

Somerset Waste Board meeting
24 September 2021
Report for decision



Recycle More Update

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Forward Plan Reference:	03/08/2021
Summary:	<p>On 28 June the second phase of Recycle More rolled out in South Somerset. As highlighted to the Board in June 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, and this unfortunately did impact on the success of the South Somerset roll-out. This paper updates on progress with bedding in the service change in South Somerset and the plans to roll-out Recycle More in Taunton Deane on 1 November 2021. A verbal update will be given to the board on the risks associated with the roll-out. A go/no-go review was taken at the end of August and all partners and an informal meeting of the Board. The paper also provides the final results of the Mendip Recycle More Customer Satisfaction Survey.</p>
Recommendations:	<p>That the Somerset Waste Board: -</p> <p>I. notes the progress made in implementing Recycle More and the risks to the programme.</p>
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>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</p>

	from Recycle More is an important part of achieving these.
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	As set out in the finance paper, Recycle More is forecast to breakeven during quarter three of 2022/23 and deliver savings to all partners of over £2m per annum. As previously agreed, no savings as a result of the new contract will be taken from the Somerset Waste Partnership until all roll out costs have been fully funded and breakeven point is reached. The anticipated savings figures have been shared with s151 Officers for inclusion in each partners MTFP process. The finance paper provides an update on the anticipated breakeven point and level of savings, which we will continue to regularly review as roll out continues.
Equalities Implications:	An impact assessment on Recycle More is maintained and updated as the project progresses.
Risk Assessment:	As previously reported to the Board, Covid-19 is a risk to the successful roll-out of Recycle More. The cumulative pressure of Covid-19 over the first year 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. When this paper was written (early September) the comprehensive range of mitigations had meant SUEZ were at full deployment, however the underlying risks have not gone away.

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 250,000-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 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.

When	Where	Households
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.

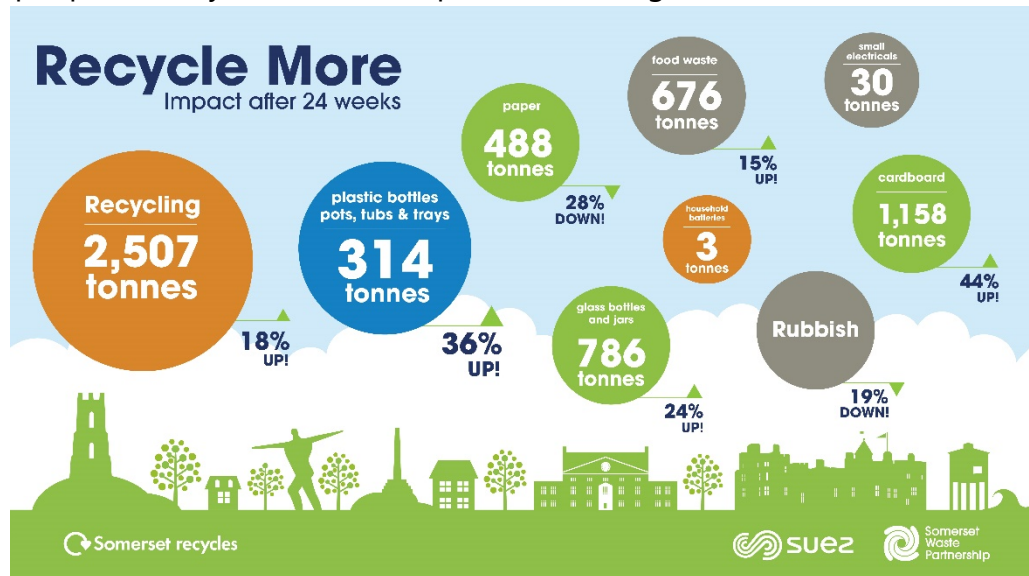


Figure 1: Recycle More 6 month tonnage in Mendip

- During March waste services for properties for Communal locations (properties that have a shared recycling collections) changed. Initial changes of bins and categorisation of different requirements across sites went well and implementation of plans did complete on time. The change has been successfully implemented with regular collections and good customer utilisation of the improved scheme. An early issue was identified with the vehicle accessibility of some of these locations and was resolved by Suez quickly
- 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). As part of the roll-out of Recycle More in South Somerset a number of additional rounds were 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 were 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. These changes have helped to improve the robustness of the recycling and communal refuse services within MDC.
- A verbal update was provided to the Board in June of a customer survey undertaken of residents in Mendip (sharing results from c1500 online responses). The survey aimed 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. It was backed up a hard copy of the survey being sent to a representative sample of Mendip residents. The combined online and hard copy results are summarised below:



Figure 2: Final results from Mendip post RM customer survey

The figures show significant support for the new, very similar to the levels of support seen following initial trials more than six years ago. Further analysis of the results is being undertaken to identify any demographics trends behind the headline figures.

1.4. Service stability and its impact on Recycle More Phase 2 (South Somerset)

Board members will be aware of the severe service disruption experienced over the summer primarily driven by the national driver shortage. It is estimated that the UK is approx. 100,000 drivers short, with SUEZ in Somerset short by around 25 drivers out of c180 required. Whilst driver shortages have been a long-term issue with an ageing workforce profile (which SUEZ's plans to have full employment/no agency staff and to train up loaders recognised), this was exacerbated by:

- the pandemic (delays to driver training and testing – 25,000 fewer LGV tests than normal) and Brexit (loss of some EU drivers).
- **Somerset specifics:** High employment, many logistics and distribution companies = hard to recruit drivers and loaders and agency staff sometimes not available either.
- **Lockdown easing:** Quickly exposed the worsened position. Alternative opportunities for drivers and other would-be crews, supply of agency staff unreliable
- **Staff exhaustion and morale:** Loads 20% heavier (more people at home through pandemic), long period of long hours, temporary depot and transfer stations, extra travel time. Sickness and annual leave higher than expected, with occasional spikes.

Members will be aware that SWP was not the only waste authority affected, nor that the waste sector was alone in this – with many headlines focusing on the impact on pubs, supermarkets, restaurants and other sectors. The impact on the South Somerset roll-out was acute. The issue hit us very suddenly 2 weeks before planned roll-out in South Somerset (i.e. after all leaflets had hit doorsteps) and an informal board meeting reconsidered go/no-go. A roll-out always places us under pressure, and the combined effect of a roll-out with the driver shortage did lead to problems with the service for which SWP apologise. The performance report sets out the steps taken to recover service stability and a verbal update will be provided to the meeting. Particular impacts on South Somerset (and the progress in recovering from these issues) were:

- Shortfall of blue bag agency delivery staff affected the smoothness of distribution. Although 98% of the 80,265 blue bags were delivered before the start of Recycle More (an improvement on Mendip), some residents had to wait too long to get their bag and we were not able to respond quickly enough where residents request bags and other recycling containers. SUEZ used Transporting Somerset to support on Saturdays, brought in support from around SUEZ nationally, and contracted with a third party delivery company called Jet to get deliveries back on track. Learning for phase 3 includes plans to have small stocks of bags in the community so that people who are missed can easily collect one. With an improving labour market the risk currently appears lower, but SUEZ are also working on a contingency plan (a third party delivery company) for phase 3.
- With the pressures on the service levels of missed collections were too high and not brought down quickly enough. The tables below compare progress week-by-week with Mendip. SUEZ are still working to address key issues, including repeated round incompleteness on Tuesdays in Yeovil, issues with narrow access, elevated levels of missed assisted collections (e.g. due to crews unfamiliar with a round) and insufficiently effective closure of repeat missed collections.

Week	Missed Recycling per 100,000 collections	
	South Somerset	Mendip
1	1,338	316
2	833	253
3	972	434
4	1,133	396
5	1,985	277
6	822	170
7	408	158
8	302	153
9	178	181

Table 1: missed recycling collections in phase 2 compared to phase 1

Week	Missed Refuse per 100,000 collections	
	South Somerset	Mendip
1	933	526
2	679	548
3	507	405
4	355	293
5	433	558
6	302	521
7	226	320
8	206	227
9	174	307

Table 2: Missed refuse collections in phase 2 compared to phase 1

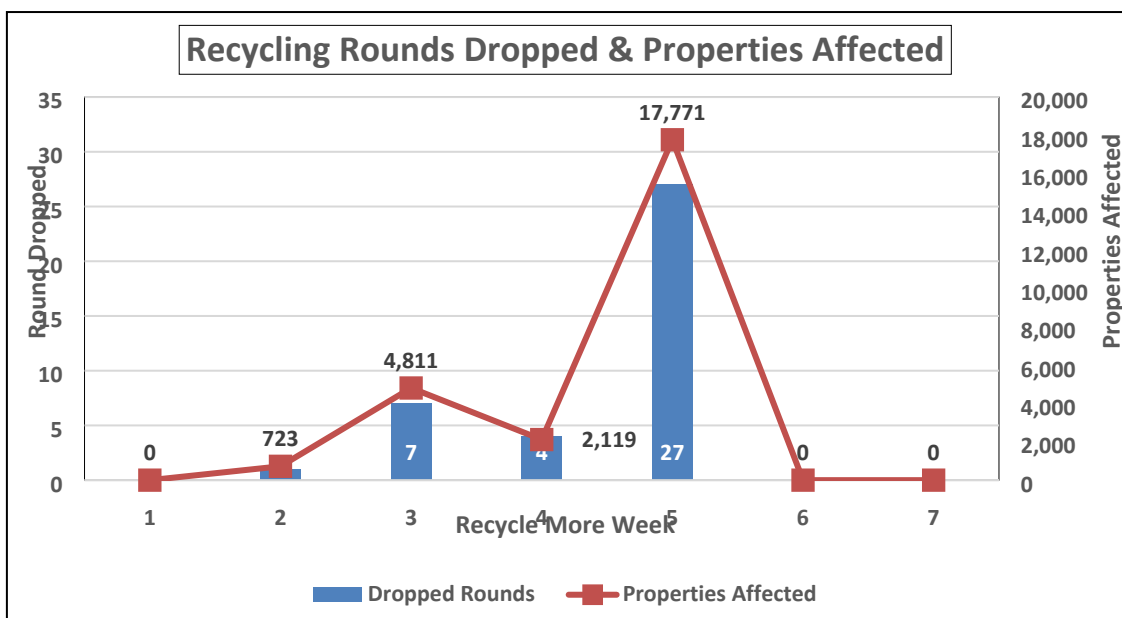


Figure 3: Dropped rounds in South Somerset

- The levels of missed collections, dropped rounds and incomplete rounds (which has been too high but gradually falling as services stabilised) led to severe pressure on SSDC customer services. SWP have funded additional resource and used a third party call centre (Agilysis) to support SSDC. As services have stabilised this pressure has reduced.

Despite these issues, the environmental performance from south Somerset is very encouraging, though it remains early days. Figures for the first 5 weeks are (with an update to be provided to the board at their meeting):

- Overall increase in recycling = 588 tonnes, 100+ extra tonnes a week and a 10% rise (11% in Mendip after five weeks)
- 88 tonnes of extra plastic. 22% up (was 23% in Mendip)
- 649 tonnes of extra cardboard. 45% (was 19% in Mendip)
- 150 tonnes of extra food waste. 8% (was 15% in Mendip)
- 11.6 tonnes of small electricals (was 6.4 tonnes in Mendip)
- It is looking like just under 98% of recycling is in the right place at the right

time (94% in Mendip). In reality this is likely to be slightly lower (i.e. more people doing the wrong thing) as it relies on crew reporting and crews have been under severe pressure. However, this is still very positive.

- At this stage, due to the timing of waste flows and reporting, we do not have reliable waste reduction figures yet

1.5. Update on planning for phase 3 and 4 roll-outs

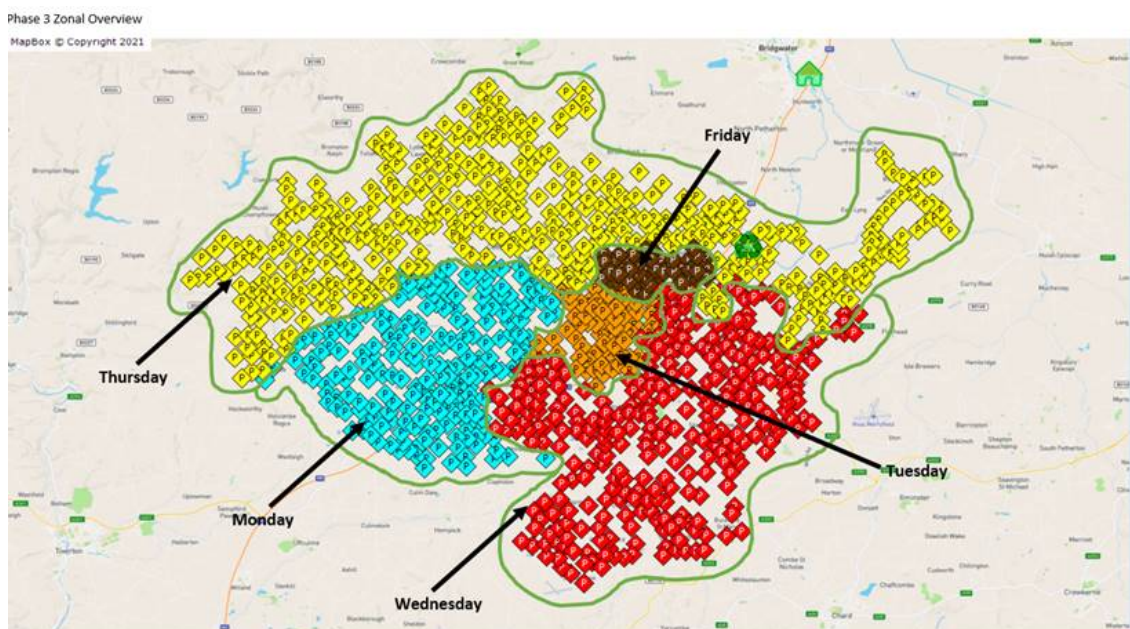
An informal board meeting was held at the end of August (following a meeting with partner officers) to review the go/no go decision for phase 3 (Taunton Deane). It concluded that the risk profile has undeniably increased, both for a smooth roll-out and service stability across the County but that the risks to the roll-out were being adequately managed and the risks and impacts of delay to the roll-out were greater than proceeding as planned.

A verbal update will be provided to the meeting, but at the time of writing this report, progress in preparing for the roll-out in Taunton Deane on 1 November was as follows:

- Plans for blue bag delivery have learnt lessons from MDC and SSDC rollout and contingency plans are being developed
- The Walford Cross Depot should broadly be completed on time/only slightly late – mitigation plan in place and power issues being resolved (baling equipment will be ran on a generator initially)
- Missed collections for Taunton are reducing and broadly on track to meet target dates as projected, though this remains a key risk SWP and partners will monitor closely.
- Taunton depot now has enough drivers, loaders and supervisory staff to stabilise service and prognosis is good, but remains a major risk (Covid and labour market impacts). Morale and exhaustion remain a risk requiring ongoing review and mitigation. Improved staffing levels should mitigate this and SWP and SUEZ will continue with meetings of a workforce cell to address these issues.
- Call centre resourcing appears adequate, with suitable contingency plans in place to secure additional resources. Communication plans are on track. An additional parish council briefing is being scheduled as attendance at events held earlier was disappointing.
- Suez is reasonably confident that it will have sufficient additional staff to support the service mobilisation but cannot guarantee this – key risk for ongoing mitigation.
- Route optimisation data has been received and has been reviewed by SWP. Initial findings are that the routing appears to be robust with lessons learnt from both phase one and two. Whilst the number of properties served by each round is broadly comparable to phases one and two there is significantly less travel time than in MDC and SSDC. Around 100 properties in Burrowbridge and Athelney will not be transitioned as part of phase 3, but will be transitioned with phase 4 in early 2022. The reason for this is that these

properties are serviced from Bridgwater and to change this would introduce undue risk. Specific communications to the affected residents, parishes and local members will explain this.

- Around 60% of households in Taunton will have a change of collection day. Whilst this is higher than the circa. one-third in Mendip and South Somerset, SWP is reassured by the apparent robustness of the routing and the high levels of public understanding of day changes in previous phases. Map 1 shows at a high level what parts of Taunton will be served on what day.



Map 1: Zonal pattern for Taunton area from 1 November

Since September 2020, the Schools Against Waste team has visited 30 schools in Mendip and 34 in South Somerset to support the introduction of Recycle More. They have 2 confirmed bookings for September – one for South Somerset and one for Taunton and are speaking with a Mendip school. This represents completing 60.0% of targeted schools in Mendip and 69.4% in South Somerset. The team continue to provide school visits in these areas, although priority will now be given to Taunton Deane area to support phase 3.

The team did contact Taunton Deane schools at the end of last term to book for the autumn term, but most preferred to wait until the new school year to think about such things. They will be doing another phone around in w/c 13 September and a verbal update will be provided to the board on take-up.

The virtual family sessions on the 3Rs offered over the summer were cancelled due to poor response. Following the success of the family day at Carymoor around the 3Rs including visit to the waste tunnel, the cancelled virtual sessions were replaced by physical sessions offered at Carymoor Education Centre over the summer.

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 1.5 sets out the risks. This will be the case for any significant change being introduced by any authority or organisation in the current uncertain times..

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. Business Continuity arrangements in place mean there are frequent meetings with all partners (including customer services and comms). Project meetings are being held with SSDC and SWAT officers (now weekly with SWAT). SDC are shadowing the SWAT meetings to learn ahead of phase 4 roll-out. SWAT District and parish council briefings were held in the summer, and an all-member briefing for SSDC members was held in August to update on the roll-out and service stabilisation. An informal board meeting (with the chair of Joint waste scrutiny and leaders invited) was held in late August to review go/no-go for phase 3.

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.