

Better information, better decisions, better services

Frequency of household waste collection



A guide to demanding better information



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Frequency of household waste collection

Part 1 – The purpose of the guide



Do you need to make a decision about the frequency of household waste collection?

This guide is ...

- one of a series produced by the Audit Commission alongside the national report *Is there something I should know?* More information on the study and supporting toolkit can be found at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

It is aimed at ...

- decision makers in councils: elected members, service directors; heads of service; and service managers.

It will help you ...

- specify the information you need for decisions on the frequency of household waste collection. Better information will help you make a better decision, which will lead to a better, more efficient waste collection service.

Frequency of household waste collection

Part 2 – Demanding better information

- Objectives
- Costs
- Impacts
- The public



The information that will help you make your decision

Clarity on your objectives

- What are you trying to achieve and why?
- What are your biggest constraints?

Costs

- What does the local scheme cost now?
- How does that compare with others?
- What are the projected costs and risks of the different options?

Impacts

- What is the current level of performance?
- How does that compare with other councils?
- What is the expected impact on performance from each of the options?

The public

- How acceptable are the proposals to the public?
- What impact will the options have on public satisfaction?

Why is this an issue and what are you trying to achieve?




| Objectives | |
|--|--|
| Why is this an issue? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public pressure?• Reducing the cost of the scheme?• Improving performance?• Sustainability? |
| What are you trying to achieve? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change public behaviour?• Encourage increased recycling?• Save money?• Reduce carbon emissions? |
| What are your constraints? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Locally agreed waste collection and recycling policy frameworks.• Current service and corporate objectives.• Waste Disposal Authority costs and capacity.• The policy and practice in neighbouring authorities. |

What are the **cost** implications?

| Factors to consider | The data that will help | The analysis that is needed |
|--|---|--|
| What does your scheme cost now? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost now, including capital and revenue. • The cost to others, including the Waste Disposal Authority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends over time, and analysis of why costs have changed. |
| How does that compare with other councils? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative data, comparing current cost against the cost in other similar councils with a range of schemes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of why costs are different. |
| What are the costs of the different options? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimates of the revenue and capital costs of each of the options. • Estimates of the costs to others, including the Waste Disposal Authority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the reasons for the cost differences between the options. • Forecast of the future cost of each option. • Analysis of the likely impact on costs from predicted changes in population / households / public behaviour / recycling income / landfill tax. |

Hints and tips – The relevance and quality of cost data

Bear in mind that ...


-  Schemes in other councils may not be exactly comparable, but comparisons with their experience may still provide useful insights.
-  Comparing and combining information – for example, student population, waste tonnage collection, proposed new builds – can substitute for imperfect population or household information.
-  Information that depends on assumptions, such as forecasts of future costs, will rarely be very accurate. But testing assumptions with experts and experienced managers, and assessing the sensitivity of forecasts to changes in assumptions, can provide confidence in forecasts and help identify risks.


What **impacts** will your decision have?

| Factors to consider | The data that will help | The information that will help |
|---|--|--|
| What is the current level of performance? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current waste collection performance data. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of performance data cut by area and street type. • Trends over time, and what has driven changes. |
| How does that compare with other councils? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative performance data from other similar councils with a range of schemes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of why performance is different. |
| What is the expected impact on performance from each of the options? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation data from similar councils who have implemented changes to frequency of waste collection. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forecast of the impact on performance of each of the options. • Forecast of the impact on the strategic priorities of the council and of the local strategic partnership. |

Hints and tips – The relevance and quality of data on impacts

Bear in mind that ...

 Forecasts depend on assumptions. Decision makers should challenge information providers on the basis on which the assumptions were made to ensure that the predictions are as realistic and robust as possible. Decision makers should also demand analysis of where the biggest projected risks lie.


 Aggregating information at too high a level can be misleading. Even where recycling performance is increasing across a council as a whole, some areas might be seeing reductions while others see increases in recycling. Different options may be appropriate for different areas.


What do the **public** think?


| Factors to consider | The data that will help | The analysis that is needed |
|---|---|---|
| <p>How acceptable are the proposals to the public?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on public satisfaction levels. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of complaints, enquiries, focus groups and councillor viewpoints to understand the concerns locally. • Analysis of local media reporting on this issue. • Breakdown of satisfaction levels by demographic type, geographical area and type of housing. |
| <p>What impact will the options have on public satisfaction?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on levels of satisfaction in similar councils, with different schemes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trend analysis of satisfaction from survey data. • Analysis and forecast of the impact that each option may have on public satisfaction levels. • Analysis of the risks associated with any possible decrease in public satisfaction levels. |

Hints and tips – The relevance and quality of data about public opinion

Bear in mind that ...

 Public perception is difficult to measure and there is often no single answer – in addition majority views may not be the most vocal ones. Combining and comparing data from different sources – for example, enquiries, complaints, meetings, surveys, and focus groups – will help to build up the picture.

 Public opinion may be quick to respond to changes, but may change again over time. Regular feedback from a panel might be appropriate. Assessment of enquiries and complaints for the same time period will provide additional information.

 Public opinion can be influenced. Details on how community leadership has helped influence public opinion on other sensitive local issues can help identify how this can be achieved in your area.

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Part 3 – Example and case study



Example – Getting behind the headline figures can give greater insight

A council is reviewing its waste collection service to assess if it can increase recycling further without increasing costs

Data from other councils shows that recycling is lower than similar areas

BUT

Breaking this down by type of goods recycling shows the council has higher recycling than other councils on all but one type of waste



The council therefore considers an extra collection for this

The initial forecast suggests an extra collection would be cost-effective

BUT

Further analysis shows the forecast is very sensitive to assumptions made on the market price for recycled materials. In some possible scenarios the extra collection would not be cost effective



The council may therefore decide to make no change for the time being

Case study – Understanding costs and public opinion in Wychavon District Council

Objective: Waste collection is Wychavon's largest service. It affects all 50,000 households in the area. The council needed to both save money and increase recycling rates. They could achieve both objectives by moving to a fortnightly waste collection.

Public opinion – What do the public really think?

Information on public opinion was obtained through:

- baseline satisfaction from surveys;
- focus groups and community road-shows; and
- a web-based survey.

The initial base data suggested that the main issue for residents was concern over the waste receptacle – it seemed residents did not want wheelie bins.

However, the more in-depth consultation told the council that the real issue was food waste and that there was a need to continue to collect this weekly.

Since the changes recycling rates have increased from 30% to 47%.

Cost – Making efficiencies

There were three basic options:

- Maintain a weekly waste collection, which would cost £4 million.
- Go to fortnightly waste collection, which would save £850,000.
- Go to a fortnightly waste collection – but maintain a weekly food collection, which would deliver a saving of £450,000.

The council ultimately decided on the third, middle ground, option. This did not deliver the biggest efficiency – however, the long term cost of the cheapest option was public acceptability, which meant it was not the best decision for the council or for residents.