

Basingstoke & Deane/Hart District Council: Waste & Recycling Services, Review of Management Structure



WYG was engaged by Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council (BDBC) to undertake a review of the management structure (the 'client side', based at Hart District Council – HDC) which oversees its joint waste and recycling contract (and service) with Hart District Council. Following a re-procurement, the contract for these services was awarded to Serco, who commenced operations in October 2018. Prior to then the contract was held by Veolia.

Towards the end of the Veolia contract and during the first six months of the new contract, residents experienced a poorer service than they had been used to / would have reasonably expected in terms of missed collections: and this problem was greater for BDBC than for HDC. The poor level of service and the large number of complaints caused understandable concern amongst the Officers and Members of BDBC that prompted WYG's review, carried out in 2019, our final report sent in September 2019.

It is quite clear to us that in the last months of the Veolia contract as well as in the first six months of the Serco contract, services were not delivered to the required / desired standard. It is also abundantly clear to us that BDBC has been disproportionately affected by this poor level of performance.

We are quite clear that the responsibility for the service failures lies firmly with the contractors. However, it is the client team's function to monitor and measure the contractor's performance and to take action in the case of poor performance in terms of holding them to account. Notwithstanding that deductions have been made from the contractors, the length of time that it has been taken for them to resolve problems and the fact that they have been allowed to take such time asks questions as to the style and strength of the current client structure.

In our view the current client structure is inadequate in terms of resource levels for the work which it currently has to deal with. Given the level of contractor performance over the period studied, it is actually quite remarkable that the current resource has delivered what it has, not only having to manage the day-to-day service but procure and mobilise a new contract and demobilise another.

We believe that the current client structure is too flat: and the Waste & Recycling Manager has too many direct reports. Also (in our view) this officer is dragged into too many day-to-day issues which, though important, means diversion of this key resource from dealing with strategic matters.

We believe that, with the introduction of a new ICT system, a new post should be created within the structure to be responsible for data accuracy as well as some other administrative roles (e.g. scrutiny of KPIs and other reports which come from the system).

We believe that there is not an adequate distinction within the client team between those looking after day-to-day issues and more strategic issues. We propose the introduction of a new post to specifically deal with day-to-day issues, which would engage with the contractor, as well as the public, and hold the contractor to

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account for service failures: leaving the Waste & Recycling Manager, as well as the Head of Service, to engage with the contractor at a more strategic level.

We believe that the post of Performance and Development Officer is entirely appropriate but should be developed so that it covers projects plus public engagement / communications.

As regards the Waste & Recycling Officers, the numbers have been insufficient and the current standards for responding to customer complaints / enquiries is simply unacceptable. We recommend the introduction, for an initial period, of three full-time equivalents. In the longer term, once the service begins to perform at an acceptable level, the number of Waste & Recycling Officers can be reviewed.

A fundamental query that we have been asked is whether it is (still) appropriate for the waste client team to be based at HDC and for BDBC to continue to be served by that team. In WYG's opinion there is no fundamental reason as to why a team based at, and working for, HDC cannot deliver this service for BDBC. We believe that, provided the appropriate changes are made, as described above, the optimal answer is to continue with one team; and there is no reason why HDC should not continue to host this arrangement (unless it is believed that this would make the changes, as recommended, incapable of implementation). That said, if there was a strong desire for change, it is possible for the recommended structure to be moved from HDC to BDBC.

We believe that there is scope for 'hot-desking' at BDBC offices and for those Waste & Recycling Officers covering the BDBC area to be based there, for say three days per week each. We suggest that team meetings could, with this new structure, be split into sessions so that one of the direct reports to the Waste & Recycling Officer could be freed up at various points in the meeting.

We believe that there should be cover at a senior level (Waste & Recycling Manager, Waste Service Manager, Performance & Development Officer, Admin Manager) plus at least two Waste & Recycling Officers during all of the hours that the contact centre is open. An additional consideration might be in relation to some presence during Bank Holidays on which the waste and recycling services are delivered.

Perhaps more importantly than the physical changes to the structure that we have recommended, we believe that the focus of the team needs to shift. We have noted that the failures in service are caused by the contractor not performing: and it is our contention that the client team is often too sympathetic to the contractor.