



Waste Refresh

Final Report

Place Scrutiny Committee

March 2015

INTRODUCTION

1. The County Council is responsible for managing and disposing of municipal waste in its capacity as Waste Disposal Authority, which includes providing a network of recycling centres and promoting behavioural change by encouraging the public to reduce, re-use and recycle waste. As well as developing a new infrastructure for the treatment and management of waste, the authority also manages waste disposal through contracts with specialist companies and is responsible to some degree for the management of 55 landfill sites.

2. In March 2013 the Place Scrutiny Committee published its Waste Task Group Report (see Appendix II) and, in November 2014, agreed to review the progress of its recommendations on the basis that

- waste tonnages and associated charges remained volatile,
- a business case for a waste service integration project had identified potential savings due to a joined up delivery of waste collection and disposal with East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge District Councils;
- a small financial saving would be gained from the operational Energy from Waste facility with less waste going to landfill.

3. Councillors Olwen Foggin, Gordon Hook and Andrew Moulding served as members of the task group and held one meeting in February 2015 in order to review the recommendations made in 2013. A summary of progress is attached at Appendix I.

FINDINGS

Waste & Resource Management Strategy (rec'n 1)

4. The Task Group noted the progress on implementing the Strategy and recognised that it continues to be an evolving document. An example of successful Strategy implementation is the completed relocation of Woods Farm Recycling Centre to the Sidmouth site and the imminent relocation of the Ivybridge site (p. 24).

Joint Waste Service (recommendation 2)

5. One of the recommendations in 2013 related to establishing a joint waste service with all the district councils in Devon. In November 2013, environmental consultant Eunomia reported that between £5.4m and £7.5m per annum could be saved in Devon by creating a joint waste service – councils working together through a single joint waste team with responsibility for both waste collection and disposal across Devon. But only four councils decided to consider working in a cluster – the County Council, Exeter City, East Devon and Teignbridge District Councils. Eunomia then produced a detailed business case identifying savings in the region of £2m per

annum but East Devon District Council recently decided not to progress this further. The County Council, Exeter City and Teignbridge District Councils are now considering their position. The remaining district councils are not in a position to work towards a joint waste service at present for a number of reasons. For example, West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council are transforming the way they work together, including waste services, by establishing a shared management structure and staff across the two councils. Similar to the evolution of the Somerset and Dorset waste partnerships, individual district councils would be able to join any cluster arrangement in the future, if they wish.

6. Under the cluster arrangement the waste collection authorities would seek to harmonise collection regimes with a weekly food waste and dry recyclables collection sorted at the kerbside, charged-for garden waste and fortnightly residual waste collection. The dry recyclables would include both mixed plastics and cardboard. Notwithstanding this, two district councils – Mid Devon and Teignbridge – are replacing their in-vessel composting (IVC) of fortnightly mixed green waste and food to a weekly food waste and charged-for garden waste collection. This should help to reduce both collection and processing costs leading to savings for both the County Council and the respective district councils, and is in accordance with the Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon Review (p. 23). The collection of mixed plastics is also imminent in Mid Devon and Teignbridge district councils.

DAWRRC (recommendation 3)

7. Another recommendation was made in 2013 relating to the review of the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee's (DAWRRC) terms of reference in order to strengthen its strategic role and further enhance cooperation with district and unitary councils. DAWRRC continues to meet three times a year and oversees responsibility for its budget of approximately £200k to deliver waste reduction, re-use and recycling schemes as well as promote community initiatives through Devon Community Recycling Network (DCRN), Devon Community Composting Network (DCCN) and Refurnish Devon. Plymouth withdrew from the Committee in April 2014. It is anticipated that the Committee's terms of reference will be reviewed in light of the outcome of the work being undertaken to establish a joint waste cluster in parts of Devon.

Recycling vs. Waste Recovery (recommendation 4)

8. In order to deliver a cost-effective waste service it is essential to treat as much waste as possible in the cheapest way possible. This approach is consistent with the waste hierarchy because managing waste through reduction, re-use, recycling and composting as well as recovery is generally the most cost-effective way. One area where the Council needs to focus more attention is the amount of waste collected per head of population; Devon is the second worst performer of the counties nationally. Even within Devon, the waste collected per person varies significantly from 289kg/head in East Devon to 428kg/head in North Devon. Reasons for this are wide-ranging and potentially include side waste policies in parts of the county (i.e. waste being placed in the appropriate bins prior to collection and non-collection of additional bags), residual bin size, garden waste policy, tourism, and residual waste collection

frequency. Work is currently being undertaken to understand these statistics and variations as well as identifying solutions for improvement.

9. Energy from waste is generally cheaper than landfill, with large-scale facilities offering the lowest gate fees. The Exeter Energy Recovery Facility is a small-scale facility and relatively expensive compared to larger plants nationally. However it does enable the waste to be managed locally in accordance with the Proximity Principle and is generating electricity which is sold to the National Grid. It also has the potential to drive a district heating scheme and the District Heating Network Group is looking at procuring an ESCo (Energy Supply Company). The Plymouth energy from waste plant will deliver both heat and electricity to the nearby HM Royal Naval Dockyard which helps to offset the gate fee. In addition, the Plymouth facility benefits from £95 million Government PFI credits. Members remained concerned about any potential impact the energy from waste plants might have on recycling rates, i.e. residents discontinuing their recycling efforts amid energy from waste plants treating waste. While officers recognised this was a risk, there was no evidence nationally to support this notion. A 'Recycle Now' campaign was undertaken in Exeter following the opening of the Exeter plant to remind the public of the importance of continuing to recycle and a similar campaign is planned when the Plymouth facility opens.

Driving Recycling Targets (recommendation 5)

10. The County Council cannot afford aspiring to higher recycling rates where it is not cost-effective to do so. But the County Council does still hold the third highest national recycling county rate, whilst the cost of waste disposal per head in Devon is the lowest in the south-west region. The move in Mid Devon and Teignbridge towards a weekly food waste and charged-for garden waste collection (see paragraph 5) might also help to increase recycling rates. In addition, the Devon Organic Waste Strategy is under review as a result of district councils changing their collection regimes. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP UK) carried out research to evaluate how to improve participation and capture rates from weekly food collections nationally and the publication of their report is imminent.

11. Devon had set itself a target of achieving an increased recycling and composting rate of 60% by 2015 and 65% by 2025, above EU-mandated targets to recycle 50% of household and similar waste by 2020. Devon is unlikely to meet its local 2015 target, however, because local recycling rates have generally reached a plateau. Achieving higher rates will be difficult without significant investment in improved communications to encourage the public to make the best use of their existing recycling collection infrastructure, making service changes and also developing future recycling technologies. There are concerns being raised that the UK Government will not meet the European target and may potentially be liable for fines for failure to do so.

12. The analysis undertaken in 2012 on the waste composition within the residual bin illustrates that there is still significant potential to reduce waste and extract more recyclable waste from the residual bin using the existing infrastructure. Since then, behavioural change and communications campaigns have focussed on waste prevention to a great extent, for example, *Love Food Hate Waste* and *Fresher for Longer*, as well as junk mail reduction through promoting the Mailing Preference Service. Recently, the County Council, working with the Devon Community Recycling

Network and SITA UK have been successful in a bid to the Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) to fund a Reuse Project Officer who will be working to increase reuse over the next year. In this context, members suggested printing recipes for leftover food on marketing material in addition to publishing them on the website and on social media, as well as informing tourists of local recycling opportunities via business owners in the tourism industry as well as second-home owners, e.g. by distributing and displaying information material. Officers agreed to scope opportunities and work together with the Economy & Enterprise service and district councils.

13. WRAP funded work carried out by Eunomia in 2013/14 which identified that if all districts in Devon collected waste using an “aligned” option (food waste, mixed plastics and card collected separately weekly and a fortnightly collection of residual waste) the make-up of the residual waste bin would change significantly and the recycling rate could reach 61%. Some districts are progressing towards this regime, but in the meantime, communications need to be targeted at poor performing areas in order to further increase recycling rates. As much as 50% of the Devon residual bin is recyclable using the current collection services. Recent WRAP work has shown that only 25% of people recycle perfectly and 75% either do not recycle materials which their collection provides for, or contaminate the collection with items which cannot be recycled.

14. With regard to innovative waste treatment options, Devon was one of the first local authorities to recycle carpets and mattresses through its recycling centres which has improved its average recycling rate to 82% across the network of sites. However the cost to the contractor in recycling these materials may not be sustainable beyond the life of the current contract unless the cost of recycling these materials reduces.

Behavioural Change

15. Behavioural change is fundamental to managing the demand for the waste service and influencing the public to produce less waste and re-use or recycle as much as possible. However, given the significant public sector financial pressures, the County Council is set to reduce the waste communication and education total budget from £320k to £220k over the next two years. This may reduce even further unless tangible evidence can demonstrate the impact of this work on waste prevention, re-use and recycling. The budget cuts are likely to result in less topic-based, standalone behavioural change campaigns and a reduction in number of schools targeted. The task group recognises and is concerned about the impact of the reduction in funding on influencing people’s waste management behaviour, and on the future generation of householders. According to Eunomia’s Waste Prevention Toolkit, it is estimated that the Devon Love Food Hate Waste ‘Join the Great British Take Off’ waste prevention campaign will save approximately 430 tonnes of waste which results in monetary savings of approximately £25k. Members suggested further exploring opportunities for generating external funding, e.g. through sponsorships, as well as using volunteers in the delivery of behavioural change campaigns.

CONCLUSION

16. Devon County Council's waste management service aims at influencing public behaviour to reduce volumes of waste, and to increase re-use and recycling. It also manages the waste contracts for management of the recycling centres, recovery and disposal; plans and provides new waste infrastructure; and works with the waste collection authorities to maximise efficiency and to provide a joined-up approach to waste management. Waste management is among the very few services which affect every single resident in Devon and it is therefore vital that it continues to be managed in an efficient and innovative way.

17. The task group requests that a further update on the work of Devon's waste management service be included in the in-year budget briefing and performance update at the 16 November 2015 Place Scrutiny Committee meeting, and has special regard to the progress of establishing a joint waste cluster in parts of Devon and reviewing the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee's (DAWRRC) terms of reference.

**Councillors Olwen Foggin
Gordon Hook
Andrew Moulding**

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member: Cllr Roger Croad, Environment & Community

Local Government Act 1972: list of Background Papers: None.

Copies of this report may be obtained from the Democratic Services & Scrutiny Secretariat at County Hall, Room G31, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4QD or by ringing 01392 384383. It will also be available on the County Council's website at:

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutiny-task-group-investigations/>

If you have any questions or wish to talk to anyone about this report please contact Janine Gassmann, Scrutiny Officer, tel. 01392 384383 or email janine.gassmann@devon.gov.uk

APPENDIX I

1	To support and commend the Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon whilst recognising that it continues to be an evolving document.	No follow-up required; see paragraph 4 and 6
2	To continue to investigate the merits of establishing a joint waste service with all district and unitary councils in Devon and to engage with all the local authorities over any opportunities in respect of: a) harmonisation of policies; b) provision of infrastructure and facilities; c) operational contracts as well as d) further development of behavioural change campaigns.	See paragraphs 5-6 and 13
3	To suggest to all member authorities that the terms of reference of the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee be reviewed in order to strengthen its strategic role and further enhance cooperation with district and unitary councils.	See paragraph 7
4	To compare the cost benefits derived from attaining higher recycling rates with those achieved through “energy from waste” or other alternative waste treatment technologies.	See paragraphs 8-9
5	To further increase recycling rates further by better utilising the current waste management infrastructure as well as exploring new, cost-effective and innovative waste treatment options.	See paragraphs 10-14

APPENDIX II

Related documents:

Place Scrutiny Committee’s Waste Task Group Final Report, March 2013

<http://www.devon.gov.uk/loadtrimdocument?url=&filename=CS/13/10.CMR&rn=13/W D137&dg=Public>

Municipal Waste Management Strategy / Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon Review, March 2013

http://www.devon.gov.uk/dcc_waste_strategy_review.pdf

Waste Education Strategy for Devon Schools 2014-2017

http://zone.recycledevon.org/sites/default/files/Waste_Education_Strategy_2014_-_17.pdf