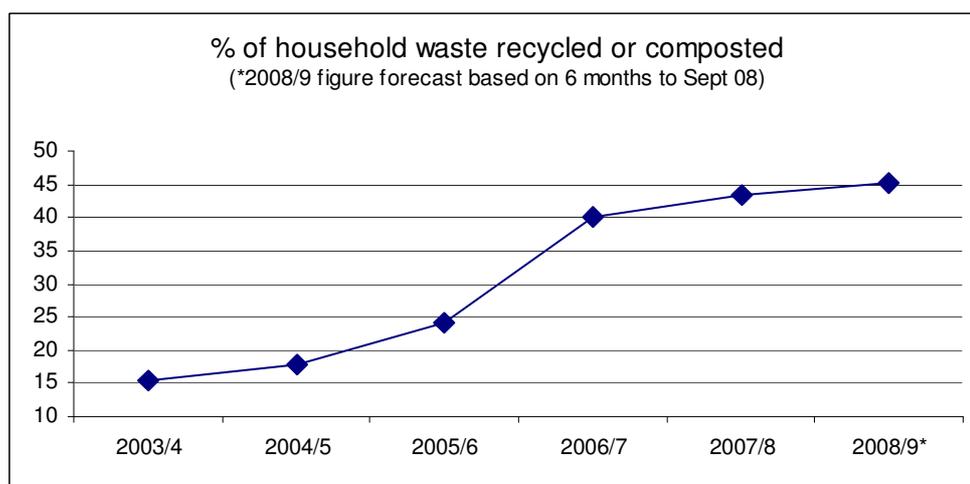


## NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES REPORT TO COUNCIL. NOVEMBER 2008

Since taking up my new portfolio in May I have spent time getting to know the Directorate's diverse services. My visits have ranged from Animal Health to Trading Standards, refuse collections to the Noise patrol. Everywhere I have been I have met dedicated Officers who are all trying to do their best to improve services to the residents of York. Although only created recently the directorate has already demonstrated it can deliver real results.

**Waste Management.** We have made great strides in encouraging and supporting our residents to increase their recycling. Residents have shown that they are keen to recycle to help the environment and Government fiscal penalties have made it an imperative for the council. Recycling and composting rates have risen steadily since 2003 putting us into the top quartile of unitary councils. We are also working to reduce the amount of waste that York produces. On average, in 2007/8 households produced 660kg of waste. The LAA Target for 2008/2009 is 640kg but we are forecasting an out-turn of 624kg based on the first six months' performance. The refreshed Waste Strategy coupled with the Waste Minimisation Strategy, recently approved, should help us to meet our challenging targets.

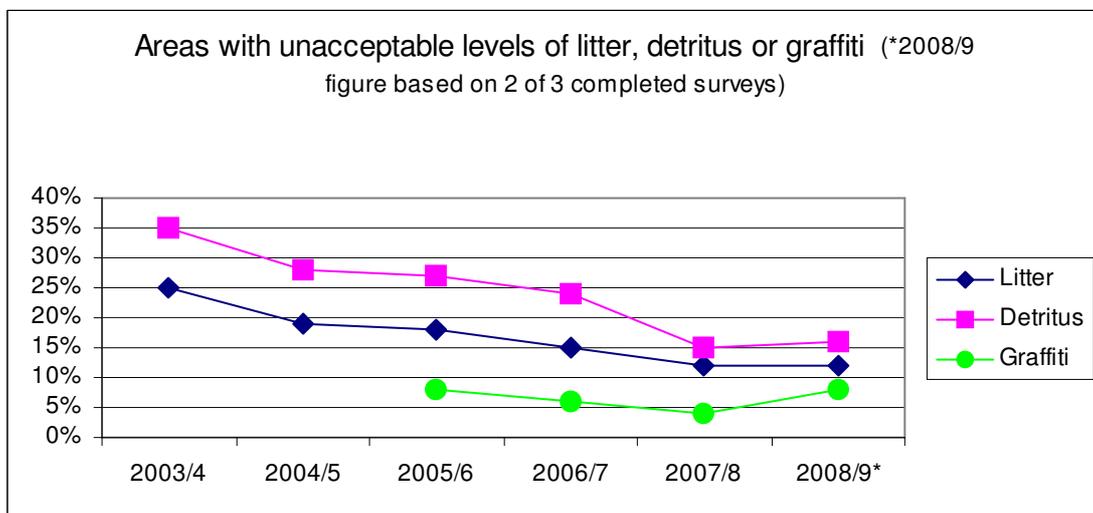


The next major step in helping residents to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste started in mid October with a pilot in the Groves area. This will help us to identify the best way to roll out kerbside recycling to terraced and flatted properties – the key next step in ensuring that all households can recycle at the kerbside by 2010. Initial results for the terraced properties in the trial are encouraging – with participation rates at 61% the first week rising to 67% in the second and over 2 tonnes of recycling currently being collected each week from less than 300 households.

Customer satisfaction with domestic waste collection dipped to 69% in 2005/6 when alternate weekly collections were introduced. By 2007/8 that figure had risen to 75% satisfied –among the best figures of those councils with alternate weekly collections.

The service has also worked hard to improve the quality of its customer performance. In 2006/7 we missed 78 bins per 100,000, but in the first 6 months of this year this rate has dropped to 44 per 100,000. When we do miss a bin, customers can report it more easily through the York Customer Centre and we now collect 96% of missed bins by the next working day (58% in 2006/7). In October, of the 164 missed bins 164 were put right in the target time (the end of the next working day), an amazing 100%.

**Local Environment.** In almost every ward residents have told us, through the ward committee and Neighbourhood Action Planning process, that the quality of their local environment is a priority. Since the creation of Neighbourhood Services we have made significant progress in improving the cleanliness of the city. The service now has the target of maintaining the improved level of performance seen in 2007/8.



A new approach to street cleansing was rolled out across York in Spring 2007. The key being that every street is swept and cleaned on a scheduled basis. Customer satisfaction is being maintained at around 70% satisfaction rate, above average for a Unitary council.

Graffiti has been a growing problem in the last year. Two years ago 25% of the city suffered from graffiti with that figure rising to nearly 60% in summer 2008. Additional resources have been invested to improve our response rate to graffiti removal and we have strengthened our joint work with local policing teams, setting up the Graffiti website. A number of offenders have recently been caught. October's cleanliness survey saw slightly lower levels of graffiti, which suggests that the problem may have peaked but the issue is being monitored.

**Yorkshire in Bloom and other awards** I was delighted that the directorate helped to harness a massive community effort this year to support the Yorkshire in Bloom entry. York achieved Silver Gilt for the second year running, with Northminster Business Park and Wheatlands Community Woodland receiving discretionary awards for the quality of their work. Many staff worked beyond the call of duty to achieve this great result. In July, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Licensing and Bereavement Services were awarded the government's Charter Mark for customer service excellence over 3 years. The 'Air Quality Bulletin' publication judged our air quality website to be the best local authority site in terms of quality. Our efforts regarding the detection of spirit substitution in the licensed trade has been recognised again with a Silver Award from the International Federation of Spirit Producers.

**Public Toilets** A review of our public toilet provision is being carried out and detailed proposals are expected next March setting out options to improve our facilities. The survey has shown which facilities have the highest usage and therefore where we need to concentrate our resources. Surprisingly Bootham Bar are the best used in the City Centre. The new facility at Silver Street is on target to open next May. Not only will they be much easier to clean and maintain, they will provide better access for all users, including a changing place.

**Housing Repairs** The Building Maintenance department has been working with Housing Services on an innovative partnership approach in order to improve the repairs service we offer our tenants. In the first half of 2008/9 96% of urgent repairs were completed in time compared to 90% in 2007/8 and 72% in 2005/6, with the average time taken to complete non-urgent repairs dropping to 7.2 days against 8 days in 2007/8 and 13.9 days in 2005/6. Satisfaction among tenants with the overall repairs service reached 90% in summer 2008. The department also won the contract to service gas appliances in the eastern side of York and now services gas appliances in all Council homes.

**Regulatory services** Our Environmental Health and Trading Standards department is one of the most go ahead in the country. The teams undertake a range of under-age sales tests to see if retailers are selling items such as alcohol or cigarettes. Through a programme of business advice and enforcement, trading standards have reduced the level of illegal sales of alcohol to below 8% on test purchasing operations. This is down from 35% in 2005 when the new provisions of Licensing Act 2003 first came into force. The team has successfully bid to host a new regional 'Scambuster' team to tackle larger scale fraud cases that cross authority boundaries. The successful bid was worth £750k grant funding to run the team until March 2011. The team is now up and running, well ahead of anywhere else in the country.

The Environmental Protection Unit offers an out of hours noise nuisance service that many councillors will know is successful in tackling an issue of great concern to many residents. EPU has prosecuted and obtained 2

CRASBOs on persistent noise offenders in recent weeks. The Noise Patrol has now received over 2,500 calls from the public and made over 1,500 visits since it started in April 2006.

The "Cold Calling Zone" programme is proving very popular with residents and is designed to tackle the problems of doorstep crime for vulnerable people. So far residents in 69 streets are protected with a further 26 requests being currently processed.

In the last 12 months trading standards officers have used Proceeds of Crime legislation to obtain court orders for the recovery of over £320,000 of illegal money from defendants proven to have a 'criminal lifestyle' (almost £50,000 in costs of bringing these proceedings have also been awarded). In addition Members will be aware of the recent successful prosecution of a market trader for selling counterfeit clothing. The Judge imposed a fine of £91,005.27 plus costs and if the offender pays the fine (rather than opting for the 5 year jail term) the Council will eventually receive 10% to use for further anti-fraud work.

**Neighbourhood Management.** York's approach to participatory ward budgeting, joint ward planning teams, and the ongoing development of local prioritisation offered by the Neighbourhood Action Plans, was recognised earlier this year by ministers. Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, announced in the summer that York has been chosen as a pilot authority for participatory budgeting. The Neighbourhood Management Unit has been working under significant staffing and resource pressures to continue to support the programme at ward level, and I would like to pay particular tribute to the team. 276 Ward committee sponsored local improvement schemes were delivered in 2007/8, and 354 schemes have been commissioned this year.

**Directorate Issues** Sickness absence and health and safety are the key organisational development priorities for the directorate's management team. In the first half of 2008/9 the directorate has lost 6.4 days per fte staff. While this remains higher than other directorates, it represents a 26% improvement on the position after 6 months in 2007/8. The forecast figure of 13 days lost per fte for 2008/9 will be a big improvement on figures of 15.5 last year, 16.8 in 2006/7 and 19.2 in 2005/6. I am pleased to support a more proactive approach with staff being offered help and support through one-to-one health checks and a drop-in Health Fair.

Health and Safety remains a concern. Directorate staff have suffered 15 RIDDOR (reportable to HSE) accidents in the first half of 2008/9. While none of these have been particularly serious accidents, this figure is still too high. However, significant groundwork has been done to influence the culture of the organisation which should eventually lead into a reduced accident rate.

**Eco Depot** The 15 KW Wind Turbine was installed in September 2008. Since then it has generated a lot of interest as well as enough electricity to boil 460 kettles (saving 300kg of CO<sub>2</sub>). Since 1st December 2006 the solar panels have generated 80,477 kWh, enough to boil 47,902 kettles - saving 34,605 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>.

In June, following a discussion with Officers, I agreed that a review of depot safety and security would be beneficial and an independent assessment was carried out by the Freight Transport Association in August along with an internal review following a theft in mid July. The review identified that uncontrolled access to the site needs to be curtailed. A temporary gatehouse has been put in place (capital bid has been made) and vehicle barriers will shortly be installed. This will ensure that access to the site is monitored and visitors made aware of the site's health and safety rules.

**Hackney Carriages.** The Authority is committed to raising standards of service provided by hackney carriages and a number of new initiatives have been introduced. Working in partnership with the Yorkshire Rail Academy and York College we have introduced a NVQ course in Road Passengers Transport. The course takes 80 hours and covers customer care for all passengers including disabled people and children. We have introduced a new standard livery, age limit on vehicles and higher emission standards and 99 of 173 hackney carriages now comply with the rest online to follow by June 2009. 15 new plates have been released to address the problems of unmet demand and they have all gone on to new purpose built vehicles which are wheelchair accessible and in the new livery.

**In brief.**

- £38k of funding obtained from DEFRA to investigate the former landfill sites at Fulford Cross.
- The Environmental Protection Unit (EPU) scored 98% in the recent inter-authority audit for the management of contaminated land in Yorkshire and Humberside.
- Healthy eating - the Food Unit ran a poster competition and quiz during food safety week. The team also spent three days at Hob Moor School during the York Food Festival holding interactive sessions with the children on hand washing (using a light box) and healthy eating. Officer also put on a stall at the childminders event in Rowntrees Park advising on personal hygiene and healthy eating.
- Approx 50,000 plants and bulbs have been planted across the cities parks, gardens and roundabouts.
- School cleaning - This years customer survey had a response rate of 77%, significantly higher than previously. The responses were positive with 92% of customers either satisfied or very satisfied with the standard of cleaning achieved within their school and a 97% satisfaction that N S understood their specific customer needs.

As I said at the beginning I have found all Neighbourhood Services staff dedicated to making a difference. Crematorium and Ancient Monuments carry out their duties with little fuss and little praise. The Crematorium provides a very dignified and sensitive service to residents at what is always a difficult time with staff in Bereavement Services also undertaking welfare funerals which ensures that everyone receives a proper service. We are now the only council that runs an ancient monuments team. In March 2008 the service agreed a partnering arrangement with City Strategy to maintain and repair the city's walls. This is a great recognition of the stonemasonry skills

and quality of the team. We work actively with York College to provide apprenticeship training opportunities and to ensure a long term ability to employ skilled stonemasons.

I would like to thank all the Officers in Neighbourhood Services for their hard work in establishing the Directorate over the last 2 years and for the welcome and support that they have given me over the last 6 months. The directorate faces an interesting few months with the departure of the Director in the New Year and the possibility of services transferring from other departments. I know that everyone will rise to the challenges ahead and continue to provide our citizens with high quality services they have come to expect from Neighbourhood Services.