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Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State
Department for Communities and Local Government
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By post and email

5 March 2014

Dear Eric

Weekly rubbish collections should be a local choice

I write as Chairman of South East England Councils (SEEC). SEEC promotes the views and interests of all tiers of local government across the South East, who together represent more than eight million residents. SEEC is a voluntary body, funded by member council subscriptions, and carries a unique mandate as the single democratic voice of the South East.

SEEC members have recently discussed CLG's guidance on weekly rubbish collections, and have raised serious concerns that the document undermines the Government's principle of localism.

Within SEEC's membership there are councils who successfully run weekly and fortnightly rubbish collections, making their choice according to local circumstances and needs. Our members believe they should be free to make local decisions on frequency of collections and be directly accountable for those decisions at the ballot box.

While some South East authorities have applied for CLG funding to redesign rubbish collections, others, particularly in more rural, sparsely populated areas continue to run successful fortnightly schemes with voter support.

Across the South East, this locally-determined approach delivers good results and high levels of recycling. Household recycling in the South East has risen from 36% in 2007-8 to 43% in 2012-13 and remains above the national average. Over the same period, widening the net to include all local authority-collected waste, the South East has halved waste sent to landfill from 51% to 22%, showing England's best performance.

Groups such as Keep Britain Tidy and WRAP both point to alternatives to weekly rubbish collections and support councils' right to make a local choice on weekly or fortnightly collections in the light of local circumstances and the views of their electors.

Many of our members have widespread support from the local electorate for their schedules of alternate weekly collections of rubbish and recycling, with many councils also offering weekly food waste collections.

For example, Chichester DC has used alternate weekly collections for over 10 years and has made considerable savings and increased recycling. Their most recent survey of residents in August 2013 found that 98% of respondents classified the waste collection service to be good and reasonable value for money.

My own local authority, Tandridge DC, has switched to a system of alternate rubbish and recycling collections plus a weekly food waste service. As a result we have seen recycling rise from 33% to 59%, a fact that has been welcomed by local residents.

SEEC has appreciated the removal of lengthy Government guidance in other areas affecting council operations. In an era of localism, our members therefore find it frustrating to see new guidance on issues such as bin collections.

Our councillors have a very close and direct relationship with their electorate and want CLG to fully recognise that role and the local diversity that is the result of genuine localism.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gordon C. Keymer", with a horizontal line underneath.

Cllr Gordon Keymer CBE
Chairman, South East England Councils and Leader, Tandridge DC

Cc: Cllr Myles Cullen, Chichester DC