

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 16 MARCH 2010

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

ALTERNATE REFUSE COLLECTION SCHEME – PROGRESS
REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: *ALL*

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To advise the Environment Scrutiny Committee of progress with the implementation of the Alternate Refuse Collection Scheme.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(A)	That the progress and performance of the scheme be noted.

1.0 Background

1.1 In November 2009 the Council implemented its agreed waste collection and recycling policy in the form of the Alternate Refuse Collection (ARC) Scheme. The objectives of the scheme were to:

- Significantly improve the Council's recycling and composting performance.
- Achieve the Hertfordshire wide target of 50% of waste recycled and composted by 2012.
- Generate savings for East Herts Council through operational efficiencies and increase income from the sale of recyclable materials.
- Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, thereby generating environmental benefits and reducing the additional Council Tax burden from rising Landfill Tax.
- Meet resident's demand for improved doorstep recycling collection services.

1.2 The new scheme involved the complete redesign of collection rounds such that refuse would now be collected fortnightly, alternating with recycling / composting collections. Plastic bottles

were added to the dry recyclable collection of paper glass and cans. Food and card was added to garden waste (composting) service. 50,000 additional (blue) recycling boxes and the same number of kitchen caddies were purchased to help residents with the new materials. These were 75% funded by the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.

1.3 When agreeing to recommend the implementation of the scheme, Environment Scrutiny Committee requested that a progress report be brought to a future meeting.

2.0 Report

2.1 Members will recall that a wide range of publicity and communication about the scheme was undertaken in the lead up to the launch. This included over 40 public presentations, 10 road shows, letters and leaflets to every household and adverts in local papers, LINK magazine and on local radio.

2.2 Following a programme of delivery of containers, leaflets and calendars over the preceding 8 weeks, collections commenced on 2nd November. Most residents were clear about the objectives of the scheme but there were, as predicted a high number of customer enquiries in the first few weeks. These were mainly about:

- Advice about the scheme and which materials to place in which container.
- Advice about the change in collection days.
- Undelivered blue boxes / caddies.
- The delivered containers not being required.
- Requests for additional blue or green boxes.
- Requests for brown bins (from residents not currently using them).
- To request a bigger bin for a larger family.

Container issues

2.3 Blue boxes and kitchen caddies were delivered together by the sub-contractor of the supplier. East Herts presents a significant challenge for delivery companies. Many rural addresses are difficult to find, particularly those properties that are away from the public highway. A certain level of missed deliveries is to be expected, but these were higher than anticipated and the delivery company slow to put problems right. This resulted in some delays in customers receiving their box and caddy. While this was a

small inconvenience, it did not detract from resident's ability to present recyclables along side their existing green box using old carrier bags.

- 2.4 Although provision was made for additional demand for brown bins as a result of ARC, this was well beyond expectation. Brown bin services have been available to some parts of the district for more than 10 years. And although all residents with a suitable property have been offered one, not everyone chose to take up the service when it was rolled out to their area or subsequently. The opportunity to compost food waste and cardboard and the reduction in residual (black bin) capacity resulted in an unexpected number of additional requests. From October until the 23rd February 2010 requests have totalled 2386 at an additional capital cost of approximately £42,000.
- 2.5 This should be viewed in a positive light, that many more residents wish to participate in the scheme and is reflected in the very significant increase in material collected that would have otherwise gone to landfill.

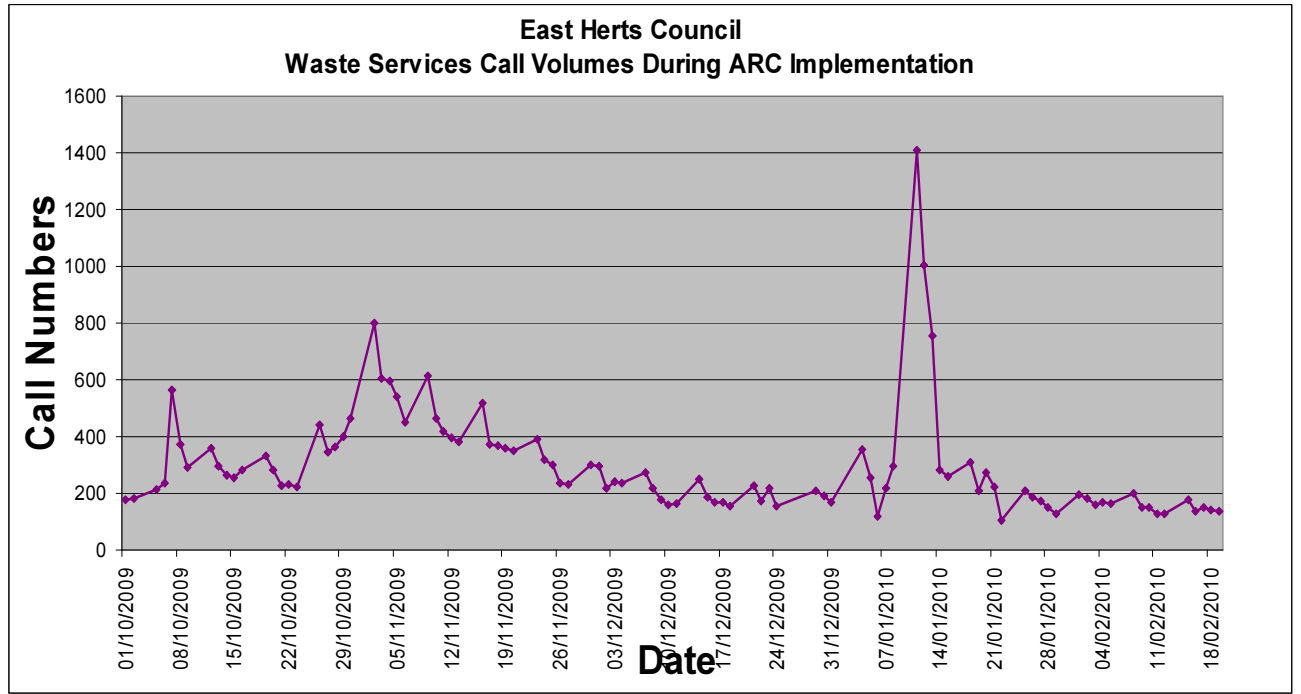
Larger containers for larger families

- 2.6 In developing the ARC scheme the Council gave consideration to how people with larger families, children in nappies and with healthcare needs would cope with the reduction in residual waste capacity. A new larger bin (360 litres) was introduced for these customers, when requested. Again the demand was significantly higher than expected and between October and February an additional 400 bins have been supplied at a capital cost of approximately £14,000.

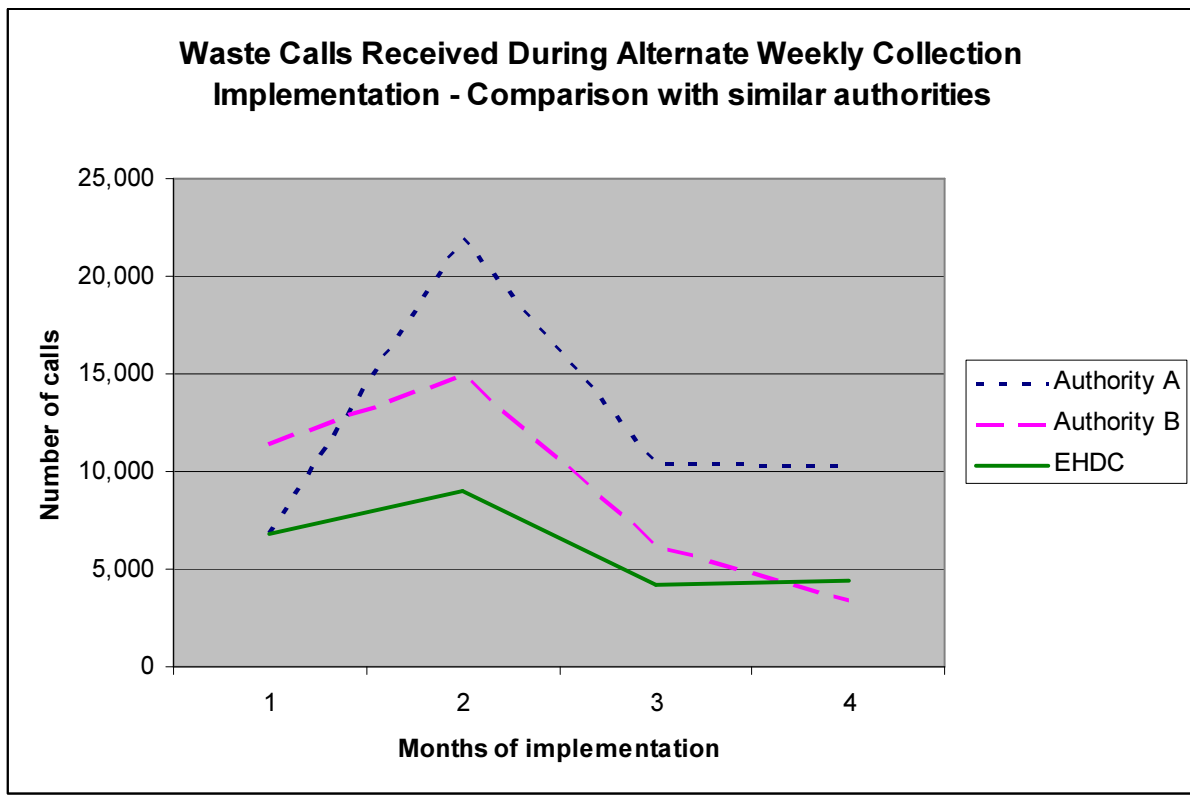
Customer enquiry volumes forecast against actual

- 2.7 When developing its implementation plan for ARC the Service researched similar authorities that had implemented similar schemes and obtained their telephone call data. This was used to forecast the potential level of enquiries. Those that had implemented the scheme poorly had experienced a very high number of calls for a longer period. Those that had done it well a lower number. For East Herts the number of calls forecast was between 3 and 4 times normal levels for a period of 4 months. Three additional temporary call handling staff were recruited and trained to meet the additional workload.
- 2.8 In fact the number of calls was significantly below those experienced by the authorities researched as can be seen in the

charts below. The maximum number received was just under 800 on the first day of ARC. This has now reduced to normal levels – around 200 per day. The additional peak shown in the graph during the second week in January is a result of additional calls following the suspension of services due to heavy snow fall.



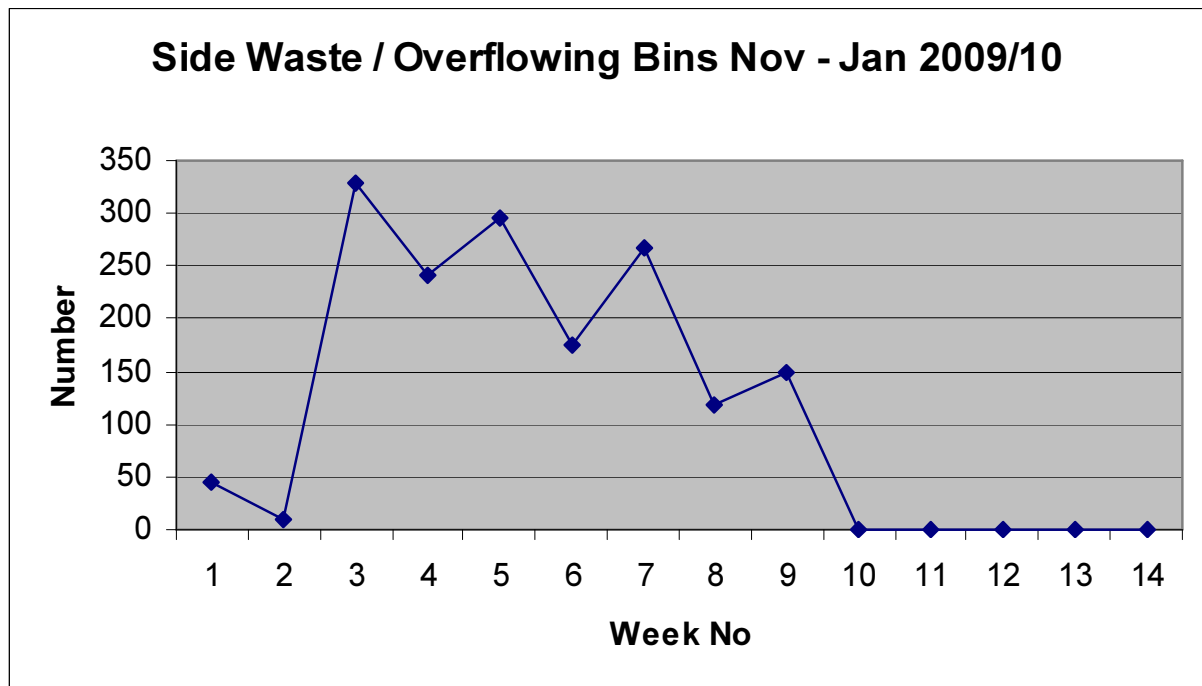
2.9 The graph below shows some comparative telephone call data with similar district councils implementing alternate weekly collection systems. This shows that East Herts Council received a relatively low level. For comparative purposes the calls generated by the severe weather have been removed from the data. These authorities implemented their schemes at different times but data has been presented to show their ‘peak call’ months at the same point.



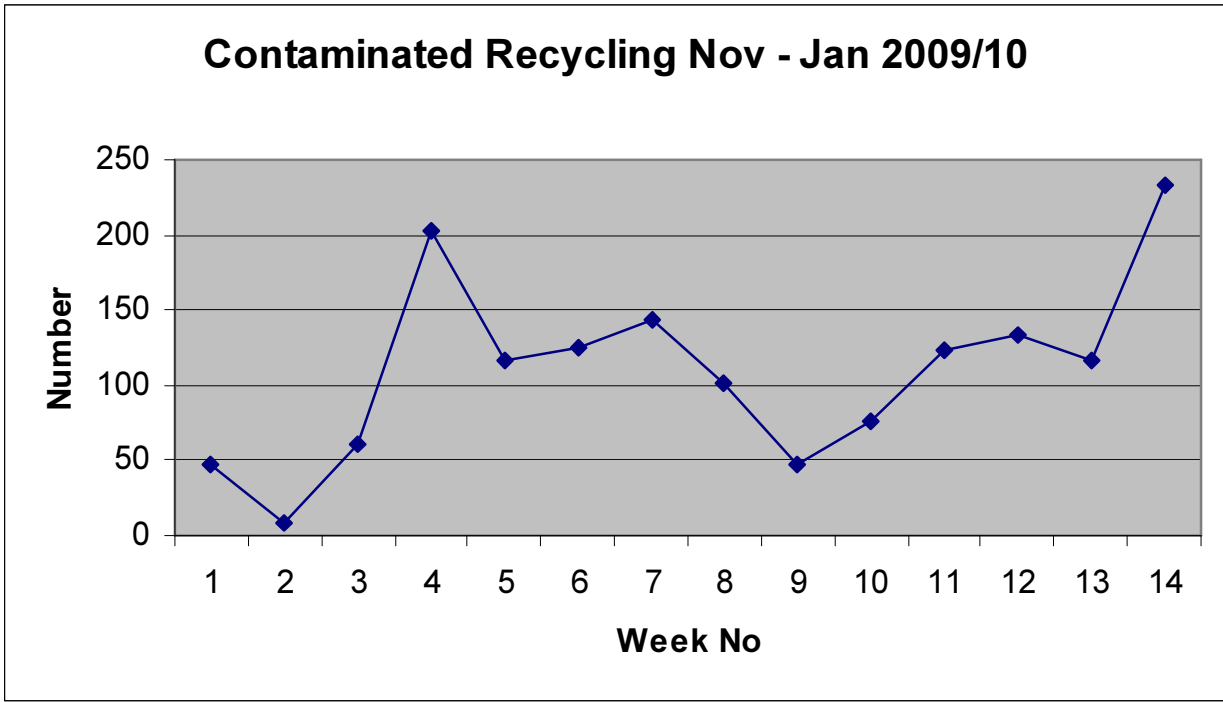
Contamination, side waste and enforcement

- 2.10 When agreeing the scheme the Council recognised that while most residents would fully understand and support it, there might be a small minority that needed more help with separating their waste. It was also appreciated that there might be a few residents who continued to contaminate or present excess waste despite the offer of assistance and that, as a last resort enforcement powers might need to be exercised.
- 2.11 Where side waste is presented, this is left by collection staff, a sticker advising of the problem placed on the waste and a note is made on collection records. Client staff then write to residents advising of the scheme rules, providing an ARC leaflet, making reference to the incident and explaining that it is an offence and offering the further assistance of a recycling advisor. The service has carefully tracked these issues and the number and type of contamination issues.
- 2.12 In general terms the number of side waste / overflowing bins has been low with an average of 26 per day. This is in the context that there are approximately 5,700 household collections per day and therefore represent only 0.5%. The graph below shows the trend for the first 3 months of ARC collections (week 1 is the first week in November). It should be noted that the rules that do not permit the presentation of side waste were relaxed during January

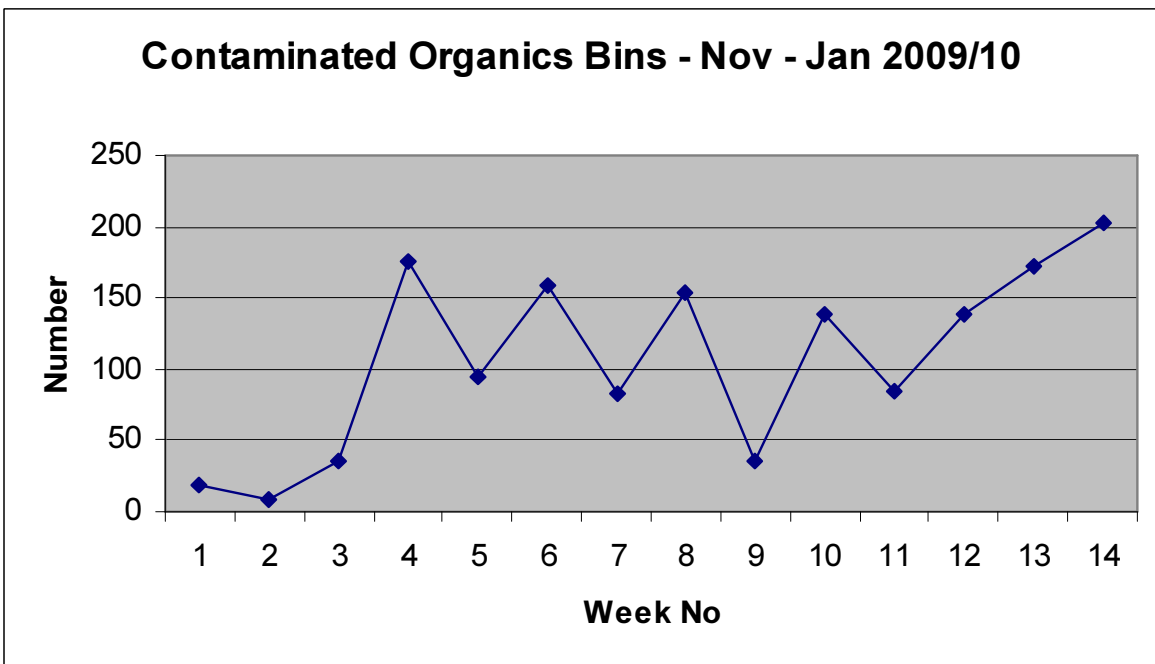
due to the extra Christmas waste and the suspension of collection services due to the severe weather. This information was therefore not collected for weeks 10 to 14.



- 2.13 Contamination of recycling boxes represents 0.5% of collections. Records show that there are no particular trends in the type of contamination, but these include broken glass, cardboard, types of plastic that the Council cannot currently recycle and certain types of wrapping paper. The graph below shows a small increasing trend in contamination, although it is believed that this is largely due to more unusually material at Christmas time; higher volumes of material in the New Year and problems associated with service suspension due to snow.

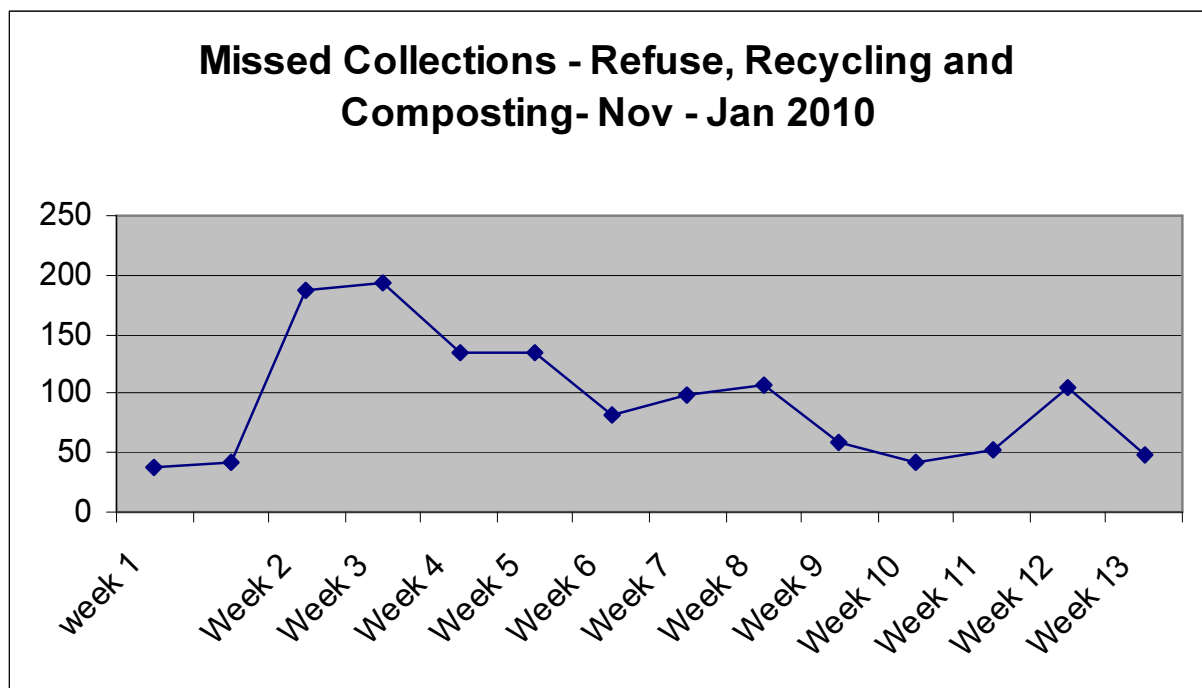


2.14 Contamination of brown bins is potentially more serious as it can result in the rejection of loads by the composting plant at additional cost to the Council and the land filling of organic material. Contamination is also around 0.5%. However, there has been a recent increasing trend in contamination and officers are undertaking further investigations with a view to possible targeted publicity and, where appropriate, enforcement action.



Collection Performance

- 2.15 The Council's annual target for missed collections is 50 per 100,000. Pre-ARC performance for 2009/10 was between 30 and 40. As anticipated the number of missed collections for all types of containers rose during ARC implementation to a peak of around 200 per 100,000 in November. This was as a result of the change to collection rounds which takes a time for residents and crews to get used to. The number of missed collections had fallen to 78 at the end of January and 55 in February. It is expected to fall to target levels by the end of March.



Recycling advisors

- 2.16 To support residents through the changes with on the ground assistance three temporary recycling advisors were recruited for a period of up to 7 months. Between November and the end of January these staff carried out 456 'jobs' including giving advice by telephone and in person; 'bin audits' at the request of residents to help them identify waste that they could be recycling; and inspections for contamination. They also sent 483 letters to residents advising of contamination or excess waste issues.. Due to the success of the scheme the number of recycling advisors was reduced to 2.6 staff in January and has now been reduced further to one.

Recycling Performance / Reduction in residual waste

- 2.17 For the first three months of the scheme there has been an increase in the amount of compost collected from 1617 tonnes to 3422 tonnes (111%). For dry recyclables there has been an increase from 1911 tonnes to 2366 tonnes (24%). Both sets of figures compare kerbside collection tonnages for November 2008 to January 2009 against November 2009 to January 2010. The significant increase in compost reflects the new scheme's addition of food waste to brown bins at a time when garden waste is low. This difference will be proportionally less in the spring months.
- 2.18 Residual (black bin) waste disposed of fell from 9366 tonnes between Nov 2008 – Jan 2009 down to 7,196 for the same period this year a reduction of 2,170 (23%).
- 2.19 In real terms, for the months of November to the end of January the Council has achieved a (provisional) recycling and composting rate of 46%. This is in the context that little gardening is done during these months and performance is likely to be higher in the spring and summer.
- 2.20 These figures need to be treated with a degree of caution as waste and recycling collection can vary significantly from month to month for a variety of reasons.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Report to the Executive - Alternate Refuse Collection Scheme
Implementation - 6 January 2009.

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives (delete as appropriate):	<p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Caring about what's built and where <i>Care for and improve our natural and built environment.</i></p>
Consultation:	None for this report
Legal:	None for this report
Financial:	Additional Capital funding has been required to fund the higher than expected demand for wheeled bins and boxes. This has been approved by the Executive. ARC is expected to deliver higher savings than originally forecast, of approximately £160,000 per annum.
Human Resource:	As detailed in the report
Risk Management:	None for this report