A report by the Scrutiny and Audit Committee

on Waste

June, 2011

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 This investigation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How the investigation was progressed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Documentation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Witnesses and evidence gathering</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aberdeenshire and waste</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Options for incineration or other Energy from Waste systems</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Composting and alternative methods of reducing waste going to landfill</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How successful is the current recycling programme?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How can a reduction in waste arisings be achieved?</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What is the remit of the Waste Management Working Group?</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Will current policies and proposals for contracting waste treatment and disposal meet the targets for landfill and avoid the financial penalties which government can impose?</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Conclusions</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Recommendations</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Thanks and invitation for feedback</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Appendices</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Investigation brief</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Investigation programme and witnesses heard</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Endnotes</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

This report sets out the process, conclusions and recommendations of the 21st investigation undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council’s Scrutiny and Audit Committee.

The work was agreed at a meeting of the Scrutiny and Audit Committee on 13 May, 2009. The investigation began in November, 2009 with the lead service briefing, and continued from December, 2009 to late November, 2010, with site visits held on 17 March and 2 June, 2010. The matter was revisited by the Committee prior to publishing its conclusions. Some of the initial considerations required to be reassessed in the light of the financial pressures which the Council and other public sector bodies face.

The Committee heard evidence from both Aberdeenshire Council staff and external witnesses during 22 sessions. Visits were made to Keenan’s recycling at Strichen and to the Crow’s Nest Landfill Site at Banchory as part of the original schedule. As part of the Committee’s investigation into Community Planning and Empowerment in February and March 2011, visits to the “2Reuse” project in Peterhead, and the shop run by Fraserburgh Neighbourhoods and Residents Association (FRANRA) in High Street, Fraserburgh allowed further evidence to be seen of community reuse and recycling initiatives. The Committee considered all the evidence gathered and drew up its conclusions and recommendations at meetings on 24 February, 1 April, 2011, 9 June and 2 September, 2011.

In coming to its conclusions, the Committee referred to the original terms of reference for the investigation.

(1) Options for incineration or other energy from waste systems (EfW).

When the investigation began, it was expected that the new tender for residual household waste would be in place and could be examined. There have been delays in signing off the tender. This means that Aberdeenshire Council has only recently determined how its waste should be disposed of, in a 15 year contract which may be further extended. Mechanical Biological Treatment and gasification is the route of choice of the contractor.

The Committee feels that there are no recommendations or comments that can be made at present about options for incineration or other energy from waste systems.

(2) Composting and alternative methods of reducing waste going to landfill.

During evidence heard, the Committee heard from several witnesses of how Aberdeenshire was reducing, or could reduce, waste going to landfill by composting or other alternative methods of reducing waste.

Areas of current joint working with communities, such as localised composting projects, and the subsidized provision of green cones to interested households was commended. The Committee also welcomed various charity or voluntary sector initiatives which were diverting waste streams.
The Committee heard that some local authorities provided seed capital grants to local groups for projects which augmented the councils’ direct provision of waste related services.

In light of financial pressures and cuts agreed for the financial years 2011/12 and following, the Committee understands that desirable as they may be, direct funding of alternative provision can no longer be extended, or even maintained at its previous level. It recommends that joint working with all possible partners be continued as much as can be to maximise resource effectiveness.

The Committee would wish to suggest that a separate food waste collection be investigated for Woodhill House, and other council offices, and appropriate infrastructure provided for left-over food and other organic waste such as coffee grounds and tea bags. The Committee commends the rural primary schools which are already using food waste collection systems.

The Committee does not know if any additional budget may be available in regard to food waste collection as the Zero Waste Plan rolls out, but would recommend that the Council look at alternatives to the kerbside food collection system, including the possible use of “bring to” collections at the Household Waste and Recycling Centres. This might include the sale of food waste collection bags to those households which wish to participate.

\[(3) \text{ How successful is the current recycling programme?}\]

Recycling rates were seen to be increasing, but not reaching the Scottish Government targets. Partially this was because Aberdeenshire’s baseline of target assessment was already at a higher level of attainment than some other authorities in Scotland; the “easy wins” had already been achieved, and officers from all authorities with whom the Committee met reported increasing challenges for each further percentage increase.

The Committee appreciates that it is not possible to assess how many people participate in recycling; not all use kerbside collection, and this is not available across the Shire. Without attributable analysis, it cannot be determined what percentage of those in Aberdeenshire do recycle, and to what extent.

Differing communities and lifestyles may find different aspects of recycling more attractive and easy than others.

The Committee feel that although recycling is a government approved measure, it is but a single factor in diverting waste from landfill. The “reduce/ reuse/ recycle” hierarchy should be given greater weight.

Education and ease of access were seen to be crucial in getting the individuals in communities to participate in diverting waste from landfill. The current budget pressures mean that it is unlikely that huge amounts of resources will be allocated to drive forward education or to develop infrastructure.
The Committee believe it is not possible to ascertain how successful recycling is –
materials are recycled, whether through kerb side collection or bring-to systems. It is
not possible to identify who is recycling, who is not, or which systems are most
effective.

(4) How can a reduction in waste arisings be achieved?

Aberdeenshire continues in a period of growth; more houses are being built to
accommodate the increasing number of households which reflect changes in living
patterns, with smaller numbers of people living in separate units. In addition, new
people are coming to stay in the area.

The Committee feels that even if people in individual households are reducing their
personal waste arisings, the accumulative impact of an increasing number of
residents and households mean that it would be very challenging to reduce waste
arising.

The Committee would urge that the Council continue to lobby, directly and via any
appropriate bodies, to have manufacturers more aware of, and responsible for, the
waste arising from their products.

(5) What is the remit of the Waste Management Working Group?

Evidence was presented to the Committee of the genesis and evolution of the Waste
Management Working Group. Originally established in 2004 to consider in detail
technical options to address waste disposal issues in north and central
Aberdeenshire, the Working Group continues to provide a cross political forum in
which members can explore with officers options relating to waste disposal policies
and Scottish government initiatives.

The Committee commends the work done to date through the aegis of the Waste
Management Working Group and would recommend its retention for all future
detailed discussions on waste management in Aberdeen.

(6) Will current policies and proposals for contracting waste treatment and
disposal meet the targets for landfill and avoid the financial penalties which
government can impose?

Aberdeenshire Council is already failing in meet government targets for reducing the
use of landfill. Should it choose, the Scottish Government could impose fines
already accrued. There is an understanding that delivery of successful outcomes, in
areas such as recycling targets and reducing waste arising is not entirely within the
ownership of local authorities. The Committee would recommend that the Scottish
Government, in discussion with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
consider more valid ways in assessing local authority performance in meeting the
targets which the Zero Waste Plan will generate. These should be linked to trends in
housing and lifestyles in each area as demonstrated in the Structure Plan for future
development, and have an awareness of the impact of new housing in areas of
growth.
The 2010 Zero Waste Plan suggests that there will be other measures to determine success; the practical application of some of the technical proposals is still being explored.

Also, the new waste contract with SITA has not been tested by operation. The Council’s work in handling other sections of waste will complement the SITA contract across other areas of waste disposal/resource management.

The Committee cannot speculate on whether unknown and untested systems will meet as yet unknown targets set by Scottish Government over processes and regulations which have not yet been determined.
The Committee would recommend the undernoted be considered:

(a) The Committee understands that desirable as it might be, direct funding of alternative provision of waste and recycling projects is no longer possible. It recommends that joint working with all possible partners be continued as much as can be to maximise resource effectiveness.

(b) A separate food waste collection should be investigated for Woodhill House and other council premises, with appropriate infrastructure provided for left-over food and other organic waste such as coffee grounds and tea bags.

(c) Alternatives to a kerbside food waste collection service should be explored and reported, including the potential use of bring-to systems at the Household Waste and Recycling Centres, charging those who participate for the bags.

(d) Efforts and available resources should be directed to education and encouraging participation in recycling and other initiatives, where possible tailoring information as closely as possible to the target participant. It would be urged that the Scottish Government continue to sponsor a national campaign, flexible enough to address local circumstances.

(e) The joint working with community groups and charities should be commended as the way forward, especially in the situation of restricted resource availability and communities should be encouraged to start up other recycling initiatives to complement the Council’s recyclate collection, with available resources directed to maximise providing advice and assistance.

(f) Good practice should be shared between the communities of Aberdeenshire. This could be done through articles on the Council’s website and discussions at meetings such as Community Council Forums, Rural Development Partnerships and local Community Planning Groups.

(g) If facilities are provided, efforts should be made to service them appropriately to their usage; communities would otherwise be disappointed by provision which does not match their needs or expectations.

(h) The Council should continue to lobby both the Scottish and UK Governments, directly and via any appropriate bodies, to make manufacturers more aware of, and more responsible for, the waste arising from their products.

(i) The “reduce/ reuse/ recycle” hierarchy should be given greater weight in policy deliberations on waste operations and priorities.

(j) The Waste Management Working Group’s previous work should be commended and the Group maintained to consider detailed consideration of waste related issues.

(k) In considering the technology advances in the context of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency’s regulatory function, that the Infrastructure Services Committee be requested to consider making representations to the Scottish Government that greater flexibility might be considered in allowing the best possible,
as opposed to the best tested, solution to be applied, with pre-application discussions facilitated as they are in major planning applications.

(I) The Infrastructure Services Committee should be requested to consider making representations to the Scottish Government that, in discussion with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), the government assess local authority performance, in meeting the targets which the Zero Waste Plan will generate, in a different way with greater validity.
INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee

1.1.1 Within Aberdeenshire Council’s Scheme of Delegation, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is empowered to:

- Review the effectiveness of Council policy implementation and Council service delivery and to identify potential improvements;
- Undertake an annual programme of reviews; and,
- Make recommendations regarding improvements to the performance of Services.

1.1.2 In carrying out its reviews, the Scrutiny and Audit Committee is able to:

- Call upon any officer of the Council or Chair/Vice-chair of the Council’s committees to give evidence or provide written reports, as appropriate; and,
- Call upon expert witnesses or members of the public to give evidence, where necessary.

1.1.3 The Committee operates according to the following principles of working:

- Deliberative
- Investigative
- Open
- Evidence based
- Transparent
- Accountable
- Responsive
- Outward-looking
- Inclusive
- Influencing
- Proactive
- Flexible
- Non-partisan

1.2 This investigation

1.2.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee, at its meeting on 13 May, 2009, (Item 5, page 328,) agreed that an investigation be undertaken to waste services in Aberdeenshire. The work began in late November, 2009, with evidence sessions and site visits continuing till November, 2010.

1.2.2 The Committee chose to accept the topic because it believes that the issue of waste services, suggested repeatedly over the past several years as a topic, required to be monitored and assessed.

It was agreed that the purpose and objectives of the investigation should be to:

“To consider the actions which Aberdeenshire Council has taken for the minimisation of waste and the reduction of landfill. To investigate what more could be done, and is intended, through potential improvements, for the future including:
(1) options for incineration or other energy from waste systems;
(2) composting and alternative methods of reducing waste going to landfill;
(3) how successful is the current recycling programme?
(4) how can a reduction in waste arisings be achieved?
(5) what is the remit of the Waste Management Working Group? and
(6) will current policies and proposals for contracting waste treatment and
disposal meet the targets for landfill and avoid the financial penalties which
government can impose?

The detailed brief for the Committee’s investigation is attached as Appendix A.

1.2.1 The Scrutiny and Audit Committee members who were involved in this
investigation were Councillors Peter Bellarby (Chair), Amanda Allan (Vice
Chair), Nan Cullinane, Sandy Duncan, Tom Fleming, Ian Gray, Fergus Hood,
Mike Sullivan and Robert Thomas. Councillor Ian Tait joined the Committee
as it drew up its recommendations and has participated in taking the report to
conclusion.

1.2.2 It has been agreed that the Scrutiny and Audit Committee should appoint
independent external experts to assist with its investigations where
appropriate. For this investigation, it was determined that there would be no
added value in such an appointment.

2. How the investigation was progressed

The Committee undertook a range of different activities to enable it to carry
out this investigation.

2.1 Documentation

2.1.1 A range of background documentation was provided to the Committee at the
commencement of the investigation. This included information from both
within and outwith Aberdeenshire Council:

Committee Papers:-

1. Integrated Sustainable Waste Management Strategy for Aberdeenshire, 2001 -
2020;
2. Public Attitudes to Waste in Aberdeenshire, October 2002;
3. Waste Aware Grampian – Recycling Centres & Points Survey Report,
December, 2004;
4. Waste Aware Aberdeenshire – Public Attitudes and Behaviour towards the
Kerbside Recycling Service in Aberdeenshire, January, 2007;
5. Waste Aware Aberdeenshire – Public Attitudes and Behaviour towards the
Handy Hints Campaign in Aberdeenshire, May, 2009;
6. Reports to Infrastructure Services Committee:
   (a) Consultation on Scotland’s Zero Waste Plan – 8 October, 2009;
   (b) Progress report – Waste Management Issues – 19 June, 2008;
   (c) Progress report – Enhancing Recyclate Recovery – 29 January, 2009
   (d) Review of Charges – Commercial Waste Service – 19 March, 2009;
(f) Zero Waste Fund – 18 March, 2010;
(g) Recycling Performance and Income – 13 May, 2010;
(h) Provision of a Rural Kerbside Collection – 7 October, 2010;
(i) Zero Waste Plan – 7 October, 2010; and

7. Waste Management Working Group –
   (a) Papers for 12 December, 2008;
   (b) Papers for 22 June, 2009;
   (c) Papers for 4 December, 2009; and
   (d) Papers for 10 September, 2010.

   **Background Information:-**

8. Scottish Government –
   (b) Waste Policy in Scotland - Web page extract;
   (c) Consultation on Scotland’s Zero Waste Plan – cover letter and extracts; and
   (d) Zero Waste Plan, June 2010;

9. Scottish Environment Protection Agency:
   (a) Landfill Allowance Scheme, July, 2008 – June, 2009;
   (b) National Waste Strategy Scotland, 2003;
   (c) Waste Data Flow – Annual Report 2007/2008 – Results for Aberdeenshire Council, January 2009; and

10. Aberdeen City Audit and Risk Committee; Extract Aberdeen Improvement Plan – 2 September, 2010; and
11. Aberdeen City Council Waste Appraisal – 21 September, 2010;


### 2.2 Witnesses and evidence gathering

2.2.1 Members of the Committee met a cross-section of Aberdeenshire Council officers. The Committee sought their views on the current operation of the waste service throughout Aberdeenshire, plans for the future collection of residual household waste and the proposed new contract for the disposal arrangements. Officers interviewed included: the Director of Planning & Environmental Services, the Head of Service (Protective Services & Waste), Waste Manager (Environment), Principal Waste Managers, Waste Strategy Officers, regional and Aberdeenshire Planning Officers and Facility Managers.
The full list of Aberdeenshire Council staff who appeared as witnesses during the investigation is given in Appendix B.

2.2.2 Individuals with relevant expertise from a wide range of organisations were invited to give evidence to the Committee. Amongst those who appeared before the Committee were: Peter Lawrence, Aberdeen City Council, Bruce Reekie, Perth & Kinross Council, and Colin Clark, Highland Council; David Jennings, of Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority; John Harris of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency; and Aberdeenshire community council representatives Hilda Lumsden-Gill, David Fleming, John Askey and Bruce Buchan, from Huntly, Stonehaven and Peterhead Community Councils respectively. Members also heard from Duncan Simpson of Valpak, Vice-Chair of the Institute of Waste Management (Scotland); Pauline Hinchion of the Community Recycling Network Scotland; and Mark Morgan of the New Hope Trust, Peterhead. A full list of the external witnesses interviewed during the investigation is given in Appendix B.

2.2.3 Written submissions on the Scottish Government’s Zero Waste Plan, published in the middle of the investigation, were also received.

2.2.4 Full details of the initial evidence given to the Committee by witnesses are contained in the agenda papers for the Scrutiny and Audit Committee meetings on 14 April and 2 September, 2010. Additional evidence was not included in the circulation to the formal meetings of the Committee but will be lodged on the Council’s website along with this report when published. These are public documents and can be made available on request.
3. Aberdeenshire and waste

The Committee heard from Dr. Gore, (Director of Planning & Environmental Services), Ian Robertson, (Head of Protective Services & Waste) and Jack Clark, (Waste Manager, (Environment)) of Aberdeenshire’s inheritance in terms of waste facility provision, policy and infrastructure.

i. From 1996 the focus was on reducing landfill and increasing recycling. These targets were challenging, particularly as sites such as the Crow’s Nest Landfill site at Banchory were coming to the end of their lives. In November 2009 the Council was reviewing tenders for future waste treatment and disposal options. These were limited due to restricted market availability. Aberdeenshire was very careful, in its choice of products to recycle, to avoid the trap of stock-piling waste. Waste Officers had been particularly successful in educating the public, including traditionally difficult to reach groups about waste minimisation and recycling. However the waste arising tonnages still grew, due in part to the continuing number of new households in Aberdeenshire. Finance was a huge issue – and all Scottish local authorities shared Aberdeenshire Council’s position of having achieved all the “quick” or “easy” wins. There was an increasing need to be creative and also to invest heavily in the next stage. Planning and regulation processes for waste related infrastructure continued to be the focus of public concern – waste was seen to be a bad neighbour, regardless of how needed the facilities were. Dr. Gore felt that most householders perceived waste as a local authority responsibility rather than their own and this was a perception which needed to be changed.

ii. Aberdeenshire, in 1996, had four operational landfill sites, operated under a council resolution. With the advent of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, waste management licences were required. The sites were only licensed for two years by SEPA, mainly because they were not contained sites. Aberdeenshire Council came up with a short-term strategy to allow waste to continue to be disposed of, including the use of a private site at Tarbothill, beside Aberdeen while consideration was made of SEPA’s stipulation for the pre-treatment of waste and landfill lining work. The potential cost for these improvements was potentially £6,000,000. Following an application of appeal to the Scottish Executive, SEPA agreed to extend the Pitrichie landfill licence for an additional three years.

iii. At that time the compost plants at Mintlaw and Inverboyndie helped. A third was required at Banchory and a bid made for Scottish Executive Strategic Waste fund. This needed to be compliant with the Council’s Policy and the Area Waste Plan.

iv. An Integrated Waste Management Strategy was produced in 2001 through the Council’s Infrastructure Services Committee. This was not updated in 2008 as had been planned as the focus was then to concentrate on what to do with residual waste. The Committee was advised that from 2001 to the present, the Integrated Waste Management Strategy formed the core of the Council’s waste operation policy direction.
v. An Area Waste Plan had been produced jointly between Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and The Moray Council in 2003, instigated by the Scottish Executive to foster joint consideration and provision. This complied with the National Waste Plan and released waste strategy funding to support the strategy. In 2004, Aberdeenshire’s pre-tendering procedure for residual waste disposal had begun. However the Scottish Executive regrouped local councils and between 2004 and 2008 the North of Scotland Strategic Options Review Group (NOSSOR) came into being. NOSSOR put before the Scottish Executive a Strategic Options Case for the future of waste disposal across Highland, Aberdeen City and the Moray Council areas jointly with Aberdeenshire. If agreed, it would then move on to a business case. If the Scottish Executive approved the business case, they would make funding available.

vi. A report in 2006 agreed that there would be two new energy plants: one in the Highlands and one on the border between Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council. The Scottish Executive reviewed the proposals, suggested that it would not be acceptable due to the high cost. It was then agreed to split the groups into two, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council in one group and Moray and Highland in the other group. The Scottish Executive confirmed that a new strategic case was needed, requiring 50% of the waste to be recycled, allowing up to 25% to go to landfill and acknowledging that the remaining 25% would require treatment. In Aberdeenshire, there was, in 2006 a short-term tender for centre and north’s residual waste. It was to be a three year contract, with an option to extend for a further three years. In 2007 the tendering process started, with a view to replacing the Crows Nest landfill site as it was getting near capacity. In 2008 there was no choice but to suggest that the Council amend the scope of the tender so it would cover all residual waste. Officers advised the Committee that the bids in relation to this tender were currently being considered.

vii. In the interim, with the new administration in Scotland in 2007, there was a change of direction and new targets established. There was a preference for smaller plants and local solutions. No Strategic Outline Case or business case was required and councils were not to be given additional funding for residual waste. The Scottish Government set new targets of 70% recycling, 25% energy from waste and 5% landfill.

viii. While the work above was ongoing, in operational terms the service sought to follow the commitments made in the Integrated Sustainable Waste Management Strategy. An implementation plan focused on waste reduction, following the “reduce, reuse, recycle” waste hierarchy; this led to the alteration in wheeled bin collections for residual waste from weekly to fortnightly collection. There was a parallel commitment to enhance “the bring-to system” of recycling where appropriate. Aberdeenshire had 160 recycling sites; some were new (as in Stonehaven and Laurencekirk, with sites actively being sought in Ballater and Portlethen); others were being upgraded (Fraserburgh, Banchory and Peterhead already done, with plans to upgrade Ellon). The remaining sites were being reviewed.
ix. At the same time, the types of waste recovered for recycling now increased; wood, scrap metals, rubble, garden waste, engine oil, batteries, electrical goods and cardboard were now recycled. Recycling facilities were now strategically placed in locations which avoid specific journeys for recycling.

x. Efforts were made to encourage and increase the number of participants in home composting. In 2002, a public attitude survey by Paisley University indicated that the ideal percentage was 55% of homes with home composting. At that time, Aberdeenshire Council already had 36% and provided an officer to act as Community Liaison Officer in relation to home composting. This post was funded by the landfill tax credit. A Master Composting Scheme was set up jointly with the Moray and Aberdeen City Councils which ran from August, 2003 to July, 2005. In Aberdeenshire 3,577 composters were sold, 577 more than the target. The scheme was continued by Aberdeenshire Council directly through to 2007. During this time an additional 6,740 units were sold. In 2007 Aberdeenshire Council joined the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) Home Composting Scheme. From 2007 to August, 2009 11,576 additional composters were sold, at a subsidised rate through a Scottish Government scheme. Officers advised members that Aberdeenshire Council had now met its commitment of 55% coverage of home composters.

xi. Officers advised the Committee that the Council had always assessed its Waste Management policies and practices against the criteria of the Proximity Regional Self-Sufficiency and the Polluter Pays principles, Best Practical Environmental Option and Sustainable Development. Because of this commitment, Aberdeenshire Council did not provide free garden waste disposal; it runs against the Proximity Principle. Such waste should ideally be disposed of at home through the use of composters. The home composter use also encapsulated other criteria; householders are required to pay £15.00 for the composters. In addition, there were no transport costs or air pollution issues with home composting, so it was determined to be a sustainable development. The use also fitted neatly into the Waste Hierarchy. If garden waste were collected, this would increase the waste which Aberdeenshire Council would require to dispose of, not reduce it. The Committee was assured that if householders did not want, or were not able to have their own home composters, there were bring-to facilities at household waste and recycling centres and additional summer weekend facilities. Officers advised that garden waste could also be collected as a paid for special uplift.

xii. In 2009 there were initiatives to develop systems of recording statistics. This was to identify trends in waste production and improve waste management decision-making. National reporting requirements were also reported as shaping the future of data capture. It was calculated that 153,000 tonnes of municipal waste were handled by the Council. Although the total was not actively divided between business and domestic waste, previous sampling had indicated that approximately 17 – 18,000 tonnes came from commercial waste. It was stressed that these figures only represent what Aberdeenshire Council collected, not the total waste, as commercial and industrial users could choose to use private companies to pick up their waste rather than the Council.
xiii. Members were advised that the Council had an established programme of waste awareness raising initiatives, for both the general public and private businesses. A Waste Promotions Officer post had been created, specialised in marketing and promotions. As part of the Grampian Waste Aware Campaign Group, with Aberdeen City Council and the Moray Council, Aberdeenshire benefitted from joint public education through various campaigns, including television advertising and mail-shots. Feedback questionnaires on all campaigns found that the public respond best to newspaper articles. Although a Waste Awareness Guide had been issued to all households in the Grampian region, waste officers had developed pictorial images, rather than written information, to assist those who were challenged by information presented in English. The Council also worked with the Scottish Waste Awareness Group to develop promotional materials, and with the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) in promoting home composting, real nappies and battery collection.

xiv. Waste Officers might attend public events, talks, education events, community council meetings and initiatives at the kerbside to encourage separation of recyclate in order to get the message of waste awareness across as accessibly as possible. The Committee was advised that in 2005 there were 119 of these events, with 215 in 2006 and 127 in 2007. Staff efforts and resources were also concentrated on specific areas if new processes were to be introduced, or where a particular difficulty was experienced in a particular community. This provided additional guidance and information to householders on waste reduction, augmenting the practical information in the Waste Aware Guide.

xv. Officers explained that the service had explored the potential for, and implications of, introducing a segregated waste collection service in a pilot project. In 2009, there were now approximately 70,000 households on kerbside collection of recyclables and 30,000 rural properties on a four weekly paper collection. It was reported that there had been a 60% participation in rural paper collection, with kerbside sitting at 50%. The figures were not as clear as they might be; as for all recycling participation, not every household put out recyclate for each collection, and some households might chose to take the recyclate to a bring-to collection rather than leave it kerbside.

xvi. In line with the polluter pays principle, domestic waste producers were charged for special collection of bulky household waste, fridges and freezers as well as garden waste. These charges were made within the authority’s statutory powers but may not reflect full cost recovery. For all trade waste customers, who chose to receive a Council Waste Management Service, full cost recovery had to be achieved in the charges levied. Members were advised that a Trade Waste Advisor was employed to provide guidance and information on waste reduction to trade waste customers, and participated in the North East Waste Management Partnership.

xvii. In 2009, a review, partly funded by the Scottish Government and undertaken by ReMaDe\(^5\) was assessing the Council’s kerbside service, looking to identify potential markets/use for recovered materials.
The Committee heard that in 2001, Aberdeenshire Council’s Integrated Waste Management Strategy had established targets for service delivery and had achieved them as undernoted.

- By 2010, home composting was to have been maximised its potential by the year 2010. This had been reached.
- The Strategy hoped to achieve 25% recovery of domestic waste by 2001/2002. This target was a bit ambitious and was only reached in 2006.
- A short term (up to five year) target for zero growth in annual waste arisings, a 1% reduction in the 5-10 year period and 2.5% reduction in the 10 – 15 year timescale was the aspiration. These targets were countered by the inevitable increase in waste as the number of new properties built in Aberdeenshire increased. Officers advised the Committee that there were year on year fluctuations in waste arisings due to external factors outwith the Council’s control, such as the weather. It would take several years for a proper overall assessment of this target to be possible. Officers felt that the waste arising target, to be valid, required to be done on a per household basis, discounting commercial waste and taking account of new properties.

The Committee was advised that the National Waste Strategy required the Council to reduce its own total waste by 5% by 2005. It was not clear how far this target had been met, but officers advised the Committee that the Council’s overall waste was audited and work undertaken with schools to ensure optimum recycling. In 2010 there was to be a major development in the in-house policy on waste and recycling, with a standardised provision of recycling and waste containers in all council premises; offices as well as schools.

The 2001 Strategy had planned a revision of the charging system for trade waste. Officers advised the Committee that the current charging system was calculated on the basis of full cost recovery. As a consequence, a significant increase in the number of traders recycling, in order to avoid the higher charges imposed for disposal of residual waste, had been noticed. Officers provided information and guidance to the producers of commercial waste to help achieve this, meeting the Strategy’s target of a reduction in quantity of trade waste by 3-5% by 2005.

Officers advised the Committee of national recycling and composting targets as detailed in Figure 1 below. Set by the Scottish Government from a baseline derived from 1999 statistics, the targets sought to guide local authorities as to what was expected to be attained with waste diverted from landfill by other processing methods.

**Figure 1: National Recycling & Composting Targets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Recycling</th>
<th>Composting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
xxii. The Committee were advised that the Council had a lot to do to achieve the 40% target for 2010. Officers commented that it was hard to see how the 70% target for recycling and composting, expected by the Scottish Government, could be met for the year 2025. This had originally been proposed to be met in full from kerbside reduction, but after much lobbying through COSLA, it had been agreed that only 4/5ths of this target come from kerbside reduction. The full amount could not be achieved as some of the waste did not come from kerbside collections. The 70% figure was reported as coming from SEPA’s assessment of current waste streams as to what reduction might be theoretically possible to achieve. The Committee was advised that officers did not believe that this percentage could be attained in practice. The targets originate from the European Union, which also set the various timescales. While each country had discretion to decide how to reach these targets, the Scottish Government had imposed the obligation on local authorities. Officers suggested that direct comparisons with European countries were flawed, as their targets for waste included all waste streams, and not solely municipal household waste. Officers indicated that waste management colleagues across Scotland shared concerns about the demanding targets set by Central Government when councils had limited power to control outcomes. Unlike England, however, the targets were aspirational with no statutory obligation to reach them; this was welcomed by officers.

xxiii. The Committee was provided with information as to how the percentage and tonnage of recyclate achieved in Aberdeenshire had increased since 2004/05, as detailed in figures 2 and 3 below.

![Figure 2: Recycling achieved as a percentage of total waste by quarter](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Annual %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/05</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/06</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/07</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/08</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/09</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/10</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 3: Recycling achieved in tonnage by quarter](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/05</td>
<td>4351</td>
<td>4566</td>
<td>4621</td>
<td>5607</td>
<td>19145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/06</td>
<td>6075</td>
<td>6287</td>
<td>5397</td>
<td>5514</td>
<td>23273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/07</td>
<td>6290</td>
<td>8508</td>
<td>8820</td>
<td>9422</td>
<td>33040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/08</td>
<td>12553</td>
<td>13571</td>
<td>11144</td>
<td>10714</td>
<td>47982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/09</td>
<td>13105</td>
<td>15008</td>
<td>10554</td>
<td>9957</td>
<td>48624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/10</td>
<td>15412</td>
<td>14457</td>
<td>10414</td>
<td>10255</td>
<td>50538</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xxiv. Officers felt that the main obstacle in achieving high recycling rates was that recycling was voluntary; there was no compulsion, or penalty, for not recycling, or
incentive to participate. There was ongoing discussion, particularly in England, of whether incentives to recycle should be established. It was felt that there may be a political reluctance to go down this route, particularly as the public’s current perception was that waste was the responsibility of the Council.

xxv. The current targets were also anomalous in that there may be an unavoidable reduction in recycling, if there is an initial reduction in the use of resources. Some retailers, for example, had already reduced the products used in their packaging. Officers advised that if people were removing potential recyclates higher up in the “reduce/reuse/recycle” hierarchy, this was not accredited in the same way as recycling later in the process.

xxvi. Although the recycling targets were non-statutory and aspirational, officers reported that the Council was bound by statute to remove biodegradable waste from landfill. Failure to meet this duty could, potentially, incur a financial penalty. The Committee were advised that the Scottish Government, in 2009, had suspended the imposition of the Statutory Penalties. Had the penalty scheme not been suspended, Aberdeenshire would have incurred a fine of £150 for each tonne shortfall would have been incurred, with a potential penalty of over £2 million for 2009/10, as detailed in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Financial penalties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target shortfall</th>
<th>Penalty Amount £ per tonne</th>
<th>Potential penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>7,159</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>£178,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>10,600</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>£530,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>11,045</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>£1,656,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>13,500?</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>£2,025,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xxvii. In seeking to meet the targets set, officers advised the Committee that the Council had:
- Introduced kerbside collections for urban properties;
- Introduced wheeled bins in the south of Aberdeenshire, (north and central Aberdeenshire had inherited wheeled bins from the predecessor local authorities);
- Increased the range of materials collected at Recycling Points;
- Increased the range of materials collected separately at Household Waste Recycling Centres;
- Changed the type of collection service and the vehicles used to service the collection of residual waste;
- Introduced paper collection for rural properties;
- Carried out major campaigns on waste awareness;
- Introduced subsidized home composting;
- Encouraged community composting; and
- Tendered for a residual waste contract.

xxviii. In addition, there were several short term projects or initiatives, intended to explore how further the targets could be met. These included:
- A kitchen waste collection trial;
- Recognition for the reduction in Biological Municipal Waste (BMW) content of outputs from the mechanical biological treatment (MBT) processing of waste;
- Continued targeted publicity campaigns;
- Provided for more separation at the Household Waste & Recycling Centres;
- Prepared a submission for additional funding for move towards the 40% recycling target set for 2010. This funding opportunity was subsequently withdrawn;
- Reviewing trade waste collections to encourage more recycling; and
- Continue joint working, where possible, with Aberdeen City Council.

xxix. Officers felt the longer term target, to have only 5% landfill waste and 70% recycling by 2025, would be very difficult to achieve. The latter would also be very expensive and it was felt might only be achieved by compulsory recycling. Whilst countries such as Holland incinerate up to 62% of their waste, and have only 2% residual waste going to landfill, this process cannot be duplicated in Scotland as the Scottish Government have stipulated that only 25% of waste can be incinerated. This, officers suggested, was to discourage the incineration of recyclable waste.

xxx. The Committee was advised that officers were fully aware of the scale of the challenges which lay ahead for Aberdeenshire in seeking to meet both the requirements of its residents and government guidance and statutory obligations. There was still a lot to do and it was increasingly difficult to achieve the high targets. The public’s expectations and behaviour would need to be modified to accept and take responsibility for the waste they produce, as would businesses. Whilst there were challenges, officers were confident that all efforts were being made to meet these challenges.
4. **Options for incineration or other Energy from Waste systems**

A. In looking at the consideration of options, including incineration or other energy from waste (EfW), the imminent signing of a contract with SITA meant that decisions had already been taken regarding options for treating household waste. The delays in the awarding of the contract for waste disposal meant the Committee found that the Council was only at an advanced stage in negotiations at the time of the investigation. Originally it had been expected that the contract would have been operational by the time of the investigation, so the process could be compared to the contract proposals. Now Aberdeenshire is in the process of concluding a 15 year contract with SITA which covers residual household waste alone. SITA has currently 65 contracts with local authorities across the United Kingdom, with collection services ranging from residual waste, kerbside dry recyclates, green waste, food waste, bulky waste, clinical waste, commercial waste to bring-banks. Given that the contract runs for 15 years, with a possible additional extension, there can be no particular recommendations made in this regard.

5. **Composting and alternative methods of reducing waste going to landfill**

A. This is an area on which the Committee heard detailed contributions from the representatives of the Recycling Network Scotland, Messrs. Mel and Grant Kennan of Keenan Recycling and community representatives, in addition to Duncan Simpson of the Chartered Institute of Waste Management (Scotland) and officers from Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Perth & Kinross and Highland Councils.

B. The Committee noted that community composting schemes, and the Council’s sponsorship of green cones for household organic waste, was not equally successful across all areas of Aberdeenshire. Whilst the scheme adopted by Udny and Pitmedden Community Council was very successful, other communities were not as receptive, or able to self-sustain, a local composting initiative. Representatives of the other authorities spoke of encouraging community ownership of composting and recycling projects at a local level through seed capital grant schemes. Some households had no need of formal provision or support for community schemes but manage their own waste arisings directly. This greatly depended on the commitment of an individual to minimising waste going to landfill. In the light of current budget restrictions, the Committee considered that there was a need to consider the cost to the Council in supporting such initiatives, as compared to the cost of what could be achieved through in-house systems. Given that Aberdeen Forward, previously a partner in supporting local community schemes, was now also restricting its ability to do so, the whole future of community composting needed to be looked at again.

C. The Committee heard from Pauline Hinchion of the Community Recycling Network Scotland and Mark Morgan of the New Hope Trust, Peterhead of the very successful diversion from landfill of household goods at a both national and Aberdeen City and Shire level. On site at Crow’s Nest, Banchory,
Members heard of the joint initiative with the third sector in the “Box Room”, where volunteers at the Crow’s Nest Household Waste and Recycling Centre and salvaged goods which could be reused instead of being deposited in skips.

D. On visits in the context of the Community Planning and Empowerment investigation, visits were made to community reuse projects in both Peterhead (“2Reuse” scheme, sponsored by the town’s development company) and a shop in Fraserburgh run by Fraserburgh Neighbourhoods and Residents Association (FRANHRA).

E. Officers of the Council spoke of joint initiatives with Aberdeen Forward. In addition to managing a creative waste exchange, a reuse project accepting a wide variety of unwanted materials from companies and businesses around the north east to be sold as a good quality, low cost resource to community groups and individuals, Aberdeen Forward was a current partner with the Council in “Give and Take” days, which allowed people to bring unwanted items and take away “new treasures” in a exchange system. This followed the theory that some one’s waste was another’s needed resource and not just “junk”.

F. The successes of these types of initiative were welcomed by the Committee. However, the budget restrictions announced in November, 2010, confirmed in February and March, 2011, removed funding intended to support community composting schemes, (£100k). Although these schemes had removed 500 tonnes of waste from landfill, this cost £200 per tonne. Done through the Household Waste and Recycling Centres, the disposal cost reduced to £30 per tonne. The residual funds in the budget (£10,000) would be directed to the areas of need.

G. In looking to reduce food waste, and divert it from landfill, the Committee heard of the pilot food waste scheme in northern Aberdeenshire. Members went on site and heard from Keenan Recycling of its work with businesses to recycle food waste to accredited compost through both open window and in-vessel composting systems. This process relied on mixed waste of garden and food waste – the food waste was needed to balance the more inert garden waste.

H. Food waste was reported to the Committee as a major pillar of the Scottish Government’s Zero Waste policies, with it being proposed that by 2013 there will be source segregation of dry recyclate and food waste. In the budget cuts of 2010, it was decided not to extend Aberdeenshire Council’s food waste collection service at present; although successful, the amounts collected had been reducing, perhaps as households were faced with the physical reality of how much food waste they produced as standard. The collection scheme was not deemed to be cost effective. Looking to be an exemplar of good practice, the Committee heard from the facilities managers at Woodhill House, the Council’s Headquarters, which had several staff and member coffee bars/ restaurants, that the greatest amount of food waste came with the uncertainty of attendance. There was no separated food waste collection for Woodhill House. The Committee noted that the building’s waste was classified as trade waste and was collected by a private contractor.
I. The Committee would wish to suggest that a separate food waste collection be investigated for Woodhill House and other council premises, with appropriate infrastructure provided for left over food and other organic waste such as coffee grounds and tea bags.

J. The Committee also heard from community council representatives and Mr. Simpson of Valpak of increased focus on producer responsibility to reduce the waste associated with packaging. This obviously would allow for the better husbandry of resources by reducing the amount of packaging material to be discarded. The Committee was urged by Mr. Buchan of Peterhead Community Council to sponsor a mini-pilot of localised extended producer responsibility. However it is felt that Aberdeenshire Council has neither the resources nor the scale of operation to make such a localised pilot effective. The Committee would urge that the Council continue to lobby both the Scottish and UK parliaments, directly and via any appropriate bodies, to have manufacturers more aware of the waste arising from their products. In terms of food stuff, the example of Boxed Easter eggs was an extreme example of the sheer amount of different types of material associated with a simple product, but the Committee was also advised of the other more common food stuffs that had unnecessary packaging, such as double wrapped, trayed meat products and fresh fruit in plastic bags or trayed and cellophaned. Repeatedly the non-recyclable design of yoghurt pots and the common drink tetrapaks was lamented by witnesses, as was the marking by manufacturers of materials which could be recycled but are not currently possible by local authorities in Scotland whether due to the lack of market or the remoteness of processing locations.

K. The Committee would urge the Council to still help where it can, and continue working with third sector charities and social projects such as “Can-do” in Fraserburgh, to support localised community initiatives. Members wish to commend on record the work already done by voluntary, charity and community organisations and suggest that the future lies in such partnership working.

6. How successful is the current recycling programme?

A. The Committee heard that although recycling figures had increased, and that Aberdeenshire’s baseline had been further advanced than other local authorities when the statistics had been originally collected, not every one was participating. It was difficult to assess exactly who was recycling what, as not everyone had, or used, the household kerbside collections. The Committee heard from several witnesses that they preferred to take their paper, tin and glass waste to Household Waste and Recycling Centres. On that basis, it would be wrong to assume that households which did not put out recycling bins for kerbside collection were not participating. The officers from the other local authorities endorsed that this was a common phenomenon; people chose to participate as it best suited them; one size did not fit all. From Mr. Lawrence, of Aberdeen City Council, the Committee heard of the range of different collection methods required to try and provide an equable service to all the different types of property in the city. Communal solutions were often difficult to provide
because the on-street communal facilities were thought to be unsightly and were hard to manage and no-one wanted a mini household waste and recycling facility on their doorstep. Mr. Fleming of Stonehaven Community Council spoke of similar challenges of different solutions being required within Stonehaven; some streets were so narrow with no access to the rear of the houses except through the houses, that black bag collection was the only viable refuse collection service. Officers of Aberdeenshire Council spoke of the challenges in either identifying sites for communal facilities such as mini household waste and recycling centres or facing the householders with difficulties in storage of the range of recycling and waste collection containers in their own houses. A “dalek” unit trialled to the rear of a terrace of flatted properties in Peterhead was locally welcomed; yet the same unit had been the subject of sustained and repeated neighbour complaints in its previous location in Fraserburgh.

B. The Committee heard that the real trick in recycling was to make it fit with the lifestyle and expectations of each individual. Mr. Simpson of Valpak spoke of European waste education campaigns which encompassed 32 different lifestyle types; in Aberdeenshire the information was often difficult to source, despite the “Waste Aware” folder with its regular updates. The dilemma of plastic tops for milk bottles was still poorly understood, there having been a change in operating practice from those purchasing the collected materials. For full engagement across the wide spectrum of the community, the Committee heard that the message needed to be simple and accessible, as well as relevant to the lifestyle of those in Aberdeenshire’s communities.

C. Much work had been done with the schools in Aberdeenshire to “grow” pro-recycling citizens of the future and the Committee welcomed the more formalised provision of waste receptacles in the schools and offices of Aberdeenshire.

D. Comment was made that the focus on recycling in Scottish Government statistics was misdirected – before recycling, greater efforts required to be made to reduce usage. The 2010 Zero Waste Plan, by shifting the emphasis from “waste disposal” to “resource management” was hoped to parallel a shift in people’s understanding of their role in producing waste. The Committee heard that recycling was only one factor in the diversion of waste from landfill.

E. The work done through the joint waste aware campaigns with other north east councils and the national waste awareness initiatives was commended, although the Committee would suggest that more targeted education be considered. As budget cuts in Aberdeenshire Council have removed finance for the waste aware bus, the Committee would hope that the Scottish Government will sponsor a national campaign as part of the application of its Zero Waste Plan.

F. For some recyclates, there was a profitable sell on value: the Committee heard that these were the areas where private sector companies operated. For other wastes, such as domestic mattresses, there was not a current end market; yet these were very bulky and contributed greatly to landfill, with, on average,
45000 mattresses going to landfill each year in Scotland. Ms. Hinchion of Community Recycling Network Scotland had advised the Committee of a pilot project in the central belt which was exploring alternative disposal methods; greater links with Community Recycling Network Scotland on this issue is recommended.

G. The Committee heard from officers from Highland and Perth & Kinross Councils that they, unlike Aberdeenshire Council, did not generally operate through permanent disposal contracts established for the selling on of recyclates. Although this system might allow bigger financial rewards at times, the Committee is content that the security the Council enjoys, together with its accumulated reputation for well sorted wastes, is the correct route to progress. It also means that officer input to negotiating and exploring new outlets can be better managed. With the Zero Waste Plan’s expectation of a move towards more source segregated waste, the competition amongst local authorities to obtain secure markets would be greater and Aberdeenshire’s prior good reputation would be helpful. The Committee acknowledges that the application of proximity principle, as far as it can be applied, in identifying destinations for recyclates had provided more of a challenge for north east Scotland’s waste officers than in other parts of the United Kingdom. The guidance from the Infrastructure Services Committee and the detailed consideration and monitoring of recylcate contracts by the Waste Management Working Group is commended; as is that Aberdeenshire Council does not entertain overseas destinations; materials are processed as close to home as is possible. This is also a matter of costs; any profit in the sale of recycled materials should not be undermined by transportation costs, either in terms of CO\textsubscript{2} emissions or fuel costs.

H. The Committee accept that the provision of alternative ways to recycle is necessary to suit the needs of different sectors of Aberdeenshire’s communities. It believes that education and making it relevant and easy for people to participate is the key to increasing success and increasing participation. Confusions arising from different operating practices between neighbouring authorities are not helpful. The Committee feels that any publications should be kept short and simple. The Committee would encourage all and any initiatives to extend awareness of individual responsibility.

7. How can a reduction in waste arisings be achieved?

A. From the evidence presented to the Committee, including from John Harris of SEPA, it is clear that the way waste arisings are calculated, it will be very challenging to seek to reduce them in areas where, like Aberdeenshire, there is a continued growth in population and the number of households continues to increase. Even if each individual household were to reduce its own waste, the cumulative impact of an increasing number of households will mean more waste arising. Over time, with better awareness of resource management and more use of the “reduce, reuse, recycle” hierarchy, the total of waste arisings may ultimately begin to decline. There are no overnight solutions. In the interim, Aberdeenshire, as an area of growth, will continue to fall foul of the
waste arising performance indicators. If no new houses were built, the targets would become more attainable as the cumulative impact reduces.

The Committee is aware that the Zero Waste Plan will set new targets to measure attainment and a new metric is to be established. This will value, and give weighting to, practices such as the closed-loop recycling of glass above the use of mixed glass cullet as an aggregate replacement. As works to define the metric are still ongoing, it is not clear how Aberdeenshire’s targets, and therefore any necessary alterations in policy direction, may apply.

8. What is the remit of the Waste Management Working Group?

A. The Committee heard that the Waste Management Working Group had been established in 2004. The Infrastructure Services Committee on 11 March, 2004 had formed a 12 member, cross-party working group for the specific purpose of considering with officers, in more detail than could be afforded at formal meetings of the Infrastructure Services Committee, technical and policy issues relating to the future waste management contracts. The Minute speaks of the working party being “(a) a means of addressing various options for handling waste in the Central area of Aberdeenshire, following the expiry of an existing contract in 2005, and (b) future arrangements for waste currently being dealt with at Brandon Howe, near Banff, in terms of European Landfill Directive.”

B. The report considered by the Infrastructure Services Committee proposed that the working group would review available options, including consideration of:
(a) Short-term disposal contracts to address the expiry of the extant arrangements in north and central Aberdeenshire for waste disposal with the expiry of contract in 2005 and the reducing time available for existing landfill sites used by the Council;
(b) Contract options which may include output specifications and/or landfill allowances and operational arrangements;
(c) Review of available technologies; and
(d) Review of existing landfill and waste treatment capacity within Aberdeenshire.

C. It was intended that the Waste Management Working Group be a time limited project group, reporting its findings to a future meeting of the Infrastructure Services Committee. At that Committee’s meeting on 6 May 2004, various issues relating to waste management were brought to Members’ attention by Internal Audit, and it was agreed that the group’s remit should be extended “(a) to review and simplify the Waste Management Strategy currently being undertaken in the Integrated Sustainable Waste Management Strategy and (b) control, develop, review and progress the Strategic Waste Fund Grant for recycling and composting.”

D. Since that time, the Working Group has had its role extended to consider the Government sponsored North East Scotland Strategic Options Appraisal, a partnership approach by Aberdeenshire Council with its neighbours Aberdeen City, Highland and the Moray Council, to look at resource and infrastructure
sharing and planning on a regional basis. This project work came to no resolution and was ultimately abandoned by the government when it realised that four councils, with disparate aims and differing political views on waste management and provision, would not easily progress joint workings. The geographic coupling also did not work.

E. In the work which has been done to consider the waste contract agreed to be awarded to SITA, the detailed discussions at the Waste Management Working Group have been continued as best operating practice for round table exploration of the issues involved.

F. The Committee, having observed the Waste Management Working Group at one of its meetings, viewed its agendas over a period of time, is content that the Working Group, despite having exceeded its original timescale, is an excellent mechanism to facilitate discussions cross-party on a variety of policy and technical issues relating to waste.

G. In the years ahead, when the new SITA contract is in operation, the Working Group will be able to monitor what is happening and consider any issues arising. In addition, the Committee feel that there are many issues yet to be made explicit in the 2010 Zero Waste Plan which will benefit from consideration by such a group.

H. The Committee believes that the Waste Management Working Group has proven its worth to date, fulfilled its remit, and should be continued for its future usefulness in assisting with sensitive policy or technical issues.

9. **Will current policies and proposals for contracting waste treatment and disposal meet the targets for landfill and avoid the financial penalties which government can impose?**

A. The Committee is aware that Aberdeenshire Council has already failed to meet the targets set by the Scottish Government for recycling and diversion from landfill. Fines have not been levied to date; neither has there been any reassurance given that they will not be applied at a later stage.

B. The Zero Waste Plan proposes new methods for measuring efforts – to look at resource management in a different way. Any “carrots” or “sticks” which will come with this change in direction have yet to be determined as the Scottish Government works with SEPA and other organisations to set the criteria for operating processes.

C. There is no way to judge at present if the new residual waste contract, the budget restricted complementary direct provision of recycling and waste arrangements, and partnership working with all possible organisations and community groups will meet any future targets and avoid any possible financial penalties which governments might impose.
10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

Whatever were the previous approaches taken by Aberdeenshire Council to meet both the needs and desires of its disparate communities and targets set by the Scottish Government, the Committee feels that Aberdeenshire Council is now in a position of reacting rather than being proactive in terms of the future of its waste management strategy and operation. Options which might previously have been considered are now restricted by (a) the imminent award of the residual waste contract to SITA, (b) the new approach determined nationally by the Scottish Government’s Zero Waste Plan, for which the details of operational impact are as yet unknown and (c) the financial restrictions the Council faces.

All three are relatively recent developments which will shape the way waste services are provided across Aberdeenshire in the years to come.

The Committee understands and commends the joint working that has already taken place, and continues to be pursued, by the Council with communities, charities and voluntary organisations in providing services suitable for use for all residents. Members see education and the provision of guidance in simple, easy to understand format as being key to increasing participation in the reduce/ reuse/ recycle hierarchy. The Committee is also aware that Aberdeenshire Council cannot make provision to suit all lifestyles and it is hard to fully engage with all sectors of the community of Aberdeenshire.

Had the investigation been concluded before the budget challenges, recommendations may have been made suggesting that additional resources be directed towards user-friendly information and education and facilities appropriate to each part of the Shire. The Committee considered the growing issue of food waste and were happy to see the pilot in northern Aberdeenshire fall victim to its own success with reducing amount collected as people realised the extent of their over purchase/ failure to use. National TV coverage of food waste from supermarkets was also viewed by the Committee, which showed a shocking waste of valuable resources. Although a key factor in the Zero Waste Plan, food waste cannot be currently progressed in Aberdeenshire as it is not cost effective. The Committee regrets that it is not possible to take this forward, but suggested that alternative provision, such as a bring-to service, with participants charged for the food waste collection containers, be investigated.

Complaints about recycling services often related to Household Waste and Recycling Centres being unable to cope with the level demanded of them. Although officers were aware of areas where additional infrastructure could not be provided to meet peak demands, the service’s usefulness to the communities it sought to serve relied on timeous collections.
B. Recommendations

Since the evidence was heard in this investigation, there have been several changes in circumstance which limit the areas on which it might otherwise have been possible to suggest alterations to established operational practice or policies.

(a) The contract for the disposal of residual household waste is in the process of being signed with SITA.

(b) The Scottish Government Zero Waste Plan has been published, establishing high level direction on the consideration of waste as a resource to be better utilised and managed rather than “rubbish” for disposal. The operational or practical application of this is yet to be established in any detail, but this will undoubtedly affect any future direction of waste management policies and procedures in Aberdeenshire as across Scotland as a whole.

(c) Aberdeenshire Council has been forced to make drastic budget cuts across all services – waste is one area where a reduction in resources has been agreed. This means that some of the education/outreach and facility development work can no longer be progressed.

The Committee would recommend the undernoted be considered:

(a) The Committee understands that desirable as it might be, direct funding of alternative provision of waste and recycling projects is no longer possible. It recommends that joint working with all possible partners be continued as much as can be to maximise resource effectiveness.

(b) A separate food waste collection should be investigated for Woodhill House and other council premises, with appropriate infrastructure provided for left-over food and other organic waste such as coffee grounds and tea bags.

(c) Alternatives to a kerbside food waste collection service should be explored and reported, including the potential use of bring to systems at the Household Waste and Recycling Centres, charging those who participate for the bags.

(d) Efforts and available resources should be directed to education and encouraging participation in recycling and other initiatives, where possible tailoring information as closely as possible to the target participant. It would be urged that the Scottish Government continue to sponsor a national campaign, flexible enough to address local circumstances.

(e) The joint working with community groups and charities should be commended as the way forward, especially in the situation of restricted resource availability and communities should be encouraged to start up other recycling initiatives to complement the Council’s recyclate collection, with available resources directed to maximise providing advice and assistance.
(f) Good practice should be shared between the communities of Aberdeenshire. This could be done through articles on the Council’s website, discussions at meetings such as Community Council Forums, Rural Development Partnerships and local Community Planning Groups.

(g) If facilities are provided, efforts should be made to service them appropriately to their usage; communities would otherwise be disappointed by provision which does not match their needs or expectations.

(h) The Council should continue to lobby both the Scottish and UK Governments, directly and via any appropriate bodies, to make manufacturers more aware of, and more responsible for, the waste arising from their products.

(i) The reduce/ reuse/ recycle hierarchy should be given greater weight in policy deliberations on waste operations and priorities.

(j) The Waste Management Working Group’s previous work should be commended and the Group maintained to consider, in detail, waste related issues.

(k) In considering the technology advances in the context of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency’s regulatory function, the Infrastructure Services Committee be requested to consider making representations to the Scottish Government that greater flexibility might be considered in allowing the best possible, as opposed to the best tested, solution to be applied, with pre-application discussions facilitated as they are in major planning applications.

(l) The Infrastructure Services Committee should be requested to consider making representations to the Scottish Government that, in discussion with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), the government assess local authority performance in meeting the targets which the Zero Waste Plan will generate in a different way with greater validity.
11. **Thanks and invitation for feedback**

1. The Scrutiny and Audit Committee would like to record its appreciation of the co-operation and assistance it received from internal and external witnesses.

2. Each investigation that is undertaken is part of a learning experience for the Committee and it would welcome any feedback or comments from participants or interested individuals on the investigation process and this report.

Cllr. Peter Bellarby  
Chair,  
Scrutiny and Audit Committee

Cllr. Amanda Allan  
Vice-Chair,  
Scrutiny and Audit Committee
# APPENDIX A – investigation brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject to be reviewed – Waste</th>
<th>Investigation No</th>
<th>21</th>
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</table>

## Scrutiny and Audit Committee – Investigation Brief

### Purpose and objectives of investigation

To consider the actions which Aberdeenshire Council has taken for the minimisation of waste and the reduction of landfill. To investigate what more could be done, and is intended, through potential improvements, for the future including:

1. options for incineration or other energy from waste systems;
2. composting and alternative methods of reducing waste going to landfill;
3. how successful is the current recycling programme?
4. how can a reduction in waste arisings be achieved?
5. what is the remit of the Waste Management Working Group?
6. will current policies and proposals for contracting waste treatment and disposal meet the targets for landfill and avoid the financial penalties which government can impose?

### Background documents/evidence/research

- Reports to Waste Management Working Group and Infrastructure Services Committee.
- Funding from Scottish Government – Strategic Waste Fund and Zero Waste Fund.
- SEPA and Scottish Government Papers on Waste.

### Witnesses to be invited to provide evidence

- **External** – Other local authorities/ SEPA/Scottish Govt/ Community Council representatives (North, central and south).
- **Councillors** – Waste Management Working Group Members.
- **Chief Officers** – Director of Planning & Environmental Services; Director of Finance; Head of Environmental Health & Waste Management.
- **Staff** – Waste Managers (Services and Policy); Principal Waste Officers (North, central and south).

### Site Visits

- Keenan’s Green waste Strichen and Crow’s Nest Landfill Site, Banchory; 2Reuse, Peterhead and FRANHRA’s reuse shop, Fraserburgh.

### Consultation process

- n/a

### Trade Unions Contribution

- n/a

### Project Team (officers)

- Jan McRobbie, Chief Executive Service.

### Other estimated costs

- TBC.

### External expert

- n/a.

### Investigation Timetable

- November 2009 – March 2011.
APPENDIX B – Investigation programme and witnesses heard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Witness/ Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 November, 2009</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>Lead Service Briefing: Christine Gore, Director of Planning &amp; Environmental Services, Ian Robertson, Head of Protective Services &amp; Waste; and Jack Clark, Waste Manager (Environment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 December, 2009</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Principal Waste Officers: Claire Loney, Ian Milne and Andrew Sheridan.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>Waste Management Officers: Pam Walker (Reduction/Education); Matt Davis (Strategy); and Donald Raymond (Disposal).</td>
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<td>17 March, 2010</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Site Visit to Keenan’s Recycling, New Deer.</td>
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<td>11.30</td>
<td>John Harris, Scottish Environment Protection Agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 June, 2010</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>Site Visit to Crow’s Nest, Banchory.</td>
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<td>23 June, 2010</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Pete Lawrence, Strategist Waste Management, Housing and Environment, Aberdeen City Council.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Hilda Lumsden-Gill, Chair, Huntly Community Council.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 June, 2010</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Pauline Hinchion, Chief Executive, Community Recycling Network Scotland; and Mark Morgan, New Hope Trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Witness/ Event</td>
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<td>30 June, 2010</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Duncan Simpson, Vice Chair, Chartered Institute of Waste Management (Scotland) / Director, Valpak.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 August, 2010</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Consideration of Scottish government letter on Zero waste and follow up questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 September, 2010</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Lead Service Update – Jack Clark, Waste Manager.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Planning[Planning] David Jennings, Strategic Development Plans Manager, Aberdeen City &amp; Shire; Alison Hogge, Policy Planner, Development Planning (Aberdeenshire) and Katherine Donnachie, Development Control Planner, Buchan (Aberdeenshire)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 September 2010</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Gillian Francis, Team Leader (Facilities) Liz Wood, Catering Manager.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 November, 2010</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>Mr. John Askey, Vice-Chair and Mr. Bruce Buchan, Treasurer, Peterhead Community Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>Session with Lead Service Ian Robertson, Head of Service (Protective Services and Waste Management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February, 2011</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>Site Visit – 2Reuse shop, Peterhead.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: Endnotes

1 Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities combust waste under controlled conditions, to reduce its volume and hazardousness and generate electricity and/or heat.

2 Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) is a form of waste processing facility that combines a sorting facility with a form of biological treatment such as composting or anaerobic digestion. MBT plants are designed to process mixed household waste as well as commercial or industrial wastes.

3 SEPA is the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scotland’s environmental regulator. Its main role is to protect and improve Scotland’s environment and it regulates activities that can cause harmful pollution, including waste disposal.

4 WRAP (Waste Resources Action Programme) was originally set up by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in England and Wales. The Scottish Government took an interest and became involved in funding home composters.

5 ReMaDe Scotland was launched in 1999 as a major initiative charged with stimulating, developing and strengthening markets for waste recyclates in Scotland. The initiative was unique at the time, being the first in the UK and supported by the then Scottish Executive, all 32 Scottish Councils, Scottish Enterprise and SEPA as well as the private sector waste management companies, Shanks, Viridor and Valpak. Following the Scottish Government’s 2010 Zero Waste Plan, in January 2010 ReMaDe Scotland’s activities were integrated into the new delivery vehicle, the Zero Waste Plan.

6 Residual Household waste, is the household waste collected that is not sent for reuse, recycling, or is not composted or put for anaerobic digestion.

7 Aberdeen Forward is a charity, established in 1999 that initiates and supports environmental and recycling projects, working with communities and businesses to educate and promote projects that help to protect our environment, reduce waste and encourage recycling.

8 In-vessel composting is an industrial form of composting bio-degradable waste that occurs in enclosed reactors, allowing for municipal scale organics waste processing, with offensive odours controlled by bio-filters.