



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report of the

CULTURAL AND LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

into

**THE DISPOSAL OF GREEN WOODY WASTE BY
LEISURE SERVICES**

1 November 2001

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Panel which considered this issue at the scheduled meeting on 18 September 2001 are:-

Councillors Briggs (Chair), Allonby, Asif and C Smith

Lead Officer; Cliff Stewart (Head of Personal Services Resources Group)

Committee Administrator: Julie McDowell

The Panel is grateful to Mr J Baird (Operations Manager (Landscape Maintenance)), Leisure Services who presented information.

The Scrutiny Committee on 17 July 2001 requested that the Cultural and Leisure Scrutiny Panel investigate the disposal of pruned branches and vegetation by Leisure Services. On 24 July 2001 the Panel requested a briefing note from Leisure Services and Environmental Services which outlined the issues including scope, environmental impact, service impact, alternatives and information on how many complaints have been received in order that the Panel could determine its terms of reference for the review.

A review was requested by Councillor J Smithson following a number of complaints by local companies, residents and Councillor Bolt between December 2000 and February 2001 about smoke from burning waste on Leisure Sites.

The Panel gave consideration to a briefing note by the Operations Manager (Landscape Maintenance), with input from Environmental Services on 18 September 2001. The Panel heard that budgetary constraints had influenced the decision to dispose of waste by burning it in traditional bonfires. The Panel therefore agreed that a report by Leisure Services should be submitted to the Lifelong Learning Core Team for consideration of the options in advance of the 2002/3 budget planning process and the next scheduled burning cycle. A report was considered by the Core Team on 23 October 2001. Accordingly, the Panel will not be investigating this issue any further other than to monitor the action of the Lifelong Learning Core Team and whether any further complaints are received during the next burning cycle between January and March 2002.

INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE

The information presented in the briefing note to the Panel on 18 September 2001 is summarised as follows.

Green waste is predominantly produced by the Parks and Open Spaces Service and it is the green waste produced by that Service which is the subject of this review. 92% of the green waste is produced by the Landscape Maintenance function. It is the green woody waste produced by this function, not grass cuttings, which has been the subject of complaints from the public. The Landscapes Maintenance Service is responsible for grounds maintenance in areas of open space owned by the Council and carries out work on behalf of a large number of Council services.

On three occasions in the year comparatively "clean" green woody waste is produced during the one shrub pruning and two hedge cutting operations which are undertaken as part of the recognised maintenance routine. This material can be processed and possibly used as mulch or compost.

The volume of waste produced by the Service as a result of pruning and hedge cutting operations varies from year to year dependent on maintenance programmes and climatic conditions. Approximately 7,300 cubic metres or about 547 tonnes is produced which is compostable or recyclable. The two hedge cutting operations produce about 40% of the total clean green waste i.e. 2,920 cubic metres or 219 tonnes and shrub pruning produces the remaining 4,380 cubic metres or 328 tonnes.

These figures are based on an analysis of clean green waste collected at Crow Nest Park from the Batley and Dewsbury areas and used to provide an estimate of overall clean green waste production across the Authority.

Between 1990 and 1997 much of the green waste was collected at central points and shredded using an Exenco Unirec shredding machine. This machine chipped/shredded the vast majority of hedge and shrub arisings and the product from the process was composted at several sites across the Authority. Where possible the resulting product was used as a mulching compost. However, problems of contamination largely by fly tipping and some shrubs meant that the mulch produced was not viable, also fire safety issues meant that this process was discontinued. The Exenco Unirec machine became too expensive to run and was at the end of its useful life.

Throughout the three periods 1997/1998, 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 the Service hired a number of smaller chipping/shredding machines. Use of smaller machines resulted in the direct return of the processed waste from shrub clippings to the soil surface as a mulch. This saved valuable down time in transporting the waste to central locations and enabling the arisings to be recycled. The hedge cuttings and other green waste collected were disposed of through the waste disposal skip service.

In the period 2000/2001 reductions in budgetary provision did not allow for the use of the chippers/shredders. The organisation had overspent its machinery budget in 1999/2000. This resulted in a requirement to burn some green waste at selected locations whilst other green waste was still disposed of through the waste disposal skips service, with some being collected at a central area where it was eventually shredded and removed by a private contractor using resources from the 2001/2002 budget.

When the Service decided that the option to burn the green waste was acceptable it was based on the following:-

- (i) The fact that it had previously burnt some materials each year with little or no problems.
- (ii) That documentation from the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection did not outlaw bonfires and in fact stated that in some cases a bonfire was the best practical way to dispose of garden waste.
- (iii) The Service had consulted with, on an informal basis, the Environment Unit which acknowledged the problems the Service faced and the proposals planned in respect of burning green waste.

During the operations of 2000/2001 complaints were received about the burning process by the Pollution and Noise Control Section of Environmental Services. The Panel received details of the complaints which were made between 10 January and 13 February 2001. There were 13 complaints in total. The Panel was informed that, considering the size of the current operation, the number of complaints was few.

Officers from Leisure Services met with Environmental Services Officers and it was agreed that the Landscape Maintenance Service's preferred method of shredding or chipping green waste then returning it to site was the best all round option, but that it was prohibitive on the grounds of cost and that other composting options which involved "gate fees" were not affordable by the Service.

Leisure Services approached the Environment Agency and was advised that burning was an option that could be followed providing that the Service kept within the legislative guidelines, particularly Section 30 of Schedule 3 of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994 and specifically Sub-Section (b) which details where burning can take place and what can be burnt at those locations. A portfolio of sites where burning can take place is currently being prepared by the Service for the attention of the Environment Agency who will examine it and subsequently confirm or not the go ahead to burn at the identified locations.

The Environment Agency also stated that any burning operations which take place must comply with the recommendations of the Air Code 1998 which identifies what can be burnt, how it should be burnt and what safety precautions need to be undertaken.

The Panel was also informed that other options have been considered for the disposal of the green woody waste:-

- (1) Using the Council's green waste composting facility in Huddersfield. This facility is already working at its 2,500 tonnes per annum capacity and is unable to handle Leisure Services green waste. The costs of disposal by this means are prohibitive and have been estimated at £46,000 per annum. The Panel was informed that the market is currently over full with other products and that woody waste could only be used as a mulch, it is not viable for growing produce.
- (2) Joint working with Yorkshire Water Authority at their Mitchell Laithes site at Earlsheaton, Dewsbury where green waste is shredded and mixed with process sewage waste to provide growing mediums. This is also cost prohibitive. The material produced would have little use to Leisure Services.
- (3) Leisure Services has previously approached the Environment Unit seeking support for financing the disposal of the green waste by chipping/shredding on site and returning to the surface of the shrub beds as mulch. The costs identified were £100,000 for the purchase of 8 chipping/shredding machines which would have a life expectancy of approximately 7 years, thus the annual financial resource required over a 7 year period would be approximately £14,285. Leisure Services itself would seek to cover the annual maintenance cost (approximately £10,500) from their existing resources. However, the Service was advised that no funding was available for this purpose.

Subsequently the Lifelong Learning Core Team on 23 October 2001 has considered a report which sets out the operational issues and budget implications of some of the options. The report indicated that Officers consider the current practice to represent the most cost effective and "environmentally friendly" means of disposal given current circumstances. The report states that should additional resources be identified the preferred option would involve disposal of the waste through shredding a large proportion in situ, returning the waste material to the soil. The report states that the cost of the machinery involved is currently beyond the means of the Leisure and Recreation Service, leaving no alternative

but to continue with the present arrangements. The report states that the preferred option would cost an additional £25,000 per annum.

The Lifelong Learning Core Team has asked the Head of Leisure and Recreation Services to submit a further paper providing information on the environmental impact of the options and more detailed information on the costs of the various options.

CONCLUSION

The Panel is of the view that the preferred option is to use chipping/shredding machines to dispose of green woody waste. This is based on the evidence that it is the best all round option. It was therefore agreed that the Lifelong Learning Core Team should take a formal position on the operational issues and the budget implications of the options.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Scrutiny Committee note that the Panel has reviewed this issue and referred it to the Lifelong Learning Core Team, which is now giving consideration to the options for the disposal of green woody waste.