

Somerset Waste Board meeting  
25 June 2021  
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](mailto:mickey.green@somersetwaste.gov.uk)

<b>Forward Plan Reference:</b>	11.06.2021
<b>Summary:</b>	On 28 June the second phase of Recycle More will roll out in South Somerset. This paper updates on the successful phase 1 roll-out, preparations for the roll-out in South Somerset given the recent service pressures. A verbal update will be provided on the final results of the Mendip Recycle More Customer Satisfaction Survey. Clearly the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic adds to the risks of the roll-out programme, as does the driver shortage and associated pressures on service stability.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report.</b>  <b>That the Somerset Waste Board notes the progress made in implementing Recycle More and the risks to the programme.</b>
<b>Reasons for recommendations:</b>	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 driver shortage and hence service stability.
<b>Links to Priorities and Impact on Annual Business Plan:</b>	Section 1.1 of the SWB Approved Business Plan 2020-25 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.
<b>Financial, Legal and HR Implications:</b>	

	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.
<b>Equalities Implications:</b>	An impact assessment on Recycle More is maintained and updated as the project progresses.
<b>Risk Assessment:</b>	As previously reported to the Board, Covid-19 is a risk to the successful roll-out of Recycle More. The cumulative pressure of Covid-19 over the first year of our contract with Suez has inevitably impacted on the pace with which Suez can embed the behind the scenes changes to meet our high expectations (not least in terms of customer service), and this remains a risk we closely manage with Suez. Recent poor service quality has also put our ability to roll-out Recycle More at risk, primarily due to driver shortages. Suez have been able to secure additional driver resources for the crucial roll-out period to help mitigate this risk, though we cannot eliminate the risk entirely.

## 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. SUEZ will roll out our new collection service model (Recycle More) 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, to 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 recycling rate to around 60%, and reduce the amount of residual waste from around 480 kg/household to 418kg per household – with all the kerbside residual waste being used to create Energy from Waste rather than going into landfill.

## 1.2. Roll-out timetable

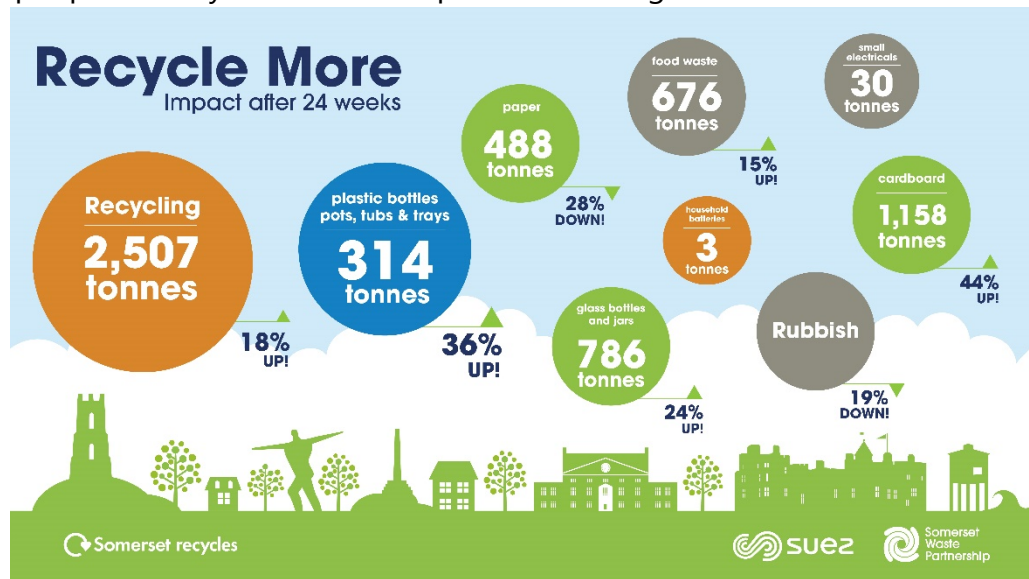
Every time SWP has rolled out a major service change it has phased the changes as it is not practical or desirable to make a change to 250,000 households recycling and waste collection services at one time. We need to phase work to depots (because whilst we overhaul our depots to deal with additional 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 due to the unprecedented and uncertain impact that Covid-19 was having on waste services. Having successfully rolled out in Mendip (kerbside on 26 October 2020, communals on 8 March 2021), and slightly adjusting the roll-out date for the autumn 2021 phase to reflect pressures on the depot build (primarily due to Covid and Brexit impacts) the revised timetable is set out below. Slipping the South Somerset timetable back beyond 28 June risks either rolling out in the height of Summer or pushing back all roll-out phases (with considerable environmental and financial cost).

<b>When</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>Households</b>
28 June 2021	South Somerset (all)	76,653
1 Nov 2021	Somerset West & Taunton (old Taunton Deane)	55,207
28 Feb 2022 (fallback 28 March 2022)	Sedgemoor & Somerset West & Taunton (old West Somerset)	72,312
Schools	Board agreed in Feb 2021 that once the recovery of schools from Covid-19 is clearer a revised timetable will be brought to the Board. We expect to bring this to the Sept Board meeting.	

## 1.3. Phase 1 roll-out: Update on impact

- Updated tonnage figures for the first 6 months (24 weeks) of Recycle More are set out below. This continues to show a positive picture, though as previously highlighted to the board, the changing impact of Covid-19 on people's lifestyles will have impacts on tonnages.



- During March waste services for properties for Communal locations (properties that have a shared recycling collections) changed. Wherever space and access allowed, sites were moved to the full kerbside Recycle More service. Where that was not possible we have aimed to expand communal collections. Many of these properties have had plastic bottles, pots, tubs, and trays as well as cardboard added into their new materials added into their recycling collection. All sites were rebranded, and colour coded bin lids installed. The service change has been delivered effectively and close liaison has been held with the management companies and resident associations throughout the transition and mobilisation. This has allowed us to increase recycling capacity where needed and required. Additionally, SWP have received some requests to reduce refuse capacity through the service. Of the 209 sites, since the start of the new service, only 3 have been reported as contaminated by our contractor.
- Any service change naturally results in a higher level of missed collections as crews get used to the changes and changed routes identify idiosyncrasies that were not previously recorded on our systems (e.g. people presenting waste in an unusual/not obvious location). SWP set a challenging target for Suez to meet in managing missed collections, with a tapered target decreasing from 200 missed collections per 100,000 collections in the first month down to the standard contractual level of 45 per 100,000 (i.e. 0.045%) in the 4<sup>th</sup> month post roll-out. These contractual targets were not uplifted to reflect the pressures of Covid, and the particular pressures on staffing in wave 3 of Covid-19 were discussed at the February Board. Whilst not quite yet at the contractual target level missed collection performance in Evercreech has significantly improved since roll-

out, with refuse missed collections now consistently down to around 75 per 100,000 (i.e. 0.075%) and recycling missed collection down to just over 100 per 100,000 (i.e. 0.01%). This continues to be an area of focus for SWP and Suez, as do service quality issues such as ensuring repeat missed collections are rectified properly once and for all. As part of the roll-out of Recycle More in South Somerset a number of additional rounds will be allocated to the Wednesday collection rounds in Mendip in order to provide additional support on what is our heaviest day (there will be no day changes to Mendip customers), and amendments will be made in future to the communal refuse service in Mendip to ensure that the refuse crews always visit sites the day after the recycling collection in order to address any contamination issues.

- As highlighted in the February update a customer survey of residents in Mendip has been undertaken in order to help us understand how residents feel about the change and to ensure we learn any lessons for future phases. The online survey was promoted in various ways, including content in the Your Somerset newspaper, newsletters and publicity through the media and our social media platforms. This is backed up a hard copy of the survey being sent to a representative sample of Mendip residents. At the time of writing this report around 1500 responses have been received and the results are very positive. The survey closes at the end of May and we will fully analyse the results and present them to the Board on 26 June.

#### **1.4. Service stability and its impact on Recycle More Phase 2**

Board members will be aware of the severe service disruption being experienced, and the causes for this will have been discussed earlier in the agenda (under the performance item). Whilst there are a number of factors underpinning the service degradation, the crucial issue is a shortage of drivers driven by:

- Major national issues in last few years (ageing workforce etc)
- Brexit impacts: EU drivers exited market
- Covid impacts: suspension of HGV Licence testing (i.e. lack of new entrants – also delayed SUEZ 'grow your own' programme), people exiting market, increased competition for drivers
- Local impacts: Historically a tight local labour market (many distribution companies), significant traffic congestion hotspots.

Collection contracts around the country are increasing under pressure as a result of the driver shortage. Anecdotally we are hearing that haulage companies in the county are also suffering.

In w/c 7<sup>th</sup> June SWP escalated these issues to the Chief Executive of SUEZ, and this has been escalated further as despite significant additional driver headcount in w/c 14 June services have been still suffering with serious issues. A verbal update will

have been provided to the Board under the performance item on the further progress in ensuring there is a viable recovery plan in place and the national SUEZ support to ensure this. However, with or without the phase 2 Recycle More, the driver shortage will affect our service resilience – our ability to cope with unplanned pressures (e.g. spikes in sickness, vehicle breakdown, heightened congestion). Numerous actions are underway to increase permanent driver numbers locally, in addition to the short-term measures in place to try and ensure we have sufficient drivers available. Whilst other options (including to delay the roll-out) were considered and discussed at an informal board meeting (also attended by some leaders and the chair of Joint Waste Scrutiny Meeting) these other options were rejected at this final go/no go point. It is worth emphasising that each phase of Recycle More that is implemented reduces the total number of drivers we need as refuse collection move to three-weekly. However, the risk profile has undeniably increased, both for a smooth roll-out and service stability across the County (the latter true whether we roll out or not phase 2 is rolled-out on schedule). SWP will be closely monitoring SUEZ's resource profile, projections and key metrics relating to this and ensuring that our communications to members and the public reflect the higher risks to service stability and provide clearer information to partners in the event of further major service disruption.

### **1.5. Update on planning for phase 2 and 3 roll-outs**

A verbal update will be provided to the meeting, but at the time of writing this report, progress was as follows:

- Successfully delivery of the with 'Warm-up' leaflet to South Somerset homes 6 weeks before the launch. As expected, this led to a spike in container orders (with nearly 3000 individual containers being ordered the week after leaflet delivery) but online systems and South Somerset District Council (SSDC) Customer Services worked well in coping with this pressure. The presence of Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) staff in supporting SSDC with the higher volumes of contact is working well and should stand SWAT in good stead for their roll-out phases.
- As with the roll-out in Mendip, around one-third of residents will have a different collection day as we re-route rounds to make them more operationally and environmentally efficient. All central Yeovil collections will be done on Tuesdays instead of over Wednesdays and Thursdays, with all the surrounding area collected on Wednesdays. Ilminster collections will move to Wednesdays, and all Chard collections will all take place on Mondays, instead of being spread across Mondays and Wednesdays. Somerton, Martock and Langport collections will happen on Thursdays rather than Tuesdays.

Day	Old Main Day Locations	New Main Day Locations
Monday	Crewkerne/South Petherton/Chard	Crewkerne/South Petherton/Chard
Tuesday	Somerton/Martock/Langport	Yeovil
Wednesday	Yeovil/Chard	Ilminster/Surrounding Yeovil Area
Thursday	Yeovil	Somerton/Martock/Langport
Friday	Wincanton/Ilminster	Wincanton/Milborne Port/Bruton

- The 'Pre-launch' leaflets three weeks before launch were delivered. Key lessons learnt from phase 1 have been embedded - include tweaking the approach to encourage even more people to keep hold of the 'pre-launch' leaflet, to further emphasise the plastics that can now be recycled, and to allow a longer lead time to account for any distribution disruption with Royal Mail. Some residents (9,500) will receive an additional letter shortly after the 3 week leaflet to let them know they will also have an interim collection, as our quality control processes identified that their interim collections had incorrectly been excluded from the leaflet. Final checks revealed c2500 properties not included in the original mail-outs so they will receive their 'Pre-launch' leaflet (including collections calendar) later than others, but still prior to launch.
- The use of video and more graphical content on social media (particularly Facebook) has continued, with a number of Facebook Q&As and Talking Cafés held.
- With the fast-rising numbers of followers on Facebook heading past 15,000, tens of thousands of engagements each month, and contents shared with dozens of targeted local groups, social media is being fully used as an effective tool for communication, dialogue and support.
- Unsolicited feedback on social media includes:

I would like to applaud you on your new recycling initiative. Having monitored the amounts of plastic we will soon be able to recycle, I estimate that in future we will average half a black bag of non-recyclable waste every three weeks. I think we will be able to recycle two to three times more than that every week, well on the way to my target of a 10:1 ratio between recyclable waste and non-recyclable waste. Thank you!

We think the plan for Recycle More is very good, and I do not underestimate the amount of preparation, planning and management that is necessary for such a change. Our view of the conduct and quality of the existing service is positive, and there have been very few errors and omissions during our 13 years here. On the waste and recycling containers themselves, I think that they are sensibly proportioned and economical. I have seen streets in other areas where the entire streetscape is dominated by excessively large and numerous containers, which are themselves an environmental threat.

- Following the learning from phase 1 that we needed to do things differently to drive attendance at stakeholder meetings, 99 representatives booked to attend the District and Parish Council stakeholder meetings. A number of members from MDC attended the District Councillor sessions so that they could give an unfiltered local member perspective on how phase 1 went – SWP is grateful for the support of those members. SSDC emailed reminders a week before booked District and Parish Council stakeholder events. Despite this, for whatever reason not all attended the session they booked and further work is required to understand the barriers to attendance and how we can boost engagement in

future phases. An additional meeting was offered for Parish Environment Champions, which received 13 bookings.

- 110 bright blue bags have been delivered to district councillors, parish councillors/clerks for them to test drive.
- Whilst our campaign remains largely online, with the gradual opening up of the world we have been able to put Recycle More displays in a number of high footfall areas (e.g. supermarkets). 17 have been booked so far and almost 6000 leaflets distributed/allocated. Recycling sites in South Somerset are hosting promotional banners.
- Our Recycle More Schools Against Waste programme continues to progress well. 31 South Somerset schools have already booked SAW visits (63.3% of the target of 49), 19 of which have already been completed. We expect that some South Somerset schools will continue to book for autumn, but working with Carymoor Environment Trust we are confident that there will be capacity to complete these and support schools in SWAT ahead of phase 3.
- Recycle More has been promoted in every edition of Your Somerset in a targeted way appropriate for the phased introduction. South Somerset editions of 'Recycle More Messengers' are being sent to over 400 stakeholders, and frequent press releases are also being sent out, with associated digital content where appropriate.
- Planning for phase 3 on 1 November (what was Taunton Deane) remain on track. The build of the new depot at Walford Cross remains on schedule. Members will have seen in the press about risks to building supplies, and this remains a key risk to the build programme. Contingency plans are in place to ensure that the roll-out on 1 November 2021 can still go ahead should there be delays to the build programme, and clearly any future waves of Covid-19 may also have an impact. A verbal update on the risks to phase 3 roll-out will be provided at the meeting.

## **2. Options Considered and reasons for rejecting them**

- 2.1.** 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 has previously been rejected due to the environmental and financial cost, though rolling out a new service through a pandemic remains an incredible challenge for SWP and Suez. Paragraph 1.4 sets out the risk that service instability in early June has caused and the consideration of other options. The alternative option to delay this phase of roll-out was rejected primarily due to the additional resources in place temporarily to support rollout and service stability (with roll-out then reducing our total driver resource requirement) and due to the financial, environmental and customer detriment from delay.

## **3. Consultations undertaken**

- 3.1.** Monthly meetings of the Strategic Management Group (senior officers from each



partner) have kept officers up to date with progress in mobilising Recycle More. A monthly meeting of customer service leads from SWP and all partners ensures close communication. Project meetings are being held with SSDC and SWAT officers (fortnightly with SSDC as service launch is imminent, and monthly with SWAT at the time being). SDC are shadowing the SWAT meetings to learn ahead of phase 4 roll-out.

## **4. Implications**

**4.1.** 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). Lessons learned are being gathered throughout the implementation, to inform future phases of the roll-out.

### **4.2. 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 were reported to the board in July and 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. A specific section of our Business Continuity Plan is devoted to the risks to Recycle More. The key risks related to the Taunton depot build programme (from Brexit related impacts to building materials/supply chain, Covid absence amongst contractors, and delays in securing planning permission) are being closely monitored. 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, it is clear that driver shortage and its consequential effects have considerably increased the risk both to service stability and to a smooth roll-out.

## **5. Background papers**

**5.1.** 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.