

Somerset Waste Board meeting
24 June 2022
Report for decision

Paper
Item No.

Recycle More Update

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Forward Plan Reference:	08.06.2022
Summary:	By early July Recycle More will have been rolled-out across the county (the service being introduced to communal properties in Sedgemoor and West Somerset happening at the end of June). This paper provides a progress update on the expanded kerbside service and plans to roll-out to schools.
Recommendations:	The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report. That the Somerset Waste Board 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 Covid-19 pandemic has added risks of the roll-out programme, as does has national shortage.
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:	Recycle More has achieved break even earlier than anticipated, see Financial outturn and use of balances 21/22 report.
Equalities Implications:	

	An impact assessment on Recycle More is maintained and updated as the project progresses.
Risk Assessment:	The roll-out is set to be completed by the end of the June/early July. The impacts of Covid-19 have been a significant risk throughout the successful introduction of the new service, although these have clearly eased in recent months. 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 (early June) staffing levels are sufficient and services have stabilised though further improvement is needed. Covid absence continues to be monitored closely and the underlying nationwide driver shortage also remains a challenge to recruitment.

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 including the phased roll-out of our new Recycle More collection service. It enables the public to recycle more through the kerbside sort system, adding the following materials to the weekly collections:

- 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') provides extra space for recycling. With 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 (where space and access allow, 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 scope to recycle more 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 toward 60% and reduce the

amount of residual waste by up to circa 23% – with all the kerbside residual waste being used to create Energy from Waste rather than going into landfill.

Note. SWP's introduction of Recycle More has been short-listed for the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2022 in the "Environmental Services" category.

1.2. Roll-out timetable

Every time SWP has rolled-out a major service change it has taken a phased approach. It is not practical or desirable to change recycling and waste collection services for 260,000-plus households at one time. Phasing work allowed depots to be upgraded and gave time for public engagement, support and behaviour change work.

The roll-out of Phase 1 (Mendip) was delayed due to the unprecedented and uncertain impact that Covid-19 was having on waste services. We have successfully rolled out in Mendip (kerbside on 26 October 2020, communals on 8 March 2021), South Somerset (June 2021), and Taunton Deane (November 2021) and to all mainline properties (non-communal) in Sedgemoor and West Somerset.

In light of the unpredictable impact of Covid (notably the Omicron variant), several steps were taken to manage the risks to a smooth roll-out of Phase 4 (Sedgemoor and West Somerset).

Mainline properties in Phase 4 received the new service at the end of February, while communal properties will see Recycle More introduced in late June/early July. This separation reduced the pressure on the mainline roll-out in light of uncertain Covid pressures (the same approach was taken in Phase 1, Mendip, when Covid pressures were also prominent).

The changes for Phase 4 communal properties starts the week beginning 27 June.

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 5,600
October 2022	All Somerset schools receiving waste services from SWP.	273 Schools.

2 Phase 4 roll-out (Sedgemoor and West Somerset)

The introduction of Recycle More to mainline properties in Sedgemoor and West Somerset started in the week beginning 28 February.

As well as delaying communal aspect of the roll-out, the risks posed by Covid and national driver shortages were further mitigated by:

- Starting the delivery of Bright Blue Bags a week earlier than originally planned (7 Feb rather than 14 Feb). This built in 'catch-up' time should deliveries be affected by heightened staff absence or severe weather.
- Delivery of the Warm-up leaflet was 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.

2.1 Extra pressures and complications

A number of factors added to the pressures and challenges to a smooth roll-out.

Storm Eunice saw a cancellation of all collections on Friday 18 February. This meant crews needing to catch-up the missed rounds (which included Saturday working) in the build-up to the launch of Recycle More. This added strain on crews already committed to consecutive Saturdays for interim collections on 26 February and 5 March (approx. 12,000 in total).

The period immediately before and several weeks after launch coincided with a time of fuel supply problems, some mechanical issues with vehicles (and slower than usual delivery of spares), and some increased staff absence. After an initial positive start this resulted in higher levels of missed collections and slower return for missed collections than we expected. A verbal update to the Board under the performance paper will summarise the ongoing progress since then

2.2 Phase 4 communications and engagement

Stakeholder engagement:

Detailed briefing packs were distributed to stakeholders in November 2021. 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. Five Recycle More Messenger stakeholder updates were sent to political and community stakeholders (including environmental groups, village agents, community group, childcare providers) highlighting key information, reiterating key dates and encouraging community awareness raising and engagement. 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 was been updated and we have seen the expected steadily increasing traffic, along with increased 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 were hosted to encourage questions and provide answers, running 7am to 7pm.

We expanded our use of the Nextdoor, which reaches an audience of over 15,000 in Sedgemoor and West Somerset. Four posts generating nearly 200 comments/questions. More than 500 votes were cast in two polls and showed a shift toward 'Excited. Can't wait!' as the launch date approached.

Direct mail leaflets:

As with previous phases, the most important elements of communications were 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 2). The crucial "Coming soon" leaflet, which contains individual collection day calendars and a detailed "what goes where?" guide arrived from 7 February (3 weeks before launch).

3. Impacts of Recycle More on refuse/rubbish and recycling

As mentioned in previous reports, isolating the impacts of Recycle More on refuse and recycling tonnages has been challenging because of the effects of the pandemic and associated lockdown restrictions.

The new service launched in different districts at different times, so each has been affected to greater or lesser extents.

3.1 Recycle More impact on refuse/rubbish

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.

Mendip offers the best opportunity see the changes year on year since it has been running the longest (since October 2020). In the first 17 months of Recycle More in Mendip, there has been an average decrease of just over 20% or around 1.5kg each week per household.

The monthly impact – comparing post-Recycle More weights with the corresponding month in the previous year - ranges from a decrease of 28% (comparing May 2021 against May 2020), to a little over 1% when (comparing February 2022 against February 2021). It should be noted that from April 2021 all figures will have been affected by the pandemic and the related lockdown

restrictions.

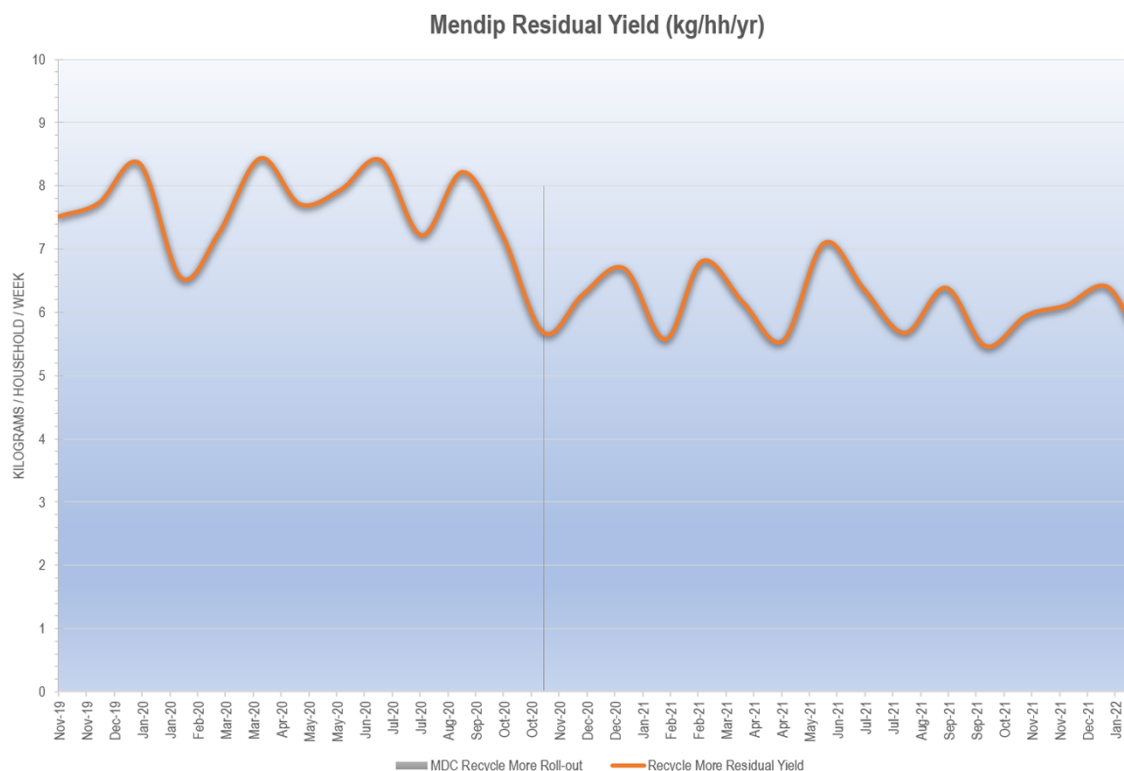
The graph (Figure 1) shows a clear dip in refuse/rubbish after the launch of the service in Mendip in October 2020.

The figures for the remaining phases do not cover a full year on the new service and, inevitably, compare post-Recycle More tonnages to tonnages that have all already been impacted by the pandemic – making it harder to draw firm conclusions about the impact of the new service and long-term trends.

However, South Somerset shows an average decrease in refuse/rubbish of 14% in the first nine months of the new service (up until March 2022). In Taunton Deane there is an average decrease of nearly 23% after five months. In Sedgemoor and West Somerset, only one month of data is available, showing decreases of 19% and 12% respectively – though not too much should be read into a single month's tonnages.

The longer the service is in place, the clearer the long-term trends will be. But at this stage we appear to be seeing the introduction of Recycle More producing a decrease in refuse/rubbish of around 20%.

Figure 1



3.2 Recycling and 'total kerbside waste arising'

The picture for recycling is more complicated, with different trends in different material streams which affect overall tonnages – for example, there appears to have been an accelerated rate of reduction in paper recycling over the last two

years, but increases in others such as plastics.

Reporting accurate waste tonnages on a district-by-district basis is extremely challenging.

Collection rounds and depot tipping are set up to be as efficient as possible and do not follow local authority boundaries. For example the Evercreech depot receives waste from Mendip *and* parts of South Somerset. Producing accurate data about what waste is from which district relies on correct apportionment by crews which cannot always be guaranteed.

Many rounds run through two district areas, and the waste collected is attributed to the district with the majority of properties, rather than apportioned to each district. There are also regular unplanned events (e.g. mechanical failure, road closures) that can mean vehicles from different areas servicing or supporting a round and tipping into different depots for periods of time. Any allocation of data to Districts therefore inevitably relies on many assumptions.

It is worth noting that as per a decision made by the Waste Board, we have not reported district-level waste data to the Board since 2016-17, acknowledging the difficulty of providing accurate information at this level.

In addition to this, the period of Recycle More roll-out saw other complicating factors:

- The re-routing of many rounds - this has made routes more efficient, but means they cover different areas which undermines 'before' and 'after' comparisons.
- The opening of the Walford Cross transfer station. Routes covering parts of both Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor tip at Walford Cross. The empty depot needed to be filled before material started to be exported and this means recycling tonnages from these district areas will be understated to some extent in the first few months.

Initial estimates of Recycle More recycling increases for each phase were also, by necessity, calculated using different baselines (to try and account of the impact of Covid lockdowns restrictions on waste) and assumptions based on material sampling.

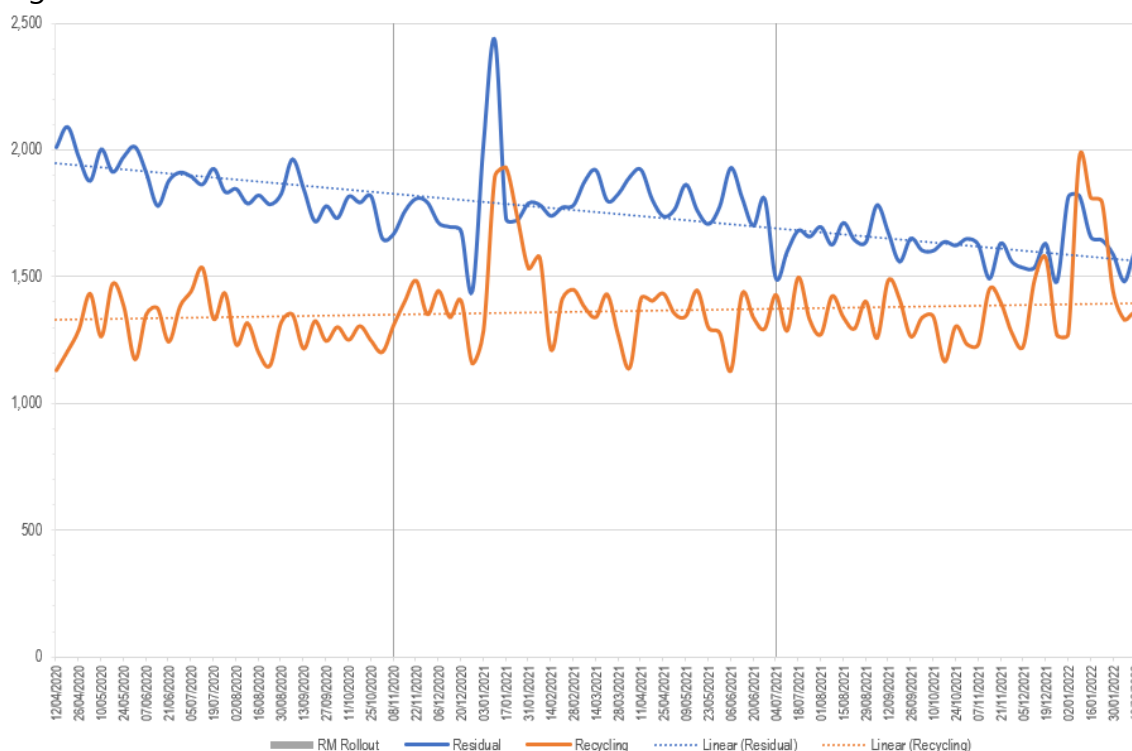
We are still exploring how to track recycling increases on a district-by-district basis in a way that is consistent and accurate, but countywide figures will be more robust. It should also be noted that we will not be able to properly understand the impact of the new service until it has been introduced and bedded-in across the entire county.

Figure 2 plots the reduction in refuse/rubbish across the whole of the county (approaching 400 tonnes per week) and the increase in the recycling (around

100 tonnes per week) over a two-year period starting in April 2020 and ending March 2022. There are peaks and troughs across the year, some seasonal and others likely to be the result of pandemic restrictions.

It is important to note that in this time period, phase 2 (South Somerset) will only have been contributing nine months of impact to the county figure, phase 3 (Taunton Deane) only five months and phase 4 (Sedgemoor and West Somerset) only a month. i.e. we are still some way from seeing the full impact of Recycle More.

Figure 2



Together, this indicates a reduction in 'total arisings' from at the kerbside of approaching 300 tonnes per week across the county, around 10%.

A reduction in overall waste generated, driven by a reduction in refuse/rubbish and an increase in recycling would be a win-win – less waste being generated and a greater proportion of what is generated is going to recycling.

The reasons for this could be many and varied and more time is needed to see if this is a continuing trend and how waste levels responds to a truly 'post-pandemic' period. That said, the reduction in residual waste and significant increase in our recycling rate are clear to see already.

Please note. During the transition of our core services contract from Viridor to Biffa a small discrepancy was found between the figures for food waste collected at the kerbside and the figures for food waste delivered to the Anaerobic Digestion Plant. We are reviewing this in more detail, but it is likely to result in

a small increase in kerbside recycling tonnages (possibly around half a percent).

4. Collection performance

Performance in the weeks following launch in Sedgemoor and West Somerset show that the 4-6 week period after launch was difficult, impacted by the factors mentioned in 2.1.

At the time of writing, we are seeing incremental but sustained improvements as the service beds-in and routes benefit from a period of stability.

Week	Missed recycling per 100,000 collections			
	Mendip	South Somerset	Taunton Deane	Sedge/ W Somerset
1	316	1,338	604	554
2	253	833	460	493
3	434	972	356	389
4	396	1,133	196	584
5	277	1,985	187	667
6	170	822	211	417
7	158	408	195	270
8	153	302	239	263
9	181	248	175	261
10	313	294	118	158
11	279	193	107	151
12	257	245	133	112

Week	Missed refuse per 100,000 collections			
	Mendip	South Somerset	Taunton Deane	Sedge/ W Somerset
1	526	933	607	586
2	548	679	484	352
3	405	507	469	444
4	293	355	461	570
5	558	433	349	667
6	521	302	360	559
7	320	226	188	312
8	227	206	98	312
9	307	186	20	291
10	174	169	109	247
11	284	216	80	200
12	255	190	70	258

5. Schools Against Waste

Every primary school in each of the Recycle More phases has been offered a free visit by the Carymoor team to support the roll-out of the service. From September 2020 to date, the Schools Against Waste team has visited 30 schools in Mendip, 40 in South Somerset and 28 in Somerset West and Taunton and 15 in Sedgemoor. A further eight bookings have been confirmed so far – three in Somerset West and Taunton, two in Sedgemoor and Mendip, and one in South

Somerset. Carymoor will continue to offer interactive, live virtual sessions as standard, although some face to face visits have been booked. The virtual sessions were devised in response to Covid restrictions and have proved very popular and convenient for schools. Since Sept 2020 to date (24 May 2022), only seven of the 113 Schools Against Waste visits carried out have been in person, with two of the eight future confirmed bookings requested also being "in person".

6. Preparation for phase 4 communals

This involves around 5,600 properties, with a concentration in the Bridgwater area.

As with previous phases, individual sites have been reviewed in terms of the available space and access, to understand the best collection arrangements.

Information postcards were distributed at approx. six weeks ahead of the change (week beginning 16 May) and the more details direct mailing arriving by the end of the week beginning 6 June.

These more detailed letters set out the change for households, including expanded recycling where possible, changes to collection days and the date of the first collections under the new arrangements.

7. Williton Depot works

Upgrading works on the Williton depot are due to start in July and expected to be completed in three to four months, having been delayed by supply chain issues and then subsequently by issues finalising lease issues. This has not substantially affected the Phase 4 roll-out and material will be handled by the Walford Cross depot until works are complete.

8. Schools Roll-out

As part of Recycle More, we 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 still scheduled for the week beginning 10 October, though this will remain under review and amended if required. An audit of all school sites is around 90% complete, considering the facilities currently in place and what needs to be introduced for the move to Recycle More. Engagement with schools has been good with lots of positive

feedback.

SWP 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.

9. Options Considered and reasons for rejecting them

- 9.1** Not relevant as this paper is simply an update on progress. The potentially disruptive pressures of Covid-19 have not, at time of writing, materialised to a significant degree so there is not need to delay the final stages of the Recycle More roll-out.

10. Consultations undertaken

- 10.1** 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 communications). Additional meetings and updates with SW&T and SDC colleagues arranged as needed.

11. Implications

11.1 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).

11.2 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 risks have diminished significantly but are still be monitored. The national shortage of drivers continues to be a risk, though the period of most acute pressure appears to have passed.

12. Background papers

12.1 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.