the council has approved the purchase of one additional small vehicle which will address a number of issues which arose in the early weeks of the new service being introduced. This vehicle will be able to access the most constrained locations which are hard to service with the standard vehicles. It will also give capacity to the service to complete rounds in the event of excess demand.
 - I have also noted in my report that the service has now completed actions to ensure that all the posts in the initial new service team structure have been filled with permanent staff.
 - Throughout this report I have made specific recommendations in relation to the matters which I have considered and reported. I summarise these recommendations in the following section and in addition make some further recommendations arising from my wider experience of similar issues with other councils with which I have worked.
- vi. Provide assurance that the actions taken, planned and recommended will enable the service to realise the objectives which were set for it.

- As set out in (iv) above I am satisfied that the actions which have already been undertaken have returned the recycling service to a normal standard of service operating in line with the requirements which have been set.
 - I have made a number of specific recommendations in this report which I consider will assist in ensuring that these standards are maintained.
 - I **recommend** that the findings of my report are referred to the appropriate scrutiny committee and that this committee ensures that the report's recommendations have been fully considered and appropriate actions implemented in a timely manner.
 - Further I have **recommended** that the relevant scrutiny committee should review the operation of the new service to ensure that it is meeting its objectives and that this should commence in the summer of 2017.
- vii. Identify what learning lessons the council should take from the implementation of the new Recycling and Waste service to apply to similar projects in the future.
- I have addressed this element of the brief in my general recommendations set out below.

11. Recommendations

I have made 13 specific recommendations throughout this report on the matters which I have investigated. I have brought all of these together below:

Specific recommendations

Introduction of any further new vehicles: I recommend that any new vehicles are used as a backup for a short period initially and to allow the new driver to get used to their new round before needing to collect from that round in a given timeframe.

Optimising the efficiency of in-day tipping: I recommend that this in-day capacity issue is an important element of training for any new crews and, particularly, drivers.

Review of collection rounds: In the light of the higher volumes, it is necessary to review the round sizing and number and I recommend that this should be done as soon as practicable to allow the changes to be well communicated to any residents affected by a changed collection day.

The council's 'place' database: I recommend that a failsafe system is put in place to ensure that all properties within the Borough are transferred when new computer systems are introduced as there should only be one 'Master' council database of 'place' which others should then duplicate from if that's needed.

Assisted Collections: I recommend that operatives are reminded that they should address any requests for an assisted collection to the Council's call centre (preferably by using the online form on the website).

Bartec Usergroup: I recommend that the council prioritises its membership of the Bartec user group to ensure that it receives the early benefits of any additional developments of the system as they are likely to be valuable in service improvements.

Enforcement of kerbside collection: I recommend that, at the earliest opportunity, the Council uses a specific article in The Reporter to clarify that it is now delivering a universal service to all households in the Borough except where an assisted collection has been agreed.

Cardboard and Glass Boxes: I recommend that, whilst the decision about a preferred way forward is made without delay, very careful consideration is given to communication and potential implementation before initiating any change, especially as this may not be delivered universally.

The provision of trolleys: This is an outstanding decision which requires resolution and I recommend that this is dealt with speedily.

Customer Services' Team Resilience: I recommend that the council considers providing further resilience to its customer services team through a pre-planned mutual support arrangement with another council.

Review of Complaints: I recommend that the council continues to see complaints as a key performance indicator which should be kept under review by elected Members and officers through the council's performance management reporting arrangements.

Missed bins KPI: I recommend that the Key Performance Indicator "Measure missed bins collections on all our routes" be reintroduced as a corporate performance measure.

Communications: I recommend that, where the council is planning such a major service change in the future, a communications contingency strategy should be prepared before implementation.

In addition to these specific recommendations I would also wish to add some others which I think the council should consider as it moves forward and which may be pertinent to future considerations in relation to the recycling and waste service but also to other activities:

General recommendations

The council is currently implementing its new digital delivery strategy through which it will make more services available interactively on its website.

As part of this process, ***I recommend that the council should encourage residents to register for 'push' messages which can be delivered by email, text, Twitter or the like (according to customer preference). These can be used to send targeted information to customers about service changes, issues or information.***

I am aware that the council is intending that there should be a review of the new service one year on from implementation to ensure it is achieving its intended objectives, this process would be undertaken by the relevant scrutiny committee.

I **endorse** this suggestion and, in addition:

I recommend that the relevant scrutiny committee review the recommendations made in this report to ensure that the council has considered the actions it will now take as a result.

I also recommend that a brief should be prepared for the relevant scrutiny committee to review the running of the new service, and that this review should be commenced in the summer of 2017.

I note that a number of the council's services are currently going through the process of accreditation under the nationally recognised Customer Service Excellence programme.

I recommend that the recycling and waste service should be considered a priority for the next phase of rollout of the Customer Services Excellence accreditation process.

I note that the recycling and waste service currently has its own Twitter username. This approach is inconsistent with the council as the service provider and operator, nor does it seem feasible to adequately resource or seek followers for this.

I recommend that this separate account is deleted and focus provided through the council's main Twitter username.

Whilst I am satisfied by the rigour of the governance of the project, particularly in relation to the oversight which was given by elected Members through the Cabinet Panel, I consider that oversight could have been stronger with managerial input from outside the service area. I note that this is practice by the council for the majority of projects but was not done in this case.

I therefore recommend that in implementing projects of similar scale the council's Executive Management Team should put in place, as a matter of course, a programme board to ensure project oversight beyond the immediate service area.

Appendix A: Review brief

Independent Review of the implementation of the Council's new Recycling and Waste Service

Commissioning and independent review

The Leader of the Council has requested the Chief Executive to make arrangements for an independent Review of the implementation of the Council's new Recycling and Waste Service. This is a joint commission with the findings being reported back to the Leader and the Chief Executive.

Background

The Council introduced a new recycling and waste service on 4th July 2016. The establishment of the new service has been overseen by a cross party Cabinet Panel chaired by the Portfolio Holder and planning for the new service began in January 2013. The introduction of the new services has been overseen by the Director of Operational Services and Head of Recycling and Waste with a project team reporting to them.

The Council's new recycling and waste service has a number of objectives:

- Make the recycling collection service simpler
- To reduce costs for residents
- Achieve at least 55% recycling rate by 2020
- Collect four separate streams of material for recycling

The initial basis of the new service is set out in a report considered at Cabinet on 23rd July 2014 a copy of which is contained with this brief. This was then further developed and refined through the work of the Cabinet Panel which was given delegated powers by the Cabinet to agree and develop the detail of the service.

In designing the new waste service the Council has had input from WRAP the non-executive agency of DEFRA which advises the majority of local councils on recycling and waste services. The design of the new service has also been undertaken following extensive public consultation and by reference to a number of best practice sites.

The new service is wholly managed in-house by the Council and this has been achieved by bringing the existing contracted-out part of the services, collection of food waste and recyclable materials, with the council's direct management control. The council has also established its own waste transfer station to handle the recycled materials.

Implementation of the new service

In the early days of the new service operating it became rapidly apparent that the amount of recyclable material which was being presented by residents and the number of and extent to which households were participating was considerably in excess of that which had been projected. Indeed, this was well beyond the levels which experience of implementing similar services in other authorities had predicted. The implementation of the new service had been scoped through detailed modelling to deal with a predicted increase of additional material in the region of 7-8% in accordance with experience elsewhere and in line with best practice. It had also been anticipated that the introduction of the new service would produce an early spike in demand due to greater participation rates and latent demand with households holding back materials for presentation until the new service commenced. For this reason, the new service was timed to commence in the main

summer holiday season when experience had been that the level of material presented is lower with households absent during holidays.

In practice the amount of material presented in the first weeks of the service and the extent of participation by residents was beyond that which had been planned for and this remained the case with volumes of recyclate being at a level of over 10% along with an ongoing increase in presentation of weekly presentation of containers.

This higher than anticipated volume of recyclate created challenges for the crews to collect all of the material resulting in not all rounds being completed on their scheduled day and these being followed up on subsequent days.

The number of unfulfilled collections resulted in a very high volume of calls to the Council's customer service centre which created very significant additional demands upon that service with high levels of abandoned calls. The number of complaints made through the Council's formal reporting mechanisms and through elected Members was significantly heightened during the early weeks of the new service. Customer dissatisfaction was also reflected in media coverage and social media commentary. Whilst the council sought to keep customers informed about unfulfilled collections and follow-up rounds through its website this was dependent upon feedback from crews which was incomplete in some cases resulting in inaccurate information being given.

Other issues which presented themselves in the early weeks of the new service was a failure to fulfil all of the assisted collections. It was also evident that certain customs and practices developed by crews under the previous service were ceased under the new service which caused a mismatch between customer expectation and service fulfilment. Further, as the new service required all recycling rounds to be revised there were challenges to crews in learning new rounds and in particular to develop 'work around' solutions particularly for locations with challenging access and in some rural parts of the Borough, including properties with long private drives.

These factors increased the level of unfulfilled collections in the early weeks of the new service. The heighten public awareness of the challenges being faced by the service also brought to the fore adverse comments from some customers unfamiliar with the non-standard type of collection service operated in their locality, for example in flats and apartment blocks. These were not necessarily directly related to the new service but added to the adverse comments from customers directly to the council and through elected members.

Independent review

The Council wishes to commission and independent review which will:

- i. Determine objectively the problems which the council encountered when the new service was implemented
- ii. Identify the causes of the problems in the implementation of the new service which caused such a significant level of unfulfilled collections and adverse customer response
- iii. Assess what actions have been taken by the managers of the service to deal with these issues
- iv. Review further actions which are planned to ensure that the service meets its objectives and to assess the suitability of these plans
- v. Assess whether there any further actions which should be taken and to make recommendations accordingly
- vi. Provide assurance that the actions taken, planned and recommended will enable the service to realise the objectives which were set for it

- vii. Identify what learning lessons the council should take from the implementation of the new recycling and waste service to apply to similar projects in the future

Independent reviewer

To undertake this assignment the council is seeking a person with the following characteristics:

- Of standing within the local government sector
- Familiar with the operation and management of local authority waste services
- Knowledge and experience of local government services at a regional or national scale
- Awareness and sensitivity to the needs and expectations of customers of public

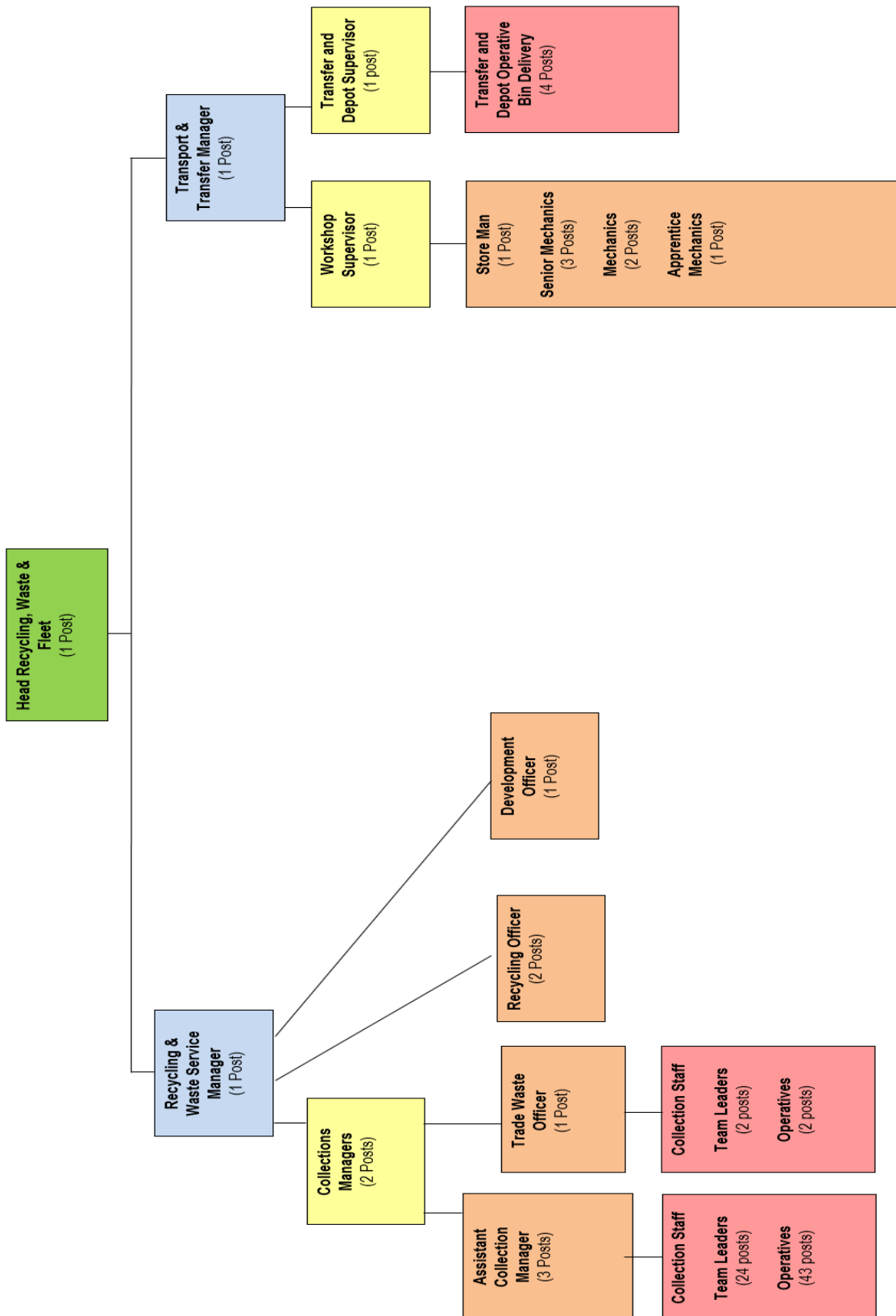
Appendix B: List of Agendas, Minutes and other papers considered (this list is NOT exhaustive)

Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 30.1.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 12.3.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 18.4.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 9.5.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 13.6.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 24.7.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 3.12.13
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 30.1.14
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 28.4.14
Cabinet 23.7.14
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 8.10.14
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 12.2.15
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 22.4.15
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 9.6.15
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 11.8.15
Presentation to Councillors before Council 9.9.15
Cabinet 16.9.15
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 13.11.15
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 14.12.15
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 8.1.16
Recycling and Waste Cabinet Panel 28.4.16

Copies of email correspondence during the first months following implementation.
Copies of the Reporter and other material relating to the changes and following implementation.
Press Releases.
Statistical data relating to call handling and collection tonnages. Previous customer survey material.
The detailed Implementation Project Plan (Gantt Chart).
PowerPoint presentations to Councillors.
Radio Interview downloaded from iPlayer.
Backtracking through the Council and the Recycling Twitter links.
The Waste and Recycling Action Programme Report to the Cabinet Panel in Feb 2015

Appendix C: Staffing Structure Chart for Recycling, Waste and Fleet Services

Staffing for Recycling and Waste = 80 posts under the Head of Service



Appendix D: Schedule of Meetings with Members post 4 July implementation

1. 12/7/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, HoOS)
2. 19/7/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
3. 25/7/16 Review of Progress (Leader, Deputy Leader, PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoICS)
4. 27/7/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (Leader, Deputy Leader, PFH, EDOS)
5. 28/7/16 Members Visit (Leader, Deputy Leader, HoRFS)
6. 2/8/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
7. 8/8/16 Portfolio Holder visit to Depot (PFH, HoRFS)
8. 9/8/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, HoRFS, HoOS)
9. 16/8/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
10. 16/8/16 Update Meeting ((Leader, Deputy Leader, PFH, CEO, EDOS, HoRFS, CIBM)
11. 23/8/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoOS)
12. 31/8/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoOS)
13. 31/8/16 Visit to Depot and on site with collection crews (PFH, CEO, EDOS)
14. 6/9/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
15. 13/9/16 Update Meeting(Leader, Deputy Leader, PFH, CEO,EDOS,HoRFS, HoC, CIBM)
16. 20/9/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS)
17. 26/9/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
18. 4/10/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
19. 11/10/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoRFS, HoOS)
20. 18/10/16 Portfolio Holders Briefing (PFH, EDOS, HoOS)

Key:	PFH	Portfolio Holder
	CEO	Chief Executive
	EDOS	Executive Director - Operational Services
	HoRFS	Head of Recycling and Fleet Services
	HoOS	Head of Operational Services
	HoICS	Head of ICT and Customer Services
	CIBM	Customer and ICT Business Manager
	HoC	Head of Communications

Appendix E: The Reviewer's Summary CV

Howard Davis MA (Cantab.), C.Eng., MICE

Before choosing to take Voluntary Redundancy in July 2015, after some 34 years in Local Government, Howard was the Principal Adviser for the Local Government Association (LGA) in the West Midlands. In a similar role, he had also covered both the South West and the North West.

He now acts as a Mentor, Coach, Adviser and Freelancer, particularly focussing on Public Sector Support.

He is a former local authority Chief Executive, is a Chartered Engineer and a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. His work for the LGA included:

- Managing the relationship between the LGA and the West Midlands' 33 local authorities (a mix of County, Unitary, Metropolitan District, and District) and 5 Fire and Rescue authorities;
- Brokering partnerships between local authorities (including shared services or management arrangements) to support self-improvement;
- Acting as senior sponsor to key national programmes delivered within the region;
- Providing a sponsorship role for strategic issues for LGA at a national level;
- Working in partnership with other agencies to ensure a co-ordinated approach to improvement within the region (he was a board member of IEWM, Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands).

Howard ran the County Highways Direct Labour Organisation (CORMAC) in Cornwall before becoming Assistant Chief Executive at the County Council. In that role, he oversaw several politically contentious programmes such as the externalisation of the Council's Residential Care Homes to a new Trust (rather more the norm now than it was in the early 90s!).

He has 10 years' experience as a Chief Executive, firstly with Tewkesbury Borough Council in Gloucestershire and then with Teignbridge District Council in South Devon. Whilst Chief Executive at Teignbridge the authority gained three charter marks, Beacon status for crime and disorder, a Good CPA rating, a significant increase in the District's recycling % and delivered a reverse TUPE for many of the Council's services.

Howard lives in Gloucestershire and had 7 years as a Governor at Tewkesbury School one of Gloucestershire's largest Secondary Schools, including 4 years as Chair following its successful conversion to an Academy. To maintain a bit of balance to life, Howard enjoys travelling with his family (40 countries so far and counting!) and cooking, as well as sport (though now more as a spectator and supporter of his children than a participant).