

**Sutton Scrutiny Committee
Task and Finish Group**

Report of the Task and Finish Group's work to look at the preparations for and the initial implementation of the new waste collection service introduced across Sutton in April 2017.

Membership:

Councillor Pat Ali (Chair)
Councillor Ed Joyce (Vice Chair)
Councillor David Hicks
Councillor Trish Fivey
Councillor Patrick McManus
Councillor Nick Emmerson
Councillor Chris Williams

June - September 2017

Executive Summary and Proposed Recommendations.

Between June and September 2017 the task and finish group (TFG) conducted an enquiry into the preparations for and implementation of the new waste and recycling service which was introduced in Sutton on 3 April 2017.

The TFG held a number of evidence gathering sessions and secured access to background documentation to better understand the preparations, processes and participation of key parties involved in this major service procurement.

The report which follows sets out in detail the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the TFG's work. The key findings and conclusions are set out below, followed by a full list recommendations¹.

Key findings

- The 'competitive dialogue' procurement approach was a novel approach for Sutton and also for the four-borough South London Waste Partnership.
- Whilst planning and preparation were thorough, more could have been done by Sutton Council, the South London Waste Partnership and Veolia to make sure that the impact of such a major set of changes (affecting service routes, crews, collection frequency and type, communication to and preparation of residents and ICT support systems) and their inter-relationship were understood.
- More time needs to be factored into planning significant service change in respect of key supporting areas such as ICT.

¹ The recommendations were proposed by the TFG and discussed, amended and agreed at Scrutiny Committee on 4th October 2017.

- Consideration should be given to finding appropriate and practical ways to benefit from members’ knowledge of their communities and keeping the wider pool of members up to speed on significant change programmes for universal services.
- The snap General Election and associated period of ‘purdah’ impacted the ability to communicate effectively with residents during the key early weeks of the new service.
- Capturing local knowledge from long-term staff is key to the success of major service changes.
- It is also important to develop and maintain robust but positive relationships with new suppliers to help identify and rectify issues.
- During a service change, residents should be kept informed about potential and existing problems, the timing and effect of any proposed solutions and the likely timetable for resumption of normal service.

| Ref. | Strategic recommendations |
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| i | <i>Earlier engagement with staff could have helped the new contractor better prepare for this significant and complex service change. When staff are to be transferred as part of a new contract, induction and one-to-one meetings (or small group discussions) should be conducted as early as possible to ensure adequate information sharing and early resolution of any issues.</i> |
| ii | <i>When there are changes to service delivery arrangements (for example, outsourcing), elected members should be given clear information about the respective responsibilities of the contractor and the internal client team, so that they know who to contact in the event of any issues.</i> |
| iii | <i>With major service changes (particularly changes to universal services), all members should be briefed more thoroughly, consistently (throughout the process) and at an earlier stage on:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>The procurement route (where relevant) and the implications for member involvement</i> 2) <i>Any partnership arrangements (where relevant) and the extent to which each partner may need to compromise in order to achieve the aims of the partnership</i> 3) <i>The potential impact on residents - particularly where there is a risk of significant or prolonged service disruption - and any projected increase in complaints.</i> 4) <i>How the change process is progressing (particularly if this changes during the process) - eg. including cost / resources, staff morale, scale of change etc.</i> |
| iv | <i>Senior officers should investigate options for member involvement in the clienting and performance management (for example, through a regular arrangement for a ‘working group’ of members representing each ward to share intelligence with the clienting team). In cases of service disruption, the ‘working group’ arrangement could then be used as a steering group for resolving service issues, and members could be kept regularly informed of the extent of the disruption and of the likely timescales for resolving issues. Further, the use of Local Committees to pick up this function should be reviewed.</i> |
| v | <i>When planning for a significant service change, close consideration needs to be given to the number and range of possible problems which might occur at an early stage in preparations. Pay particular attention to:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Working with potential service providers in an open and collaborative manner whilst also having the confidence to rigorously challenge their proposals and past experience (even</i> |

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| | <p>where they might have a long-standing and positive industry reputation); and</p> <p>2) Pro-actively making a robust crisis-management plan for use if the need should arise.</p> |
| vi | <i>In relation to major service changes - particularly to universal services - the council should maintain a continuous dialogue with residents. This should include clear and explicit communications about the potential for service disruption, as well as more communication about the reasons for service changes in the context of the wider challenges and opportunities facing the council.</i> |
| vii | <i>When making changes to a long-standing in house service, more consideration should be given to the potential impact of staff changes, and arrangements should be made with HR to ensure that any risk of unanticipated resignations has been identified and mitigated against.</i> |
| viii | <i>The council should ensure that, in relation to all remaining in-house services, local knowledge has been documented systematically. Where a service change requires the continuation of certain accommodations / enhancements, these should be documented and residents advised.</i> |
| ix | <i>For future service changes, potential new service providers should be more cognisant of the importance of local knowledge and of 'walking through' the service in detail even where paper based due diligence has been conducted.</i> |
| x | <i>As our SLWP partner boroughs implement waste service changes, they may want to be cognisant of the amount of time needed to prepare for and implement a successful flats service and of the steps that need to be taken to document local information on a case by case basis. More effort should be made to contact managing agents (at least three attempts should be made) and it should be made clear what issues may arise if a response is not received.</i> |
| xi | <i>For future service changes, steps should be taken to minimise the level of complexity in relation to ICT. In this instance, the option of passing information from the council's website directly to Veolia (rather than via our CRM) should be investigated.</i> |

| Ref. | Operational recommendations |
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| i | <i>Internal arrangements should be put in place at the council so that whenever a project mandate is agreed, internal support services 'sign off' their input. This should then be kept under review as the project progresses.</i> |
| ii | <i>Where a contracted service is reliant on the delivery of a system, an agreed date for the delivery of the system - and performance measures relating to ongoing ICT support - should be written into the contract and the mobilisation project team should ensure there is sufficient resource to monitor progress against agreed milestones.</i> |
| iii | <i>Now that residents are more familiar with the new service, follow-up communications should be sent out with more detail about the recycling requirements (particularly in relation to why certain items can or cannot be recycled).</i> |
| iv | <i>When any major service change is introduced, all members should be equipped with an information pack. This should also be circulated to community groups and residents associations, who should be encouraged to assist with communicating the information to residents.</i> |

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| v | <i>LBS and Veolia should work together to review all bespoke arrangements that have been put in place to address lack of recycling capacity. A decision should be taken in each case as to whether this arrangement should continue, and the evidence gathered through this process should inform modelling for future service changes in other boroughs.</i> |
| vi | <i>When a contracted service provider is providing equipment or resources to the council as part of a service change, a clause relating to the delivery of these resources (and the information to be provided to the council in the event of any issues) should be built into the contract and the mobilisation project team should ensure there is sufficient resource to monitor progress against agreed milestones.</i> |
| vii | <i>If a resident-facing event is to be organised by a contracted service provider, better preparations should take place to ensure the requirements of Sutton's residents have been adequately planned for.</i> |
| viii | <i>With any future service changes:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1) Build in longer timescales for receiving and testing equipment (e.g. vehicles) to increase the likelihood of timely resolution of any issues.</i> <i>2) Ensure that a critically-aware due diligence is applied to handover activities, paying particular attention to the need for flexibility to bring in additional capacity if need is evidenced by service performance / management information during the mobilisation phase.</i> |
| ix | <i>Flats with limited space should be identified to provide the required tonnage of dry mixed recyclables and, to avoid confusion, residents in these flats should be clearly informed that they are part of this scheme.</i> |
| x | <i>The council should work with SLWP, WRAP and other relevant agencies to promote a packaging reduction campaign</i> |
| xi | <i>Stickers should be put on containers before they are distributed, and messaging should be 'futureproof' to avoid a secondary action.</i> |
| xii | <i>All council systems should be 'load tested' to check what can be accommodated in the event of service disruption. In the event of future service changes, members should be advised of any likely spikes in call volumes (as noted in Strategic recommendation iii).</i> |
| xiii | <i>Particularly during periods of increased pressure on the contact centre, introduce automated responses to email queries to give residents assurance that their email has been received and is being addressed.</i> |
| xiv | <i>In preparation for the introduction of any contracted service, escalation email addresses and processes should be put in place at an early stage so that contact centre managers are able to contact the appropriate person in the event of specific issues.</i> |
| xv | <i>Now that the issues in the contact centre have been resolved, residents should be actively encouraged to reported missed collections; this is important in order to feed into the performance management information and ensure that a consistent service is being provided across the borough.</i> |
| xvi | <i>Consideration should be given to prioritising resolving 'high visibility' issues (eg. overflowing bins) which impact on resident experience of the borough, as well as high volume issues.</i> |

Establishing the task and finish group (TFG) and the scope of work

On 19 May 2017, Councillor Pathumal Ali - Chair of the Scrutiny Committee - wrote to members of that committee and the leaders of the majority and opposition parties to propose that the Scrutiny Committee use its powers to establish a task and finish group (TFG). The purpose of the TFG was to investigate the planning and implementation of the new waste and recycling service which had launched on 3 April 2017 and had encountered some significant difficulties.

The email (attached at Appendix A) contained a draft scope (attached at Appendix B) and proposals for the number and political membership of the TFG. The four key focuses of the TFG's work as set out in the scope were:

Aim 1: The preparations made for the introduction of the new service.

Aim 2: The preparations made for communicating the changes to Sutton residents.

Aim 3: The service problems encountered during the implementation phase.

Aim 4: The response to those problems.

Methodology

Once the TFG was established, members held two meetings to discuss and agree the specific lines of enquiry which they wanted to explore during the investigation. These key lines of enquiry were designed to underpin the four aims which had been agreed by the Scrutiny Committee when they considered the initial scope.

The resulting 20 lines of enquiry informed the questions addressed during the investigation and identified sources of documentary evidence which could be used to brief TFG members.

As the TFG members proceeded through their evidence gathering sessions, learned more and identified further areas which they wanted to address, the final bank of questions extended to number more than 60. During the sessions themselves, TFG members also took the opportunity to ask numerous supplementary questions.

The TFG held:

- Two preparatory meetings to discuss and agree the key lines of enquiry and identify the key witnesses and documentation that would help them undertake their work.
- One background and context setting briefing from the lead Sutton officer.
- Ten evidence gathering sessions with a wide range of witnesses from LBS, SLWP and Veolia, and from other London boroughs with experience of waste service changes.
- One resident focus group, which followed a door-to-door survey of 288 residents commissioned by the SLWP. The TFG offered advice on some of the questions asked during the survey, and the focus group looked in more detail at some of the key issues

arising from this. The reports for the survey and focus group (attached at Appendices C and D) contain the detailed survey and focus group responses, the methodology and arrangements for determining sample quotas.

- The TFG also heard evidence from an expert witness - the Local Authority Support Manager at Resource London².

The full list of sessions (describing the witnesses and TFG members present at each session) is provided at the end of this report.

Background / context

As the TFG progressed through its evidence gathering sessions, it became clear that it would be necessary to review early elements of the commissioning of the new waste and recycling service. This meant the scope was extended to cover matters which helped the TFG understand why and how the service was launched in April 2017.

The TFG heard that the London Borough of Sutton (LBS) commissioned the new waste collection service through the South London Waste Partnership (SLWP) - a four borough partnership which includes Kingston, Croydon and Merton councils. Partnership arrangements began in 2004 through the procurement of a joint garden waste treatment contract between Sutton, Merton and Croydon and over the last 13 years the SLWP has predominantly dealt with waste disposal matters.

Following a series of intra-authority agreements, a fully constituted Joint Waste Committee (JWC) was created in 2005. This committee - which contains two members from each of the partner boroughs - has jurisdiction over waste disposal but not waste collection. The TFG heard that the procurement of the waste collection service was therefore overseen by a joint 'Strategic Steering Group' (comprised of Chief Executives and directors from each of the four boroughs) with appropriate decisions being taken by the relevant committee in each borough (in Sutton's case, the Environment and Neighbourhoods Committee).

Throughout the evidence gathering process, the TFG was told about the rationale and key drivers behind the decision to commission a new waste collection service through the SLWP. Although the council's in-house waste collection service was high quality and valued by residents³, changes needed to be made in order to respond to new challenges and opportunities including a number of significant and long-term issues:

- The need to contribute to the European Waste Framework Directive requirement for member states to reuse or recycle 50% of household waste by 2020.
- The need to continue to make austerity savings and minimise impacts on other sensitive / vulnerable services: the changes to the waste service are projected to achieve a saving of £8.2million over 8 years.
- The need to maximise the benefits of working in a partnership of four authorities, namely: achieving better leverage in the marketplace and realising economies of scale through

² [Resource London](#) is a partnership programme which supports London boroughs to deliver more consistent and efficient waste and recycling services.

³ As evidenced by the [London Borough of Sutton Residents' Survey 2015](#), which reported 82% satisfaction for refuse collection and 77% satisfaction for recycling.

standardisation of services.

Across a number of the evidence gathering sessions, TFG members heard about the strategic and operational drivers which provided the backdrop and direction to this procurement. The three key aims agreed by the South London Waste Partnership and set out in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) notice were:

1. To target optimum savings on the costs of service provision through lower service costs and recycle revenues;
2. To deliver residents a high performing service, achieving high levels of customer satisfaction;
3. To provide improved environmental and carbon outcomes in the way we deliver environmental services.

Senior officers from LBS and the SLWP explained that the procurement was undertaken using the 'competitive dialogue' methodology. Competitive dialogue is a procurement process which allows organisations to negotiate with multiple prospective providers through a series of confidential, structured discussions. Rather than producing a detailed specification, the procuring organisation can set out broad principles and aims and allow the market to offer possible solutions which meet these criteria. The TFG heard that the benefits of using competitive dialogue to procure a service of this complexity and scale were that it allowed the SLWP to explore a series of options (in increasing detail) throughout the procurement process, and that savings could be achieved through negotiations and by maintaining competitive tension between the bidders. More detail on the six key stages of competitive dialogue procurement is attached at Appendix E.

The TFG was told that, following the Environment & Neighbourhoods (E&N) Committee's agreement in principle (in November 2014) to undertake the procurement through competitive dialogue and as part of the SLWP, authority was delegated to officers to take forward the procurement in accordance with the aims set out above. This process resulted in a recommendation to E&N Committee in June 2016 to award Preferred Bidder status to Veolia⁴.

Evidence

The work of the TFG was broken down into four broad areas ('aims') in order to provide a logical and progressive approach to the investigation. Taking each of these aims in turn, the sections below present a detailed picture of the evidence heard by the TFG, the conclusions which can be drawn from that evidence and the recommendations which the TFG proposes for consideration. As well as seeking to identify lessons from which Sutton can learn, the work of the TFG will also be useful for the other SLWP boroughs as they transfer to the new contract.

Aim 1: The preparations made for the introduction of the new service.

Service implementation planning, information sharing and handover

⁴ The 27 June 2016 Environment and Neighbourhoods Committee papers are accessible [here](#).

The TFG heard that Veolia was responsible for service implementation planning, but worked closely with an internal LBS project team for the duration of the service implementation. Veolia are experienced with conducting service changes of this nature and scale for individual local authorities, and the Regional Director had been personally involved with 20 such service changes. However, witnesses from Veolia emphasised that every service change is very different and that the service change in Sutton was particularly complex because we were moving from an in-house service to a contracted service as well as entirely changing the way in which the service operated. The TFG also heard that this was a unique procurement exercise, as a service of this nature and scale had never previously been procured through a four-borough partnership or using competitive dialogue.

Witnesses from Veolia described the information that had been received from LBS prior to the implementation of the service (this included service schedules, staff information and specific data about properties in the borough; the full list of 41 elements of information is attached at Appendix F). Because of the nature of the competitive dialogue procurement, a large amount of borough-specific information had already been shared with all bidders and further information was shared during the 'fine-tuning' and 'mobilisation' stages. Witnesses from Veolia confirmed that the information received from LBS was similar to that which they had received from other local authorities prior to service changes.

TFG members heard that, as part of the handover period, managers from Veolia attended monthly staff meetings from September 2016 until the service start date. Veolia was provided with office space at the LBS depot (at Therapia Lane), where the General Manager and colleagues spent time observing how the LBS service was run, getting to know staff, gathering intelligence and gaining local knowledge about existing issues.

As part of the new contract, LBS staff would be transferring to Veolia under TUPE⁵. Senior Veolia managers reported that they were aware of the risk of resistance to change among staff, particularly given the routine and repetitive nature of many jobs in the industry as well as the higher than average age profile of the LBS workforce. Veolia's approach was to fully re-train all staff, which involved a half-day induction and at least one 'one to one' meeting with Veolia managers prior to the service start date. TFG members were told that, while these initial interactions were generally useful in gathering local knowledge, building trust and preparing LBS staff for the transfer to a private contractor, more time could have been spent on this process. Specifically, one-to-one meetings with LBS staff only began eight weeks prior to the contract going live; witnesses from Veolia felt, in hindsight, that this was not early enough.

Strategic recommendation (i): Earlier engagement with staff could have helped the new contractor better prepare for this significant and complex service change. When staff are to be transferred as part of a new contract, induction and one-to-one meetings (or small group discussions) should be conducted as early as possible to ensure adequate information sharing and early resolution of any issues.

⁵ TUPE stands for Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) and applies when an organisation or service transfers to a new employer. Under TUPE, employees of the 'outgoing employer' become employees of the 'incoming employer' but their terms and conditions and continuous service are protected.

Contract signing and the client function

TFG members were aware that the contract had not been signed until late March 2017 (i.e. very close to the service start date of 3rd April 2017) and queried whether this had had any impact on the mobilisation or implementation of the service. Senior LBS officers informed the TFG that, while the signing of the contract was an important formality, it had no operational impact because the terms of the agreement had already been established through the competitive dialogue process.

In terms of clienting and contract management, TFG members were informed that SLWP led on the final discussions in regard to the contract, while the role of LBS officers was to ensure that the final contractual terms corresponded to what had been agreed through the competitive dialogue process.

The TFG members heard that there is a dual aspect to the way in which client-side responsibilities are delivered, with the client function effectively being split between strategic clienting (SLWP) and operational clienting (LBS); the rationale is that this ensures a consistent approach to contract management at a strategic level across the four boroughs, while allowing each borough to monitor and manage the contract as it operates 'on the ground'.

Although this was communicated to the E&N Committee in June 2016, the TFG felt that client and contractor responsibilities should have been more clearly explained to all members - especially given the novelty of this procurement and the added complexity of the partnership arrangements. The TFG also concluded that members could play a useful role in overseeing the performance of the service and suggested establishing a member / officer working group for this purpose (discussed in more detail later in the report).

Strategic recommendation (ii): When there are changes to service delivery arrangements (for example, outsourcing), elected members should be given clear information about the respective responsibilities of the contractor and the internal client team, so that they know who to contact in the event of any issues.

Risk analysis and management

In relation to risk management, the TFG was told about three key risk registers. These were:

- The LBS project team risk register
- The South London Waste Partnership risk register
- The risk register held on LBS's central performance management system (Covalent).

The TFG heard that risks were identified and addressed throughout the competitive dialogue process, and that key risks were reported to the E&N Committee in June 2016 as part of the information in support of the recommendation to award Preferred Bidder status to Veolia.

At several of the evidence gathering sessions, TFG members asked witnesses about the extent to which certain issues could be foreseen and how risks had been mitigated (more detail on specific risks and issues appears later in the report - see, for example, sections on customer services, communications and staffing). When asked what role LBS officers had played in challenging Veolia about risks and issues in the lead up to the implementation of the service, senior LBS officers responded that as a large and long-standing organisation in this industry they were confident in Veolia's ability to deliver the service change successfully. While, as detailed later, mitigations were in place for various risks, all parties agreed that the degree and length of potential disruption to the service had not been sufficiently anticipated or communicated. Therefore, these mitigations were not always adequate.

Equality and diversity

The TFG was informed that equality and diversity was considered throughout the commissioning process, and that all bidders were required to comply with relevant equalities legislation⁶.

The TFG was told that, in line with all major decisions, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted in relation to this service change and noted with the E&N Committee paper in June 2016.

As a result of the EIA, refinements were made to the waste service. In particular, the EIA identified that residents with mobility issues may find it more difficult to manoeuvre the new recycling containers, so the Customer Services team was instructed to offer an assisted collection to these residents.

The TFG was also informed that accessibility had been considered in relation to non-English speaking residents. In line with Government recommendations, the decision was taken not to translate leaflets into different languages, but instead to ensure that the leaflets were very visual and signposted residents to the council's website, where information can be translated into multiple languages. Communications leads for LBS, SLWP and Veolia informed the TFG that all communications were developed in accordance with industry standards and rigorously tested by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)⁷.

Resident engagement / consultation

TFG members asked senior officers and the Lead Member for Environment and Neighbourhoods to explain why the decision had been taken not to conduct a formal consultation with residents about the changes to the waste collection service.

Witnesses responded that, in accordance with competitive dialogue procurement rules, evaluation criteria were agreed by the four SLWP boroughs and published at the beginning of the procurement exercise, through an OJEU notice in January 2015. Procurement rules dictate that decisions must be made based on agreed and published evaluation criteria rather than any other

⁶ [The Equality Act 2010](#) requires that public sector organisations have "due regard" to the need to "advance equality of opportunity", including by "tak[ing] steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it."

⁷ [WRAP](#) is an organisation which "works with governments, businesses and communities to deliver practical solutions to improve resource efficiency".

factors (such as the outcome of a consultation). The TFG was informed that, had a consultation been conducted after the publication of the OJEU notice, this would have impacted upon the the agreed and published evaluation process, compromised commercial confidentiality and would likely have lead to legal challenge and potential reputational damage, both publically and within the waste management market.

In relation to the decision not to consult prior to starting the procurement exercise, the TFG was informed that being in a four borough partnership was a key factor. As detailed earlier, one of the key aims of this procurement was to drive efficiencies, and this relied upon harmonisation of services across the SLWP; a degree of compromise was essential in order to achieve this, so the decision was taken that the four boroughs would agree on broad principles and then allow the market to offer solutions through a competitive dialogue. The TFG was informed that, had each borough conducted a consultation, this would inevitably have resulted in four different sets of requirements (particularly as two of the four boroughs already had fortnightly waste collections). Presented with four different sets of criteria, it would have been difficult for the market to offer a feasible solution which achieved the required savings.

There is no general duty to consult on service changes, but the Gunning Principles stipulate that if an organisation does consult, then it must be lawful and comply with those principles⁸. In the circumstances of the four borough competitive dialogue approach, it was clear that consulting with residents in the boroughs could not have resulted in a feasible or affordable solution, so conducting a consultation would have been disingenuous and could have resulted in a legal challenge to the council and / or the SLWP.

Witnesses also explained that the option of making a service change in Sutton alone had been investigated. However, it was evident that this would have achieved only a fraction of the £8.2million saving achieved through the joint SLWP procurement, and it also would not have been economically viable to provide the same range of services to residents (ie. including collections for food waste, batteries and textiles). While this option may have allowed for a resident consultation, witnesses also explained that it was important to consider the behaviour change required to achieve savings and improve recycling rates: a consultation would most likely have indicated that residents wanted to retain weekly residual waste collections, but ultimately this would have been neither affordable nor appropriate in the context of the nation-wide drive to improve recycling rates and evolving industry standards.

Additionally, the TFG was told that significant data on resident requirements and preferences had been gathered prior to starting the procurement exercise - specifically:

- A food waste pilot conducted with 2500 residents in three wards (which ended in 2013) showed that 72% of residents wanted to retain food waste collections as long as this was not detrimental to other services and did not increase Council Tax.

⁸ The Gunning Principles:

- Consultation should be undertaken when proposals are still at a formative stage;
- Sufficient reasons for any proposals should be provided;
- Adequate time should be provided to consider and respond; and
- Product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account.

- Senior LBS and Veolia officers attended all six local committees from January to March 2017 to engage with residents about the details of the new service . This showed that:
 - Residents had concerns about the new containers - which led to the decision to allow residents to use their existing green wheelie bins for mixed recyclables as long as they were clearly marked.
 - Residents were anxious about being reprimanded for recycling incorrectly. This was a factor in the decision to let the service ‘bed in’ before informing residents about contaminated bins.

Approach to and arrangements for member involvement

The TFG asked senior officers about the extent to which the council’s elected members had been engaged in the decisions surrounding and the introduction of the new service.

Witnesses explained that in November 2014 the E&N Committee took the decision to undertake the competitive dialogue procurement, agreed the operating principles and evaluation criteria, and delegated authority to officers to undertake the procurement in accordance with these principles. Once the procurement exercise had started, members were not permitted to influence the solution or the selection of the preferred bidder until the key decision-making stage.

Officers gave details of the key occasions when members were briefed on the service change (following the E&N Committee decision in November 2014), namely:

- January 2016 - briefing to the majority group and opposition group on the detail of the three solutions that had progressed to the ‘Invitation to Submit Final Tender (ISFT)’ stage of the competitive dialogue procurement.
- June 2016 - E&N Committee agreed to the recommendation to select Veolia as the Preferred Bidder in accordance with the evaluation criteria.
- August 2016 - briefing to Council
- September 2016 - briefing to Local Committee Chairs.

The TFG was initially concerned that there had not been sufficient opportunities for member engagement. Once the competitive dialogue process had been explained, they acknowledged that procurement rules meant that members could not influence the procurement process; however, they felt that this context should have been explained to all members in more detail and at an earlier stage. TFG members also felt that the implications of procuring through a partnership - specifically in terms of the potential compromises this would entail - had not been adequately explained to members.

Additionally, senior officers from both LBS and Veolia acknowledged that members’ expectations of the service change should have been better managed. All parties agreed that members had not been sufficiently prepared for the magnitude of the service change or the extent of the likely disruption and that, had members been better informed, they would have been better able to advise and support residents during the service change. Senior Veolia officers also commented that Sutton’s members were an especially engaged group of councillors and that, had they

appreciated this, Veolia could have better equipped members to prepare residents for the service change.

Taking into consideration the evidence heard at several sessions, the TFG felt that all three parties (the council, SLWP and Veolia) had a responsibility to ensure that members were more fully prepared for the service change and able to better manage residents' expectations. While Veolia should have been more proactive in considering members' needs and advising the council and the partnership about the likely extent of service disruption, the SLWP had a responsibility to ensure that experiences and expertise were shared across the partner boroughs to make sure that each partner was adequately prepared for their service change. Moreover, senior Sutton Council officers with responsibility for commissioning and communications should have been more proactive in preparing members and residents for the potential extent of the service disruption.

This finding is supported by an August 2017 report of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman which concluded that, to prepare for changes to waste services, local authorities should ensure that "councillors are fully briefed so they know how to help when people report problems."⁹ The TFG also heard evidence from senior officers from other London boroughs, one of whom told the TFG that they had explicitly prepared members for a significant increase in waste-related complaints while their new service bedded in.

Strategic recommendation (iii): With major service changes (particularly changes to universal services), all members should be briefed more thoroughly, consistently (throughout the process) and at an earlier stage on:

- 1) *The procurement route (where relevant) and the implications for member involvement*
- 2) *Any partnership arrangements (where relevant) and the extent to which each partner may need to compromise in order to achieve the aims of the partnership*
- 3) *The potential impact on residents - particularly where there is a risk of significant or prolonged service disruption - and any projected increase in complaints.*
- 4) *How the change process is progressing (particularly if this changes during the process) - eg. including cost / resources, staff morale, scale of change etc.*

TFG members asked whether there was a member steering board, and were told that it was not possible to take this procurement to the Joint Waste Committee as that deals only with waste disposal. The TFG was also informed that it was not appropriate for E&N Committee to discuss the detail involved in the procurement, as this was still subject to the formal and commercially-confidential procurement process (as detailed above, officers conducted the deselection of bidders exercise in accordance with agreed and published evaluation criteria, which all four boroughs had been given delegated authority to agree).

Although the TFG understood the restrictions on member involvement in decision making as set out above, they felt that an ongoing member / officer working group could usefully have been put in place prior to the mobilisation of the contract. This would have allowed a group of members to retain oversight of mobilisation and implementation, helping to resolve any emerging issues and ensuring that members had a strong understanding of the likely impact of the service change. TFG

⁹ "Lifting the lid on bin complaints: learning to improve waste and recycling services", *Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman*, August 2017.

members suggested that, if such a working group had been in existence, it could have later been used as a 'steering group' to assist officers in resolving the service-related issues.

Strategic recommendation (iv): Senior officers should investigate options for member involvement in the clienting and performance management (for example, through a regular arrangement for a 'working group' of members representing each ward to share intelligence with the clienting team). In cases of service disruption, the 'working group' arrangement could then be used as a steering group for resolving service issues, and members could be kept regularly informed of the extent of the disruption and of the likely timescales for resolving issues. Further, the use of Local Committees to pick up this function should be reviewed.

Members also asked whether any borough could have withdrawn before the contract was signed. Officers explained that in theory this would have been possible as each individual borough made their own decision as to whether or not to award; however, there would have been significant financial implications as laid out in the Inter Authority Agreement.

'Big bang' approach to new arrangements

TFG members asked witnesses from LBS and Veolia whether a phased introduction of the service had been considered, and requested an explanation of the rationale behind the 'big bang' approach to the service change.

Senior LBS officers explained that, through the competitive dialogue process, it became clear that a 'big bang' approach would allow earlier achievement of savings and improvements to recycling and would be less confusing for residents. This was discussed in more detail with Veolia through the fine tuning process and both parties were confident that the change could be delivered all at once.

The TFG raised this question with the expert witness from Resource London, as well as with senior officers from other boroughs - one of which had successfully used an incremental approach. The opinion of the expert witness was that neither approach is objectively better than the other. While a 'big bang' service change could be considered more disruptive in some ways, an incremental approach would by definition be more drawn out. A 'big bang' approach would also generally generate more and earlier savings.

While the TFG acknowledged the rationale behind the 'big bang' approach, they also felt that in this instance some of the problems had been exacerbated by the extent and number of changes introduced at the same time (see more detail in Aim 3).

Strategic recommendation (v): When planning for a significant service change, close consideration needs to be given to the number and range of possible problems which might occur at an early stage in preparations. Pay particular attention to:

- 1) Working with potential service providers in an open and collaborative manner whilst also having the confidence to rigorously challenge their proposals and past experience (even where they might have a long-standing and positive industry reputation); and*
- 2) Pro-actively making a robust crisis-management plan for use if the need should arise.*

Specific preparations in the contact centre

The TFG was informed that, as part of the overall approach to introducing the new service, the decision had been taken that the council should retain responsibility in our contact centre for receiving calls about the new service rather than transferring this responsibility to Veolia. The reason for this was to ensure that residents could contact the council - as the council is ultimately responsible for the provision of these services - and to ensure that we retained adequate knowledge of any emerging issues. Before this decision was taken, LBS contact centre staff had received any relevant staff briefings (so they could be prepared to TUPE to Veolia if necessary).

The possibility of a 'spike' in call volumes following the service implementation was raised as a risk in October 2016. At that stage, the decision was taken to include the Contact Centre Operations and Improvement Manager in project team meetings, in order to be briefed on and prepare for this possibility. To mitigate against the risk of a significant rise in call volumes, it was agreed that three full-time equivalent (FTE) posts would be added in the contact centre for 12 weeks (this was based on the predicted additional call volume). Once it became clear that this was insufficient to cover the rise in call volume, staff from other parts of the council were deployed to help temporarily and additional temporary staff were recruited; as of September 2017, there were five temporary FTEs in the contact centre specifically recruited to deal with waste-related contacts. This issue is explored in more detail under Aims 3 and 4.

Specific preparations in ICT

Through speaking to senior officers in the LBS ICT service, the TFG was informed that the timescale for implementing the necessary ICT changes was considered tight given the complexity of the implementation.

Members were told that the key issue for ICT was the importance of integrating LBS's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system - Microsoft Dynamics - with Veolia's system - Echo. Members were informed that the biggest challenge in this regard was that Echo had to be set up differently for each of the four boroughs in the South London Waste Partnership; this was for two reasons - firstly, each of the four boroughs had a differently configured CRM solution and, secondly, Echo had to be adapted for the different approaches to waste collection operating in each of the four boroughs (eg. where one borough had a different approach to bulky waste collection from another, the ICT systems had to be set up to accommodate both approaches). An added complexity was that Veolia's Echo system is owned by a third party developer (Selective Interventions), meaning that in some cases the best escalation route for issues was not immediately clear.

The TFG was informed that four factors exacerbated these challenges and meant that ultimately the required integrations were not delivered on schedule:

1. ICT representatives felt that they had not been involved with early conversations about the project, which meant that some of the complexity only became clear later.
2. The decision to award Preferred Bidder status to Veolia was 'called-in' in two of the four SLWP boroughs. This meant there was an approximately two-month delay to the integration work (ICT colleagues used this time to work on improving the ICT 'customer journeys' in relation to the service, but could not start the key integrations until the Preferred

Bidder had been agreed and it was therefore clear which systems would need to be integrated).

3. Key ICT developers chose to leave LBS at a crucial point during the implementation, due to a change to IR35¹⁰ tax law (this specific issue is detailed under Aim 3).
4. The Echo system was only delivered for testing one week before the service start date (with the live system delivered two days later). While the ICT service was able to do some development work using APIs¹¹ - which were delivered in November 2016 - there was a limit to what could be tested without the full system in place.

In response to a question about whether there was a requirement for Veolia to deliver the system for testing by a certain date, the TFG was informed that this was not written into the contract. The TFG concluded that this was an omission, and that any future contract that is dependent on an ICT system should have a clear contractual requirement for the date of delivery of that system (at least six months in advance of the service start date for a universal service of this scale). This was supported by the TFG's discussion with other London boroughs, during which it was suggested that performance measures for ongoing ICT support could also usefully be included in any future contracts.

Operational recommendation (i): Internal arrangements should be put in place at the council so that whenever a project mandate is agreed, internal support services 'sign off' their input. This should then be kept under review as the project progresses.

Operational recommendation (ii): Where a contracted service is reliant on the delivery of a system, an agreed date for the delivery of the system - and performance measures relating to ongoing ICT support - should be written into the contract and the mobilisation project team should ensure there is sufficient resource to monitor progress against agreed milestones.

Aim 2 : The preparations made for communicating the changes to Sutton residents.

Communications strategy and timetable

In relation to communications, the TFG heard evidence from lead communications officers from LBS, SLWP and Veolia. The responsibility for communications was shared between the three organisations, and each of the communications leads had signed off on all communications.

The TFG heard that communications was a key consideration in the preparation for the service

¹⁰ 'IR35' refers to "off-payroll working rules" designed to "ensure that individuals who work through their own company pay broadly equivalent taxes as employees, where they would be employed if they were taken on directly." As of 6 April 2017, a change to this legislation moved "responsibility for deciding if the off-payroll rules for engagements in the public sector apply, from an individual worker's PSC [personal service company] to the public sector body, agency or third party paying them." For more information, see [Off-payroll working in the public sector: changes to intermediaries legislation](#).

¹¹ An API (Application Programme Interface) is a set of tools and protocols used for building and integrating data and software. Essentially, an API dictates the 'rules' for how different pieces of software should interact.

change, and that preparations began in earnest in April 2016 (a year prior to the service start date). Witnesses explained that there were three key communications plans and strategies covering the period from April 2016 up until the service 'go live' date and beyond. These were:

1. The Comms Phase C LBS Communications Strategy (a Sutton-specific communications strategy which covered the period to December 2016 and was eventually supplanted by the 'service change communications plan' - below).
2. The Sutton Recycling and Waste Collection Service Change Communications Plan (a detailed plan developed by Veolia, SLWP and LBS, explaining how the service change would be communicated to residents and other stakeholders). An extract from this plan showing the agreed key messages is attached at Appendix G.
3. The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Communication Protocols (a contractually binding document owned by Veolia and developed in consultation with SLWP, setting out the key communications principles as well as details of the budget available for communications).

These communications plans included clear protocols about permitted communications during the 'fine tuning' stage of the procurement process. The communications plans also identified several key risks, in particular:

- That lack of communication during the procurement process could have an impact on staff morale.
- That, of the four SLWP boroughs, Sutton would be one of the boroughs at higher risk of service disruption due to the nature and scale of the service changes.

The LBS communications lead explained that the broad principles of the Sutton-specific communications plan were approved by senior officers in the Environment, Housing and Regeneration Directorate and by the Lead Member for Environment and Neighbourhoods, with communications leads given the flexibility to adapt and change the communications plans as necessary during fine tuning, mobilisation and implementation.

When asked about the rationale for the communications timetable, officers explained that communications in Sutton began in May 2016 (with a public press release and an article in the council's staff newsletter) because this was the point at which information about the Preferred Bidder and outline solution was about to enter the public domain (via Croydon Council's committee papers). Referring to the communications 'grid' within the service change communications plan, officers explained that week-by-week (and eventually day-by-day) communications were planned for the period from 3rd January to 3rd April 2017. The TFG was told that, while in theory it would have been possible to begin more regular communications in December 2016, this may have been less effective due to the Christmas break. Moreover, all parties were in agreement that three months was an appropriate period for a communications campaign of this nature.

Rationale for communications channels and messaging

Witnesses explained that a wide variety of communications channels were used, including:

- Press releases
- Leaflets

- Events, including staff briefings, roadshows and attendance at local committees
- Social media
- A Sutton-specific Sky TV advert

The choice of communication channels was guided by a combination of industry best practice and the cumulative experience of the three communications leads in running different communications services in other local authorities. All communications materials used templates provided by WRAP and Recycle for London¹² and had been tested in focus groups which included residents from Sutton. Two thirds of the communications were 'direct line' communications, because these had proven to be the most effective elsewhere - and there was flexibility in the communications budget to accommodate this; for example, while Veolia's communications budget allowed for distribution of a leaflet to residents via a leafleting company, LBS contributed extra budget to allow the leaflets to be distributed by Royal Mail in a Sutton-branded envelope with an accompanying letter from the Lead Member for Environment and Neighbourhoods (based on experience that this would be more likely to be read).

The effectiveness of the communications campaign was measured through a door-knock survey of 288 Sutton residents in June 2017, which confirmed that 85% of residents recalled receiving either one or both of the leaflets distributed, and 91% of those found them useful (67% of respondents reported that Sutton Council kept them well informed about the upcoming service changes overall). In the follow-up resident focus group, attendees agreed that the communications were effective in explaining the service changes.

In relation to communications, TFG members queried whether more information could have been given to residents about which specific items were recyclable. The communications leads explained that this was constrained by space in the leaflets, and that the decision had been taken to focus on high volume queries (with the leaflet directing residents to more detail on the council's website). In the resident focus group, attendees generally agreed that the leaflet was clear as to what could and could not be recycled; however, they felt that more information would have been helpful as to why certain items could not be recycled, and that this would encourage more behaviour change.

Operational recommendation (iii): Now that residents are more familiar with the new service, follow-up communications should be sent out with more detail about the recycling requirements (particularly in relation to why certain items can or cannot be recycled).

Having heard evidence from the relevant witnesses, the TFG's main concern about communications was that messaging about the potential nature and extent of service disruption had not been sufficiently clear or repeated sufficiently frequently. The TFG felt that, had residents been more clearly informed about the potential disruption to the service, they would have been less frustrated by the problems and better equipped to deal with them.

Communications leads - as well as senior officers in the Environment, Housing and Regeneration

¹² [Recycle for London](#) is a recycling campaign designed to help London boroughs increase recycling rates in line with the Mayor's target of recycling 50% of local authority-collected waste by 2020.

Directorate - acknowledged that messages about the potential disruption should have been more proactive, clearer and more frequent. Based on the results of the door knock survey, which showed that slightly over half of residents felt that the reasons for the service change were communicated well, the communications leads also resolved that future messaging about the reasons behind service changes need to be clearer and more frequent. This is supported by the report on the door-knock survey, which reinforced “the importance of keeping residents informed due to the significant impact this has on satisfaction with the service”, as well as reported recycling behaviours (see Appendix C).

Strategic recommendation (vi): In relation to major service changes - particularly to universal services - the council should maintain a continuous dialogue with residents. This should include clear and explicit communications about the potential for service disruption, as well as more communication about the reasons for service changes in the context of the wider challenges and opportunities facing the council.

During the evidence gathering session with other London boroughs, TFG members heard that elected members in one borough had been provided with ward-specific leaflets explaining the details of their upcoming waste service change. The TFG felt that with any future universal service changes, all members should be provided with a clear information pack (including details of the service change, FAQs etc) in order to better equip them to answer residents’ questions. The TFG also concluded that community groups and residents associations should be equipped with this information in order to help disseminate the key messages across the borough (particularly to harder to reach groups, such as the elderly).

Operational recommendation (iv): When any major service change is introduced, all members should be equipped with an information pack. This should also be circulated to community groups and residents associations, who should be encouraged to assist with communicating the information to residents.

The impact of the snap General Election and pre-election period (Purdah)

A snap General Election was called by the Prime Minister in a speech on 18 April 2017. The pre-election ‘purdah’ period started on Saturday 22 April 2017, and continued until close of polling on Thursday 8 June 2017¹³.

The LBS, SLWP and Veolia communications leads spoke to the TFG about the impact of the purdah period on the communications to residents about the waste collection service. As the Chief

¹³ ‘Purdah’ refers to the pre-election restrictions on communications as per the [Local Government Act 1986](#). Section 2 of the Act states that councils should not publish “any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party” and the Government’s [Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity](#) (published in 2011) clarifies that “local authorities should pay particular regard to the legislation governing publicity during the period of heightened sensitivity before elections and referendums”. The Code states specifically that “during the period between the notice of an election and the election itself, local authorities should not publish any publicity on controversial issues or report views or proposals in such a way that identifies them with any individual members or groups of members.”

Executive had explained at his evidence session, the intention had been to decouple this major service change from the political cycle to avoid impacts on implementation and delivery such as purdah. However, the unexpected announcement of the snap general election meant that a period of pre-election purdah started during the early weeks of the new service, and legal and Monitoring Officer advice confirmed that any public communications on these service changes would likely contravene purdah rules (a risk which was intensified given the specific mention of the service change in a Prime Minister's Question on 19 April 2017).

Communications leads informed the TFG that 13 weeks of 'reactive' communications had been planned and budgeted for in case of service disruption, but ultimately these were unable to be put into effect during the purdah period. In particular, once the extent of the service disruption became clear a letter had been drafted from the Lead Member for Environment and Neighbourhoods to all residents apologising for the disruption and detailing the likely extent of the issues - but this was unable to be dispatched. The communications leads advised the TFG that the door-knock survey showed a 7% decrease in resident satisfaction with communications between April 2017 and July 2017, suggesting that the purdah restrictions on communications affected residents' experience.

Aim 3 - The service problems encountered during the implementation phase, and Aim 4 - The response to those problems

Through the course of their work, the TFG heard about the problems that occurred during the implementation of the waste collection service. As the TFG heard from senior officers from other boroughs and the expert witness, a level of temporary disruption is common following the introduction of waste service changes. However, it was also clear that the extent and scale of the problems experienced in Sutton had in some cases been significantly worse than expected.

The following sub-sections set out both the nature of the problems and the way in which the problems were responded to by the council, SLWP and Veolia.

Incorrect / misleading modelling

The TFG was informed about several key areas where the modelling of the new service arrangements by Veolia proved to be incorrect or misleading, ultimately resulting in significant disruption:

The first of these was the assumptions made about flats; these were categorised by Veolia as being anything more than six properties in one building, when in reality some were maisonettes and should have been allocated to a kerbside round (more detail about the specific problems in relation to flats can be found later in this report).

Secondly - and with an even more wide ranging impact - were the assumptions made about recycling rates. Prior to the introduction of the service, Sutton was recycling around 36% of our waste, and this was projected to rise to over 40% with the new service changes. In reality, the first audited figures show Sutton is now recycling around 52% of waste - significantly higher than predicted (particularly for food waste). While this is clearly an excellent result - and a testament to residents' interest in keeping Sutton a 'green' borough - Veolia officers, LBS officers and members

alike acknowledged they had not anticipated the level of uptake of recycling. This meant Veolia's vehicles were filling up much more quickly than expected and could not complete entire rounds.

Finally, the results of the door-knock survey and subsequent focus group indicated that a proportion of residents had experienced problems with lack of recycling capacity. Although a decision had been taken that residents without sufficient recycling box capacity could continue to use (clearly marked) wheelie bins, the evidence suggested that this was not consistently understood by residents. The TFG concluded that the specific issues LBS has experienced with recycling capacity should be reviewed, in order to formalise and clarify arrangements in Sutton as well as to assist other boroughs making similar service changes.

Operational recommendation (v): LBS and Veolia should work together to review all bespoke arrangements that have been put in place to address lack of recycling capacity. A decision should be taken in each case as to whether this arrangement should continue, and the evidence gathered through this process should inform modelling for future service changes in other boroughs.

Loss of staff / loss of local knowledge

The TFG heard from senior Veolia officers that one of the most significant initial problems was loss of staff. LBS staff transferred to Veolia under TUPE; however, several took the opportunity to retire or resign (including six very late retirees / resignations) and ultimately Veolia started operating the service on 3rd April 2017 with nearly 50% agency staff (29 out of 62 required staff). The witnesses explained that Veolia managers had taken the decision to staff the refuse rounds as a priority, which meant the recycling rounds had a particularly high complement of agency staff (with certain rounds staffed with only agency workers). This, compounded with the unexpectedly high recycling rate (as detailed above) caused unprecedented disruption to the recycling service.

TFG members asked whether Veolia had attempted to recruit more permanent staff before the contract went live, but were told that it was only within the final two weeks prior to the service start date that the extent of the problem became apparent. Senior Veolia managers told the TFG that they had contacted a large network of agencies (and indeed over-resourced agency staff on the first day of the service); they also explained that 'temporary to permanent' is a popular and successful way to recruit in the industry, as refuse collection is a demanding and repetitive job so it is important to ensure potential staff have the right qualities and skills before recruiting them. This, along with the specific difficulty of recruiting HGV drivers (an industry-wide issue), meant that a large complement of agency staff could not be avoided.

The TFG heard that the loss of LBS staff resulted in a loss of local knowledge, and that this was compounded by the rounds changing significantly with the introduction of the new service, and the fact that the new Veolia management team was not aware of existing LBS staff's specialist areas or of teams that did or did not work well together. This was exacerbated by the fact that much of this knowledge had not been retained; for example, local LBS management teams had not documented details of a number of 'unofficial' assisted collections, nor of addresses where unofficial arrangements had been made to collect bins from the back of properties rather than the front.

The TFG heard from senior LBS and Veolia officers that LBS had previously had a very ‘bespoke’ service, which relied on a lot of accumulated knowledge and in many instances on staff making accommodations for certain residents (without always recording these on the list of documented assisted collections). While residents understandably appreciated these bespoke accommodations, some needs now have to be met in a different way in order that the service can be harmonised and costs reduced. LBS officers and members agreed that they had not sufficiently appreciated the amount of local knowledge which had never been documented in a systematic way and would therefore be lost at the point of transfer.

In relation to the issues around staffing and local knowledge, Veolia managers stated that one of their key priorities is to establish a stable and knowledgeable workforce. Existing and planned measures to achieve this include:

- Senior managers driving around the borough in the early weeks to check on rounds
- Trialling a new rota pattern; moving from a shift system to a standard working week of nine-hour days on a three-month basis
- For a two week period, offering incentives to staff for learning rounds
- Introducing additional managers to focus solely on flats and assisted collections
- Systematically logging all assisted collections, meaning that the official list has now increased to around 2500 compared to the list of around 1300 originally provided by LBS (this is partly due to the new style boxes which can be more difficult for some people to lift).

The TFG heard that a further intervention which is likely to enhance local knowledge in the future is the introduction of the Neighbourhood Team structure in LBS, which will mirror the current Local Place and Engagement team structure with the aim of ultimately having a team of officers (locality manager, officer and lead officer) with responsibility for overseeing improvements in each local area.

Having heard the evidence in relation to local knowledge the TFG felt that, despite document-based due diligence having been conducted, more time should have been spent exploring the topography of the borough. Moreover, as an experienced service provider in this industry, Veolia should have advised the council of the importance of identifying and documenting local knowledge prior to the service change.

Strategic recommendation (vii): When making changes to a long-standing in house service, more consideration should be given to the potential impact of staff changes, and arrangements should be made with HR to ensure that any risk of unanticipated resignations has been identified and mitigated against.

Strategic recommendation (viii): The council should ensure that, in relation to all remaining in-house services, local knowledge has been documented systematically. Where a service

change requires the continuation of certain accommodations / enhancements, these should be documented and residents advised.

Strategic recommendation (ix): For future service changes, potential new service providers should be more cognisant of the importance of local knowledge and of 'walking through' the service in detail even where paper based due diligence has been conducted.

Specific problem: collections from flats

Throughout the evidence gathering sessions, TFG members were informed that the longest running repeat issues with missed collections have been experienced by residents in flats. Veolia officers informed the TFG that they initially had concerns about the data that had been provided to LBS in relation to flats, and therefore sought to validate the data by conducting a flats survey to check how many containers could be stored at each property. Veolia officers acknowledged that while conducting their flats survey they could have been more proactive about trying to gather local knowledge - specifically by checking where bins were stored at each property and documenting any instances where bins were difficult to find.

TFG members had heard a rumour that Veolia had attempted to force the council to build new bin storage units at flats at a £10,000 cost to the council, and asked witnesses from the council and SLWP about this. They were assured that this was not the case, and that each block of flats is being assessed (by LBS and Veolia jointly) on a case by case basis to find the best solution for storing bins. Veolia officers also informed the TFG that they had attempted to contact all managing agents of flats prior to the service change, but had only received a small number of replies.

The TFG was also told that Veolia's decision to separate trade waste and waste from flats has added to the difficulties with the flats service, as experienced staff being directed to deal with trade waste had left the flats service under resourced.

In relation to solving the problems with collection from flats, the TFG was informed that LBS and Veolia have set up a specific joint task force to deal with these issues. This will be project managed by the Local Place and Engagement team at LBS, and will also involve the Neighbourhood Management team. Blocks where issues are still apparent will be targeted in a very focused way and residents will be contacted throughout the process with information about the plan for waste collection at their block (now and on an ongoing basis).

Having heard the evidence in relation to collections from flats, the TFG concluded that other boroughs making changes to their waste collection services will need to take account of the significant preparations necessary to implement a successful flats service, and in particular that more steps need to be taken to contact managing agents. This finding is supported by the report of the door-knock survey, which noted that residents who receive a kerbside collection were "significantly more likely to feel informed about the changes ... compared to those who receive a communal collection service", and noted that "the added complexity of communicating with residents in communal properties" is a potential consideration for future communications campaigns about service changes (see Appendix C).

Strategic recommendation (x): As our SLWP partner boroughs implement waste service changes, they may want to be cognisant of the amount of time needed to prepare for and implement a successful flats service and of the steps that need to be taken to document local information on a case by case basis. More effort should be made to contact managing agents (at least three attempts should be made) and it should be made clear what issues may arise if a response is not received.

Specific problem: missed collections

The TFG wanted to investigate the extent of specific issues with missed collections and questioned officers from Veolia and LBS accordingly. They were informed that in the early stages of the service there were significant problems with missed collections due to both lack of local knowledge and lack of capacity in the recycling collection vehicles (due to unexpectedly high recycling rates).

The problem with missed collections was exacerbated by the way in which ICT systems had been set up, which meant that residents could not report a collection as missed online after 48 hours had elapsed; officers explained that this workflow had been set up for a 'business as usual' scenario but in the early weeks of the new service there was so much disruption that bins were repeatedly being missed for more than 48 hours. To address this issue, an interim Google Form was introduced to allow residents to report missed collections after 48 hours, and eventually the 48 hour 'rule' was removed from the ICT system. This has allowed residents to report missed collections more easily, but has also reduced the quality of the data that LBS and SLWP require for performance management purposes.

The TFG was informed that Veolia have introduced management interventions to address the issue of missed collections (ie. additional staff, including bringing in staff from their contracts in other boroughs). Alongside this, LBS Research and Intelligence officers are triangulating the data on missed collections to ensure that members have an accurate picture of the issues.

In response to a query about the comparative figures on missed collection rates between the old and new service, TFG members were informed that whilst there have been significant problems, it would not be meaningful to compare figures because of the difference in the service and the number and type of collections.

Specific problem: late delivery of bins

The TFG was informed that LBS officers were alerted in mid-March 2017 to a problem with the delivery of containers; due to a delay with Veolia's supplier, there was a backlog of 800 containers (following further discussions between Veolia and their supplier, over 500 containers ended up being delivered late).

Operational recommendation (vi): When a contracted service provider is providing equipment or resources to the council as part of a service change, a clause relating to the delivery of these resources (and the information to be provided to the council in the event of any issues) should be built into the contract and the mobilisation project team should ensure there is sufficient resource to monitor progress against agreed milestones.

The TFG asked whether delaying the 'go live' date had been considered, and were informed that Veolia had requested a delay; however, LBS had informed Veolia that delaying the 'go live' date was not acceptable due to the resources that had been committed and the fact that communications had already been sent out informing residents of the start date. Veolia were asked to reconsider this position and to work with their suppliers to see if there was any intervention available to enable the start date of the new service to be retained. Following discussions with their suppliers, Veolia informed LBS that they were confident of meeting the required start date for the new service. In addition, two further interventions were put in place to mitigate this issue:

- Firstly, Veolia adopted a policy of 'lifting all' recycling (ie. collecting all recycling weekly instead of on alternate weeks) for the first 2 weeks of the service change. While this mitigated the issues to a degree, it would have been confusing and frustrating for residents as well as undermining some of the messaging that LBS had introduced about the importance of abiding by the correct collection weeks.
- Secondly, Veolia organised an event at B&Q in Sutton to allow residents to collect additional containers. Unfortunately, this event caused further problems because the number of containers required was significantly underestimated (as many residents requested more than one container, due to the capacity issues referenced earlier). This resulted in long queues and in the containers eventually running out. The TFG heard that this was very frustrating for residents, some of whom were already unhappy with the quality of the service.

Operational recommendation (vii): If a resident-facing event is to be organised by a contracted service provider, better preparations should take place to ensure the requirements of Sutton's residents have been adequately planned for.

Specific problem: vehicle problems

Senior LBS and Veolia officers spoke to the TFG about two vehicle-related problems that had been experienced:

- Firstly, although the vehicles were new, many of them had mechanical issues (particularly hydraulic fluid leaks).
- Secondly, some of the vehicles proved to be too wide for the streets in Sutton. Veolia had been given information about 550 narrow streets in Sutton and although they had attempted to check some of these roads (either online or with the vehicles used in other boroughs) pilot runs were not conducted due to staff capacity. Once the service went live, drivers found that some streets in Sutton were too narrow (a specific narrow access vehicle is now in use).

In addition to this, the TFG heard at the resident focus group that some vehicles have been leaking food waste onto the streets.

In response to a query from the TFG, LBS officers explained that the vehicles are owned by LBS but licensed to Veolia (as this is a financially efficient arrangement). This means that Veolia are contractually responsible for all maintenance issues with the vehicles, and for purchasing the appropriate sizes.

The TFG asked officers whether the issues with the vehicles could or should have been foreseen, and specifically whether the timescale for ordering and introducing the new vehicles had been too tight. Officers responded that, while the timescale had been tight - and more time for testing may have made a difference - it would have been impossible to fully test the vehicles without long and resource intensive pilot rounds. Moreover, officers explained that the mechanical issues were not anticipated because the vehicles were new.

Operational recommendation (viii): With any future service changes:

- 1) Build in longer timescales for receiving and testing equipment (e.g. vehicles) to increase the likelihood of timely resolution of any issues.*
- 2) Ensure that a critically-aware due diligence is applied to handover activities, paying particular attention to the need for flexibility to bring in additional capacity if need is evidenced by service performance / management information during the mobilisation phase.*

Specific problem: contamination / incorrect recycling behaviours

The TFG wanted to investigate the extent of problems with contamination / incorrect recycling behaviours and any potential impacts. They were informed by LBS officers that in fact recycling contamination has remained consistent (at approximately 8%) compared to the previous year. The results of the door-knock survey showed that only 13% of residents reported uncertainty about how to separate materials immediately after the introduction of the new service, falling to 6% by July 2017 - which supports the idea that contamination / incorrect recycling was not a major issue in relation to the problems experienced at the start of this service change.

The TFG did, however, have concerns about reports of recycling which had been separated by residents later being mixed by Veolia - which would, understandably, be confusing and frustrating for residents. LBS officers acknowledged that the initial 'clear all' policy (as detailed above) may have caused some confusion, but that that policy had now come to an end. Officers also explained that LBS have an obligation to provide a certain amount of dry mixed recycling under a different contractual arrangement, and that there are therefore a small amount of areas in the borough where residents have been asked to mix their recycling for collection. A senior LBS officer explained that it is only in these properties where Veolia should be collecting mixed recycling (the senior officer will be raising this with Veolia). The TFG was also told that Veolia were using split-bodied vehicles, which may have lead residents to believe that their recycling was being mixed when in fact it was being separated.

Members of the TFG felt that more could be done to advise residents about how their recycling would be collected, to avoid this confusion and frustration. As noted earlier, this was supported by comments at the resident focus group where participants stated that they would appreciate more information about the recycling process once the service has bedded in.

TFG members also commented that some residents (particularly in flats) find it more difficult to separate their recycling due to space constraints, and suggested that these flats should be identified and used to provide the required tonnage of dry mixed recyclables.

Operational recommendation (ix): Flats with limited space should be identified to provide the required tonnage of dry mixed recyclables and, to avoid confusion, residents in these flats should be clearly informed that they are part of this scheme.

The TFG also spoke to lead communications officers about how contamination was being dealt with, and were informed that there is a plan to introduce bin hangers to alert residents as to the reason why their bin had not been emptied. However, this had deliberately not been introduced immediately, as LBS and Veolia did not want to cause anxiety among residents about recycling - especially while there were ongoing problems with the service. The TFG was also advised that Veolia's education outreach team will visit residents who have specific queries about recycling.

Finally, the TFG felt that - while good recycling practice among residents is vital - responsibility also lies with other parties such as supermarkets to reduce packaging. The TFG suggested that the council should work with SLWP, WRAP and other relevant agencies to promote a packaging reduction campaign.

Operational recommendation (x): The council should work with SLWP, WRAP and other relevant agencies to promote a packaging reduction campaign.

Specific problems: incorrect leaflets / lack of stickers on bins

The TFG asked commissioning and communications officers to explain what steps had been taken to alert residents to which items should go in which recycling container, and commented that residents may have been confused by the old stickers remaining on their recycling containers. The witnesses explained that the original plan had been for the stickers to be replaced with new ones during the first few recycling rounds; however, this was not feasible because of the degree of disruption in the first few weeks of the service.

Officers explained that replacing the stickers on the containers is a resource-intensive exercise. However, the TFG was assured that there is a plan to do this in the near future once the service has settled into normal operation (officers acknowledged that - notwithstanding the issues with the late delivery of containers - ideally stickers should have been placed on new containers before they were sent out).

Operational recommendation (xi): Stickers should be put on containers before they are distributed, and messaging should be 'futureproof' to avoid a secondary action.

The LBS communications lead informed the TFG that over 100 people had contacted the council to tell us that they had received the wrong leaflet for their collection type. However, he highlighted that

this was a very small proportion of the overall leaflets sent out (over 80,000) and explained that each of the residents who reported receiving the incorrect leaflet had been contacted individually by Veolia, who provided them with the correct information.

Problems in the contact centre

The TFG heard about significant issues in the LBS contact centre as a result of the service-related issues described above. Disruption to the service resulted in an unprecedented volume of calls to the contact centre, meaning residents were ultimately unable to get through and many calls went unanswered. The TFG was advised that on 3rd April 2017 (the first day of the new service), around 2500 calls were attempted (witnesses clarified that this figured related to calls, not individual callers). Of these calls, 573 were answered and the average waiting time was 7.5 minutes - with a small number of residents waiting considerably longer.

Operational recommendation (xii): All council systems should be 'load tested' to check what can be accommodated in the event of service disruption. In the event of future service changes, members should be advised of any likely spikes in call volumes (as noted in Strategic recommendation iii).

Two weeks after the service change, the average number of calls attempted per day had reduced to around 1800, with around 350 calls answered and an average waiting time of 11 minutes. One month after the service change, 598 of the 775 attempted calls were answered, with an average waiting time of 3 minutes (in comparison, the average refuse waiting times prior to the service change was 3 minutes 48 seconds).

At the resident focus group, the TFG was told that a particular frustration among participants was not receiving a response to email contacts. A suggestion from focus group attendees (which the TFG supported) was that, particularly during periods of increased pressure on the contact centre, residents should receive an automated email response clarifying the likely timescale for a reply.

Operational recommendation (xiii): Particularly during periods of increased pressure on the contact centre, introduce automated responses to email queries to give residents assurance that their email has been received and is being addressed.

Senior LBS officers with responsibility for customer services reported that Veolia had initially been reluctant to provide specific email addresses for escalations, due to a concern about excessive email contact from LBS contact centre staff. The TFG was told that it would have been better to have these escalation routes in place at an earlier stage, and that Veolia could have been reassured that issues would be triaged at LBS so that things were only escalated where necessary.

Operational recommendation (xiv): In preparation for the introduction of any contracted service, escalation email addresses and processes should be put in place at an early stage so that contact centre managers are able to contact the appropriate person in the event of specific issues.

The TFG was also told that in future the customer contact shared service with Kingston Council will provide a more resilient service, as more resource will be able to be brought in if there is a raised volume of calls to the contact centre. The TFG also heard that the shared customer contact service will allow Sutton and Kingston Councils to have a singular view of Veolia's performance across the two boroughs.

Having heard all of the evidence in relation to the contact centre, the TFG concluded that now that the issues in the contact centre have been resolved, residents should be actively encouraged to reported missed collections and other issues. This finding is supported by the report of the door-knock survey, which notes that 36% of those who experienced a significant issue with the waste service did not contact the council, and recommends that "further exploration is conducted to understand non-engagement with the council to consider further signposting of contact methods in service change communications."

Operational recommendation (xv): Now that the issues in the contact centre have been resolved, residents should be actively encouraged to reported missed collections; this is important in order to feed into the performance management information and ensure that a consistent service is being provided across the borough.

In relation to this issue, the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council also spoke about the importance of encouraging 'channel shift' in order to make best use of public resources - although both agreed with the TFG that in order to facilitate this it is essential that residents are able to complete required transactions efficiently online (which has not been possible with waste collection in some instances, due to ICT issues). As noted earlier, receiving appropriate confirmation that emails have been received may prevent the perceived need to make telephone contacts (which was the most cited method of contact according to the door-knock survey).

ICT problems

The TFG heard that significant ICT issues had been both a cause and an result of the wider service problems.

The most significant ICT problem was lack of integration between the LBS Microsoft Dynamics CRM and Veolia's Echo system. While the most important integration (the 'schedule lookup' feature) went live on the first day of the contract, nine further priority integrations were delayed by three weeks. This lack of integration meant that Veolia had to manually transfer information from Contender (the LBS waste management ICT system, which was integrated with Dynamics) into Echo.

Senior LBS officers with responsibility for ICT explained that this lack of integration was caused by a combination of factors:

- Firstly (as mentioned under Aim 1) late delivery of the Echo system to LBS meant that there was not sufficient time to test the integrations. Once it became clear that the delivery of the system would be delayed, there were discussions about delaying the service start date.

However, this was not a feasible solution because communications about the 3rd April start date had already begun and containers were being delivered.

- Secondly, a change to IR35 tax laws meant that three key ICT consultants left LBS around the point at which the system was delivered. The tax changes had an impact for consultants and contractors nationwide, and meant that it was difficult for LBS to replace the consultants in good time. Ultimately, an external company was engaged to provide extra resource; senior ICT colleagues explained that, while initial progress was slow because the new developers had to learn about the Sutton-specific ICT environment, this company (which specialises in Microsoft Dynamics) has been key to putting improvements in place. Having a single company responsible for this development work has also provided flexibility where the council requires scalable ICT support.

In terms of solutions, ICT colleagues explained that high volume and high risk transactions are being prioritised for integration; in the meantime, a degree of double handling of data has continued. At the time of their interview for this Scrutiny exercise (in August 2017) the highest priority integrations ('schedule lookup', 'missed collection', 'container request' and 'fly tipping report') were integrated. TFG members suggested that, while it makes sense to prioritise high volume transactions, it is also important to prioritise 'high visibility' issues such as overflowing bins - as these also have a significant negative impact on resident experience of the borough.

Operational recommendation (xvi): Consideration should be given to prioritising resolving 'high visibility' issues (eg. overflowing bins) which impact on resident experience of the borough, as well as high volume issues.

ICT officers explained that the ICT service is working with SLWP and contact centre colleagues to agree the priority of each transaction. This is being project managed through an 'Agile' methodology, where integrations are built, tested and implemented in three week cycles ('sprints') and 'sprints' can be re-prioritised as necessary. In response to a query about negotiations between the four SLWP boroughs about priority, LBS officers explained that there has generally been a consensus about priority; where this is not the case, agreement depends on compromise between the partners and, as with all aspects of the service, the needs of different boroughs are prioritised at different times.

Having heard all of the evidence in relation to ICT problems, the TFG concluded that this had been a very complex ICT integration and that the extent of this complexity may not have initially been appreciated. The TFG resolved that for any future service changes, more and earlier consideration should be given to the complexity of ICT integration; in this instance, the option of passing information directly from the council's website into Echo (as, the TFG heard, has been done in other boroughs) should be investigated.

Strategic recommendation (xi): For future service changes, steps should be taken to minimise the level of complexity in relation to ICT. In this instance, the option of passing information from the council's website directly to Veolia (rather than via our CRM) should be investigated.

Resource reallocation and other impacts

At several of the evidence gathering sessions, the TFG asked witnesses about the impact of the service disruption on residents, the council and on Veolia.

Officers explained that in the council the biggest resource impact was in the contact centre. While, as detailed previously, additional resource in the contact centre was part of the implementation planning for the service, it quickly became clear that the planned resource was not sufficient. Staff resource in the contact centre was therefore increased significantly, including:

- Temporary staff
- Staff from the Revenues and Benefits service
- Staff from Business Support
- Staff from Commissioning & Governance
- Staff from Environment Commissioning

Officers explained that the council is currently funding this extra resource but negotiations will take place with Veolia with a view to recouping some of the expenditure regarding this and other aspects of the service change.

The TFG also heard that there has been a knock-on impact elsewhere in the council as staff - in Commissioning & Governance, ICT, Environment, Housing and Regeneration and Communications, as well as Strategic Directors and the Chief Executive - have been redirected from other work. In particular, officers explained that the focus of the Neighbourhood Services team has had to shift significantly from proactive work to improve the local area to dealing reactively with issues and enquiries about the waste service.

The senior officers who took the decisions to reallocate resource explained that they had been careful to only redirect staff in a way that would not have a further negative impact on residents.

On a positive note, the TFG heard that officers across the council pulled together to provide support and that the issues have been a good lesson in the importance of corporate resilience - showing the extent to which the council is able to galvanise when faced with a significant service problem.

In terms of impact upon councillors, the TFG was aware that they and other ward members had experienced a large increase in the volume of concerns raised by their constituents through their mailbags, inboxes and indeed in person. TFG members also commented that it had taken longer than usual to receive a response to their 'member enquiries', and that they were not always advised of the likely timescale for a response.

The door-knock survey showed that the highest volume issues experienced by residents in the first weeks of the new service were missed collections (68%) and non-delivery of containers (22%).

Overall, the door-knock survey showed that just over half (52%) of respondents experienced a significant problem with the service in April 2017, falling to 28% in July 2017.

Of course, as all parties acknowledged, a major further impact on residents has been the frustration - and, in some instances, anger - caused by the ongoing service disruption. While clearer communication about the likelihood of service disruption may have reduced residents' frustration, the major problems with the service were to do with implementation and it remains crucial that any residual issues are resolved as quickly as possible.

Responsibility for resolving problems / contractual terms

Finally, the TFG asked senior officers from LBS and Veolia about their responsibilities for resolving problems with the service and to give details of any further interventions that have been put in place to date.

The TFG was told that resolving these issues is a joint responsibility; the council and SLWP are in an eight year relationship with Veolia, and all parties must work together to get the service to the level that residents require. Officers explained that, as a result of the initial problems following the new service introduction, an Improvement Board was set up and is providing direction to resolve matters; it currently meets on a weekly basis and is chaired by the council's Chief Executive.

The TFG asked whether the council is empowered to claim back money from Veolia as compensation for the service problems and were informed that - after an initial 'grace period' of 13 weeks - contractual mechanisms are in place for deductions to be made in response to performance against certain agreed indicators. The TFG was told that deductions are calculated through a mechanism in the contract (ie. there is no subjective decision about whether or how much to deduct). The TFG was told that ultimately the council and SLWP want to maintain a relationship of trust and collaboration with Veolia and that joint initiatives (such as the flats project detailed earlier) will be crucial to resolving issues.

Conclusion

The task and finish group completed its evidence gathering sessions in September 2017 and this report presents a summary of the task and finish exercise.

While the TFG recognised that some important objectives are being achieved through this service change - specifically, an £8.2million saving over eight years, and an increase in recycling rates - they concluded that there were significant problems with the implementation of the service, some of which were avoidable. The TFG's recommendations are embedded within the relevant paragraphs and summarised in a table at the beginning of the report.

The TFG would like to thank all of the people and organisations who contributed to this piece of work, and hope that the findings and recommendations provide useful learning for other local authorities and for future service changes in Sutton. The recommendations should also be taken into consideration in any planned service reviews.

Details of evidence gathering meetings

| Event and date | Purpose | TFG member attendance |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Two preparatory meetings 15 June and 30 June | To discuss and agree the starting key lines of enquiry, identify those people / organisations the TFG would like to see as witnesses at evidence gathering sessions and identify key and background supporting documentation. | 15 June: Councillors Ali, Williams, Fivey, Joyce, Emmerson, McManus 30 June: Councillors Ali, Williams, Hicks, Fivey, Joyce, Emmerson, McManus |
| Initial briefing 17 July | Background and context setting briefing covering the history, role and governance arrangements for the SLWP and how a competitive dialogue (CD) procurement works. | Councillors Ali, Williams, Hicks, Fivey, Joyce |
| Evidence gathering: Session A - Customer services 27 July | To take evidence from senior officers regarding the preparations for and service delivered by the customer contact centre looking in particular at issues of staff resourcing, ICT support systems and the telephone system technology. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Emmerson, Hicks . |
| Evidence gathering: Session B - LBS senior officers 8 August | To take evidence from senior officers about information sharing during CD, fine tuning and mobilisation, and remedial actions post 'go-live'. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Emmerson, Hicks, Williams, Ali. |
| Evidence gathering: Session C - SLWP 9 August | To take evidence from senior officers from SLWP and senior LBS officers on their respective responsibilities and actions over the CD, fine tuning and mobilisation phases, and actions post 'go-live'. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, McManus, Hicks, Williams, Ali. |
| Evidence gathering: Session D - Veolia 14 August | To take evidence from senior Veolia managers about their experiences, preparations for and delivery of the new service, responses to issues and remedial actions following 'go-live'. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Emmerson, Hicks, Williams, Ali. |
| Evidence gathering: Session E - ICT | To take evidence from senior LBS officers responsible for ICT about their | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Hicks, Williams, Ali. |

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| 16 August | work to provide an integrated ICT infrastructure. Looking at timing, preparations for implementation, and remedial actions post 'go-live'. | |
| Evidence gathering: Session F - LBS senior officers 24 August | To take further evidence from senior officers on preparations for the new service and issues arising post 'go-live', and in particular looking at issues around client-side responsibilities. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Hicks, Williams. |
| Evidence gathering: Session G - Leader, Chief Executive and expert witness 30 August | To take evidence from the Leader, Chief Executive and an expert witness on the strategic thinking and aims behind the approach to the new service and how this sits within the wider industry and customer context. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Hicks. |
| Evidence gathering: Session H - Communications 30 August | To take evidence from senior Veolia, SLWP and Sutton officers on the preparations for communication to residents about the changes arising from the new service, and issues arising post 'go-live'. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce, Hicks. |
| Evidence gathering: Session I - Lead member / senior officers 31 August | To take evidence from the lead member and lead officers about the aims of the new service, the preparations for communicating and launching and the response to the problems arising after 'go-live'. | Councillors Fivey, Joyce. |
| Evidence gathering: Session J - Resident focus group 7 September | Externally facilitated focus group to understand further some of the key issues arising from the SLWP door-knock survey relating to the communications and preparation for the new service and the responses to the initial problems experienced by residents. | Councillors Fivey, McManus, Ali. (Maximum of three TFG members to observe) |
| Evidence gathering: Session K - other boroughs' experiences 12 September | To hear from a selection of other councils (Camden, Croydon and Brent) about their experiences of introducing new waste services with Veolia. | Councillors Joyce, Fivey, Emmerson, Hicks |

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