

Recycle More Update

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Summary:	On 26 October the first phase of Recycle More was rolled out to around 52,000 homes in Mendip as planned. This paper updates on the successful first few weeks of that roll-out, noting that risks remain (especially due to Covid-19). A presentation will be provided to the board to give an up to date picture.
Recommendations:	That the Somerset Waste Board notes the successful progress made in implementing Recycle More.
Reasons for recommendations:	Report for information only. 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.
Links to Priorities and Impact on Annual Business Plan:	Section 1.1 of the SWB Approved Business Plan 2020-25 concerns the implementation of Recycle More. All partners have declared climate emergencies/similar, and the environmental benefit from Recycle More is an important part of achieving these.
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	Recycle More is anticipated to breakeven during the early part of quarter two of 2022/23 as reported to the board on 31 July 2020. It is still expected that the saving from Recycle More will exceed £2m per annum. The anticipated savings figures have been shared with s151 Officers for inclusion in each partners MTFP process. The position will continue to be monitored and updated as roll out commences and the board will be updated accordingly, but it is too early to provide a substantive update on the financial savings

	from the roll-out at this point in time. 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.
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 elevated levels of infection seen in Somerset mean that we are at higher risk of staff absences, and the lockdown means we risk seeing elevated levels of tonnages like we did in the last lockdown – making it harder for our crews to complete their rounds.

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 this residual waste being used to create Energy from Waste rather than going into landfill.

1.2. Revised 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 Somerset Waste Partnership 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. The revised roll-out schedule for Recycle More agreed by the Board in July 2020 is as follows:

When	Where	Households
26 Oct 2020	Mendip (all)	51,768
28 June 2021	South Somerset (all)	76,653
27 Sept 2021 (fallback 25 Oct 2021)	Somerset West & Taunton (primarily old Taunton Deane)	55,207
28 Feb 2022 (fallback 28 March 2022)	Sedgemoor & Somerset West & Taunton (primarily old West Somerset)	72,312

As agreed by the Board in July 2020, communal properties in Mendip were not included within phase 1, but we plan to extend the range of materials they can recycle expanded on 8 March 2021 (adding plastic pots, tubs and trays and ensuring all can recycle cardboard, on top of paper, glass and metal existing recycling). We will take this opportunity to simplify the range of services accessed by communal properties (reducing the risk of confusion) so that all communal properties are either:

- 1) Communal rubbish and communal recycling only (and wherever it is possible for any household in the communal location to have a weekly kerbside food waste collection then we will encourage this)
- 2) Communal rubbish and kerbside recycling only (inc food)
- 3) Communal rubbish only (for the very small number of properties where circumstances prevent us from enabling recycling)
- 4) Full kerbside service (individual bins for rubbish and kerbside recycling)

As set out in the business plan, we intend to then review food waste recycling at communal properties in 2022 to seek to ensure that all households can recycle food. Whilst days of refuse collection may change for some communal properties, the

frequency of rubbish collection will not change as a result of Recycle More.

As agreed by the Board in July 2020 Schools will still roll out in two phase, and it is anticipated that we will roll out Recycle More to schools in Mendip and South Somerset on 28 June 2021, and to schools in Sedgemoor and Somerset West & Taunton in either Sept 2021 or February 2022. A finalised timetable will be brought back to the board later in this financial year.

1.3. Communications and Engagement: Phase 1 Summary so far

Direct communications

- Two-stage direct mailing was a key tactic for providing information to the public, with 'Warm-up' and 'Pre-launch' leaflets distributed at six weeks and then three weeks before launch. Both leaflets arrived slightly later than planned due to mailing house and data issues, but this does not seem to have caused any significant issues. The Pre-launch leaflet was particularly important, containing information about what should go into each container and a bespoke collection day calendar.
- Traffic to the Recycle More website, as well as early presentation and contamination figures, suggest these leaflets successfully delivered core information to the majority of residents. Copies were provided in Arabic, Mandarin and Braille on request.
- We will consider feedback from various sources to make improvements for future phases.

Social media

- In the absence of face-to-face engagement, SWP's well-established Facebook presence (12k+ followers pre-launch) has been a focus for engagement with the public.
- Facebook engagements increased more than six-fold from September (4,423) to October (27,700) and nearly 300 more followers were added. Much of this can be explained by the investment in in-house digital content combined with keen interaction with the comments and questions these generates.
- Engagement with video rose dramatically in the run up to launch, albeit from a low base. Some examples of well-viewed video content include an introduction to the change film (15k views in October), introductory animation (14k views in Sept/Oct), 'what goes where?' animation (9k views in October).
- The tone of Facebook discussions were a mixture of enthusiasm and challenge, though predominantly seeking information, especially around the Bright Blue Bag, new materials (especially which plastics are collected) and three-weekly collections. This has continued to be the case since launch and engagement on the SWP page has gradually reduced week on week.
- The virtual engagement (see below) worked well and will be something to build on for future phases, particularly if COVID restrictions persist.
- SWP's Twitter engagement also doubled in October, to more than 2k, though

it is a less useful platform for the 'discussion' style engagement needed for Recycle More.

SWP's website

- SWP's website has had a dedicated page on Recycle More for many months, and content has been regularly updated and added to. It has been used to host information and guidance, video and animation content and an FAQ.
- Views of the page doubled between August to September (4.1k views to 8.3k) and doubled again in October making it the second most viewed page on the SWP website with 16k+ visits in October.
- Significant spikes in traffic to the page coincided with the delivery of the Warm-up and Pre-Launch leaflet. Approximately a third of visitors to the page came by directly typing in the correct address, and another third referred from Facebook or other online locations – for example the Mendip District Council website was the most common referral route to the page during October. Together, these suggest that direct communications, social media and partner support have successfully directed people to the right place for information and guidance.

Virtual engagement

- In the absence of face-to-face events, SWP ran four dedicated Facebook Recycle More Q&A sessions between late August and the end of October. These were in addition to the 'Business As Usual' social media engagement. Two took place in the evening (7-8pm), one in the morning (7-8am) and one on a Saturday 11am-12noon to give a spread of out of hours opportunities. The four sessions produced nearly 6,400 engagements in total and a reach of 31,700, with more than 500 comments – suggesting these should be replicated in future phases.
- SWP also hosted two, 45 minute slots on the Mendip Talking Café, run by the Community Council for Somerset, as we wanted to reach those that may be more isolated. The viewing figures (September: 2.8k, October: 3.7k) suggests this will be worth replicating in other roll-out areas if possible.

Stakeholder engagement

- We have had to work with the challenges of COVID, which has ruled out face-to-face engagement, relying more on online and virtual routes as well as written information:
- In August, briefing packs were sent out to various stakeholders, including elected members at parish, town, city, district and county level, and MPs; as well as non-political groups and organisations across Mendip.
- Since then we have provided stakeholders with regular updates, pre and post launch, and highlighted opportunities for engagement.
- Starting at the beginning of September, Recycle More Messenger updates (seven in total) have been distributed; summarising information, reminding of key dates and sign-posting to engagement opportunities and further information. Updates have also been sent to elected members beyond Mendip

at key, major milestones.

- As well as briefing to the Mendip Cabinet meeting in early September, all Mendip elected members (parish, town, city, district and county) were invited to three Teams meetings over the course of the month (two in the evening, one in the daytime). Attendance at these was disappointing, though possibly this is due to Recycle More having been on the Mendip radar for some time. The discussions that did take place were productive – reflecting support but also concerns and challenge. An invite was also extended to elected members in Mendip to pick up Bright Blue Bags from early September, to encourage engagement and understanding of the service. 29 Councillors collected bags.

Publicity/promotional materials

- The use of publicity and promotional materials has been blunted by COVID restrictions which have discouraged content that encourage dwell time. Our materials primarily direct people to the Recycle More webpage for information.
- Variations of display materials, some with take away information, were in place in ten locations in Mendip – four libraries, five supermarkets and the MDC offices (when open).
- Promotional posters – including an editable version to assist local messaging – were shared repeatedly with all stakeholders and the three recycling sites in Mendip hosted promotional banners.
- Two of the SWP pages in the September Your Somerset were dedicated to Recycle More, with the Mendip edition giving more relevant information. A similar approach is being taken to the December edition.
- Through the pre-launch and post-launch period we have distributed Press Releases at key points, the majority of these to Mendip media only – conscious that the new service is not yet available across the county. This has generated largely balanced coverage, in print, online, radio and both regional television outlets. Which coverage has tended to lead with three-weekly collections, this has been balanced by the additional recycling and including key messages around materials.

Schools engagement

- This has also been affected by COVID, with the shift to 'virtual' assemblies and workshops with the Carymoor Environmental Trust successfully transferred to activity online.
- This has been offered to all 52 Mendip primary schools, and despite the obvious competing priorities and disruption facing schools, at Mid-November 20 had signed up for sessions and initial feedback has been very positive.

1.4. Customer Experience

As reiterated throughout the preparation for Recycle More, success comes from supporting residents to change their behaviours. It is also a challenge for our crews: re-routing rounds serving over 50,000 households is a logistically complicated

exercise. Crews have to get used to new rounds, collect different materials in different containers and report exceptions so that we understand where we need to provide more support to residents. The pressures on our crews are significant given that they are also coping with Covid-19 – resulting in higher levels of staff absence than normal and higher levels of presentation with more people at home for longer. Key areas SWP have been focussing on are:

- 1) ***Ensuring residents have understood any change in collection day and supporting those that haven't:*** 38% of residents in Mendip have had their refuse and recycling day changed and all kerbside served households have had a change in waste collection frequency. During the first two weeks of Recycle More, Suez report 96% of residents presented recycling and 95% presented refuse bins for collection on the correct day. Typically presentation rates for collection are around 90% and this strong return indicates a positive understanding of the day changes by the public. In order to mitigate levels of non-presentation both Suez and SWP staff visited areas and, where a bin was not presented on collection day, they presented the bin for collection on behalf of the resident and provided the resident with literature to reinforce the day change. Refuse missed collections reports have been screened to ensure that they are not reporting against their incorrect collection day. SWP receive, on average, 10 reports a day from residents reporting against the wrong day.
Ensuring that residents understand what goes in what container: as set out above, this was a key focus for our communications (including the leaflet through their door). Whilst a small minority of residents have been confused about what plastics are expected, our sampling shows that the vast majority have understood what we take and what goes where. Should the collection crews notice contamination within the recycling this would be tagged with an educational leaflet and collected if possible. Less than 1% of properties have been tagged due to contamination of the recycling presented. However, from feedback (e.g. through social media) it is clear that more can be done to explain the types of plastics that are accepted and those that are not. This is something that we are addressing in future communications (e.g. social media, content online and in the Your Somerset Newspaper) and will reflect on for future phases.
- 2) ***Ensuring that all residents have the new bright blue bag and any additional recycling containers:*** As expected, we have seen very high demand for recycling boxes. On average the SWP deliver around 1700 recycling and food waste containers a week. After the day change notification literature was delivered this rose to over 4000 a week for over three weeks. To mitigate for the expected increase in container demand SWP reviewed purchasing arrangements to ensure that a steady and deliverable pipeline of orders was in place. Additionally, SWP increased warehousing capacity to allow us to move away from a “just in time” supply chain to mitigate against the risk of supplier/delivery failure. SWP worked closely with Suez to increase their delivery capacity, which was effectively

doubled during the periods of peak demand and worked Saturdays, to make sure that we've been delivering all of our containers requests within 5 working days of receipt. We have seen higher than expected demand for the bright blue bag – both where people need a second bag and where they didn't receive one in the first place. Nearly 3,000 bright blue bags have been ordered since the start of recycle more and have absorbed within the existing container management process. This is an area we will learn lessons from and seek to improve in future roll-out phases.

Supporting those residents who worry they will struggle to cope with 3 weekly refuse collections: We expected a surge in customer contact surrounding the transition to 3 weekly refuse collections. Pleasingly this (as yet) has not been as big an issue as we had initially expected and we have only been receiving around 10 or so extra capacity requests a day since communications and services began. We expect as the first full cycles of three weekly refuse collections come into operation, we may see more requests. The main message has been to give the service a go, which by and large, the residents of Mendip have been doing. Experience elsewhere show that in the majority of cases people find that after trying the service, the capacity issues are not what they first feared.

- 3) **Identifying areas where residents need further support:** Presentation of blue bags has been high in most parts of Mendip with 96% recycling presentation. As the service beds in we are using crew exception data, where crews identify additional bins and excess waste to target residents to provide advice and help to get people to Recycle More.

Amongst the most important areas for us to manage are missed collections and ensuring we deal with the elevated level of customer contact.

1) **Managing customer contact:**

In the run-up to Recycle More SWP produced a demand analysis to resource against projected levels of container demand and customer contact, we also streamlined some processes to make the customer journey easier. Overall SWP, Partners and Contractors resourced accordingly to the projected demand, ensuring that transactions are processed within SLAs. Demand has been high as a consequence of the change in service in MDC with SWP processing around 250 transactions a day at peak. However, this is broadly in line with our expectations. There were some lessons learnt, particularly around Bright Blue Bag deliveries, which led to significant un-forecast customer contact, which is something that we will be looking to change. Disappointingly the on-line self-service fell as a percentage of total transactions dropped from over 50% to 39%. We are still reviewing this and understanding why this was the case and how we can drive it up in future roll-outs.

2) **Missed collections:**

It was expected that missed collections would rise in the period after the service roll-out. Our contract with Suez set very challenging targets for this – raising the

level at which performance deductions apply from 45 missed collections per 100,000 (i.e. 0.045% missed collections, or 99.955% of successful collections) to 200 in the first month after roll-out, 125 in the second month and 75 in the third month before reverting to the contractual norm.

The changes to waste collections in Mendip for recycling and refuse required a complete revamp of all the rounds. This has been a complex change, the logistical design of the new routes across 55,000 properties is challenging, despite the quality control and validations deployed, there will remain gremlins within the plan itself. Crews need to familiarise themselves with the new routes and their intricacies, sometimes in areas where they have never worked before. We expected there to be a temporary downturn in the quality of service for these reasons. The routes are under technical snagging review daily with Suez to highlight and fix the issues. We are learning and ensuring that these issues are not repeated. During the first three weeks of the service we missed 769 recycling collections (success rate of 99.5%), and missed 193 refuse collections (success rate of 99.7%). These numbers are above our contracted figures but we expect through continual improvement to achieve contractual levels. Missed collections are being addressed promptly and learnt from. Some collection days within the service are difficult as they require high productivity levels from Suez staff, though pleasingly the recycling service in particular has seen a step-change improvement in week three. We are working with Suez to ensure that the problem is fixed whether that is through improved routing or ultimately the provision of additional resources to stabilise the most difficult operational days.

A presentation will be provided to the board at the meeting which provides more up to date data on these areas as Recycle More continues to bed in.

1.5. Tonnage

At the time of writing this report we are only in the fourth week of Recycle More implementation (i.e. only just completed the first full cycle of refuse collections). Analysing tonnages over such a short period of time needs to be done with caution as data over such a short period of time can be affected by many other factors such as the impact Covid-19 is having on behaviours, the impact of Halloween on food waste, how residents may have stockpiled the new materials ahead of Recycle More, the fact that the full impact of moving to a three weekly cycle is unlikely to yet be being felt, the time it takes before individual materials are sent out for reprocessing. Using data from such a short period of time to extrapolate what might happen over a longer period of time needs to be undertaken with extreme caution. However, the initial indications are positive:

- Over the first three weeks of Recycle More we collected an extra 174 tonnes of recycling compared to the average from the month before (noting that Covid-19 would have led to elevated tonnages in the previous month).

- Of that extra material notable highlights include:
 - o 20% increase of plastics, with a higher impact in the first week (possibly as an impact of stockpiling)
 - o Sampling of the blue bags collected on a range of rounds shows that 94% of what was captured was target material (23% being plastic pots, tubs and trays) with the most common contaminants being cardboard, food residue, particulates and Tetra Paks
 - o 34% more food waste (which reflects the extremely high demand for food waste caddies ahead of the roll-out and of course the impact of Halloween pumpkins). Capturing more of the food that is currently thrown away was a key aim of Recycle More
- Having just completed the first cycle of rubbish collections it remains too early to have reliable data on residual waste tonnage, though initial data continues to suggest a reduction in residual waste tonnage collected in Mendip since Recycle More was launched

A presentation will be provided to the board on 4 December providing more up to date data.

2. Options Considered and reasons for rejecting them

2.1. Not applicable as report is for information only.

3. Consultations undertaken

3.1. Bi-weekly meetings of the Strategic Management Group (senior officers from each partner) have kept officers up to date with progress in mobilising Recycle More. As set out section 1.3 of this report, the Board, Scrutiny and Mendip Members have been regularly updated on progress.

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 is placing SWP, Suez and our partners under considerable 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 specific risks to Recycle More.

5. Background papers

5.1. All previous board papers on Recycle More are available on the SWP or SCC websites.

- 29 March 2019 Board meeting agenda and papers
- 9 June 2020 Decision to delay Recycle More
- 23 April decision on phase 1 of revised Recycle More roll-out timetable
- 30 July decision on overall Recycle More roll-out timetable