



**Marlborough Litter Project**

**Milestone One Report**

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**Prepared for Marlborough District Council**

**And**

**The Ministry for the Environment**

**By**

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## **Disclaimer**

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## **About the author**

Christine McNeil is a highly motivated and focused individual who is creative and forward thinking. With a former career in healthcare, Christine has a keen interest in institutional culture and the social organisation of work. Comfortable with questioning, challenging and debating, Christine can simplify complex ideas, locate common ground within difference, and find pragmatic solutions where required. Respectful of others, Christine has proven interpersonal and written communication skills.

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## Executive summary

It is accepted that Local Authorities hold a responsibility for waste and litter service provision. While there may be an expectation of an optimum level of service from the public across the district, operational possibilities are largely informed by the capacity of ratepayer contribution. Current thinking within Marlborough District Council (MDC) tends towards a reluctance to increase public spending. In practical terms, this means that, in the main, litter service provision is more likely to focus existing commitments to street plots, high profile sites, local reserves, and State Highways.

By implication, therefore, MDC operates within a 'high trust model' of waste and litter service provision. MDC relies on people to 'do the right thing'. Categories of waste and litter serve to differentiate product type and the location of their appropriate disposal. While 'doing the right thing' is important, inconsistencies exist in respect of sharing those expectations with the public, and in the possibilities for product disposal.

This report seeks to expose these inconsistencies by exploring the ways in which current service provision is caught up with the challenges of servicing a geographically diverse region. It enquires into the different philosophies that inform waste and litter service provision, the difficulties that arise, and the ways in which perceived inappropriate service use may be inclined to inform the approach to future service provision. It becomes evident that MDC oversight of operational activities also relies on public contribution. Through the reporting of inappropriate littering activities, and, with volunteer litter picking contribution, the public become not only, the 'eyes and ears' of MDC, but a valuable resource that supplements core service provision.

Attention is also drawn to the complex systems within which MDC staffs must operate. Council staffs provide a service to the community. This service is demonstrated through the administration of short and long term planning strategies. It becomes apparent that considerable experience and expertise exists across departments that hold a waste and litter remit. Any ability to accommodate requests for additional or alternative service provision however, rests in the main with Council committee. Grant funding is frequently applied for, to provide for what could be considered core service provision.

It is to those contradictions and complexities of service provision that questions must be addressed. Underpinned by an economic model of cost allocation, processes continue seemingly uninterrupted under their own unique momentum. To that end, this report considers possibilities that litter service provision might benefit from further consideration of 'the way things are done' both at a local and national level.

## Marlborough Region

Marlborough is recognised as a region which boasts breath-taking scenery, benefits from long sunshine hours and has a temperate micro-climate. Sitting at the north-eastern aspect of the top of the South Island, Marlborough's diverse landscape includes wide lowland plains, mountainous terrain, high country farming stations, and the waterways of the Marlborough Sounds. In the past thirty years, give or take, the economic mainstay of Marlborough has shifted from being primarily agricultural, to now being supported by the forestry, viticulture, aquaculture, tourist and hospitality industries. Marlborough is recognised on a national and international platform for excellence in wine and seafood production. There are a number of established events which celebrate this reputation and attract a growing number of visitors to the region. Over the past five years, the building industry has seen resurgence as new subdivisions are being released for development.

Marlborough has a settled population of 43,416, which at the time represented 1% of the New Zealand population as a whole (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). One fifth of the population is aged 65 or over; the median income is \$27,000. Households typically have access to three or more vehicles and for 62% of the population the most frequent mode of transport to work is by personal or company vehicle (ibid). The main road links for the region are via State Highways 1 and 6. State Highway 63 is used as an alternative route south while road repairs continue after the Kaikoura earthquake in November 2016. Picton, Waikawa and Havelock, with their proximity to the Marlborough Sounds provide sea to land access at their respective marinas.

Service provision, in terms of meeting household needs can be accessed across the region. Availability of such services can be dependent on population size and location. While most townships have access to provisions and fuel, larger supermarkets, household goods stores, and professional services, with some exceptions, are more likely to be located in Blenheim.

Marlborough District Council is both a local and unitary authority. As is common with streamlining processes that inform Governmental thinking, over time, the authority formerly granted to smaller settlements within the region has been centrally located to Blenheim, the main centre of population. While governance processes are assisted by having elected members from throughout the district, in the main decision making relies on information from the outlying settlements coming into the building.

## Project objectives

The aim of this project is to look at the ways in which litter service provision is currently implemented across the Marlborough region. To gain an understanding of the operational requirements that MDC must undertake as part of their civic responsibilities, it is appropriate to find out the ways in which the people who have oversight of litter service provision make sense of what they do. Opening up their insights will make public the possibilities and limitations available to them as they carry out their work on behalf of the community. This project will reveal the types of common sense understandings that influence service provision, and identify how these understandings may get in the way of building open lines of communication with the community at large.

An exploration of Council employee reflections of litter service provision would be remiss not to acknowledge the structures within which workers must operate. It is therefore appropriate to appraise the standards by which central government expect local government to administer the local population. It is also fitting to look at the internal practices that inform litter service provision; specifically contract management, and long and short term planning processes. In addition, it is helpful to gain an appreciation of matters that are connected to litter service provision more broadly.

## The Local Government Act 2002

The purpose of the Local Government Act 2002 is to formalise the expectations of central government in respect of divesting authority to local communities to operate and manage infrastructure, resources and populations. This expectation is facilitated by electing community members to oversee the work carried out within local government. It is anticipated that a governance oversight to operational requirements, will enable transparency of that work. The Local Government Act expects that local authorities are accountable to their communities and to central government.

The work of local government is conveyed to their publics through short and long term planning initiatives. In Marlborough, contribution or commentary regarding intended planning initiatives is invited through personal or group applications which speak to itemised agenda points. The Act intends that local government will *'meet the current and future needs of communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services, and performance of regulatory functions in a way that is most cost-effective for households and businesses'* (Local Government Act 2002, pp.33-34).



## **Contract Management**

MDC ensures compliance with contract service provision requirements by having a procurement policy (MDC Procurement Policy, n.d). With an intention of enabling staff empowerment across the organisation, MDC supports staff of any level to become involved in service procurement within the remit of their job requirements. The policy is advanced as being easy to follow using a flow-chart methodology. Professional advice regarding the legal requirements of service procurement is readily available. Contract requirements remain solely the domain of each department. In this way, any speciality within MDC is able to articulate specific skills or services required to meet the anticipated requirements of service provision.

Once formally contracted, service providers are invited to regular meetings with managers to ensure that agreed service outcomes are being achieved. It is anticipated that points of discussion during meetings will be mutually beneficial in which both parties can speak freely about the contracted relationship. Nevertheless, it remains the responsibility of the contract manager to safeguard the position and reputation of MDC within the local and wider community by ensuring as far as possible, expected outcomes are actualised.

## Methodology

The outputs for this milestone of the Litter Project are twofold: firstly, to find out how current litter services are performing, in respect of the cost impact to MDC and others, and secondly, to reveal any unintended consequences from this service provision. While current thinking within MDC is inclined to focus on keeping spending to a minimum, 'cost' in the context of this project refers not only to the monetary value of service provision, but the impacts upon, and implications for relationship building within the wider community in respect of litter service provision, and other interactions more broadly.

Purposeful sampling is a methodology used in qualitative research that seeks access to particular information. Participants were invited to participate in this project because they are able to share information relevant to the study.

### *Why Interview?*

By asking participants in the project to explain the ways in which they make sense of what they do it is possible to gain an appreciation of the types of thinking that informs everyday practice, and gain insight into the complexities of the role they undertake. Interviewing is conducted in the style of a conversation to elicit information, however it not a conversation. In the role of interviewer, Seidman (2006), counsels that it is advantageous to remain unobtrusive, and to adopt a demeanour that will not disrupt the flow of information, or impose upon those taking part. Meetings therefore were scheduled to suit participants existing work commitments.

The use of a semi-structured interview schedule is enabled by engaging participants with open ended questions. A brief description of the project was given upon invitation to participate. Meetings in person were often likely to start with an opening line of 'Tell me about litter (service provision) as it relates to your job / your situation'. While a suite of questions has been prepared prior to the meeting, oftentimes participants would reveal details without prompting being required. Giving details about the project in advance can have the effect of encouraging participants to think about what they might say in the interview proper. Using seemingly benign statements, and gentle prompts such as, 'can you tell me a bit more about that', 'what kinds of situations do you encounter', or 'how will people know that' provides an opportunity to glean further detail about work specific information.

### *Ethical considerations*

While this project actively sought access to the experiences of MDC employees and others as a means of understanding the current condition of litter service provision, it is not a critique of individual or departmental performance. Rather, it should be thought of as an opportunity to appraise litter service provision *taking into account* the opportunities and challenges available across MDC as a whole. Participant accounts have been de-identified

and aggregated across specialities in order that comments cannot be attributable to any one participant.

### *Project parameters and data collection*

This project is based around the contribution of employees of MDC, contract service providers, and members of the public. The project aspires to enable an insight into the 'way things are done'. Participants contribute by expressing their own views through relaying observations and reflections about their professional practice. Data from interviews reveals that participants within MDC describe aspects of their work in respect of distinct philosophies within departments, and are inclined towards interaction with the public in those same terms.

MDC employees and associated contract service providers relevant to the anticipated outcomes and outputs of the project were invited to participate. Rather than audio taping interviews, notes were taken during interviews. The rationale for this was threefold. Firstly, transcription from audio to written notes is time consuming. It is not the nuance of what people say that holds importance for this project, rather the content. By the time I had left the meeting and driven home, I had replayed and considered the content of the interview over several times. In this way, it became possible to establish broad categories for further consideration. Secondly, participants may be wary of having a verbatim record of our discussion. While assurances were given that meetings were undertaken within the remit of the project, it is often past experience informs current practice. Thirdly, taking notes requires an attention to detail, offers an immediate opportunity to seek clarification if required, and is more inclined to place a time frame around meetings. It is important to acknowledge that participants agreed to take part as an adjunct to their workloads.

## **Current Litter Service Provision**

A remit for general litter service provision falls to three departments within Council: Solid Waste, Reserves and Roads. While historically focused on domestic waste collection services, within the past five years, the Solid Waste Department has become involved in public litter and recycling. The following provides a description of the operational activities each department undertakes.

Information is provided on the ways in which the public can offer feedback about litter service provision.

## **Solid Waste**

The Solid Waste Department oversees refuse and recycling collection. Household refuse services are funded through a targeted rate basis. To accommodate for the challenges of population size, geography and distance, a different approach to refuse and recycling service provision operates across the region. In general terms, the transition from urban to rural settlement sees a reduction of domiciliary service provision, to bulk community facilities. People who live in rural or semi-rural locations hold responsibility for their own waste and recycling activities. Burning of household generated waste is possible in urban and rural locations within permitted guidelines (MDC Urban Burning Guide, n.d; MDC Rural Burning Guide n.d.). Residents in rural communities, who wish to recycle, may have to travel some distance to do so.

The two main centres of population – Blenheim and Picton - have an opportunity to dispose of rubbish and recycling at a household level. For areas that do not receive a Council service, householders may engage a private waste service provider. Blenheim and Picton have waste transfer stations: payment for discarded household or other waste is calculated by weight in Blenheim, and by volume in Picton. Recycling opportunities are well established at both sites.

### ***Household Rubbish Collection***

Residents of Blenheim and the wider Picton area, pay a targeted rate for the weekly collection service. Upon payment of household rates, Council issues a voucher which provides for 52 refuse bags; one for each week of the year. Vouchers can be redeemed at Council or at local supermarkets. Additional refuse bags can be purchased at the householders own cost. While a maximum weight limit of 15kg per refuse bag exists, MDC does not restrict the number of refuse bags any household can dispose of each week at the kerbside. Residents, who do not live in Blenheim or Picton, can also purchase MDC refuse bags. People can choose to take MDC refuse bags to transfer stations, or on bin uplift day, outlying residents can leave MDC identified refuse bags alongside those of usual town residents on any given refuse route. If a refuse bag exceeds the maximum expected weight, it is stickered as such by the contract service provider and not removed. Advisory

information about the expected presentation of waste prior to collection is given on the premise that this will minimise the likelihood of product loss into the street environment.

### *Household Recycling Collection*

Open topped recycling crates are provided to each household in Blenheim and the wider Picton area. Recycling crates are serviced weekly on the same day as the refuse collection. Guidelines for packing the crate are given. Limitations to crate capacity exist in respect of weight and height of product above the top of the container. If a crate is packed incorrectly, or if excess recycling product is left adjacent to the crate, it is stickered as such by the contract service provider and not removed. Excess recycling material can be taken to the Resource Recovery Centre in Blenheim, or the transfer station in Picton.

### *More distant townships*

The townships of Havelock, Seddon, Rai Valley, Wairau Valley and Ward have a transfer station. Aside from Ward transfer station, which has open access with no charge for waste disposal, each facility has an attendant with opening times that generally meet the requirements of the local community. Opening hours, upon consultation with MDC, may be adjusted during peak season times. It is accepted that residents in these locations will have their own household systems in place for waste and recycling storage prior to disposal at any transfer station. A charge for disposal of waste is based on the size of refuse bag or container. There is no charge for MDC refuse bags as the disposal cost is accounted for in the purchase price of the bag. There is no charge for recycling at the point of disposal; rather a specified rate is taken at source from general rates across the region.

Residents of the Marlborough Sounds who travel by land vehicle can dispose of household refuse at any of four coin operated skips located at Ohingaroa Quarry, Portage, Rai Valley and The Grove. On a timed access mechanism the \$3 charge allows for disposal of two standard sized rubbish bags. Recycling facilities are available at the aforementioned transfer stations. Information regarding appropriate use of the facilities is provided on the MDC website and at local points of disposal. Clear messaging describes expectations of behaviour and penalties for misuse of facility. In all locations digital camera technology provides remote surveillance opportunities.

Residents of the Marlborough Sounds whose property is accessible only by boat can bring household refuse to collection points at Picton and Havelock Marinas. Picton Marina is considered to be a high value amenity site. As such residents and business owners are keen to minimise any potential adverse impact to visitors in the area. Over time, a number of initiatives have been implemented to cater for this circumstance. A permanent working solution is yet to be achieved. Household refuse collection points have been designed to blend in with the surrounding street scape. There is no opportunity to dispose of bulk household recycling.

A further point of discussion with regard to sea to land transition for visitors and business operators exists in respect of personal rubbish disposal at a destination point at Picton, Waikawa, or Havelock. Private boat operators in these locations may act both as excursion service providers and core transport service providers. Consequently, patrons who use any such service may have accumulated a volume of personal rubbish on a day trip, or a longer stay in the Marlborough Sounds. This rubbish falls outside expected categories of litter and capacity of bin available. While a solution for this circumstance has been implemented in Picton Marina (a locked bin enclosure accessible to adjacent business owners), no similar service has been made available for Waikawa or Havelock Marinas.

### ***Rural Community Recycling containers***

Community recycling facilities are located in the townships of Grovetown, Spring Creek, Rapaura, Tua Marina and Renwick. After a trial and consultation period permanent sites for the containers have been established adjacent to local primary schools in each settlement. The rationale for placing the recycling containers next to schools was twofold: visibility and responsibility. It was anticipated that there would be less likelihood of facility misuse, and a high profile location could have the potential to encourage recycling behaviours as the public adapted to a new norm. Custodial duties for interim oversight and general site cleanliness between uplifts have been divested to those schools. Each school can decide how this will happen in practice. Some container areas are maintained by the students, other sites have chosen to engage an individual. Each school receives a payment for this work. Funding for the adapted shipping containers was obtained from the Packaging Forum, which 'promotes and funds consumer awareness programmes about packaging, recycling, and litter reduction' (The Packaging Forum, n.d).

### ***Public Place Recycling***

In recent years the Solid Waste Department has become involved in public litter and recycling service provision. Again, in response to funding from the Packaging Forum distinctive wheelie bins have been located in Blenheim town centre, and in Picton along High Street and the waterfront areas. In accordance with the internationally recognised colours of waste and recycling, the red (rubbish), and yellow (recycling) containers initially received an unfavourable response. The containers were perceived to be unsightly and not conducive to fitting in with the type of amenity anticipated in high profile locations. Nevertheless, the wheelie bins remain in use and provide an opportunity for recycling products outside of the domestic realm.

### ***Reserves***

The Reserves Department holds responsibility for managing open spaces. The term open spaces, refers to any public space adopted by MDC. Over time this has grown to include not only parks, reserves, and sports grounds, but road berms, road reserves and landscaped areas adjacent to housing developments. As more land becomes available for housing

development across the region, the potential number of open spaces for MDC to manage increases.

Whilst focused on grounds maintenance, environmental and biodiversity protection, and visual amenity within those areas mentioned, the Reserves Department also is instrumental to townscape and regional planning initiatives. Litter bins are designed to blend in with the environment in which they are situated and tend to reflect the aesthetic of the time in which any improvement initiative was undertaken. Litter bins designed for urban settings are intended to be used for hand held, loose litter items only. Consequently the aperture available to put litter into the bin is scaled to minimise any likelihood of misuse. Misuse in this circumstance is understood to be the placing of any contained, bulk group of litter items into the street bin. For example, collecting and tying loose items of litter, or household/commercial materials within a plastic bag, and placing that bag in the bin is deemed to be unacceptable practice.

More remote recreational areas, such as bush or river walking tracks within the region are likely to be co-managed between Reserves and the Department of Conservation or the Rivers Department in MDC. Distant areas of the Marlborough Sounds available for recreational purposes do not have litter service provision. Prior experience of operational difficulties tends to inform current decision making on service provision.

Over time the cost to provide litter service to remote locations has increased. Past misuse of litter bins, for example by people leaving litter adjacent to a bin if bin capacity has been reached, creates potential for litter to enter the natural environment, and is likely to attract insects and vermin, particularly in warm weather conditions. Barriers to service provision are therefore expressed in terms of minimising financial impact to the ratepayer, and reducing potential negative impacts to local environments in which recreational areas are situated.

### *Visual pollution*

To maintain the integrity and natural beauty of the Marlborough landscape, in particular the Marlborough Sounds, overt signage at park or reserve areas is thought to be inappropriate. Any manufactured structure that may impede a view or negatively impact upon the general aesthetic of an area is kept to a minimum. Messaging through general notification at the site is limited in height and prominence. Information about the potential for litter service provision in remote areas is largely absent. While self-removal of litter is anticipated to be the best method of litter management, information about taking litter away is minimally, if at all available.

### *Event management in public spaces*

Sports and recreational facilities are available for general use free of charge. Private events may be held at any park or reserve with prior permission. Consent for the use of public spaces is granted on the condition that no additional cost to MDC will be incurred for site

clean up after any event. Responsibility therefore lies with the event organiser who is expected to arrange for litter removal, toilet cleanliness, and site preservation for future use. The application process formalises an understanding by MDC that any, 'area is left in a clean and tidy condition following the event, and that all excess rubbish or litter including that in park bins is removed from the site by the organisers' (Conditions for the use of Council Reserves and Sportsgrounds, MDC, n.d.).

While there is an expectation of environmentally appropriate practice held within the agreement, litter service provision at any event largely depends on the size of event, and anticipated revenue generated by that event. This circumstance will influence what is able to be achieved in respect of litter management. In general terms, organisers of events that generate more money can have the ability to have a more sophisticated litter management plan. This may include having volunteers on site to direct appropriate product disposal by event goers, engaging contract service providers to manage litter bins or skips, and having recycling facilities available.

Events that do not generate a high turnover may not have a similar opportunity, and instead choose to engage volunteer labour that takes a more 'hands on' role, for example by picking up litter during the event. Volunteer groups who engage in litter service provision generally receive a lump sum payment for giving their time. Any ability to recycle is similarly influenced; it may not be cost effective to separate litter and recycling, therefore all event by-product from low value events may be disposed of at landfill.

In some circumstances contract service providers are also engaged to pick up litter during events. This is likely to happen when an event is held in a high profile site, and that high profile site is expected to be in pristine condition immediately after an event, or for the following day. Examples typically include festive events in Blenheim and Picton town centres. MDC actively seeks to encourage visitors from outside the region. A clean and tidy visual amenity is anticipated to create a good impression and work to create a pleasant visual amenity for current and future visitors.

### *Recreational site management techniques*

Public access to prominent sites across the region, such as the Wither Hills Farm Park and Taylor River Walkway in Blenheim, and Victoria Domain in Picton, is readily encouraged. Litter bins, where available, are generally situated at the entrance or exit points of walking tracks and open access areas. Use of litter bins is monitored. If, after a period of observation and assessment litter bins are deemed to be underutilised, or surplus to requirements, bins may be removed in the absence of public consultation.

While it is accepted that the use of public spaces is generally good, unacceptable use of public amenity across the region can see vehicular access denied. In locations where it was once possible to park vehicles, deliberate obstruction with the use of large boulders or concrete blocks now prohibits parking opportunities. Prior experience informs current



practice in this respect: areas that were formerly 'hot spots' for litter being discarded from parked cars have been reduced with the intended outcome anticipated to be a reduction in littering.

Examples where this type of prohibitive litter management has been successful are cited as being on the Wairau Diversion river bank at Spring Creek, and the Taylor River floodway in Blenheim. Similar preventive measures at Victoria Domain in Picton include a reassessment of traffic flow; traffic is only permitted to travel in an anti-clockwise direction from one access point. Modifications made to layby areas, now makes it difficult for vehicles to pull over and dump rubbish from cars or trailers. In this high use area, walkers, bikers and cars share the road. It is hoped that increased visibility of public activity will deter littering, or perhaps encourage a member of the public to report littering or illegal dumping actions.

### *Additional resources*

The Reserves Department is assisted by Rangers, whose remit spans both an observational and regulatory role. Supplementary to the work of contract litter service providers, the work of the Ranger is to patrol open spaces and respond to reports of illegal dumping of rubbish, bulk household waste, or other similar items. Familiar within the local community, Rangers give out contact details to people who frequent local leisure areas. In this way, members of the public are encouraged to become 'the eyes and ears' of the community in respect of reporting acts of littering.

Rangers typically look for clues within discarded rubbish that might lead to finding the person who left the items. Rangers can issue infringement notices under the Litter Act 1979: fines can range from \$50 to \$400. MDC issues approximately four or five litter infringement notices per calendar month. Penalties for the dumping of bulk or hazardous waste materials may be less likely to be actioned because it is not always possible to identify where the materials have come from.

### *Marine environment*

MDC, along with other Government departments shares responsibility for managing, monitoring and maintaining 1800 km of coastline (State of the Environment Report, 2015, p. 19). Whilst litter in a land environment can be identified and dealt with, the extent to which litter has an effect on the marine environment can be underappreciated. This is primarily because the litter is not seen unless it is washed up onto a beach. With many smaller beaches being accessible only by boat or kayak, littering in such circumstances remains invisible to the general public, and escapes wider community notification unless deliberately brought to their attention. Bays, in which pristine conditions might be expected, are now bearing evidence of discarded litter and other items which have found their way into the sea.

Beach cleaning activities generally fall under the remit of special interest groups who seek similarly minded volunteers to assist with 'clean ups'. To engage a broader audience, this summer MDC initiated a competition that highlights the problem of litter in the ocean. The

competition, supported by Mayor Legget, was advertised in the local newspaper. Inviting people to send in a picture of the strangest piece of litter at the beach, it is anticipated that participants in the competition will have some fun while highlighting the issue. By extension, it is hoped that those people who read the local paper will be more aware of marine litter, and be encouraged to pick litter up when they next visit the beach.

## Roads

A long standing relationship between MDC and the New Zealand Transport Authority (NZTA) sees responsibility for rural and urban litter collection, and street sweeping divested to the roading department. In a similar way to litter bins within areas managed by the Reserves department, street bins are designed to contain hand held litter only. Seasonal variations to service provision for both the Reserves and Roothing departments allow for a daily uplift for litter bins in winter; this increases to twice daily during peak season times. Emphasis is given to maintaining high profile amenity sites in pristine condition.

In addition to litter service provision in respect of bin emptying, the Roads Department deals with the removal of litter, and other discarded items from road verges and roadside reserves. Strict distance measurements dictate the parameters within which litter can be removed from the roadside. While main State Highways are patrolled on a rotation basis every day, minor roads may only see service provision for roadside littering on a calendrical cycle, or upon request. To rephrase the point, minor roads may only be serviced two or four times a year, or if a member of the public highlights an issue. To ensure compliance with litter service provision, a financial penalty may be levied if the expected standard of operation is not achieved.

Members of the public can call MDC or NZTA directly. This year the roading department has dealt with 22 calls from the public. A breakdown of issues raised is as follows:

- 2 reports of littering
- 16 reports of discarded rubbish bags
- 2 reports of animal carcasses
- 1 report of discarded grape marc
- 1 report of discarded tea bags

## Communication with MDC

### *Incoming communication*

MDC has systems in place that work to address enquiries and concerns from the public. Customer service staffs deal with telephone calls and emails using an internal computerised information system. A standardised template is used to collate information from any enquiry; the enquiry is then forwarded to the manager who is responsible for the area or department being discussed. The efficiency of the system relies heavily on department managers inputting accurate information such that customer service staff can offer the correct advice to any caller. Members of the public can also ask to see a staff member if they wish to raise an issue in person. Depending on availability, staffs generally accommodate these requests.


In real time matters of concern can be resolved relatively quickly. For example, if a caller has an enquiry regarding refuse or recycling collection, customer service staff can liaise with the contractor and within a short timeframe can offer the caller an answer. Customer service staff can also relay advice about refuse and recycling presentation, or any other matter that arises.

Grey areas do exist, however. Depending on the location of reported litter, uncertainty may arise regarding which department will hold a budget to service the area in question. This circumstance is generally more likely to happen when it is unclear which department should do the work. For example, if litter or other items have been discarded by a road but adjacent to a reserve area, a decision must be made about whether Roads or Reserves holds responsibility for clearing it up.

### *Outgoing Communication*

As is common with large organisations that have responsibility for administering the population, outgoing communication has to serve a purpose: outgoing communication is therefore functional. While the transmission metaphor initially conceived by Shannon and Weaver (1949) is now a somewhat redundant concept, it is a useful way to think about the mechanics of 'message sending' (emphasis added), (Chandler, n.d). The transmission metaphor may be particularly relevant for the digital age where information is passed regularly on social media via digital telecommunications systems.

The principles of the transmission metaphor require (1) a source of information, (2) something to transmit the information, (3) something to receive the information and (4) someone to read the information (Shannon and Weaver 1949). Following the above linear process, a rates bill for example, can be the source of information, the postal service delivers the letter, the letter is put in the post box, and the householder reads the letter. In a similar way, a Facebook post is the source of information, sent via a digital device, received by another digital device, and finally read by the person that accesses the message.



Another example may be a report of littering from MDC, written up in narrative form, put in the local newspaper, and read by the local populace.

What the transmission metaphor does emphasise is that there is no requirement for interaction between sender and receiver. Assumptions implicit within functional message sending, hold that any message is correct, that the intended meaning sent is the meaning received, and that the message will have some sort of effect on personal behaviour (ibid). Communication is not a linear process however. The ways in which people make sense of information is influenced by socio-cultural understandings: people are social beings and benefit from interaction (Carey 1989). Whilst it has been acknowledged that MDC has processes in place to facilitate interpersonal discourse, any tendency towards functional communication transmission processes may be mistaken in any assumptions that are inadvertently made. When addressing instances of littering MDC tends to make frequent use of the transmission metaphor. While intended to share information and encourage normative behaviour standards, messages received at the level of the individual, may not correlate to noticeable behaviour change at the level of society.

## Public space littering by department

Contract service providers are a valuable resource in respect of being able to identify where littering occurs. Workers know what types of litter are generally discarded and the locations of habitual littering throughout the region. It has already been established that contracted relationships underpin the standard of presentation of public spaces and highways. The following information shows what public service workers do, and the types of conditions that workers contend with as they keep the community clean. While contractors work to enable public safety, it becomes clear that they must also work within Health and Safety guidelines, and may at times be exposed to situations that could potentially be hazardous to their own wellbeing.

### *Solid Waste*

The removal of general refuse product from urban centres is undertaken by Councils to minimise any adverse risk to the health and wellbeing of residents. It has already been noted that guidelines have been established for the safe packaging and setting out of both refuse and recycling materials. MDC anticipates that both waste streams will be put out for collection on the morning of any given collection route. This advice is given to minimise any potential negative outcomes for residents and contract service providers alike. A potential adverse outcome that inadvertently litters the streetscape includes:

- Refuse bags put out on the night before collection day may be ripped open by household pets.
- Non-compliant refuse bags will not be removed and may sit on the kerbside for some time. Again, household pets may rip the bag open.
- Contents may be spilled or be blown out of recycling crates that are put out the night before collection day.
- Non-compliant recycling product will be left either in the crate or on the kerbside. In both circumstances recycling product can remain in the street environment.

### *Reserves*

With a dual focus of landscaping and grounds maintenance, as well as litter bin servicing, contract service providers for the Reserves Department provide useful commentary on the way people may use and connect with public spaces. The following provides commentary on litter (and other product) found by area of service provision. Across the region, glass bottles are removed from verges and parks prior to grass cutting.

- Awatere and Seddon - alcohol bottles, cans (soft, energy drink and alcohol), chip packets, energy drinks bottles.
- Wairau Valley – garden rubbish.
- Spring Creek  
Ferry Bridge Reserve – garden rubbish and grass cuttings, dog excrement.
- Picton

London Quay and Foreshore – fish and chip wrappers, soft drink cans, ice cream wrappers, cheap alcohol bottles and cans, energy drink cans.

- Blenheim

Taylor River Walkway – alcohol cans and bottles, human excrement.

Taylor River – possum and pig carcasses.

Sutherland Stream – shell fish and fish heads.

Harling Park – deer and pig skins.

Forest Park Drive – garden rubbish and grass cuttings discarded on to Council reserve.

## *Roads*

In a similar way, contract service providers for the Roding Department provide information on the types of littering, and other activities, common to their areas of work along the region's rural and urban roading network. Litter that settles on private land, or falls outside of the expected area of service provision will not be picked up. Some examples of litter and other activities include the following:

- Blenheim – human vomitus and excrement generally on Saturday mornings, in the lane behind the Post office.
- State Highway 1, between Wairau Bridge and the Riverlands Industrial Estate – fast food wrappers, cans and bottles (energy drink and soft drink), chippie packets, coffee cups.
- Queen Charlotte Drive – fast food wrappers, drinks bottles and cans, cigarette ends, cigarette packets.
- Marlborough Sounds – illegal dumping of household appliances and house clearance product.
- Minor roads adjacent to vineyards – vineyard wrapping material.
- Minor roads leading to recreational areas – fish and chip wrappers, drinks bottles and cans (soft drinks and alcohol), fast food wrappers, cardboard boxes (alcohol).

## Council expenditure

An expectation of this report is that costings for service litter service provision will be revealed. Publicly available information will be discussed in respect of figures relating to MDC core service provision. Other monetary sums will be aggregated because the information is commercially sensitive and relates to contract procurement processes.

### Monies into MDC

Activity	User Pays	Targeted rates	General Rates	Waste Disposal Levy	Revenue
Kerbside (refuse)	\$193,647	\$827,419	\$0	\$0	\$1,021,066
Kerbside (recycling)	\$0	\$626,646	\$0	\$0	\$626,646
Transfer stations	\$1,246,661	\$0	\$558,247	\$0	\$1,804,908
Landfills	\$4,923,636	\$0	\$34,883	\$0	\$4,958,519
Waste Projects	\$274,479	\$0	\$732,363	\$176,089	\$1,182,931
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$6,638,423</b>	<b>\$1,454,065</b>	<b>\$1,325,493</b>	<b>\$176,089</b>	<b>\$9,594,070</b>
<b>Totals %</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above, taken from a document presented to the Assets and Services meeting in November 2017, brings together the sources of income from Solid Waste related activities from the 2016/2017 financial year.

**User pays** fees refers to revenue generated by charging the public and business for disposing of waste materials at the Waste Sorting Centre in Blenheim, aforementioned transfer stations across the region, and Blue Gums landfill. Charges are calculated either by weight (tonne) or by volume (cubic metre).

**Targeted rates** refer to the charge levied at those residents of Blenheim and Picton who receive a domestic refuse and recycling collection.

**General rates** refer to costs spread across the Marlborough wide ratepayer population. Revenue collected in this way supports larger infrastructure projects and other service provision related to waste.

The **waste disposal levy** is a mechanism set up by Government in relation to the Waste Minimisation Act 2008. The tax is levied against landfill disposal activity and is included in the gate fee at a rate of \$10 per tonne of material disposed. The tax is intended to make disposal to landfill unattractive, and aspires to encourage waste diversion initiatives.

Once collected, it is expected that the revenue generated by each landfill across the country will be sent to the exchequer. Revenue raised in this way is protected and set aside to be used only for waste and recycling activities. This differs somewhat from a similar scheme in the United Kingdom, in which a landfill tax is absorbed into general taxation revenue.

While the intention of the tax holds that it would act as a disincentive for disposal to landfill, a loophole in the wording of the act has meant that those landfills that do not take household waste argue that they do not have to participate. A review of the waste disposal levy in 2017 sought to address this circumstance in order that greater revenue can be generated for waste diversion activities.

The Ministry of the Environment (MfE) has oversight of the scheme. It is expected that tonnages taken at landfill will be declared to the MfE. Using a population based weighting system the MfE then returns a portion of the taxation generated revenue back to each region. While not all landfills participate in tax collection, every region receives a monetary return from the total revenue. MDC receives in the region of 35-40% of the taxation revenue that it sends to the MfE. To ensure transparency, this sum, and the intended use of the money must be declared to the public in the Waste Management and Minimisation Plan. Accepting that administration costs must be accounted for, the remaining percentage of total revenue goes to the Waste Minimisation Fund – a contestable sum of money open to the waste sector and wider community for projects that fit with the theme of reducing waste.

## **Litter expenditure across departments**

As previously noted, the Solid Waste department has had relatively little involvement in litter service provision. Included in the budgets allocations for outgoing expenditure is:

- \$18,000 per annum to Ports Marlborough advanced as a contribution in lieu of Ports Marlborough dealing with material (waste or litter) adjacent to their own waste collection system: sources include people using the reserve space within the Ports environment.
- \$60,000 per annum to service red and yellow refuse and recycling bins in Blenheim and Picton: currently under trial and not allocated a definite budget allocation so taken from reserve funding.
- \$60,000 per annum to service domestic and visitor refuse containers at Picton Marina located at London Quay and Coat Hanger Bridge: Currently under trial and not allocated a definite budget allocation so taken from reserve funding.
- \$18,000 per annum as a contribution to illegal dumping that the Rangers pick up, and payment requests to assist with community clean up events: funded through general rates and income from infringement notices once administration fees have been deducted.

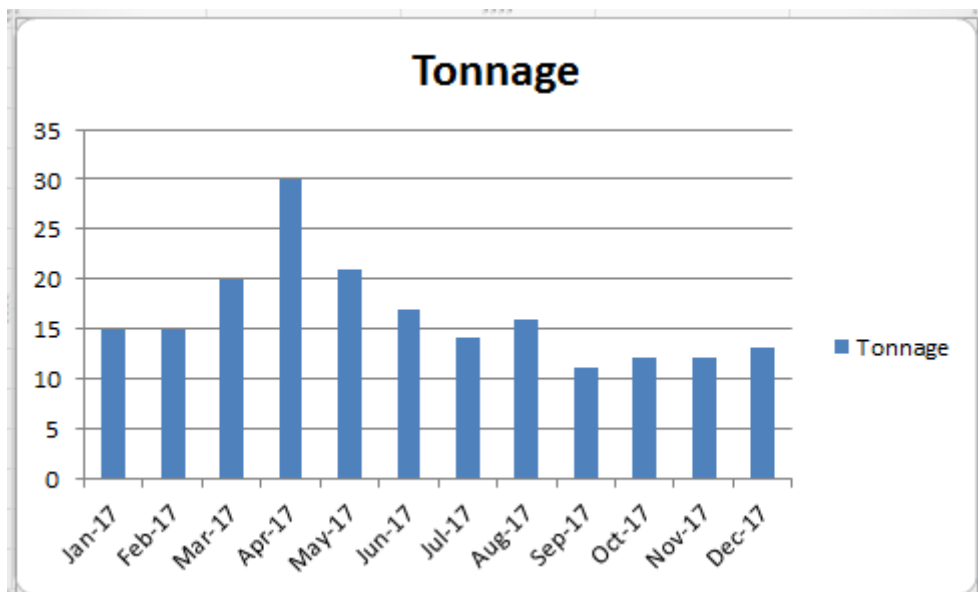


- \$90,000 per annum to service rural community recycling containers: paid for through general rates.
- A total of \$246,000 per annum to service the above contracts.

Expenditure for litter service provision across the reserves and roading departments is in the region of \$650,000 per annum.

Total expenditure across all three departments is in the region of \$896,000 per annum.

The table below shows the tonnages of waste sent to landfill under the litter category and amounts to 196 tonnes during 2017.



## Common sense truths

It is evident that the geography of Marlborough poses challenges for parity in service provision. Those challenges have, it seems, over time become obstacles to introducing alternative service opportunities particularly for people who live in remote locations. The systems for waste and litter service provision, previously described and currently in place have the effect of situating and embedding common sense truths about rural living. 'Common sense truths' in this context means anecdotal knowledge that over time becomes accepted as fact: those 'facts' then become barriers to alternative thinking for the general population and within organisations.

In Marlborough (and perhaps in other areas), common sense truths hold that rural people should not expect to have the same level of service provision as those people who live in urban situations. The interesting thing about common sense truths is that people inadvertently begin to believe what is said. Paradoxically, this has the effect of both diminishing the voice of rural people, yet instilling in them a sense of resilience, which in turn reinforces the common sense truth.

## Unintended consequences

More commonly found in the realm of economics, the term unintended consequences 'illuminates the perverse unanticipated effects of legislation and regulation' (Norton, n.d.). Looking at MDC practice through this lens, provides an opportunity to reveal how people, contract service providers, MDC officers, and Government are all involved in creating effects that are not deliberately intended. For the context of this report, unintended consequences refers to events or processes that happen within usual litter service operational practices. It has been established that MDC operates waste and litter services based on a high trust model: where services are supplied, it is anticipated that people will 'do the right thing'.

The following provides a critical analysis of service provision by department. It should be emphasised however, that observations should not be misinterpreted as critique of staff practice or support for public frustrations. Rather, an analysis of this kind should be read as an account that provides opportunities for alternative thinking and consideration for alternative practice.

### *Solid Waste*

Possibilities for disposing of refuse and recycling vary across the region. Waste and recycling services are available but require a different level of contribution from residents, both in terms of organisation, physical activity and financial contribution. A balance it seems is being sought that enables individual responsibility but acknowledges Council responsibility to mitigate potential public health hazards. In an urban situation waste and recycling is collected at the kerbside. In a rural situation, if households do not choose to engage a private contractor, waste and recycling can be taken to the local transfer station. The unintended consequences of both methods of collection are noted as follows.

### *Kerbside collection*

- Refuse bags put out on the evening before collection day may be torn open by household pets spilling bag contents into street environment.
- Contents of open topped recycling crates can spill into street environment.
- Spilled recycling may not be picked up by the contractor unless notified.
- Excess recycling can be put in adjacent bins inadvertently causing neighbourhood tensions.
- Excess recycling may be put into refuse bags.
- Non-compliant refuse bags or excess recycling may remain in the street environment.
- Waste minimisation is not addressed if householders can dispose of any number of refuse bags.
- Placing stickers on non-compliant waste and recycling is a blunt communication tool and may have no effect on behaviour change.
- The contents of spilled refuse bags are cleaned up by the roading department.

### *Rural waste and recycling disposal*

- Contents of recycling containers may fall out of vehicles into road environment.
- Different methods of charging for waste disposal hold that calculations by volume are more expensive than calculations by weight – there is a sense that this may contribute to illegal dumping.
- Product left by the roadside is collected by the roading department.
- Household and general waste may be left beside recycling containers or at the gates of transfer stations.
- Waste disposal via sea to land transfers creates anxiety at high value amenity sites particularly during peak season.

### *Urban litter and recycling collection*

- Blenheim and Picton are already well supported with street litter bins – other towns in the region may appreciate some additional support with litter and recycling promotion.
- While public place recycling seems to resonate with the public, small volumes of recycling are disproportionately expensive to service.
- Mixed messages exist in respect of recycling because items in street bins are not washed.
- Contamination of street recycling sees the contents go to landfill.

### *Reserves*

With an intention that street and reserve litter bins should contain hand held litter only, bins are designed to limit any potential for misuse. Bins in urban areas allow for the immediate disposal of single litter items. In parks and reserves litter bins are less readily available. It is anticipated that patrons will take litter away from open spaces; however minimal public information exists to support this aspiration. While litter service provision forms a core part of contracted agreements, litter removal is also an adjunct to other grounds maintenance activities. Unintended consequences are given below:

- Litter bins are designed to fit in with the street scape and may not be readily visible.
- Removal of litter bins from reserve areas may be interpreted by the public as unnecessary service removal: reinstatement is by bureaucratic processes through Council committee and application to the Annual Plan.
- If bins are full people leave litter beside the bin which can attract insects and vermin; there is the potential for litter to enter the surrounding environment.
- Classification of litter may inhibit problem resolution, for example bottles or pizza boxes are not perceived to be hand held litter.
- Consents that seek to return public spaces to pristine condition after an event may inhibit public participation in appropriate litter disposal.

- The expectation that people will ‘pack in and pack out’ of destination recreational areas may inadvertently cause littering in places adjacent to that area as people discard rubbish from their vehicle.

### *Roads*

The roading department has responsibility for servicing street and roadside litter bins. In a similar way to the reserves department litter bins have been designed to accommodate hand held litter only. Bins are serviced on a pre-determined basis which accommodates for seasonal variations. Litter bins tend to be situated on main roads in urban areas. There are limited bins between township destination points. Distant settlements do not have any litter service opportunity. The unintended consequences of service provision are similar to those noted for the reserves department and include:

- Infrequent or by request litter service provision has the effect of minimising the effect of littering in rural areas.
- Litter that falls outside specific distance criteria for service provision may never be recovered.
- Distant townships with no litter facility have to interact with visitors to ensure their local environment remains litter free.

### *Communication*

It has been suggested that organisations that have responsibility for administering the public send messages via the transmission metaphor. MDC uses a variety of platforms to communicate with the public, for example by traditional print media, radio adverts and social media. There are noticeboards at the Resource Centre and advertising space is available on refuse trucks. While making an attempt to connect with the public, measurements cannot be made as to the effectiveness of this style of communication. At times, community surveys are sent out to canvass opinion about waste service provision and other topics.

News about the adverse impact of littering is generally told in the style of a human interest story. A statement may be made about the effect of litter on local residents, or the environment in which litter is found. No response is required, and it is expected that the narrative will in some way have an effect on the reader to encourage pro-environmental behaviour in themselves and others. The unintended consequences of this form of communication are as follows:

- Information via news stories is generally given in respect of department or speciality specific issues.
- If public opinion is sufficiently provoked, there is no MDC led vehicle to harness goodwill for longer term community benefit.
- Common sense truths are likely to develop about the type of person who would discard litter in given situations.

- Processes of communication into MDC can be complex in respect of requests to change litter service provision: decisions as to whether requests are met rest with Councillors.

### *Contractors*

Insofar as contract service provision is vital to enabling litter removal, the economic model that underpins such service will not actively address litter reduction, and may work as a barrier to alternative ways of thinking. Unintended consequences of the contracted relationship include:

- If contractors are paid to pick up refuse or litter, and more product is perceived to be being generated, contractors will ask for more money or resource to pick up the extra product.
- Maintaining the visual amenity of identified sites is given precedence: there is a lack of evidence of litter reduction measures.
- Contractors are a valuable source of information for revealing types of litter discarded, and for identifying litter hot spots: this information is not currently being accessed in a pro-active way.
- Explicit contract terms may not marry with inferred public understandings of that same contract.
- The contracted relationship is inadvertently obscuring the extent of littering within the region.

### *Volunteer litter picking*

Unless publicly notified after prearranged community or interest group events, volunteer litter picking can remain unacknowledged. Contribution in time and effort, while known to those individuals and groups who participate, may not benefit from wider community, or official recognition. While a vital adjunct to supporting community cleanliness, the unintended consequences of volunteer contribution are:

- The values of community contribution may tend to be emphasised rather than identification of sources and types of litter recovered.
- Where specialist skills are required for community clean up events, in the marine environment for example, there is an absence of administrative and logistical support available to assist with event organisation and product retrieval.
- Volunteer contribution inadvertently obscures the extent and scope of littering in the region.
- Volunteer contribution has the effect of distancing MDC from needing to be involved in current systems appraisal.
- Apart from minimal advertising, MDC does not at present actively support 'national clean up' initiatives.

### *General points of interest*

Any discussion about litter service provision must sit alongside other possible waste and recycling management systems. From those systems currently available a conclusion can be drawn that MDC is caught up within the contradictions that arise as a consequence of those same systems. It has already been suggested that MDC operates a high trust model of litter and waste disposal. It has already been established that the geography of the region poses difficulties, actual or perceived, for service provision opportunities. In general terms the ideology that underpins current thinking within MDC expects that people will bear individual responsibility for systems compliance. The concept of individual responsibility in this context holds within it unarticulated expectations that litter or rubbish generated in the private realm, for example, from businesses in remote locations, or during a car journey or leisure excursion on water, does not find accommodation in the public realm. Unintended consequences of such measures include:

- For remote locations, litter or rubbish may be accumulated on site: historical practices of 'bulk, bury or burn' inadvertently become established practice with product either being stored in large quantities, or concealed in self-excavated, unlined dump sites on private land.
- While burning rubbish is permitted within established guidelines, people may burn any type of material in the absence of external guidance or other disposal opportunities.
- There is an absence of disposal opportunities for contained litter product from vehicles, for example campervans during peak visitor season.
- Any accommodation from MDC for picking up litter in high profile public sites may be misread by business as an opportunity to request similar support for private business sites.

## Picton as a case study

To provide an example of the ways in which MDC systems work, it is useful to consider the operational pathways that are currently being administered in Picton, a high profile and a high value amenity site. An exploration of 'the way things are done' shows the ways in which physical space is divided, and departmental ideologies compete to retain ownership of identity and purpose. While it should be noted that there is a willingness to work together to seek problem resolution where it arises, previous tendencies to remain within departmental specific frames of reference have on occasion been the cause of tensions for and within the local community.


Within a geographically confined area, Picton Foreshore, London Quay and Picton Marina intersect. Several waste streams converge within the area: two MDC departments and Ports Marlborough oversee that work. It has already been established that sea to land transport can carry domestic, visitor, and business (tradesperson) passengers. Marlborough Sounds residents have an opportunity to dispose of domestic refuse in the same area. In addition to established litter bins overseen by the Reserves department, the Solid Waste department has introduced red and yellow wheelie bins along the Foreshore to collect litter and recycling. By prior arrangement, any extra rubbish left at London Quay may be picked up by Ports Marlborough.

Litter bins administered by the Reserves Department are intended for the disposal of hand held litter items only. Bins that on occasion have been used by tradespersons have been removed: content analysis reveals that commercial waste has been put in a litter only bin. Marlborough Sounds residents can deposit household waste in refuse bins administered by the Solid Waste Department.

When residents come to shore by boat larger household items may also be left beside the refuse bins: Picton Transfer Station is some distance away by land transport. The uplift of those larger items, now thought of as illegal dumping because items are too large to fit inside the bin enclosure, is divested to the Reserves Department, or to Ports Marlborough if available, or to another occasionally-contracted service provider.

A level of anxiety underpins peak season in Picton in respect of establishing and maintaining a pristine environment for visitors. Tolerance levels for perceived deficiencies in service provision are largely absent. Commercial operators and the public alike notify MDC immediately for those perceived omissions in service provision. The sub-text of litter service provision is heavily underpinned by the transitions that litter makes on the journey from being purchased as an item, to being disposed of in a litter or refuse container. Individual responsibility in this circumstance escapes critique because once an item has been placed into or adjacent to a Council litter or refuse container, MDC holds responsibility for cleaning it up.





Despite being largely oversupplied with litter service provision at key visitor sites at the Foreshore and London Quay, a wider sweep of the community reveals a more persistent littering situation. Every year, Picton residents are invited to participate in the 'Annual Spring Clean'. Organised by a keen environmentalist, this event has grown in terms of participants over the past few years, and now includes residents of Waikawa Bay. This year eighty people took part in the event. Participants collected one skip of rubbish from around the community: this includes the marine environment.

Items recovered include aluminium cans, glass bottles, plastic bags, food containers, items of clothing, and other general litter items. Of particular note this year was the recovery of large amounts of cigarette ends, and degraded plastics on the beach. Another unintended consequence of littering is the camaraderie brought forth by joining in with community events. However, it should be noted that the event comprises generally the same individuals and groups of people every year, and the organisation of the event becomes time consuming for those involved.

MDC provides the means of disposal and absorbs the cost into pre-populated budgetary allocations. However, questions do not seem to be being asked about why there is a glut of litter within the Picton and Waikawa communities. It seems apparent that while current litter service provision deals with 'expected' litter, materials are still getting into the street and marine environments. A conclusion must be drawn that while contracted service provision operates to remove litter and rubbish, in order that the streetscape appears to be litter free, systems currently in place cannot meet an outcome that the whole town is litter free. A similar circumstance can be found in towns across the district.

## Discussion

The Marlborough Litter Project was prompted by an observation that litter service provision is carried out according to predetermined contract specifications across three departments and is informed by a desire to minimise public expenditure. Each department that has a remit for litter service provision ‘thinks differently’, therefore the approach to that same service has a focus on department specific objectives. The purpose of this report is to enquire into those circumstances and reveal the unintended consequences of this way of working. The report reveals that litter service provision in the main focuses on established operational requirements. While undoubtedly addressing material retrieval, and reducing a reliance on landfill in respect of commercial waste product, to date MDC does not have a strategic plan sufficient for mitigating littering across the region.

By taking a closer look at the ways in which litter service provision is currently implemented around the region, it is possible to reveal the complex systems that underpin that service provision. Undertaking an exploration of each department opens up a space for further consideration of ‘the way things are done’. An unarticulated assumption within departmental specific thinking holds that people will take responsibility for the appropriate disposal of litter items, yet, it transpires that MDC inadvertently sends mixed messages to the public in respect of waste and litter management.

An argument may be made that if MDC supplies a service, then those people who use the service should do their best to comply with expectations of service delivery. However, an absence of common thinking across departments inadvertently thwarts the possibility for standardised or strategic methods of operation across the region. Situation dependant resolutions to waste or litter problems tend to offer single issue outcomes. Single issue outcomes are unable to project a united methodology to the public. Consequently, MDC becomes caught up within a cycle of problem identification and problem resolution. Unsatisfactory to both staff and lay publics, a lack of traction to locate alternative solutions ultimately maintains the status quo. If a raised public awareness of the extent of littering is to be achieved, the different philosophies and the operational requirements that inform each department may also inadvertently inhibit such an outcome.

It must again be emphasised that a critique of service delivery should not be read as a critique of managers or workers involved in service provision. Activity in the ‘waste space’ requires that workers deal with aspects of public activity that are unpleasant, may be hazardous to wellbeing, and takes physical strength and a capacity for endurance to complete. Rather, by looking at the way ‘things are done’ now, this analysis reveals possibilities for changes to practice that can have future benefits for those people involved.

While an expectation exists that refuse and recycling will be separated within the home environment, contract specifications do not allow that all materials set out at the kerbside will be collected. Materials unable to be recycled are left behind; excess compliant materials outside the crate will not be collected. Recycling product may be put in adjacent containers,

in refuse bags or may not be retrieved from the street environment at all. Excess recycling can be taken to the Resource Recovery Centre (Blenheim) and Transfer Station (Picton) however another unanticipated consequence of services offered at the level of the household holds that items put out for collection should be picked up by contractors. In practical terms then, inadvertent littering and excess waste production may happen as a result of the way in which current service provision is put to work.

In rural areas where people deal with their own waste and recycling management, materials can fall off vehicles and trailers during transportation. This material, if identified, will be attended to by the Roads department, or may never be retrieved at all. It is thought that uncertainties about methods of charging for waste across the region might contribute to incidences of illegal dumping. Informed by the 'user pays' model of cost allocation, an expectation that waste disposal charges must be achieved, may inadvertently lead some people to dispose of their waste out with usual disposal mechanisms. To rephrase the point, people who cannot or do not want to pay for waste disposal will find another way to get rid of rubbish.

Brightly coloured wheelie bins in Blenheim and Picton signal an aspiration to be part of a nationwide collective that promotes public place litter reduction. Easily seen, the bins work as social sight markers to discourage littering. Nevertheless, the bins are supplementary to existing litter bins and their presentation is in opposition to other street refuse bins which are designed to blend in with the street scape. A seeming oversupply of litter bins in high profile urban areas does not address an excess of litter in those locations where bins are sited.

Unobtrusive in its operation, litter management in the Reserves Department experiences similar types of contradictions. In terms of identifications bins tend to merge into the surroundings in which they are placed. Under or inappropriate use of bins in reserve areas works as a signal that the bin may be removed, because it is thought to be surplus to requirements or perceived to be not being used in the appropriate way. Intolerance of specified litter types in reserve bins, for example bottles and cardboard can see problem resolution being located to another department. While contained rubbish is not anticipated to be put in litter bins, the public do wish to dispose of bagged litter: if a bin is full bags of rubbish may be left beside the bin.

Processes in respect of event management in public amenity sites require that no extra burden to the ratepayer is generated from that event. Such an expectation divests responsibility for site maintenance and cleanliness to the event organiser. Any focus on achieving a pristine post-event environment can inadvertently push event organisers towards engaging people, either contract service providers, or volunteer labour (paid or unpaid) to clean up for patrons during and after any event. As a consequence, picking up litter in the context of event attendance is inadvertently rearticulated as providing hospitality. Events that generate limited revenue are unlikely to participate in recycling.

Litter service provision is generally not available in distant recreational locations or in the Marlborough Sounds. Any understanding that people 'pack in and pack out' of those locations is not clearly conveyed. While end destination points may remain free of litter, it is reported that rubbish may be discarded over embankments or into vegetation as vehicles leave the area. An opportunity to dispose of contained rubbish from sea to land transfer has been given further consideration in Picton.

The Roding Department has an operational remit to empty litter bins along state highways. With strict geographical guidelines for litter retrieval at the side of the road, and a focus on maintaining main arterial routes, some locations may only see contractors a few times a year. Other more distant areas may have to request litter service provision as it is needed. Litter that does not fall into service parameters is unlikely to be picked up.

Public engagement practices are recognised within administrative processes. Said another way, messages to the public serve a purpose, usually impart information and generally do not require a response. Communication of this type has the effect of distancing 'sender' and 'receiver'. It has been established that staff are willing to engage in personal conversations about litter issues with members of the public, however, the responses they give are informed by the possibilities available to them. Individual staff autonomy may be limited. Decision making in respect of changing service opportunities may ultimately rest with Council committee.

If MDC should decide that having an appreciation of the ways in which people live is to be achieved, communication that is underpinned by the transmission metaphor must be considered to be an ineffective tool of communication. Effective communication is assisted by gaining access to community systems, by asking questions about the effectiveness of service provision, and by having an appreciation that the ways in which people are living presently, may not be sustainable for the longer term. Across the region, changes to community demographics, for example, could signal to MDC that 'things might need to be done differently.'

The current administration of waste and litter service provision requires that contractors meet performance outcomes. The qualitative character of contract management as it currently presents, values problem identification and resolution. At times omissions in public compliance can be read as points of contention which may lead service providers to convey that they require additional material and financial resource. Thinking differently can make it possible to seek a more broad based approach to that same problem resolution.

For example, a conversation currently exists in respect of domestic recycling provision: the given open topped container frequently does not accommodate all recycling product. Consequently for the public and the contractor, apparent problems with capacity are conflated with general service inadequacies. A request has been made for a supplementary crate and an additional recycling vehicle. Decisions in this respect, however, may be

adequately addressed with the introduction of a community focused service, rather than allocating resources that benefits only one sector that receives home-based service provision.

It has been suggested that volunteer contribution in respect of 'keeping the community clean' does not receive adequate recognition. This suggestion should not be misinterpreted as a dismissal of the efforts of those involved, rather it may be thought of as an acceptance of the types of activities special interest groups, and individuals routinely take part in. While allocations for disposal fees may be accessed, an acceptance that voluntary groups undertake such work has an unintended consequence of removing MDC from needing to be engaged, particularly if litter and waste product is retrieved from locations outside contract remits.

Across this set of unintended consequences, the 'litter, waste and disposal space' emerges as complex and contradictory. Each area following an independent ideology, strives to meet department specific outcomes. Opportunities for alternative thinking are yet to be achieved because MDC does not have a strategic plan for litter management. This obstacle in concrete terms works to obscure the scope and extent of littering across the region, and inadvertently has the effect of minimising that same problem.

Declaring the contradictions that play out at a local level can be of benefit to provoke conversations that evaluate the systems as it currently stands. While an aspiration may be held that individuals will be responsible for their own actions, department specific thinking may work against this outcome. A series of observations can be made in this regard:

**First observation:** systems in place for kerbside refuse and recycling collection may inadvertently cause litter.

**Second observation:** mixed messages exist in respect of volumes of refuse and recycling that may be disposed of at the kerbside.


**Third observation:** mixed messages exist in terms of preparation of recycling presented for collection at the kerbside and in public places.

**Fourth observation:** litter management at special events may focus on post event site clearance rather than public involvement during any event.

**Fifth observation:** 'hand held litter' bins are insufficient for disposing of contained rubbish so bags full of litter frequently get left beside bins.

**Sixth observation:** contractors know of litter hot spots yet this information is not accessed in a pro-active way.

**Seventh observation:** value based volunteer contribution inadvertently distances MDC from needing to be involved in community litter issues.



These observations work as a reminder that as much as there may be a focus on littering; systems already in place both contribute to and detract from littering being considered in different ways. Frustrations about littering, from staffs and the public alike, are unlikely to gain traction because MDC keeps on doing the same types of things. Expressed in terms of omissions in personal responsibility, yet positioned as a collective concern, in the absence of a district (or nation) wide strategy, littering will continue to be conceived as a problem that nobody really knows what to do about.

## Recommendations

As is common with a report of this nature, it is anticipated that some outcomes be identified to resolve or mitigate the issue discussed. As is also common in this circumstance, there may be an inclination to be drawn towards finding operational solutions: to make revisions to service provision, or to encourage people to do the 'right thing'. Inevitably proposed solutions will cover both aspects. However, the way in which litter has been constructed as a 'societal problem' merits the inclusion of central government in respect of the part it has to play in the discussion more broadly. Litter mitigation cannot take place in the absence of structural change – changes to the way we think about litter, changes to considering the circumstances in which litter is generated, and changes to the systems that currently deal with litter.

Reviewing the unintended consequences of service provision makes it possible to 'see' where changes may be implemented that would be of benefit to the community as a whole. Recommendations for operational change seek to address difficulties encountered by residents and contractors who work in the 'litter space'. A staged process is anticipated to 'ease' the public and MDC into changing practice.

If a reduction in the potential for litter in the public realm is to be achieved, then the following operational recommendations are suggested:

- Develop a strategic plan that resonates with the philosophies across all departments that bear responsibility for litter service provision.
- Include a prerequisite within documentation for leasing public spaces that encourages the public, not only the organiser, to participate in appropriate litter disposal methods.
- Seek community representatives to take part in focus or working group meetings to capitalise on good will: local people generally have access to knowledge of practical issues within communities.
- Engage a person capable of working across business and community sectors in respect of raising awareness of litter responsibilities and litter reduction. Arguably of greater importance is that this person raises awareness within MDC of the types of circumstances in respect of littering issues that people experience across the region.
- Across the region, establish bulk recycling containers adjacent to supermarkets or other suitable sites. Excess recycling material can be brought from home, and containers can be available to visitors during peak season times.
- Across the region, introduce MDC branded litter bags for general waste disposal, to include a collection service. While potentially unpopular at a time when public opinion appears to support a reduction in plastic bag use, extending the reach of MDC branded litter bags would establish a standardised method for permanent resident and visitors that includes disposal charge. Taking services into communities would signal an awareness of changing demographics, for example an ageing

population, would go some way to bolstering community inclusion and wellbeing. This could potentially reduce the illegal dumping of household rubbish.

If litter reduction at the level of society is to be addressed it requires an approach from both local and central governments. It should be declared that within the current system of waste disposal, waste product continues to be generated. While local solutions to litter mitigation, in terms of reducing the likely incidences and frequency of littering, have been suggested, litter reduction proper is yet to be addressed.


Within the waste pyramid of reduce, reuse, recycle, little attention it seems is given to reduction, or reuse: recycling it seems is the default position. While championed by the public at large, and favoured by business, [in the main because an economic benefit can be gained by selling by-product to other producers], on a global level, markets predominantly in developing countries are now becoming saturated by waste product sent to them by the rest of the world. A salve to the conscience at a local level sees the unintended consequences of recycling swamp those distant countries, as selective processing of plastics, for example, leaves unwanted product languishing in open spaces and in the ocean (Weule, 2017).

While this report does recommend mechanisms such as recycling to divert product from landfill, it also looks toward a staged process for waste reduction in general. At the level of government this must surely include a robust appraisal of product stewardship. Product stewardship is a method by which producers take responsibility for reducing as far as practicable, any adverse impact to the environment from items they make. This includes end of use management. Currently, such schemes are voluntary in Aotearoa New Zealand: product stewardship would benefit from legislative measures to ensure appropriate consideration has been given to the life span of any product. This would reduce the financial burden on the ratepayer, and redirect responsibility to the producer.

Returning to the local community, for which this report seeks to address littering: the fundamental unintended consequence of service provision is that litter keeps getting picked up. The contracted relationship in itself inadvertently contributes to littering. Using contractor knowledge to identify littering hot spots, information can be used to critique common sense truths that have developed as a matter of course. Using the location and types of litter found it is possible to ask the kinds of questions that may over time lead to the reduction of litter.

To effect change within any community, willingness must exist not only to administer the population but to have some sort of interest in the welfare of the people. Commonly found items such as cigarette ends or energy drink bottles or cans might lead to thoughts about public health, rates of smoking, or possible correlations between the consumption of energy drinks and incidences of adverse behaviour. Fast food wrappers might lead to thoughts about the ability to purchase such food late at night or overnight. Illegal dumping may be





attributable to housing insecurity. Information freely available but considered in different ways might go some way to reducing littering. Ultimately it remains within the remit of MDC to make full use of their resources and community connections to take that information, think differently about it, and effect sustainable change that has a potential to benefit the region at large.

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