Merton’s draft Municipal Waste Management Strategy consultation - response summary

Merton’s Draft Municipal Waste Management Strategy was subject to public consultation from 10 April until 19 May 2006 and 59 responses were received. The general public was encouraged to participate in the consultation through promotion in borough libraries, the local Guardian newspaper and on the Merton Council homepage. Several local groups were contacted directly including all registered residents and tenants associations, Merton’s Local Strategic Partnership, the Merton Environment and Safety Forum and several local interest groups. We also sent copies of the Strategy to statutory consultees, including the Mayor of London, Government Office for London, Environment Agency and neighbouring authorities.

Overall, the people agreed with the approach set out in the Strategy. A number of questions were presented in the consultation document and were designed to result in a range of views being put forward by respondents. The respondents' greatest uncertainty as evidenced by responses to the questions related to the ‘proximity principle’. As this principle suggests that waste treatment and disposal facilities be located within the borough or close by, the elevated number of people suggesting they are not sure about supporting this principle is not surprising. However, the majority of responders still agreed with the idea that waste generated within Merton should be dealt with in or close to Merton.

The only other question that did not meet agreement from at least 75% of respondents relates to paying more now to deal with our waste challenges, rather than facing more considerable penalties in future. Although most people thought it sensible to take this approach, some also questioned investing more now when the goalposts are continuously shifting and don’t think meeting targets should be at the taxpayers expense.

The draft Strategy has been amended, although these changes were relatively minor given the nature of the respondents’ feedback and their general agreement with our proposed approach to dealing with waste in the future. The amendments to the Strategy include that we aim for Merton’s waste management services to be sustainable, as well as affordable and represent value for money. A further change has been made to the proposed objectives, where the need to build flexibility within waste contracts has been specified. This is particularly important given the usual length of waste contracts and the nature of changing legislation.
Consultation results
Consultation questions are repeated below while corresponding selected comments included are representative of those received.

Consultation question 1: We will shortly be developing an Implementation Plan to meet the Municipal Waste Management Strategy’s aims and objectives. Are there any specific actions you would like to see us take to deal with our waste problems other than those we are already carrying out?

Respondents’ comments:
“Wheelie bins to allow for more recycling – the boxes are not big enough”.
“The purple and green box scheme doesn’t work”
“Better information for flats”.
“Nothing about transport minimisation and use of alternative fuels”
“Introduction of a free recycling collection service for business areas in Merton”.
“Penalties against those that do not recycle”
“Introduce a collection point for batteries”
“Link in with regional and national awareness campaigns”
“Increasing the number of materials that can be recycled from the door step”.
“Introduce a collection alongside the green and purple boxes for green waste and food waste”

Comment:
Alongside our Strategy we have developed an Implementation Plan, which outlines our commitment to constantly review how we can improve the recycling services and possibilities on how we can recycle new items. We are developing a Communication Plan which we hope will improve all aspects of communication such as information for householders regarding new services or changes to collections. We are also investigating increased recycling opportunities for businesses.

Consultation question 2: Do you agree that Merton should work closely with its neighbouring boroughs to tackle waste issues?

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>93%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
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Respondents’ comments:
“If sharing resources reduces the cost to the taxpayer, then it should be pursued”.
“The Merton tip is too far for those of us on the border and it would be useful to use a closer one in a neighbouring borough”
Comment: Merton has formed an informal partnership with the neighbouring boroughs of Croydon, Sutton and Kingston and is considering joint procurement of waste treatment and disposal options ahead of the current waste disposal contract terminating in 2008. The main reason for this is to provide greater value for money for Merton residents. As part of this partnership arrangement, we are also considering other possible benefits such as sharing of CA sites.

**Consultation question 3:** The ‘proximity principle’ requires that waste is dealt with as close to its production as possible. Do you agree with the idea that waste generated in Merton should be dealt within or near Merton’s boundaries?

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<th>Agree</th>
<th>63%</th>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>Not sure</td>
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Respondents’ comments:

“I believe Merton should use new processes to reduce waste created by Merton and then dealt locally if possible. But I think Merton should share facilities with other Councils”

“If it would be more cost effective to deal with waste somewhere further away, I think I would prefer that”.

“If waste is dealt with within London then it should not matter where it is dealt with”.

“I think that once residents are made aware of this, they might recycle more”. “It would be environmentally counter-productive to transport waste over long distances”.

Comment: With recent legislation starting to bite, the commissioning of waste treatment and disposal facilities closer to home is inevitable. National and regional policy both point toward more localised facilities as it is no longer considered acceptable to transport waste long distances. With transport costs also continuing to rise, sending the waste a long distance will become increasingly expensive. Within the area of the partnership mentioned previously, we consider it likely that a number of waste facilities will be developed over the next 2-10 years to deal with the waste emanating from these four boroughs.

**Consultation question 4:** If we provided you with a clean and easy way to collect kitchen waste and garden waste for composting, what would your attitude be?

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<th>Definitely have a go</th>
<th>82%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Might try it</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>18%</td>
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Respondents’ comments:

“Absolutely. Since you placed recycle bins behind our flat, half of the left-over refuse is kitchen waste that could be easily composted”.
“Very complicated for flats with shared gardens and poor garden management”.
“Its not a question of “would you use it”? People should be fined if they don’t”
“I think this is a brilliant idea. While I am keen to recycle my kitchen waste I do not really want a smelly compost heap in my tiny garden”.
“This ignores businesses”.
“About time. Other countries have been doing this for ages”.

Comment: As written in our Implementation Plan, we are committed to a trial for a scheduled green waste collection and are considering options to include a kitchen waste collection. Despite many people composting, kitchen waste is worthwhile collecting separately because it still makes up at least 20% of the household waste stream. Such a collection would help Merton considerably towards meeting its Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) allocation, avoiding potentially severe financial penalties.

### Consultation question 5: Do you agree that we should be taking actions to meet our targets, even if there is an added cost now or in the near future, rather than face more significant financial penalties in future?

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>74%</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>Not sure</td>
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Respondents’ comments:

“It would be irresponsible not to take actions now to avoid financial penalties in the future”.
“You should be taking action to meet the targets within your current budget”.
“We should be doing these things because they are right, not simply because they avoid financial penalties”
“Environmental issues are one of my top priorities. We will only pay in the future if we sit back and do nothing”.
“You can’t anticipate what the government is going to do so makes sense to focus on what is already known”.

Comment: What we do know about the future is that landfill tax increases every year and the implications of not meeting our LATS targets. Given these certainties, we consider it irresponsible to plan our future waste management activities without taking these into account. We are committed to minimising costs wherever possible and undertake to attain value for money for Merton residents.
Do you agree that our overriding principle should be prevent or reduce waste as much as possible?

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<th>Agree</th>
<th>94%</th>
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<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>Not sure</td>
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Respondents’ comments:

“Waste prevention/reduction is the overriding principle of national and regional strategies and therefore should be the overriding principle of this strategy”

“You cannot prevent waste unless you tackle the packager in every industry”.

“Reduce is much better than recycle”.

“Of course, but how do you stop people from consuming?”

“…Supermarkets should charge for their plastic bags…”

Comment: We would like to reduce waste where possible but it is very difficult to measure reduction as waste growth generally is based on a number of variables over which we have no control. This is why we will consider waste reduction as a principle in all our decisions but haven’t included a target for doing so. The Implementation Plan outlines what we intend to do encourage waste reduction, of which a large component will be to raise awareness and encourage people to consider their purchasing options with waste in mind.

The Strategy’s Aims and Objectives

The Aims and Objectives in the proposed Strategy were largely agreed to with few further suggestions.

Respondents’ comments:

“Proximity is mentioned in the main document but does not feature as an aim”.

“These need to be made SMART, otherwise how will you know you have achieved the objectives”.

“Flexibility is essential where local authorities are entering into…. long-term service delivery contracts”.

“Would welcome… an aim that services provided by Merton will not contribute to climate change”

“An objective along the lines of working with planners to identify sites within your boundaries”.

Comments: The ‘proximity principle’ featured prominently in the consultation and we certainly recognise that Merton as a borough cannot continue to send waste to landfill out of the Greater London area. The proximity principle is the focus of one of our three overarching policies and consider this to be sufficient at this point in time.

We recognise that our objectives do not have measurable targets associated with them. We do intend to, as part of our annual Implementation Plan review, identify whether we are meeting each of our objectives. It was felt that
already being so target driven, the Strategy would focus on meeting existing challenging targets, rather than setting further targets which we consider at this point in time to be unrealistic.

We recognise and acknowledge the impact waste management has on climate change but consider that is unrealistic at this point to say that will aim not to have any impact on climate change. The aims and objectives cover environmental impacts, acting sustainably by choice, and delivering sustainable waste management solutions and services and we reason that this also includes issues to do with climate change. The Municipal Waste Management Strategy will periodically be subject to review and Merton Council will re-consider its waste management aims and objectives at that time.

We are working with our planners and have carried out an assessment of potential sites within the borough. We will certainly continue to have a close relationship with our planners to identify potential sites.

Additional comments
There were a number of general comments on the proposed Strategy:
“Ensure that action follows words. Refuse collectors are not doing what you claim they are doing”
“Work with planners to identify sites within (Merton’s) boundaries”
“Include businesses in schemes for free recyclable waste collection in order to surpass targets for sustainable municipal waste management”. “Contracts with the private sector should be flexible”.
“The actual “cleanliness” of the streets/pavements should be an issue, especially around the station and the Broadway”
“Should consider carbon neutrality and energy self-sufficiency”

Comments: One of our main objectives is to consider ways in which we can improve services to Merton residents. We recognise that problems do arise from time to time with collections, but we will seek to minimise the impact of these. Street cleaning is an important aspect of the services we provide for residents and we continue to investigate opportunities for making improvements and incorporating recycling.

Amendments to the Strategy
Following careful consideration of all consultation responses, amendments were made to the following aims and objectives:

Aim 4: Develop and work in partnerships that ensure sustainable waste management services are affordable and represent value for money.

Comment: As we have proposed six principle aims, it was felt that the concept of ‘sustainability’ should and could be given greater importance without generating an additional aim.
Objective 5: Maximise efficiencies and value for money through partnership working with neighbouring authorities to deliver sustainable residual waste recovery and disposal solutions that are robust and flexible to meet ever changing future demands.

Comment: Objective five was amended to specifically stress the importance of flexibility as a key consideration when Merton enters any future waste service contracts.

As mentioned previously, there were many useful comments on the proposed Strategy. As a vast majority of respondents agreed with our intended approach, it was considered that the document did not require wide-ranging changes. Many of the suggestions were about the services provided by the council and what it should do to improve its performance. These comments have been reviewed and incorporated in the Implementation Plan as well as taken into consideration as to how Merton can improve its day-to-day services.

All the consultation responses will be kept as a matter of record.
List of consultees:

Those directly consulted on the Municipal Waste Management Strategy include:

- Registered Residents and Tenant Associations
- Merton Local Strategic Partnership members
- Merton Environment and Safety Forum
- The Vine Project
- Squirrels
- Kingston and Merton Real Nappy Network
- Groundwork Merton
- LB Merton staff - through the staff bulletin
- LB Sutton
- LB Croydon
- LB Kingston
- LB Wandsworth
- LB Lambeth
- Western Riverside Waste Authority
- London Remade
- London Waste Action
- Association of London Government

As well as the following statutory consultees:

- Greater London Authority
- Government Office for London
- Environment Agency

In additional to contacting these directly, public participation in the consultation was encouraged by having the document on display at libraries, promoted on the Merton Council homepage, and press releases in the local Guardian.