

Somerset Waste Board meeting
11 February 2022
Report for decision

Recycle More Update

Lead Officer: Mickey Green, Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership

Author: Mickey Green, Managing Director, Somerset Waste Partnership

Contact Details: mickey.green@somersetwaste.gov.uk

Forward Plan Reference:	25/01/2022
Summary:	Recycle More has been rolled out to three areas so far: Mendip (October 2020), South Somerset (June 2021) and Taunton Deane (Nov 2021). The fourth and final phase is due to bring the service to households across Sedgemoor and West Somerset at the end of February 2022. As highlighted to the Board in previous meetings, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic adds to the risks of the roll-out programme, as does the national driver shortage and associated pressures on service stability. Mitigating steps have been taken where possible, in agreement with all partners. This paper provides a progress update from Mendip, South Somerset and Taunton Deane. It also updates on preparation for the final phase of the kerbside roll-out programme and plans to roll-out to schools and the final tranche of communal properties.
Recommendations:	<p>The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report.</p> <p>That the Somerset Waste Board: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notes the progress made in implementing Recycle More and the risks to the programme.
Reasons for recommendations:	Recycle More is the most significant element of our current Business Plan given the environmental and financial benefits it delivers to all partners. Clearly, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic adds to the risks of the roll-out programme, as does the national shortage and hence service stability.
Links to Priorities and Impact on	

Annual Business Plan:	Action 3.1 of the Business Plan 2021-26 concerns the implementation of Recycle More. All partners have declared climate emergencies and the environmental benefit from Recycle More is an important part of achieving these.
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	As set out in the finance paper, Recycle More is forecast to breakeven during quarter three of 2022/23 and deliver savings to all partners of over £2m per annum. As previously agreed, no savings as a result of the new contract will be taken from the Somerset Waste Partnership until all roll out costs have been fully funded and breakeven point is reached. The anticipated savings figures have been shared with s151 Officers for inclusion in each partners MTFP process. The finance paper provides an update on the anticipated breakeven point and level of savings, which we will continue to regularly review as roll out continues.
Equalities Implications:	An impact assessment on Recycle More is maintained and updated as the project progresses.
Risk Assessment:	As previously reported to the Board, Covid-19 is a risk to the successful roll-out of Recycle More and this continues to be the case. A repeat of poor service quality seen last summer/autumn, primarily due to driver shortages, would also put our ability to roll-out Recycle More at risk. At the time of writing (mid-January) staffing levels are sufficient and services have stabilised. However, Covid is contributing to heightened staff absence and is being monitored closely. The underlying nationwide driver shortage also remains and tonnage levels remain challenging.

1. Background

1.1. Background to Recycle More

On 29 March 2019 the Somerset Waste Board decided upon SUEZ Recycling and Recovery UK as the preferred bidder for Somerset’s waste collection contract. SUEZ took over delivering services on 28 March 2020 and is rolling out our new Recycle More collection service model in phases. This will enable the public to recycle even more through the kerbside sort system, adding in the following materials to the weekly collection:

- Plastic pots, tubs and trays (including black plastic)
- Food and beverage cartons (e.g. Tetra Paks)
- Small electrical equipment (e.g. a kettle or toaster)
- Household batteries

This is in addition to what can already be recycled every week – food, paper, glass,

cans, aerosols, plastic bottles, cardboard, foil and wearable clothes and shoes.

A 60litre weighted reusable sack (a 'Bright Blue Bag') will ensure residents have space for all their extra recycling. With so much more recycled each week, rubbish collections will take place every three weeks. This change is crucial to us being able to respond to public demand to recycle more, to nudge those that aren't recycling fully at the moment and support our aim to see waste treated as a resource. Communal properties (adding in plastic, pots, tubs and trays and ensuring all can recycle cardboard) and schools (adding in plastic, pots, tubs and trays) will also have increased options to recycle. Neither schools nor communal properties will see changes to their rubbish collection frequency, which will still be responsive to when bins are full.

We expect this to take our overall recycling rate to around 60% and reduce the amount of residual waste by up to 23% – with all the kerbside residual waste being used to create Energy from Waste rather than going into landfill.

1.2. Roll-out timetable

Every time SWP has rolled out a major service change it has phased the changes. It is not practical or desirable to make a change to 260,000-plus households recycling and waste collection services at one time. We need to phase work to allow depot upgrades (while we overhaul our depots to deal with additional recyclables we still need to continue with the 'day job') and be able to support residents to change behaviours.

On 9 April 2020 the Managing Director of the SWP took the decision to delay the roll-out of Recycle More Phase 1 due to the unprecedented and uncertain impact that Covid-19 was having on waste services. We have now successfully rolled out in Mendip (kerbside on 26 October 2020, communals on 8 March 2021), South Somerset (June 2021, and Taunton Deane (November 2021).

The continuing and unpredictable impact of Covid (notably the Omicron variant) on staffing absence represents a risk to the smooth roll-out of Phase 4 in Sedgemoor and West Somerset.

Several steps have been taken to mitigate this risk:

- The roll-out of Recycle More to communal properties will take separately to the 'mainline' changes (see 3.1). This is now scheduled to take place in the week beginning 27 June, but we will review this in the coming weeks. This will simplify the February roll-out and, to some extent, reduce the staffing pressures. This approach was also taken in Phase 1 (Mendip) to reduce risk in light of uncertain Covid pressures.
- Deliveries of Bright Blue Bags will start a week earlier than originally planned (7 Feb rather than 14 Feb). This is to allow time to catch-up should the deliveries be affected by heightened staff absence or severe weather. At time of writing,

there is no sign of this risk being realised.

- Delivery of the Warm-up leaflet were paused for one week. Originally planned to arrive from 17 January, it was delayed to allow for any significant post-festive spike in Covid-related staff absence to become apparent.

When	Where	Households
28 Feb 2022	Sedgemoor & Somerset West & Taunton (old West Somerset) 'Mainline' households.	71,000
27 June 2022	Sedgemoor & Somerset West & Taunton (old West Somerset). Properties receiving 'communal' collections of some kind.	Circa 5,500
October 2022	All Somerset schools receiving waste services from SWP.	273 Schools.

2 Updates on progress - tonnages

It is difficult to produce exact district-level figures on tonnages. Routes and depots are designed around operational efficiency rather than local government boundaries (depots receive recycling from more than one district area).

The impact of Covid on home-working and domestic waste has been dramatic and coincided with the change of collection contract and roll-out of Recycle More. This complicates the picture considerably, making it more difficult to precisely isolate the effects of the new service.

We have made best efforts to baseline changes in tonnages in a way that accurately accounts for the varying impacts of Covid and lockdown restrictions. However, figures should be considered estimates.

We are reviewing how best to track Recycle More's impact on both recycling and residual tonnages in the long-term, in the most accurate and consistent way possible. This should be ready for reporting at the next waste board (June) and will be used for other reporting requirements. This data will still come with caveats that Covid has made precise tonnage comparisons and proving causality extremely difficult.

The figures below show variations between districts that are likely to level out as the service is bedded in over time. The longer the whole county is operating on the new service, the more apparent significant longer-term trends will become.

Note: Tonnages will only tell part of the story. An important aspect of Recycle More is the capturing of more plastic for recycling - plastic being both carbon-intensive and taking up considerable space in rubbish bins. Plastic is also very light and so weight measurements will not accurately reflect the positive impact on rubbish capacity and carbon minimisation.

2.1 Residual waste Phases 1-3 (Mendip, South Somerset and Taunton Deane) residual waste tonnages

Moving waste from rubbish bins to recycling is a key objective of Recycle More. In the longer-term reducing waste overall is the ultimate aim and future reporting (see 1.3) will include residual (rubbish/refuse) tonnages. We are still working on most accurate and consistent way of establishing the impact of Recycle More on residual waste, trying to take account of the complications that come with Covid and varying lockdown restrictions.

However, **initial calculations, using the 30-week period before each service change as the baseline, suggest Recycle More is reducing residual waste by around 20%**. Over the course of a year, this would equate to nearly 80kg per household, or around 1.5kg per week (noting that much of the increase is in plastic, which whilst low-weight takes up a lot of space in people's bins and saves a lot of carbon). We will be refining our measures of progress in the coming weeks and will report back at the next board meeting.

2.2 Phase 1 Mendip update - recycling tonnages

We now have updated tonnage figures for 64 weeks of Recycle More in Mendip. As set out below, this continues to show a positive picture and represents a significant change to recycling behaviour.

An estimated 7,533 tonnes of extra recycling (21%) has been collected in this period, an average of 118 tonnes extra per week. This includes an estimated 1,352 extra tonnes of plastics (58% increase) and significant tonnages of cartons, small electricals and batteries.

Across the course of a year, this would equate to nearly 114kg of extra recycling per household per year (2.2kg per week).

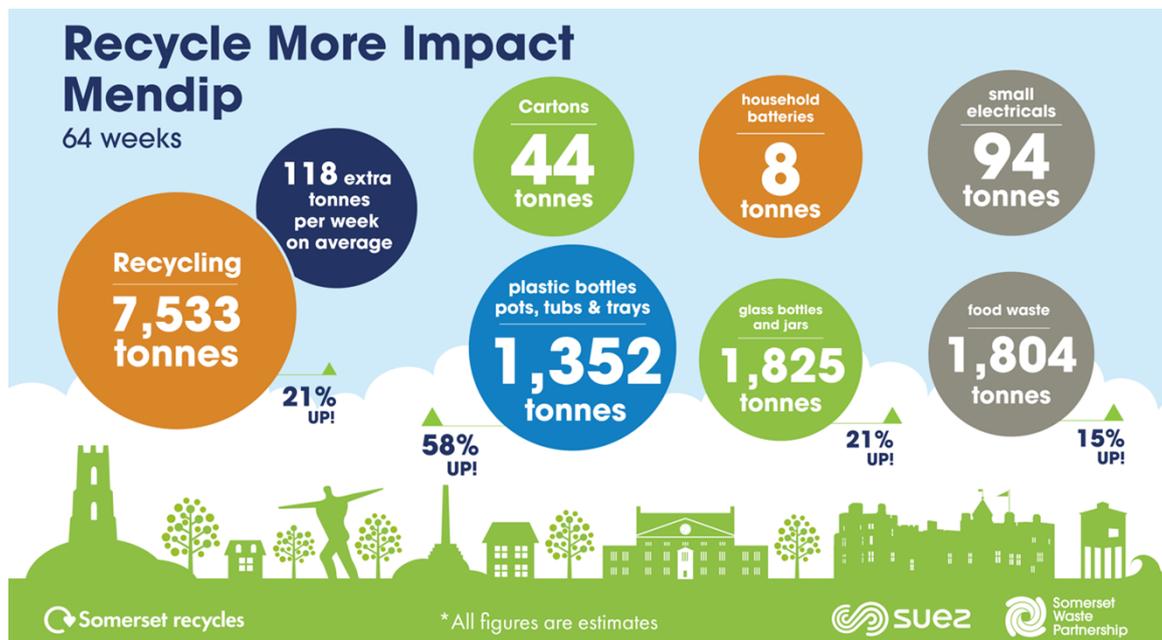


Figure 1: Recycle More 64-week tonnage in Mendip

2.3 Phase 2 South Somerset update - recycling tonnages

The launch of Recycle More in South Somerset was hampered by the nationwide driver shortage, a situation exacerbated by pandemic delays to training, Somerset’s challenging labour market and the strain on crews coping with increased tonnages for a sustained period.

The service has bedded in as crews become comfortable with the new routes and materials, though we will continue to look for performance improvements.

The latest figures for South Somerset, cover Recycle More’s first 29 weeks. Like Mendip, they show a significant boost to recycling tonnages.

An estimated 3,845 tonnes of extra recycling (11%) has been collected in this period, an average of 133 tonnes extra per week. This includes an estimated 725 extra tonnes of plastics (30% increase) and significant tonnages of small electricals and batteries. At this point, no cartons had been exported from the depot. Across the course of a year, this would equate to nearly 87kg of extra recycling per household per year (1.68kg per week).

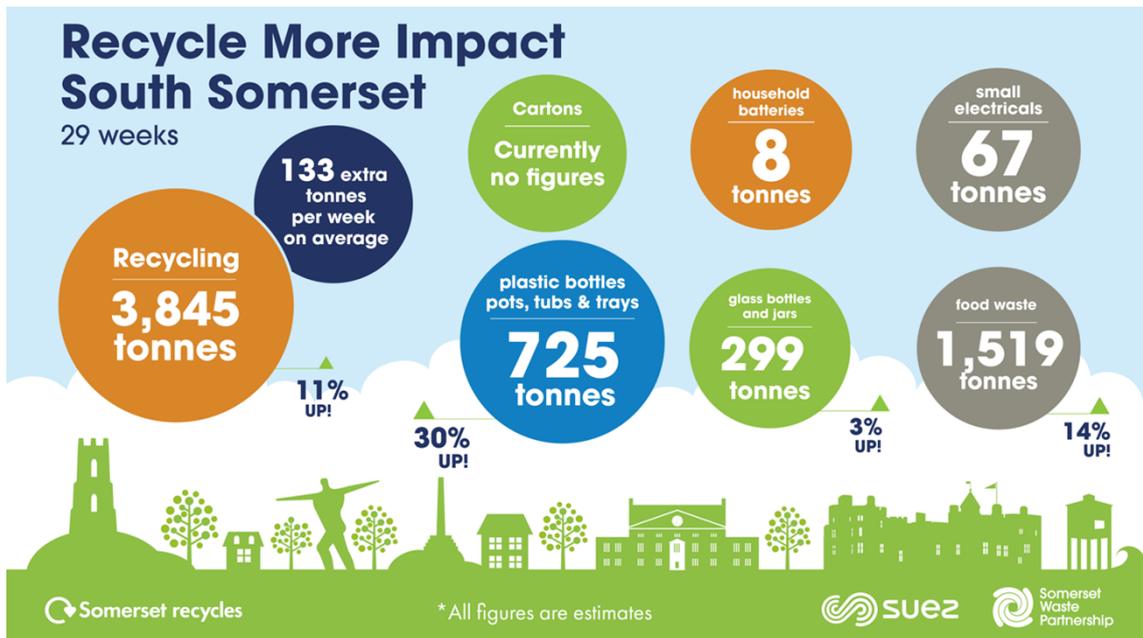


Figure 2: **Recycle More 29-week tonnage for South Somerset**

2.4 Phase 3 Taunton Deane update - recycling tonnages

As discussed at the last board meeting, the launch of phase 3 was the smoothest to date - a major achievement given the pressures on crews and testament to their hard work.

It is still early days in this phase, and the figures for Taunton Deane should be considered indications only.

This is the first phase to launch from a brand new, empty depot and this adds more complications when calculating tonnages. Tonnage figures split by material come from what we transport out of the depot and this only happens when the bays in depots are appropriately full. Therefore, some materials were not exported in the early weeks of this phase because the bays were still filling up. We have tried to take account of this, by excluding the first week of figures, but it will still have had some impact.

With these caveats, **the first ten weeks estimates are that** overall recycling is up 740 tonnes (8%), and average of 74 tonnes per week. Across the course of a year, this would equate to nearly 69kg of extra recycling per household per year (1.33kg per week) but we expect to see this climb as we saw in the earlier phases. An extra 70 tonnes of plastic were collected (17%), an extra 13% (265 tonnes) of food waste. Of the new materials, 4 tonnes of batteries had been collected after ten weeks and 15 tonnes of small electricals. At this stage there had been no exports of cartons from the Taunton depot.

2.5 Collection performance

Performance in the weeks following launch in Taunton Deane has been on a par or better than that seen in Mendip, and substantially better than South Somerset (where collections were hit by the national driver shortage).

Week	Missed Recycling per 100,000 collections		
	South Somerset	Mendip	Taunton Deane
1	1,338	316	604
2	833	253	460
3	972	434	356
4	1,133	396	196
5	1,985	277	187
6	822	170	211
7	408	158	195
8	302	153	239
9	178	181	175

Week	Missed Refuse per 100,000 collections		
	South Somerset	Mendip	Taunton Deane
1	933	526	607
2	679	548	484
3	507	405	469
4	355	293	461
5	433	558	349
6	302	521	360
7	226	320	188
8	206	227	98
9	174	307	20

2.6 Schools Against Waste

Every primary school in each of the Recycle More phases has now been offered a free visit by the Carymoor team to support the roll-out of the service. From September 2020 to date (19 January 2022), the Schools Against Waste team has visited 30 schools in Mendip, 37 in South Somerset and 18 in Somerset West and Taunton. A further 12 bookings have been confirmed so far – seven in Sedgemoor and five in Somerset West and Taunton. Carymoor will be following up earlier invites to West Somerset schools to boost engagement. For the foreseeable future these sessions will be interactive, live virtual sessions though this will be reviewed in light of changing national restrictions. These were devised in response to Covid restrictions and have proved very popular and convenient for schools

3. Preparation for phase 4

3.1 De-coupling of changes to communal properties

As per paragraph 1.2 the communal element of Phase 4 will take place later than the mainline services. This is the same approach taken in Mendip to reduce pressures on the mainline roll-out. At present, this is scheduled for the week beginning 27 June, though this will be reviewed and could change slightly to ensure the best fit operationally. There are around 5,000 households receiving some kind of communal/shared collection, the majority of these in Sedgemoor. Contact has been made with Homes in Sedgemoor and we will be working with them to engage tenants at the appropriate time. All residents will be written to twice before any change. The full implementation of communal refuse changes will also result in some changes to days of collection from communal properties across the County (particularly on refuse) as SUEZ make improvements to the efficiency and resilience of their communal routing.

3.2 Communications and engagement

Stakeholder engagement: This is well underway and will continue up until launch. Detailed briefing packs were distributed to stakeholders in November. Two out of hours virtual Briefing/Q&A sessions were hosted for Councillors at county, district, town and parish level in early December, attracting around 50 attendees. Three Recycle More Messenger stakeholder updates have been sent to political and community stakeholders (including environmental groups, village agents, community group, childcare providers) highlighting key information, reminding of key dates and encouraging community awareness raising and engagement. A further three are scheduled. Regular updates are also provided for staff and member internal newsletters at all partner authorities.

Online engagement: The dedicated recycle-more page on the SWP webpage has been updated and at time of writing was seeing steadily increasing traffic which we expect to jump in later January and through February. We were also seeing the expected increase in engagement through the SWP Facebook page, though, clearly, page engagement is affected by a wide range of factors and issues. Four Recycle More Facebook Q&A Days are being hosted to encourage questions and provide answers. In a change of format, these run from 7am to 7pm. The first session generated more than 600 engagement and a reach of more than 7,000, and we expect engagement to improve as we approach launch day. We are also increasing our use of Nextdoor social media platform, which reaches an audience of over 15,000 in Sedgemoor and West Somerset.

Direct mail leaflets: As with previous phases, the most important elements of communications are the two directly mailed leaflets, in this phase being delivered to more than 70,000 households. The warm-up leaflet arrived five weeks before launch (a week later than originally planned, see 1.2). The crucial "Coming soon" leaflet, which contains individual collection day calendars and a detailed "what goes where?" guide is due to arrive from 7 February (3 weeks before launch).

3.3 Williton Depot works

Upgrading works on the Williton depot are still due to finish in June, having been delayed by supply chain issues and then subsequently by issues finalising lease issues. This will not affect the Phase 4 roll-out and material will be handled by the Walford Cross depot until works are complete.

3.4 Bright Blue Bag deliveries

Deliveries are again being made by SUEZ staff, limiting as much as possible the use of agency staff who will not have the same route and service knowledge. They were scheduled to start on 7 February, rather than the original 14 February (see 1.2). Learning from its success in Phase 3, an informal network of community collection points for bags will be in place again for phase 4. With the support of libraries, Co-op supermarkets and other community bases, these will provide a convenient solution for many customers who for whatever reason did not have a bag in time for their first collection – a nearby location where a bag could be collected rather than waiting for a replacement to arrive.

3.5 Customer services

SWP Customer Contact leads have been in regular contact with counterparts in Sedgemoor and Somerset West and Taunton, sharing timelines, information and supporting documents. Sedgemoor call handlers have had training from SWP and SWT has ensure that its staff, who have experience from Phase 3, are well-briefed on phase 4. The Customer Contact levels from Phase 3 were in line with forecasts and well managed.

3.6 Route optimisation

This has been completed for mainline properties appears to be robust with lessons learnt from earlier phases. Around two thirds of the households in Phase 4 will have a change of collection day. Around 12,500 households will have a one-off, Saturday interim collection of rubbish only to ensure no-one goes more than three weeks without a rubbish collection as they move to the new service - 7,100 of these will take place on Saturday 26 February and 5,400 on Saturday 5 March. This is made clear on the cover and the calendar of leaflets where it applies.

4. Schools Roll-out

As part of Recycle More, Recycle More will be improving recycling service for the county's 273 schools receiving a service from SWP. It will add plastic pots, tubs and trays to collections, adding capacity and improving 'binrastructure' with the aim of boosting recycling rates which currently lag behind domestic rates. The impacts and solutions for individual schools will vary depending on their circumstances and the space and access available. The improvements will be supported by the dedicated Schools Waste Management Officer.

The introduction of Recycle More to schools is scheduled for the week beginning 10 October, though this will remain under review and amended if required. Ahead of that SWP are undertaking an audit of all school sites, considering the facilities currently in place and what needs to be introduced for the move to Recycle More. This process has been going well with good engagement with, and feedback from schools visited.

SWP has attended head teacher association meetings for Secondary and Primary schools to discuss Recycle More (and wider waste topics) and will attend relevant meetings of school Business Managers in the coming weeks.

We will be using established channels to raise awareness among schools and seeking to learn from SUEZ experiences in other parts of the country about how schools can be supported and encouraged to improve their recycling.

5. Options Considered and reasons for rejecting them

- 5.1.** Not relevant as this paper is simply an update on progress. The alternative option of delaying roll-out of Recycle More until the pressures of Covid-19 have dissipated has previously been rejected due to the environmental and financial cost and the acceptance that there is no guarantee as to when those pressures will be gone. Rolling out a new service through a pandemic remains a significant challenge for SWP and Suez - paragraph 1.5 sets out the risks. This will be the case for any significant change being introduced by any authority or organisation in the current uncertain times..

6. Consultations undertaken

- 6.1.** Monthly meetings of the Strategic Management Group (senior officers from each partner) have kept officers up to date with progress in mobilising Recycle More. Business Continuity arrangements in place mean there are frequent meetings with all partners (including customer services and comms). Project meetings are being held with SSDC and SWAT officers (now weekly with SWAT). SDC are shadowing the SWAT meetings to learn ahead of phase 4 roll-out. SWAT District and parish council briefings were held in the summer, and an all-member briefing for SSDC members was held in August to update on the roll-out and service stabilisation. Go/no-go review meetings have been held with the Strategic Management Group and SUEZ at key milestones.

7. Implications

- 7.1.** Recycle More is expected to deliver a significant environmental benefit – reducing the amount of rubbish generated and increasing recycling levels, both of new materials and the half of the average rubbish bin in Somerset that could already be recycled already. Recycle More also results in lower emissions as vehicles will travel less distance overall (with refuse collections moving from two-weekly to three-weekly whilst recycling collections remain weekly).

7.2. Risks: The underlying risks to Recycle More (i.e. the risks of not achieving the stated objectives) remain broadly as they were and have been the subject of previous board papers (see background section). The additional risks related to Covid-19 and the impact this has had on waste services are reflected in our risk register. Covid-19, especially the risk of spread of a more virulent variant continues to place SWP, SUEZ and our partners under extreme pressure and the uncertainty inherent in Covid-19 means it is difficult to fully describe all the potential risks. The risks in relation to driver shortage will exist whether we roll-out Recycle More or not – additional external resource is in place to support SWP/SUEZ through the roll-out period, recruitment and retention work continues, and we expect to require fewer drivers once Recycle More is rolled out. However, any further acute driver shortage and its consequential effects would considerably increased the risk both to service stability and to a smooth roll-out.

8. Background papers

8.1. All previous board papers on Recycle More are available on the SWP or SCC websites. A report on Recycle More is taken to each board meeting.