

Somerset Waste Board meeting
10th February 2023
Report for information

Reuse and Community Action Groups (CAG)

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Forward Plan Reference:	<i>FP/22/06/05</i>
Summary:	This report updates on progress on reuse and developing a Community Action Group network.
Recommendations:	The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report. It is recommended that the Board notes the progress made.
Reasons for recommendations:	Reusing things that would otherwise become waste is better for the environment than recycling them. The activities within this also have wider social value impacts and help support people through the cost of living crisis.
Links to Priorities and Impact on Annual Business Plan:	Action 2 in the Business Plan for 2023-28 is focussed on reuse with a number of supporting activities including Fixy and CAG.
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	Financial: The CAG project is to be funded by SWP and Suez through the SWEEP fund. The future of Fixy is largely dependent on sourcing external funding. Legal: No implications identified. HR: No implications identified.
Equalities Implications:	No adverse impacts were identified.
Risk Assessment:	Key risks will be incorporated into SWP's risk register.

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1. Background

- 1.1.** Encouraging reuse is a key strand of the SWP Business Plan for 2022-27. The Fixy project and Community Action Groups are the key areas of work that have come from the research commissioned from Resource Futures.

From this research, Resource Futures proposed three models:

1. Providing a container at recycling sites to segregate reusable items, with an arrangement for a third-party reuse group to collect suitable items.
2. Developing a Community Action Group network which supports community projects to reduce, reuse, recycle, share, swap, mend and compost.
3. Developing a mobile Repair Bus which provides a visual focal point to promote reuse whilst increasing access to repair in remote or disadvantaged communities.

We are effectively exploring how we can progress all three models, with sequencing determined to some extent by funding availability (including external funding), internal capacity and the right contractual conditions to enable progress.

2. Progress of the projects

- 2.1.** A review of how the recycling site network could play a further role in reuse and diverting reusable items from the waste stream will be part of discussions with Biffa once all contractual formalities are complete.

2.2. Fixy (Repair Bus)

Delivered in partnership with Resource Futures, Fixy is supporting and promoting the repair and reuse of electricals and electronics throughout the county. It has been taken forward with grant funding from the Ecosurety Exploration Fund, the availability of which made this the priority reuse action.

The Fixy van provides practical support for Somerset's network of repair groups and has visited all but one at least once. Fixy is also promoting repair and reuse at other events, from Eat festivals to cost of living drop-ins.

A popular strand of its work has been Fixy 'tech amnesties' – collecting unwanted tech items for refurbishment, data-cleansing and redistribution to good causes by project partner DonateIT. Anything that cannot be fixed is recycled.

Recent weeks have seen focus on targeting businesses to collect tech and talk to staff and linking in with the Schools Against Waste programme to engage with primary schools.

By the end of December Fixy had achieved the following:

- 58 events attended.
- Over 2,100 people engaged (spoken to/sign-posted).
- 435 items (2,200+kgs) of tech donated (mostly laptop/desk top computers).
- 40 volunteer leads generated.
- 15 group set up enquiries

We have recently sent a follow up survey to members of the public who had completed a general Fixy survey and agreed to be contacted again about the project. From this we can track attitudes on reuse and repair. The initial responses are showing very positive results:

- More than 90% saying they are very or quite likely to get something repaired for reuse
- More than 60% saying they felt better informed about how and where to get things fixed,
- More than 50% saying they now think more about buying refurbished or second-hand items.

We have also recently sent a survey to the repair groups to see how Fixy has helped them. We await the results of that survey, but anecdotal feedback from the groups is very positive.

Funding for Fixy formally runs out at the end of December. However, we have reached agreement to 'stretch' remaining funding to keep the service going until the end of February 2023.

We are considering all options for how the service may be able to continue beyond this and potentially be broadened beyond electricals and electronics.

This includes seeking further external funding and looking at how it could potentially be absorbed into the developing project to support Community Action Groups in the county. We are in the process of submitting two bids to funds focussing on increasing reuse and recycling of electrical items. There is a risk that the project will have to be put on hold at the end of February if these funding bids are unsuccessful and alternative funding cannot be found but we hope that this will be a short-term issue.

2.3. Community Action Group network

The aim is to develop a community group network with designated coordinators to help groups develop and expand, work more efficiently, collaborate better, strengthen community cohesion, facilitate skills share and maximise existing assets in the region.

Resource Futures have successfully set up and managed CAGs in Oxfordshire and Devon. They also conducted research in Somerset whilst developing the proposal and found that there is a clear need and support from groups for the project. Developing a Community Action Group network will support community projects to reduce, reuse, recycle, share, swap, mend and compost.

Key benefits include:

- An opportunity to build internal group capacity and improved resilience.
- Enables skills sharing and skills training across the network.
- Helps to build awareness and connections across the network.
- Could act as a route to facilitate skills and asset share regionally.
- The coordinator would provide a focal resource for all groups to utilise and could take responsibility for reuse coordination across the region.
- Creates online presence for the benefit of all groups to advertise events etc.
- Provides insurance cover for all member groups freeing up time and money.
- Provides support and advice for developing risk assessments, seeking external funding and similar activities
- Reduces waste tonnages for disposal over time with increased activities.
- Provide point of collection for group stats to show wider impact, and provides social value in volunteering opportunities, upskilling, knowledge share.
- Helps to build community and individual resilience, including helping communities respond to and recover from the cost of living crisis.

At December's Joint Management Board, approval was given to develop the CAG project, using funding from the SWEEP fund. The SWEEP fund is a joint fund developed by SWP and Suez, which is a behavioural change fund ringfenced from income from sales of materials for recycling. Both Suez and SWP contribute 2% of their share of recyclate income so 4% in total. The fund has been underused during Covid so there is a pot that will cover the CAG project with funds left over to tackle other behavioural change projects as well. The CAG project will initially run for 2 years with the possibility to extend for a further year.

This will involve the recruitment of two community development managers to cover the whole county, and a CAG network officer to provide administrative support. Resource Futures will manage the project with support from Suez and SWP. There will also be a small grant fund to support groups with projects.

We are in the process of setting up the partnership agreement with Resource Futures, and once this is approved, then the project will be able to progress and recruitment for the new posts will commence with the aim to start in Spring 2023.