

JOINT SCRUTINY PANEL OF THE SOMERSET WASTE BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of the Somerset Waste Board held via Microsoft Teams on 8th February at 2.00pm.

Present: Cllr Jo Roundell-Greene, Cllr Brian Hamilton, Cllr Michael Dunk, Cllr Harry Munt and Cllr Hilary Bruce.

Other Members Present: Cllr Sarah Dyke.

Officers: Mickey Green, Christian Evans, David Oaten, Jo Currie, Michael Cowdell, Mark Ford.

1. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies received were Cllr Adam Boyden, Cllr John Hassall and Cllr Robin Bastable.

2. Declarations of Interest- Agenda Item 2

No declaration to declare.

3. Minutes from the previous meeting- Agenda Item 3

The Panel agreed the minutes from 7th December 2022 as an accurate record.

4. Public Question Time- Agenda Item 4

There were no public questions.

5. Recycle More Update- Agenda Item 8

The Chair invited Somerset Waste Partnership Head of Communications and Engagement Mark Ford to provide an update on Recycle More

The following was highlighted:

- The phased nature of the roll-out adds another layer of complexity. The longer the service is in place, the clearer the long-term trends will be. Recycle More has reduced refuse/rubbish by around 20%.
- It has helped Somerset's recycling rate climb to 57.3% - its highest rate on record.

- Ensure that direct mailing is considered as part of the communications approach for future changes of this kind, subject to costs.
- SWP are in the process of distributing Service Guides to all residents and these will contain a collection day calendar.
- The Communication around the phased service changes were helpful for residents.
- The investment in good quality digital content, and time spent engaging/responding to comments helped deliver information and address concerns and this will remain a separate site on Facebook post vesting day.
- Make sure contingency planning and flexibility is in place before undertaking change of scale. Continued to recognise the value of appropriate level of communications and customer/data capability and resource.
- The improvements needed in the data held on communal collections.
- The Recycle More chatbot had limited success and SWP do not replicate in future change work - unless better iterations of the technology are available.
- SWP and SUEZ met regularly throughout. Meeting frequency varied with proximity to service changes and key milestones. This helped successfully manage the complex array of tasks and risks, allowed stakeholders to be updated milestones achieved. The only slippage was the communal phase that was supposed to be incorporated into Phase 4 (SDC) and the Schools Phase that was moved out of a Covid window.

The panel members asked the following questions: The general residual waste collection being moved to three weekly and the collecting of plastics physically being retrieved through the refuse collections. The textiles going into the residual waste at the kerbside and life expectancy on the blue bags. Additional black bins for larger families.

Somerset Waste Partnership Managing Director Mickey Green informed the panel about separating the plastic materials from the kerbside waste and the wait for the composition analysis to retrieve the data. The challenges are clearly set out in the performance report with the details. The black bin request go through a triage process.

Somerset Waste Partnerships Contract Manager David Oaten informed the panel about the data analysis through the Waste transfer station due at the end march and contamination on materials and not being a good end product. Viridor are installing a new Shredder.

Somerset Waste Partnership Head of Communications Mark Ford informed the board that no issues have been reporting in regard to the wear and tear on the Blue

Recycle More bags and for request of a black bin through conversations and is on a long term.

The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report.

That the Somerset Waste Board:

- **Note the lessons learnt**

6. Flex Collect- Agenda Item 8

The Chair invited Somerset Waste Partnership Head of Communications and Engagement Mark Ford to provide an update on Flex Collect

The following was highlighted:

- Flexible plastics are a particularly difficult material to recycle, being low quality and made of many different plastic types. The national FlexCollect plastic recycling pilots is a great opportunity to take part in, learn from and help us achieve our aim of adding these materials to the kerbside collections in the future.
- SWP with WRAP conducted a small trial of collecting flexible plastics in 2015, covering 1400 households. The trial itself was successful, though participation levels were low.
- SWP are in the 'industrialisation' phase, and joining the pilot from April 2023, for 2 years. Five other local authorities are expected to join in this phase. 300-3500.
- Somerset has been chosen to represent a rural area with some levels of deprivation. The pilot area to be chosen needs to take this into account. Due to space constraints and capacity issues at the depots the pilot will need to be run from Evercreech Depot.
- Stage 2 areas will be determined at a later point and is not contingent on the stage 1 area chosen.
- Stage 1: Small pilot of 3,500 properties to run for 1 year.
- This will allow us to trial the collection system and learn lessons. Stage 2 the pilot will be extended to around 15-20,000 households enough to take it to a wider range of properties and learn from that.
- Residents will receive clear guidance developed by WRAP on what can and can't be accepted. Households involved in the pilot will receive a teaser leaflet 4 weeks ahead of the start, a reminder leaflet 2 weeks ahead of the start and a

'nudge' leaflet around 6 weeks post-start date. SWP will seek to apply the lessons learnt from the Recycle More roll-out test-driving bags with community champions.

- An information sheet will be circulated about the phased approach to members.

The panel members asked the following questions: Welcomed the pilot project and asked about who was funding the projects; the protocol for collecting soiled plastic and the contamination or issues around this and the quality of the product.

Somerset Waste Partnership Managing Director Mickey Green informed the panel that the Government funding to fund this project and closely working the Waste and Resources Action Programme. The Plastic trialing is also down to the producer package responsibility and following the final review of the first phase no issues were reported about the processes or the quality.

The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report.

That the Somerset Waste Board:

- **To endorse the proposed approach to the flexible plastic pilot.**

7. Reuse and Community Action Group- Agenda Item 8

The Chair invited Somerset Waste Partnership Head of Communications and Engagement Mark Ford to provide an update on the reuse and Community Action Group

The following was highlighted:

- 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.
- 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 Donate IT. Anything that cannot be fixed is recycled.

- SWP 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. 60% plus 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.
- Funding for Fixy formally runs out at the end of December. However, SWP have reached agreement to 'stretch' remaining funding to keep the service going until the end of February 2023.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

The panel members asked the following questions: commented about the project helps divert the waste from landfill. The starting of a project in Frome for recycle Bikes and the community group involved would like to receive more bikes to fix and reuse.

Somerset Waste Board Managing Director Mickey Green informed the panel that Viridor sold part of their business and Biffa were the buyers. SWP have met with the Strategic Managers of Biffa to discuss the waste reduction going to landfill. There is a bike reuse shop in Wellington and Taunton and to liaise with others for the project in Frome.

Somerset Waste Partnerships Contract Manager David Oaten informed the panel that the operational part with Biffa there is a meeting to take place at the end of February and discussion about reuse shop in Somerset that will offer repair may happen.

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 the reuse and Community Action Groups**

8. Somerset Waste Board Business Plan 2023-2028 - Agenda Item 9

The Chair invited Somerset Waste Partnership Managing Director Mickey Green to provide an update on the Somerset Waste business plan 2023-2028.

The following was highlighted:

- The annual Business Plan sets key aims and priorities for Somerset Waste Partnership for the next 5 years, with a particular focus on the coming year. It may be revised if this is necessary to align with the Somerset Council County Plan.
- The Government published their response on Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) setting out how they intend it to work. Key points of the proposals are: Timetable, What was included, deposit, expected impact, Return points, enforcement, impact on kerbside collection.
- DRS will be an 'all in' type scheme covering plastic (PET) and Steel and Aluminium beverage cans up to 3 litres in volume. Glass will not be included in England or Northern Ireland but will be included in Wales and Scotland. Multi-packs are included. Things drunk inside pubs, cafes and restaurants don't need the deposit. Not taking glass as Defra feel this will add increased handling costs and equipment complexity (and concerns that what they collect will be worse quality than how we collect it at the kerbside).
- Government expect DRS to increase capture of in scope packaging from 70% to 90% within 3 years of scheme launch. Govt expect littering of in-scope packaging to decrease by 85% after scheme launch. Penalties on the DMO if they don't reach this level.
- This should help tackle littering (though we'll need to collectively think about what it means for growing on-street recycling), but it will cost us – we will lose the revenue from this high value material and there is no corresponding

efficiency in collection. Welsh research suggests each Local Authority could lose almost £100k.

- The composition and participation analysis we're undertaking in the next few months should help us understand the picture better.
- Action 4.2 in the Business Plan sets out SWP plan to review alternative fuels. Following the trials that took place in 2022/23 on using Hydrogenated 6 Vegetable Oil in the fleet, it has been decided not to move to develop a business case for using these fuels at this stage.
- Joint work SWP is participating in to support the development of a food strategy, finalisation of our contract with Biffa meaning SWP can finally work with them on reuse at HWRCs. Agreed funding for the Community Action Groups to support a growth in reuse and success in securing a place on the national flexible plastics trial.
- The need to review the business case on PV panels at two of our depots given price changes whilst we have been delayed in finalising this
- SWP joint success (working with economic development colleagues) in securing funding for a Green Business Support pilot.
- The need to review if and how SWP charge developers for costs associated with the bins and boxes for new housing, as many other authorities do - Noting the work needed to be undertaken in relation to branding as we become part of Somerset Council and hence remove the separate identity of SWP in order to improve transparency and accountability.

The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report.

That the Somerset Waste Board:

- **Approves the draft Somerset Waste Partnership Business Plan 2023-28, noting that the format and approach to business planning may change in Somerset Council.**

9. Performance Monitoring Report Q3 October 2022- December 2022- Agenda Item 6

The Chair invited Somerset Waste Partnership Managing Director, Mickey Green, to provide an update on the performance report for performance monitoring report Q3 October 2022- December 2022 and compares these to the same last year.

The following was highlighted:

- SWP overall recycling rate continues to improve compared to last year (up 0.73% to 57.31% from 56.58%).
- For Q3 2022-23, almost 96.2% of materials stayed in the UK, with the amount that was reprocessed in Somerset decreasing to 50.0%, mainly due to reductions in garden waste tonnages at this time of the year, all of which is composted within the County.
- In addition to SWP corporate risk register we maintain a detailed risk register for Covid-19. The separate Recycle More risk register is now closed, and any remaining open risks incorporated into the main register.
- The expanded collections were introduced to the 273 schools in the county who have their waste services provided by SWP.
- Viridor/Biffa: As updated to the Board in December, the services provided through the Core Services Contract (Recycling Sites, Compost Sites, Walpole Anaerobic Digester & closed landfill management) was expected to transfer to Biffa shortly. It can now be confirmed that the contract novation has been completed. This allows greater control over future operational standards and presents the opportunity to formally discuss service enhancements & developments with Biffa. Now Biffa
- SUEZ/Veolia: As expected SUEZ Recycling & Recovery UK Limited re-joined the SUEZ Group after an offer of £2bn was matched to buy the business in the UK, with the sale finalised in December. Whilst the new group remains called SUEZ it is no longer a French stock market listed entity, but instead majority owned by a number of corporate investors (Meridiam and GIP)

Somerset Waste Partnership Strategic Manager Michael Cowdell highlighted.

- SUEZ commenced the waste collection contract in 2020. At contract commencement this required all waste collection staff to transition from Kier to SUEZ, a new organisation with different culture, values and working processes.
- Contract commencement coincided with the first national Covid -19 restrictions, the implication was that the hands-on induction of new starters as well as the scheduled culture change activities were delayed or only partially implemented.
- This change programme resulted in the redesign of over 600 collection rounds, from 5 (redesigned/rebuilt operating centres and represented a considerable challenge both in planning, communication, deployment and operation of the new service.
- There was tragic accident outside the Evercreech Depot on the 4 January involving a member of the public. The accident resulted in a road closure that

affected the recycling operation at the depot. Incomplete services effected just under 3000 properties for that day were suspended and recollected on their next collection day.

- Improvements with software systems and processes have now been specified to allow the timely identification and escalation of repeatedly missed collections. Our software developers are incorporating these improvements in both SWPs and SUEZ's systems and we expect to go live with this during April/May 2023.

The panel members asked the following questions: the figures in Mendip regarding the Fly tipping are higher than the other District and understanding the reasoning behind this. An explanation about Carbon Capture the RAG rating is highlighted as Green however the number of drivers were low against the Plastic collection trial. Could figures be shared of the total carbon capture and savings at the landfill sites.

Somerset Waste Partnerships Contract Manager David Oaten informed the panel historically fly tipping in the Mendip area is the same area that has become a hotspot and the situation has not changed over time. The green RAG rating are the admission target and the CO2 emissions are not reported however Viridor are putting some matrix's together in April and will be reported through the futures reporting arrangement.

The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considered and commented on the following recommendations in this report.

That the Somerset Waste Board:

- **Note the performance results in the Third Quarter 2022-23 Performance Report.**
- **To note the additional report- Key performance Indicators Review (Appendix 2)- updates for Q3**

10. Financial Performance Update 2022/2023 and Draft Annual Budget 2023/2024

The Chair invited Strategic Finance Manager, Christian Evans to provide a presentation and update the panel on the Performance Update 2022/2023 and Draft Annual Budget 2023/2024

The following was highlighted:

- Districts reporting updated forecast underspends figures for full year.

- Based on actual tonnages to November and forecasts for a fully rolled out service.
- Overall District predicted saving £1,635k District Recycle More savings are £1,149k, other variances for Districts is mainly £438k saving on Covid costs. Materials income has reduced significantly due to price reductions and is expected to remain at this level for the next quarter, this has reduced the saving to Districts compared to the last report by £300k.
- Overall County predicted saving £973k - £935k Recycle More saving.
- Equalisation fund estimated at £582K surplus for 22/23.
- The waste Budget for 23/24 now finalised subject to approval by Full Council, AFRs totalling £5.9m.
- £3.5m Inflation on the disposal contract - Baxter amended to 13%, RPI 12%, CPI 10% (1% lower than previous budget).
- £2.1m Inflation and housing growth on the collection contract inflation.
- £0.3m for increase in waste volumes for housing growth on the disposal contract.
- £3.1m Recycle More savings, £1.1m Capitalise bin/box delivery (like most districts already do), £0.6m Removal of Covid-19 measures.
- £0.4m Recycling revenue 100% - No equalisation reserve and £0.3m Increased fees & charges in line with inflation.
- Highlighted the draft budget figures in the report.
- The outstanding remand to sign off of MTFP from Executive and Full Council in February.
- The pay awards and utilities increase not yet included
- Disposal contract inflation not confirmed until March (as usual, estimate made)
- Potential legislative change: HWRC charging: £300k+ and POPs (tbc)
- Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility and consistency (food) appear more likely and therefore could be £millions extra income, though not until 2024/25 at the earliest.

The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report.

That the Somerset Waste Board: -

- **Notes the summary financial performance for 2022/2023 to the end of month 9 (April – Dec) and the potential outturn position for each partner authority.**
- **Considers the budget for 2023/2024.**

- **To discuss the Confidential Presentation.**

Exclusion of the Press and Public

To consider passing a resolution having been duly proposed and seconded under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting, on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, within the meaning of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972:

11. Any other urgent items of Business

Lunch on Friday after the Board and form part of the Climate and Place scrutiny Proposed to be open and transparent.

Cllr H Bruce thanked the SWP Managing Director Mickey Green and the team for all the work of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Waste Board.

(The meeting ended at 15.44pm)

CHAIR