



Waste Task Group

Final Report

Place Scrutiny Committee

March 2013

INTRODUCTION

1 The County Council is responsible for managing and disposing of municipal waste in its capacity as Waste Disposal Authority; this 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 manages waste disposal through contracts with specialist companies and is responsible for the management of 55 closed landfill sites.

2 Developing and publishing a joint authority **Municipal Waste Management Strategy** is a statutory responsibility under the Waste and Emissions Trading Act. Municipal waste is defined as household and trade waste collected by local authorities, waste from recycling centres, and includes soil, rubble and fly-tipped waste. In March 2005, the County Council published a joint strategy for Devon in partnership with the district councils and the Environment Agency. The unitary authorities of Plymouth and Torbay were also involved.

3 There is an obligation to update the strategy at least every five years but due to the delay in an announcement from Government regarding possible changes to this statutory duty, the update was overdue. However, no decision has ever been announced and due to changes in waste legislation, the publication of a new Waste Strategy for England, and significant progress in Devon on improving recycling rates and in the delivery of new waste infrastructure, the strategy has now been refreshed. The new **Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon Review** looks forward to 2035 and co-exists with the old Municipal Waste Management Strategy. The draft new Strategy has been submitted to the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee (DAWRRC) in February 2013 and will be considered by Cabinet in April 2013.

4 The Place Scrutiny Committee had set up this task group in response to a number of waste management items on its work programme and because of their strong policy development component. The task group has examined them prior to the present report and refreshed Strategy being submitted to the Committee. The group met on six occasions; members also visited a variety of waste management sites and observed a meeting of the Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee (DAWRRC). To date the group has considered the following written evidence and has also taken oral evidence from the waste management service:

- Municipal Waste Management Strategy project proposal and draft programme
- Report on the consultation responses in relation to the strategy refresh
- Presentation on waste policy and performance, partnerships and schools
- Presentation on changing the public's behaviour in respect of waste
- Presentation on the results of the waste audit
- Waste management statistics and performance information, including recycling
- Final draft of the Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon

5 Polly Colthorpe (Chair), Eileen Wragg, Andrew Eastman, Dennis Smith and Ray Radford served as members of the task group. The group submitted an interim report to the Place Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2012 (report number CS/12/02), which this document will supersede.

FINDINGS

6 The waste task group published a number of recommendations in their March 2012 interim report relating to research informing the refreshed strategy, the merit in establishing a joint waste service with the district and unitary authorities, striking the balance between recycling and waste recovery, education in schools and behavioural change campaigns as well as the standards of contractors' operations. In the following sections, the progress against the original recommendations will be explained, and new findings and corresponding recommendations will be presented. A list of the original recommendations is set out in the appendix.

RESEARCH

7 Research was carried out in March 2012 to establish the types of residual waste produced by 200 households per district, the so-called black bin contents. The research was carried out using ACORN (acronym for A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods) categories. The exercise presented a snapshot but nevertheless provides valuable information, e.g. the disappointingly high proportion of food waste in black bins across the districts. The data will be used to target communications effectively and to support behavioural change campaigns such as "Love Food Hate Waste".

8 As part of the strategy refresh, a consultation was carried out during the summer 2012. The majority of respondents supported setting higher recycling targets. Considering the findings of the earlier research in March 2012, there is potential scope to meet increased recycling targets within the current infrastructure. The current recycling rate of approximately 55% across the county could be increased if certain types of waste were redirected from residual waste to recycling, e.g. food waste (see section on driving higher recycling targets).

9 The task group satisfied itself that the research findings and consultation responses have informed the strategy refresh and are adequately represented in the current Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon. For example, it reviewed examples of how the draft strategy had been amended in light of the consultation responses. The Waste & Resource Management Strategy also identifies outstanding work in progress at the beginning of the document (page 3) which will be further pursued during 2013.

Recommendation 1: To support and commend the Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon whilst recognising that it continues to be an evolving document.

JOINT WASTE SERVICE

10 The district councils, in their function as waste collection authorities, collect household and bulky waste from households, collect trade waste by special arrangement, provide local recycling points, remove fly-tipped waste and abandoned vehicles, clean streets and collect litter.

Item 5

11 Waste collections still vary significantly across the county in frequency as well as in the range of materials being collected. Although more district councils are now working together and are establishing joint services, North Devon and Torridge District Councils for example, there is still significant variation across the different collection systems. A unified service across all districts would make sense from the residents' point of view – as well as potentially increasing value for money. For example, some district waste collection lorries are operating at capacity and there might be some merit in reviewing collection methods, e.g. separating materials at the kerbside rather than the depot.

12 An outline business case to consider options for closer working across the county, district and unitary councils has been developed as this task group recommended in its interim report. Following preliminary work, members and officers from the county, district and unitary authorities met on 29 January 2013 when the outline business case was presented and it was agreed that further work be undertaken to develop a detailed business case by June 2013.

Recommendation 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.

13 The Devon Authorities Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee (DAWRRC) is a joint committee, the remit of which is to co-ordinate strategically the establishment of waste minimisation and recycling schemes including the oversight of joint contracts, behavioural change campaigns, the communications strategy, funding initiatives and events. The task group suggested that the committee remit could be refreshed and widened.

14 A move which gave DAWRRC a more strategic role might also contribute towards encouraging a joint waste service with the district and unitary authorities. Somerset have realised significant savings by establishing a joint approach and, if a similar service were established in Devon, savings could potentially be achieved. Devon County Council's waste management service is also planning further and close collaboration with the Somerset and Dorset joint waste partnerships in order to inform implementation locally.

Recommendation 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.

RECYCLING VS. WASTE RECOVERY

15 There is an overall strategic direction away from landfill. For example, creating energy from waste provides a sustainable waste management solution and is a process of generating energy in the form of electricity and/or heat from a variety of

Item 5

waste treatment processes. Two “energy from waste” plants are currently being built in Exeter and Plymouth; they will together be able to process approximately 120,000 tonnes of waste per year from July and September 2014 respectively. A non-landfill solution for managing residual waste from North Devon, Torridge and potentially Mid Devon will be tendered for during 2013.

16 The task group previously questioned the cost involved in driving higher recycling rates versus treating waste in “energy from waste” plants as well as opportunities to achieve higher recycling rates within the current infrastructure, e.g. by redirecting food waste from residual waste (see next section). The environmental consultant Eunomia is carrying out research into cost benefits during February and March 2013, financed by WRAP (see paragraph 18 below).

Recommendation 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.

DRIVING HIGHER RECYCLING TARGETS

17 Nationwide, a number of local authorities managed during the year to increase their recycling at rates better than those achieved by Devon. The County Council was in first position in 2010/11 and, with a current recycling rate of 55.2%, dropped to fourth position in 2011/12 behind Oxfordshire (59.6%), Leicestershire (56.2%) and Cambridgeshire (55.8%). Oxfordshire County Council, for example, had been able to increase their recycling rates by introducing weekly food waste collections, recycling wood at recycling centres as well as by operating unified collections across the county. No amendments are currently planned for the Devon recycling rate targets but the Council is considering an option to reduce costs by sending poor quality wood waste for recovery, not recycling. This change in classification would result in the recycling rate achieved by the County Council falling by up to 4%.

18 The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP UK) is currently carrying out some research to ascertain the merit of weekly food collections in Devon. It is a government-funded, not-for-profit company working to reduce waste and develop sustainable products across the UK. Redirecting more food waste from residual waste is possible if weekly food waste collections are introduced but is costly because of the increased resources and collections required. The current focus, therefore, is on considering the implementation of separate collections of food waste, mixed plastics and cardboard across the county. The WRAP findings are expected at the beginning of June 2013.

19 The County Council and WRAP research has already identified which ACORN groups would benefit from specific targeting, e.g. those households which already recycle but could increase their activities, and to which type of communication those groups would best respond. This information identifies opportunities to increase recycling rates within the current infrastructure, for example by redirecting certain types of waste, including food waste, from the black bin to the recycling bin. In other areas, there might also be opportunities to increase recycling or reduce waste, e.g. by providing extra boxes or bags or by promoting home composting. In-vessel composting presents another cost-effective option for treating food and other organic waste.

Item 5

20 There is a further financial reason why higher recycling rates should be pursued. Although the waste tonnage growth has remained low during 2012/13 and this is predicted to continue throughout 2013/14, the further increase to the landfill tax of £8 per tonne per year provides a strong incentive for diverting waste from landfill.

Recommendation 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.

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

21 In order to further increase recycling rates further by better utilising the current waste management infrastructure, there is a need to continue to work to change people's behaviour and to reduce waste. Behavioural change campaigns play a vital role in preventing the growth of waste and in altering residents' behaviour. There is a need to connect with those people who are not yet recycling habitually and those who could increase their recycling activity. The ultimate aim is for people to adopt waste prevention behaviour and become "advocates".

22 Most of the county's local authorities use the "**Don't let Devon go to waste**" campaign or a localised version of it. The County Council holds an external marketing contract which is evaluated via annual qualitative and quantitative research. The research has shown that where there has been a dip in expenditure on advertising, brand recognition rates go down. In order to mark the campaign's success and its tenth anniversary in 2012, "thank you" videos were released and awards were presented to e.g. champion householders or collection vehicle crew members. The "**Love Food Hate Waste**" campaign aims to reduce the amount of food waste going to landfill. It provides advice and tips on (monetary) savings if food leftovers are used. If the number of people committed to reducing food waste in Devon increased by just 2%, there would be total savings of approximately £45k in one year.

23 Similar levels of funding for behavioural change campaigns have been maintained in the current and for the next financial years (2012/13-2013/14) as this task group recommended in its interim report. The waste management service continually needs to find new ways of communicating its "behavioural change" messages in different formats and by way of different channels in order to reach as many people as possible. A new member of staff is now overseeing the service's social media presence in order to develop this method of communication and to reach out to a wider audience – in particular the 18-24 age group. Other digital opportunities have also been pursued, e.g. the joint development, with four of the district councils, of an app which will provide dates for kerbside collections and advice on the appropriate materials for bins.

24 Reducing waste leads to cost savings for the district councils by not having to collect the waste in the first place and the County Council in not having to treat it. It is hoped that the number of "Committed Food Waste Reducers" will have increased by 2% during 2012/13 and that the recycling rate will, by targeting communications, have been increased by 1%.

25 The task group has already recommended that educational and behavioural change campaigns should be promoted and increased, particularly in schools, and it recognises the importance of educating the next generation (see next section). This

Item 5

is particularly important in managing the waste at the top of the waste hierarchy which leads to a reduction in costs for both the districts and county councils.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

26 The County Council's waste management service is continually exploring more and new ways to work with communities. For example, there are opportunities for external funding for waste initiatives, including work with the private sector to secure sponsorship for joint projects. European funding might also be available for community engagement. There are further routes to explore with third sector partners who are able to access different funding streams.

27 Schools are another important vehicle in targeting behavioural change campaigns. The County Council has a waste education contract with Resource Futures to educate children and young people on waste. This helps students to grow up with the right messages on waste and recycling and creates the opportunity for such information to be taken into their homes. 80 schools in the County are now involved with the Devon schools' composting project funded by Investing in Devon and there are now some schools which are not sending any food waste to landfill. This particular project ends in March 2013. The total number of schools composting currently stands at 156 but they are not allowed to sell compost which they produce on their premises under restrictions imposed by the Annual By-products Regulations.

28 An additional member of staff working in schools started in September 2012, an increase from two to three full time staff. A separate new position now covers educating schools on composting on a part-time basis (0.5 FTE) and is also funded by DAWRRC. The contractor is currently mainly working on developing further resources in schools, e.g. new workshops, teacher training, video resources and event planning. However, any school which is not already involved but would like to be will be provided with assistance because the extra resource is flexible. The waste management service tries to target "learning communities" in order to approach multiple schools under one umbrella and to encourage the local exchange of information and learning.

CONTRACTOR RELIABILITY

29 In April 2012 the County Council awarded a contract to run 17 of its 19 household waste recycling centres to SITA UK, a recycling and resource management company. Since the change of contractor in May 2012, the perception is that customer care has improved at recycling centres across the county and the number of complaints against site staff has decreased. All site staff receive customer care training and the contractor can now be fined £250 per complaint. The waste management service keeps reviewing incoming complaints.

30 Overall, recycling rates have increased under SITA management because of the provision of new containers for additional materials, these being carpets, mattresses and hard plastics. SITA has also recruited a sales manager to oversee the development of their resale facilities across the locality. The previous provider, Devon Waste Management, had resold as much as possible while SITA was more particular regarding selecting items for resale.

CONCLUSION

31 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 recycling 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. The task group is satisfied that the refresh of the Municipal Waste Management Strategy followed a robust process and that interested parties had ample opportunity to influence the contents of the new Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon.

32 The task group presents the following recommendations for adoption as set out in this report:

1	To support and commend the Waste & Resource Management Strategy for Devon whilst recognising that it continues to be an evolving document.
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) harmonisation of policies; b) provision of infrastructure and facilities; c) operational contracts as well as d) further development of behavioural change campaigns.
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.
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.
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.

Jan Shadbolt
County Solicitor

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:

www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/decision_making/scrutiny/taskgroups.htm

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

Item 5

APPENDIX

The waste task group submitted the following recommendations to the Place Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2012:

	Recommendation	Progress
1	To review the outcomes of the research currently being carried out and how these are represented in the refreshed Municipal Waste Management Strategy.	Achieved (see paragraphs 7-9)
2	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.	In progress (see paragraphs 13-14)
3	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) harmonisation of policies; b) provision of infrastructure and facilities; c) operational contracts as well as d) further development of behavioural change campaigns. 	In progress (see paragraph 12)
4	To compare the cost benefits of achieving high recycling targets versus the energy recovery from waste through alternative waste treatment technologies in relation to the waste hierarchy.	In progress (see paragraph 16)
5	To increase the number of schools involved in educational and behavioural change campaigns, including amongst those schools which are now academies.	In progress (see paragraph 28)
6	To review monitoring of contractors as well as waste collection and disposal operatives in order to ensure the highest possible standards of operations, including customer care, in the areas of waste management for which the County Council is responsible.	Achieved (see paragraphs 29-30)
7	To continue to resource and support behavioural change campaigns in the future and to investigate new opportunities to deliver such campaigns to residents.	Achieved (see paragraph 23)