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**The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP**  
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Dear Mr Sullivan,

### **FORTNIGHTLY RUBBISH COLLECTIONS**

As you may be aware, in Opposition, Shadow Ministers publicly criticised guidance and publications produced by the Audit Commission which encouraged and cajoled councils into moving to fortnightly rubbish collections of household rubbish. We also had concerns over some cases of councils seemingly being 'marked down' in inspections for not adopting fortnightly collections. Excerpts from the guidance are enclosed.

As the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, I am keen to ensure that the pledges we made in Opposition are delivered upon in Government.

I am therefore writing to ask the Audit Commission to rescind this guidance and stop giving perverse incentives to local authorities to cut the frequency of rubbish collections.

While the decisions on rubbish collections will ultimately be a matter for local discretion, I believe that Whitehall should be supporting regular and frequent rubbish and recycling collections, rather than forcing and encouraging councils to make cuts to this vital frontline service.

Yours sincerely,

**Rt Hon ERIC PICKLES MP**  
**SECRETARY OF STATE**



## EXAMPLE GUIDANCE

“The Audit Commission recommends a range of actions for local government to take... exploring the potential for **reducing costs, such as alternate weekly collections**” (p.3).

“Councils are often reluctant to disrupt traditionally popular methods and patterns of service for waste collection – for example, **switching to alternate weekly collection** of recyclables and non-recyclables. But improvements to the environment are so important that councils need to convince local people to support appropriate changes. **Central government expectations, which involve challenging traditionally popular service provision, need to be made clearer**” (p.11).

“Actions required – Local Government should... explore the potential for reducing costs, such as alternate weekly collections” (p.11).

“Inspectors will also be looking to see that authorities’ best value reviews and action plans address the waste management issue... The Audit Commission will increase the challenge to authorities in its inspections of waste management” (p.17).

Audit Commission, *Waste Management: The Strategic Challenge*.

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/Pages/wastemanagement.aspx#downloads>

“Case study: “Waste collection is Wychavon’s largest service. It affects all 50,000 households in the area. The council needed to both save money and increase recycling rates. They could achieve both objectives by moving to a fortnightly waste collection... The council ultimately decided on... **Go to fortnightly waste collection**” (p.16).

“What are you trying to achieve? ... Save money?” (p.7).

“Public perception is difficult to measure and there is often no single answer – in addition majority views may not be the most vocal ones. Combining and comparing data from different sources – for example, enquiries, complaints, meetings, surveys, and focus groups – will help to build up the picture” (p.13).

“Public opinion can be influenced. Details on how community leadership has helped **influence public opinion on other sensitive local issues** can help identify how this can be achieved in your area” (p.13).

Audit Commission, *Decision making guide: Frequency of household waste collection*.

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/istheresomething/Pages/guides.aspx>



"In reality, an **alternate week collection** simply restricts the amount of waste a householder can throw away. It **makes it as easy**, or even easier, to recycle than not recycle" (p.18).

"The minimum life cycle of the fly is 14 days in the UK, so a **fortnightly collection should be okay** providing waste is wrapped before putting in the bin" (p.18).

"Q: A council has been critical about our judgement that they are not doing enough on waste minimisation. What should they or could they have done?...

- Restricted the amount of waste they will accept – **not taking side waste and closed lid policies** are a start but still leave 240 litres of waste capacity a week (or 12,480 litres a year). If you add a 55 litre recycling box then the council has increased the capacity of the refuse collection – even if the collection is fortnightly then the capacity for refuse collection has increased by 11% (in terms of volume)...

- **Sampled waste bins to find out what is in the bin** so that they can target recycling and waste reduction initiatives." (p.18)

"Actions: bizarre as it may seem, but the evidence shows that a bigger bin leads to people throwing away more waste. There is still disagreement about the actual reasoning for this, but it is undeniable that a weekly refuse collection with a large wheeled bin collects more waste than areas with smaller bins, less frequent collections or on a (smaller) traditional bin." (p.23)

"Other actions can also have an impact on changing peoples habits; simply restricting the amount of waste that will be taken (such as **closed bin lid policy, no side waste or a maximum number of black bags**) all help. Some councils have been **more progressive – such as only emptying the refuse bin on a fortnightly basis** or issuing smaller (than the traditional wheeled bin – which is 240 litres in volume) bins."

Audit Commission, *Waste management quick guide*.

<http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2010/DEP2010-0937.doc>

