

Recycle More Update

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Forward Plan Reference:	23/11/21
Summary:	<p>On 28 October the third phase of Recycle More rolled out in the Taunton Deane area. This follows the introduction of the service to South Somerset on 28 June this year and Mendip at the end of October 2021. This paper updates on progress with bedding in the service change in South Somerset and Mendip and very early days of the service in Taunton Deane.</p> <p>It also updates on preparation for the final phase of the roll-out programme in Sedgemoor and West Somerset, planned for the end of February 2022. A review of readiness for roll-out will be discussed at the Board meeting, reflecting the risks to the whole service from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, driver shortage and associated pressures.</p>
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:	<p>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.</p>
Links to Priorities and Impact on Annual Business Plan:	<p>Action 3.1 of the SWB Approved 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</p>

	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 partner’s 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. The cumulative pressure of Covid-19 over the first eighteen months of our contract with Suez has inevitably affected the pace with which SUEZ can embed the behind the scenes changes to meet our high expectations (not least in terms of customer service). This remains a risk we closely manage with SUEZ. A repeat of recent poor service quality, primarily due to driver shortages, would also put our ability to roll-out Recycle More at risk. At the time of writing (mid-November) staffing levels are sufficient and services have stabilised. However, the underlying nationwide driver shortage has not gone away and high tonnages continue to present a challenge.

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 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 260,000-plus households recycling and waste collection services at one time. We need to phase work to allow depots 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 due to the unprecedented and uncertain impact that Covid-19 was having on waste services. We successfully rolled out in Mendip (kerbside on 26 October 2020, communals on 8 March 2021), South Somerset at the end of June 2020, and slightly adjusted 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.

When	Where	Households
26 Oct 2021	Mendip (communal properties done later on 8 March 2021)	51,768
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
TBC	Schools – Recycle More will also enhance school recycling services. 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 (see below).	

1.3. Phase 1 roll-out (Mendip): Update on impact

Because routes and depots are designed around operational efficiency rather than local government boundaries, it is difficult to produce exact district-level figures on tonnages (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 roll-out of Recycle More, further complicating the picture and making it more difficult to precisely isolate the effects of the new service. We have endeavoured to baseline changes in tonnages in a way that accurately accounts for the impacts of Covid, but please consider these figures estimates.

- We now have updated tonnage figures for a full 12 months 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 5,613 tonnes of extra recycling have been collected in the first year, an average of 108 per week. This includes an estimated 1,061 tonnes of plastics and significant tonnages of cartons, small electricals and batteries. These figures will include the changes that were made to communal collections in Mendip in March this year.

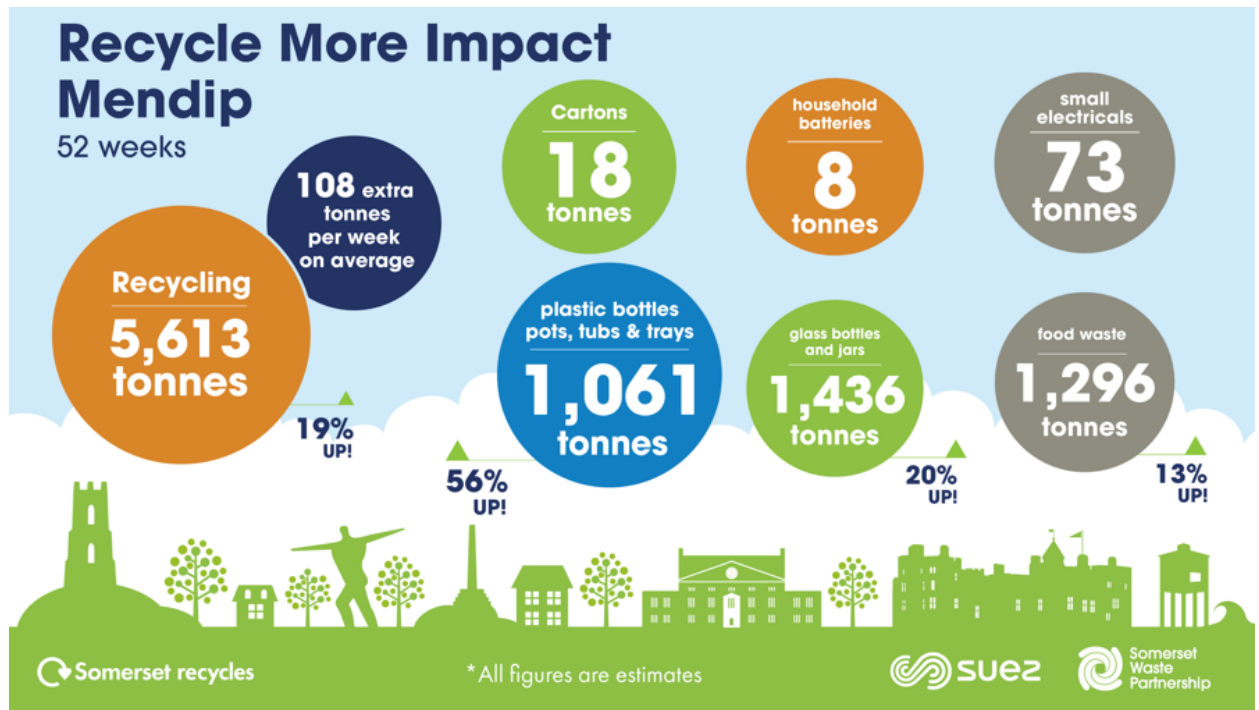


Figure 1: Recycle More 12-month tonnage in Mendip

1.4. Phase 2 roll-out (South Somerset): Progress update.

Board members will recall that the launch and initial embedding of Recycle More in South Somerset was significantly hampered by the nationwide driver shortage, a situation that has been exacerbated by pandemic delays to driver training, Somerset’s challenging

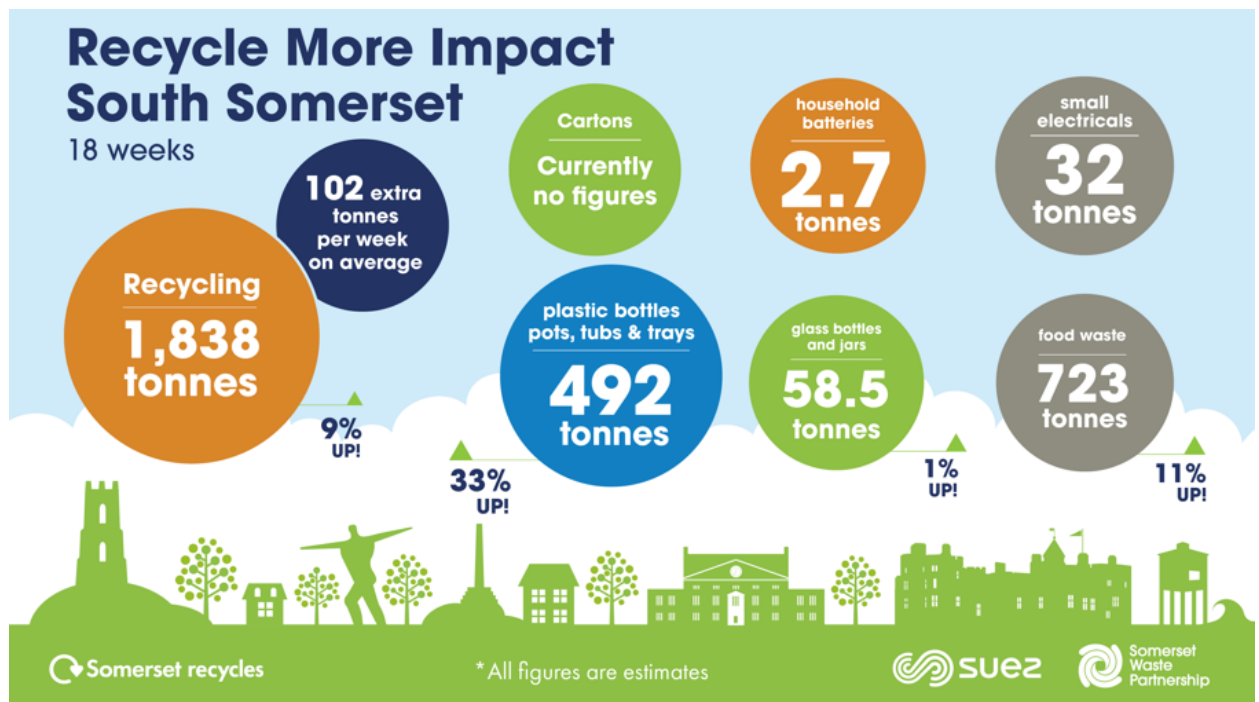
labour market and the strain on crews who have been coping with increased tonnages for a sustained period.

Various actions have been undertaken by Suez to address the issue, and while the situation services are fragile that are much improved on where they were during the summer roll-out in South Somerset.

These pressures saw poor collection performance in the early stages of the roll-out and in the delivery of Bright Blue Bags ahead of service launch, but the situation has improved as staffing numbers and services got back on track.

Operational changes at the Lufton depot (recycling and garden waste collections now running from the site as well as refuse) had affected collection reliability in some localised areas last month. Additional staff and management support is now in place to address these issues, with the early signs of improvement being encouraging. The latest figures for South Somerset, covering 16 weeks, are below and, like Mendip, show a significant boost to recycling tonnages.

Extra recycled is estimated at more than 1,838 tonnes, more than 100 tonnes a week on average including nearly 500 tonnes of extra plastics. These figures demonstrate the challenges of accurately baselining and measuring progress in the wake of Covid impacts and over a short period of time. The extra tonnage of glass was considerably higher at 12 week than 18 weeks, a tail off in recent weeks as brought weights closer to the baseline.



1.5. Phase 3 roll out (Taunton Deane): update on Progress

At time of writing, it is still very early days and too soon to draw conclusions, however the launch seems to have gone smoothly, with lessons learnt from previous roll-outs successfully applied. A summary of the roll-out to date is set out below, but an update (including on early tonnages) will be provided at the meeting.

Communications and engagement

Stakeholder engagement:

- Two virtual briefing/Q&A sessions were hosted for county and district councillors (12 and 14 July) and town and parish councils (28 and 29 July) in the area, and a fifth hosted (7 October) in light of low take up. Our sense is that, with half the county already having Recycle More, many members felt well informed without the need for an additional briefing.
- Two briefing/Q&A were presented to Taunton Deane Care Providers at their regular meetings with social care managers.
- Five Recycle More 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.

Online engagement:

- Visitors to the Recycle More page of the SWP website climbed from 3,138 to 6,679 between August and October as the page was promoted through various channels including through the media, the direct mailing leaflet and display materials.
- Engagements on the SWP Facebook page increased from 6,653 in August to 11,025 in October (though, clearly, page engagement is affected by a wide range of factors and issues).
- Four out of hours Facebook Q&A sessions were hosted between 15 September and 5 November, two between 7-8am and two 7-8pm. Between them these generated more than 1,800 engagements and a reach of 28,500.
- We also increased our use of the Nextdoor platform, which reaches an audience of over 12,000 in Taunton Deane.

Events:

The easing of Covid restrictions made face-to-face public engagement (with appropriate precautions) possible for the first time in the roll-out of Recycle More. Five events (two in Taunton Fore Street, Wellington Food Fare, Wiveliscombe Town Square and Priorswood Community Centre) engaged with around 800 residents providing information and answering questions.

Direct mail leaflets:

The two direct mail leaflets were updated and amended based on feedback from Phases

1 and 2, for example new collection day on from cover as well as the calendar inside, more information about plastics. The “Warm-up” leaflet arrived as planned six weeks before launch. Royal Mail delivery of the important “Coming soon!” was for many, we believe as part of the general pressures on postal services. As a result, leaflets started arriving four or five days later than planned and a relatively small number of residents received their Bright Blue Bag before the leaflet. This does not seem to have caused any issues of significance but we will do whatever we can to avoid this in phase 4.

Depot rebuild

The Walford Cross depot upgrade was completed on time and in time for the launch of Phase 3. Some cosmetic and snagging works continue, but nothing that has had an impact on operations.

Bright Blue Bag deliveries

Learning lessons from Phase 1 and 2, this has been a smoother operation. All deliveries were made by Suez staff rather than agency or a third party. Although there will always be a small proportion missed or poorly delivered, the majority arrived how they should and when they should. In addition to this, SWP organised an informal network of community collection points for bags. With the support of libraries, Co-op supermarkets and other community bases these provided 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 be delivered. The success of this will be reviewed and decision made on whether to do the same in phase 4.

Collection performance

At time of writing, we can only reflect on the first two weeks of collections (an data for the third week may change if more missed reports come in), but the performance has been notably better than that seen in South Somerset and in line with what was seen in Mendip (note the number of properties in the South Somerset phase is higher than in Mendip and Taunton Deane)

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

Week	Missed Refuse per 100,000 collections		
	South Somerset	Mendip	Taunton Deane
1	933	526	607
2	679	548	484
3	507	405	469

Customer services

SWP has worked closely with the Somerset West and Taunton Customer Contact team to

prepare for the roll-out and preparations put in place during the planning stage are proving to be very effective. At time of writing, contact levels are high but within the projections and the team is managing the call traffic well. There have been no major issues and both SWT and SWP Customer Services are happy with the way things have gone.

Phase 4 preparation:

Preparation for Phase 4 is well underway and early December represents the go/no-go point (i.e. reviewing whether services are stable enough and preparations and risk mitigation are going well enough to proceed on the planned timetable). At the time of writing this report we remain on track for the planned rollout on 28 February, but given the significant risks under which we are operating (covid-19, driver shortage etc) a verbal update will be provided to the Board.

Williton Depot upgrade

The upgrade of the Williton depot will not be completed until around June, with work starting in January. This is due to the disruption to supply chains internationally which are hampering construction project timelines. SUEZ have now de-coupled the depot construction timeline from the roll-out timetable – effectively with trucks being shunted back and forth from Williton until it is upgraded, and with additional temporary vehicle parking near the existing depot. Whilst this does add another risk to the roll-out, it outweighs the potential disbenefit of delaying the rollout to after Summer 2022.

Route optimisation

This has now been completed for both mainline and communal properties and provided to SWP. Initial findings are that the routing appears to be robust with lessons learnt from both phase one and two, and we have emphasised the need for consultation with drivers and crews to be a key part of this exercise. Around two thirds of the 72,000 households in Phase 4 will have a change of collection day.

Communications and engagement

By the time of this meeting, initial communications and engagement will have started, with briefing packs sent to various stakeholders, both elected members, potentially interested and affected groups of various kinds. Two briefing and questions and answer sessions were due to take place this week for county and district councillors and towns and parishes. The first Recycle More Messenger stakeholder update is due to be issued before Christmas, with the rest following in the New Year along with four Facebook 'Q&A days' starting in the New Year along with – Covid restrictions allowing – public events (details TBC).

Schools Against Waste

Every primary school in each of the Recycle More phases is offered a free visit by the Carymoor team to support the roll-out of the service. Since September 2020, the Schools Against Waste team has visited 30 schools in Mendip, 35 in South Somerset and four in Taunton Deane. A further 12 visits to Taunton Deane schools (and another in South Somerset) have been booked and visits will be made between now and the end of January. Primary schools across the Phase 4 area will be extended an invite for a visits in the New Year. For the foreseeable future these sessions will be interactive, live virtual sessions. These were devised in response to Covid restrictions and have proved very popular and convenient for schools.

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. At time of writing, the timing of the roll-out of the improved schools services was still to be confirmed, following discussions with Suez and engagement with Headteacher Associations to minimise disruption.

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 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 4.2 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.

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. Regular project meetings are being held with SDC and SWAT officers. 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.

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 risks related to the 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, but are not expected to impact on phase 4 as the roll-out is not contingent on the depot construction programme. 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. The cumulative fatigue and morale of staff from the pressures on them over the last 18 months can also not be under-estimated, and SWP are working closely with SUEZ to improve morale.

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.