

Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 21 September 2016

Attendees: Councillor Christopher Arnold (Deputy Chairman), Councillor Phil Coleman (Member), Councillor Adam Fox (Group Spokesperson), Councillor Mike Hogg (Member), Councillor Lee Scordis (Member), Councillor Barbara Wood (Member)

Substitutes: Councillor Peter Chillingworth (for Councillor Beverly Davies)

Also Present: Councillor Graham, Councillor Barber, Councillor Barlow, Councillor Buston, Councillor Harris, Councillor Hazell, Councillor Lissimore, Councillor B.Oxford, Councillor G.Oxford, Councillor Smith, Councillor Willetts.

85. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 August 2016 were confirmed as a correct record.

86. Work Programme 16-17

The Committee heard that the Homelessness Strategy Progress Report Delivery Plan 2015-19 had been included for the November meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2016/17 be noted.

87. Colchester Waste Collection Strategy

The Colchester Waste Collection Strategy was presented by Councillor Graham, Portfolio Holder for Waste and Street Services, Ann Hedges, Chief Operating Officer, and Chris Dowsing, Group Manager for Recycling, Waste and Fleet. The report requests that the Panel note the results of the recent waste consultation and comment on the proposed changes to the waste and recycling service.

Have Your Say!

Annesley Hardy

Annesley Hardy attended the meeting and stated that if the waste service is not broken then it did not need to be fixed. Annesley Hardy questioned whether there would be any advantages for residents in changing from the current system in Colchester. The

introduction of food waste bins reduces the likelihood of bin bags being ripped open, and this alongside greater education of the public negates the justification on spending £1m on wheelie bins. Mrs Hardy also highlighted that the money set aside for this change in waste collection service would be better spent on the police, improving the highways and new housing. Annesley Hardy questioned the amount of money spent on the consultation that only provided 2,000 responses, the terminology used in the questions that were included and the profile of those that were surveyed. In addition, Annesley Hardy highlighted that in New Town and Christ Church Ward, they ran their own consultation on the introduction of wheelie bins and most people did not want the inconvenience, street clutter, or invitation to chuck everything in that large wheelie bins present.

Councillor Arnold questioned Annesley Hardy regarding point raised about the terminology used in question 13 to which she clarified that this question forced those responding to choose either a soft plastic bin bag or a hard plastic wheelie bin; respondents were not able to skip the question.

Simon Crow

Simon Crow attended the meeting and informed the Panel he had previously stood as a candidate in New Town and Christ Church ward and that he publishes the Colchester101 blog. Simon Crow stated that it had been reported that residents of New Town and Christ Church were unlikely to be given wheelie bins because of their unsuitability due to lack of storage space and impact on the street scene. Simon Crow questioned whether the proposals as stated would be rolled out on permanent basis or whether it would just be a trial ahead of rolling out wheelie bins to every house in the Borough.

Norman Bailey

Norman Bailey attended the meeting to have his say against proposals to introduce wheelie bins. He stated that the commitment to wheelie bins was not included in the Liberal Democrat Manifesto, and was not wanted by the public. He also stated that the survey with only 2,600 responses was not democratic. Norman Bailey said that no party had a mandate to introduce wheelie bins, and that this issue should be voted on at the next election.

Alan Morgan

Alan Morgan stated that he hoped that Councillors would come to a sensible decision; and highlighted a letter written by Councillor Graham stating that those who did not want wheelie bins would not get wheelie bins. Alan Morgan stated that he would like to opt out from having wheelie bins and expressed concern on implementing wheelie bins across Colchester Borough, particularly near areas of conservation.

Alan Morgan also stated that other areas that have wheelie bins look significantly worse due to the number of bins on the street, in comparison the black sacks impact less on

the street scene and on average are only out for half a day. Alan Morgan questioned whether the Planning Committee had been consulted about the impact of wheelie bins on the visual amenity. Alan Morgan also commented on the online survey being complicated, and the lack of yes or no vote.

Thomas Rowe

Thomas Rowe attended the meeting and stated he was pleased that residents of Colchester have the opportunity to be heard, and whilst he was not against reducing waste going to landfill, he was concerned about the way in which the Council was developing its proposals. Thomas Rowe questioned the funding for certain projects and highlighted budget underspends that could have been used on protecting frontline services and to encourage people to recycle.

Thomas Rowe also questioned what would happen if residents put out more than three black bags, particularly in flats with communal bin storage; would there be the introduction of a black bin tax in future. In addition, Thomas Rowe suggested that there should be analysis into why some residents do not recycle and what options there are to get people more engaged. Thomas Rowe also questioned why residents should be forced to split waste, when this could be done centrally through investing in technology. There should be a longer term vision to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Stephen Rowe

Stephen Rowe stated that as a resident of Colchester he was concerned about the proposals leading to wheelie bins. Stephen Rowe was not convinced by the residents' survey, and felt that the questions were engineered, particularly as there was no question around weekly or fortnightly collections.

Stephen Rowe highlighted his concerns about the lack of proposals as to where the wheelie bins will be located and that particularly in urban areas wheelie bins will be left on pavements, restricting the walkways and giving a rundown appearance to the Borough. Stephen Rowe also questioned the cleanliness of the wheelie bins, particularly if black bin bags aren't used and whether those who do not have access to wheelie bins and are forced to purchase black sacks will be given a Council Tax discount.

Stephen Rowe also stated he could find no evidence that the proposals would improve Colchester's recycling rates, and it would take significant education to ensure that all residents were using the correct bins for recycling and waste. Stephen Rowe stated that this would be difficult to monitor and that introducing fines for those who used bins incorrectly would not be acceptable. Mr Rowe felt that a better solution for waste management in Colchester needed to be found.

Councillor Dominic Graham

Councillor Graham thanked the officers for the work undertaken for the report and the

Scrutiny Panel for allowing a discussion on this topic.

Councillor Graham stated that a significant amount of work has been completed in a short amount of time and that the 2,600 respondents to the survey was, by relative terms, a significant amount for a Borough Council consultation.

Councillor Graham stated that the work is ongoing, with the plan to come back to the Scrutiny Panel as soon as possible. The current proposals do not include the costings, or exact details on where wheelie bins may be situated. However, given the information from the consultation it is possible to see where wheelie bins are unlikely to go.

With regard to the comments from those attending the meeting to have their say, Councillor Graham stated the current situation is not acceptable, and the level of recycling in the Borough needs to be increased. Councillor Graham acknowledged that in line with the proposals education is required, however Councillor Graham pointed out that this does already happen with the Zone teams. It is often reported back that some residents are not interested in recycling and therefore part of the proposals will look at the possibility of introducing fines, however this has yet to be finalised.

In response to queries about the consultation, Councillor Graham stated that the face-to-face respondents provided a cross section of the demographic of the Borough. The consultation focused on providing an advisory answer rather than definitive as a definitive answer would have required 400 respondents per ward, which would have been unmanageable.

With regard to the query on whether wheelie bins could be installed in the future in areas that do not currently support their introduction this would only occur if residents support it in the future. Councillor Graham also highlighted that the proposals to provide a waste service that residents wanted was included within the Liberal Democrat manifesto.

In response to a query from Mr Morgan, Councillor Graham stated that in areas like St John's where only 28% of residents surveyed were supportive of wheelie bins it was unlikely for wheelie bins to be provided unless local Councillors wanted them. Councillor Graham also highlighted that in places where there is nowhere to store the wheelie bins, like the Dutch quarter, it would not be practical to have wheelie bins.

Commenting on further points made by members of the public having their say, Councillor Graham stated that the level of recycling does need to be addressed and hopefully will rise as a result of these proposals.

Councillor Graham also noted that there will need to be a discussion around comingling versus separation of waste, as one provides an increase in the weight of the recycle material and the other provides better quality materials which can be sold for a greater level of income. Councillor Graham also confirmed that residents would be responsible for cleaning their own bins.

In response to a query from Councillor Arnold, Councillor Graham stated that the

investment in wheelie bins would provide a benefit to the entire Borough.

Visiting Councillors

Councillor Gerard Oxford

Councillor Gerard Oxford stated that he did not believe that the number of people consulted in Highwoods Ward was enough upon which to base a decision. Councillor Oxford also stated that in the Highwoods ward there are too many issues to roll out wheelie bins; many of the households in the region do not have a storage facility or back gardens. Councillor Oxford stated that residents had repeatedly informed the ward councillors that they do not wish to have wheelie bins.

Councillor Oxford believed that the introduction of food waste would reduce the likelihood bin bags being split by animals. Councillor Oxford accepted the proposal within the report to stop the provision of black sacks and also highlighted the importance of education to reduce the instances of fly tipping. Councillor Oxford also highlighted that he would have no issue in having wheelie bins in those wards across Colchester that requested them, and supported the additional green boxes for glasses and cans.

Councillor Willetts

Councillor Willetts stated that he believed that the waste service was one of the most important services provided by the Council, and because of the significance of the service it should be fully resourced with a formal referendum held for such a significant decision.

Councillor Willetts also stated that a weekly residual waste collection should be retained, until the recycling streams can filter and separate the putrescible waste collected. Councillor Willetts believed that the focus should be on education and incentivising residents to recycle rather than changing to wheelie bins; Councillor Willetts did not believe that changing the bins would increase the recycling rate of the Borough.

Councillor Willetts stated that he did not disagree with wheelie bins in rural areas, but was concerned with wheelie bins being introduced in urban areas where it would not be practical due to storage or aesthetically pleasing.

Councillor Willetts also questioned why there was no solution included for the medical or sanitary waste, and strongly advised against providing waste collection that identified a particular resident as requiring medical waste collection.

Councillor Hazell

Councillor Hazell stated that Shrub End residents were against wheelie bins and the results from the consultation did not tally with her experience or surveys that she had conducted within the ward. Councillor Hazell was also concerned by the low number of respondents to the consultation and the proposal to charge for black sacks. The

proposal to charge would adversely affect those who are not able to have a wheelie bin.

Councillor Hazell was concerned that the proposals, which provide for one wheelie bin, would lead to additional wheelie bins in the future like many other districts. The proposal is not resident led, but administration led and the survey was only a cosmetic exercise; members of the public require more clarity about where the proposals will lead in the future.

Councillor Harris

Councillor Harris stated that he wanted to see Colchester as a clean and green borough, reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill. However, residents in e-mail and letters are opposed to the introduction of wheelie bins. Instead a focus should be on the management of those who do not recycle and how to improve take up.

Councillor Harris stated that visiting other areas that have wheelie bins show that they are not aesthetically appealing. Councillor Harris stated that the number of respondents surveyed in Berechurch was not representative of the whole ward. Councillor Harris also highlighted issues for those individuals who may not be able to move wheelie bins and would require assisted bin collection. Councillor Harris welcomed the ongoing dialogue to improve the proposals, but concluded by saying that his ward did not want wheelie bins.

Councillor Smith

Councillor Smith stated that the use of wheelie bins only formed part of the Colchester Waste Collection Strategy, and that the administration has also proposed other solutions to tackle and improve the recycling rate.

Councillor Smith stated that the administration was not attempting to impose a one size fits all policy, but one that meets the needs of the residents and listens to Councillors who are in regular contact with the residents.

Councillor Smith highlighted that he would not want his ward to have wheelie bins as they are unsuitable, however other areas may well like them. Councillor Smith highlighted the example of army families in Colchester lobbying for wheelie bins.

Councillor Smith highlighted that the calculations provided by Councillor Willetts were not accurate as a significant amount of the Council Tax collected gets returned to the Government. Councillor Smith also highlighted that there was not the funding to provide a scheme of incentives for recycling.

The Council will speak to Councillors and if the residents of that ward do not want to have wheelie bins installed then they will not have to have them installed. Councillors have the authority to decide for their local area.

Councillor Lissimore

Councillor Lissimore attended the meeting and stated that only 3.3% of residents responded to the consultation as a whole. Councillor Lissimore also congratulated the current waste service due to the high percentages of satisfaction from the service that is received.

Councillor Lissimore questioned the evidence behind wheelie bins increasing recycling. Councillor Lissimore stated that this evidence had not been provided when she was on the task and finish group, and highlighted that one of the Boroughs included in the top ten recycling authorities had only recently introduced wheelie bins, but had a significant amount of support from residents for their introduction.

Councillor Lissimore also stated that there is no proposal included for nappies and medical waste. There could be significant issues if medical waste is collected on a fortnightly basis. Councillor Lissimore also highlighted to the Panel that some Council's provide different coloured sacks for those requiring medical waste collection that acts as an identifier which many residents may not wish to have.

Councillor Lissimore also questioned how the three sack limit would be policed, as eventually the refuse collectors would be required to pick up the waste. This may also cause issues for those who share areas where waste is collected.

In addition, Councillor Lissimore stated that the proposals to increase the number of boxes goes against what residents said in the consultation as it would increase confusion. Councillor Lissimore also questioned how the areas that may have wheelie bins were defined, whether it would be a whole ward or part of a street or an estate.

Councillor Lissimore questioned the survey as a number of surveys completed by the Conservative party in Colchester regarding wheelie bins did not show similar results to that of the Borough Council consultation. Councillor Lissimore listed the discrepancies between the official survey and local ward Councillor surveys for a number of different wards.

With regard to the consultations with Councillors, does this mean that they will be listened to, or that Councillors could override the allocation of wheelie bins, and if so what was the reason for holding a consultation. Councillor Lissimore questioned how the Council would deem certain areas appropriate for wheelie bins and stated that her ward of Prettygate would not want wheelie bins.

Councillor Lissimore also questioned the financial implications on the introduction of wheelie bins; Councillor Lissimore estimated that the introduction of additional green boxes is likely to cost £350,000 and the introduction of wheelie bins going to cost £1m. Councillor Lissimore requested a timetable for introduction of the Colchester Waste Collection Strategy and when proposals would return to the Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Lissimore commented on the conclusions provided within the report, and suggested that the Council should focus on improving the current service. This would include improving the quality of the black bin bags and comingling recycle material to

make it easier for residents to recycle.

Councillor Buston

Councillor Buston attended the meeting and highlighted that he was a former Portfolio Holder for Waste, and recognised that it is one of the most important issues for local authorities as if it goes wrong it is very noticeable.

Councillor Buston commended the work of the officers and stated that in 2008 Colchester Borough Council were top of the league of recycling but this has now slipped due to a range of reasons.

Councillor Buston questioned whether there could be an issue in providing wheelie bins to army families due to security. Councillor Buston was concerned that the survey results were at odds with the surveys undertaken by local councillors where residents did not want wheelie bins. The effect on the street scene would be detrimental, and the gain on recycling would be minimal.

Councillor Buston supported Norman Bailey's contribution for Have Your Say as residents views on changes to the waste collection system cannot be seen electorally for 18 months. Councillor Buston stated that Prettygate did not want wheelie bins.

Councillor Graham

Councillor Graham provided responses to those questions and concerns raised as part of the Councillor Have Your Say section to the agenda. In relation to consultation if the survey numbers in the wards are lower than fifteen it would not be a safe number to base a decision, and discussions will take place with Councillors.

In response to the Chairman, Councillor Graham confirmed that if all three Councillors from a ward rejected the introduction of wheelie bins it would be difficult to impose.

With regard to concerns over the consultation results in Shrub End Ward, the online surveys and face-to-face surveys each provided a different result, which was an exception to the rule. Councillor Graham also highlighted that some local authorities had charged for the introduction of wheelie bins. Councillor Graham welcomed the contribution from Councillor Harris with regard to Colchester Borough Council being clean and green, and for an open dialogue to incorporate the views of public and Councillors.

With regard to the collection of nappies and medical waste, Councillor Graham stated that there would be exceptions to the rules and that these would be included as part of the formal proposals. Ann Hedges stated that officers had commenced research on other authorities, who restrict black bag waste and provide medical waste collection. Ann Hedges provided an example of Swansea Council who allow exemptions on collection limits after a visit from an officer to the resident. In Colchester it would be likely that zone teams would visit households. Councillor Graham also clarified that the NHS do provide

some collection when a resident is receiving treatment from a visiting nurse in their house.

Councillor Graham welcomed the comment by Councillor Buston with regard to safety and wheelie bins for army households, which would be investigated.

Scrutiny Panel Members Questions

Councillor Arnold questioned what the local authorities that have similar waste collection systems as Colchester, in the top ten recycling authorities in Essex, were doing differently. In response, Chris Dowsing stated that the main difference is fortnightly collections of residual waste. Councillor Graham added that the aim is to reduce the number of black bags going to landfill. Evidence suggests that a fortnightly collection of residual waste reduces the amount going to landfill and increases the recycling rate; those Council's in the top seven all collect fortnightly and those below collect weekly. Having a three black sack limit is because this is a similar quantity to one wheelie bin and drives out the recycling from the residual waste material. Introducing wheelie bins provides an additional benefit to the Borough for recycling which would assist reaching the top spot of recycling authorities.

In response to a question from Councillor Hogg regarding comingling of recycled waste, Councillor Graham stated that comingling the waste increases the sheer amount of recycled material, however this reduces the quality and therefore the money received from the recycling. Chris Dowsing also stated that comingling can provide benefits in terms of reducing the number of waste vehicles required to collect different types of waste, but would likely end up in Colchester Borough Council paying gate fees.

Councillor Chillingworth questioned what the authorities that collect fortnightly do with nappies and hygiene equipment. Chris Dowsing stated that each authority would provide exemptions when additional collections are required. For Colchester Borough Council this would most likely involve a visit from a member of the zone teams to ensure that households are recycling as much as possible before granting an exemption with reviews of the exemptions taking place when required. It was also confirmed that the authority would not wish to stigmatise those in a certain situation by providing different coloured bins or bags for medical waste.

In response to a query regarding how the authority would stop people who were not adhering to the three black sack limit, Councillor Graham noted that it could be difficult to identify those households that were not sticking to the limit, particularly in relation to those households that have joint bin storage. Proposals on how this could be monitored would be included at the next stage. Ann Hedges highlighted that in bringing forward these proposals there will need to be an extensive amount of education for residents to inform them of the limit to black sacks. Currently the waste crews and zone wardens do report those households that do not recycle with 700 visits taking place last year.

Councillor Fox suggested that Councillors, whilst identifying those areas that would not

be suitable for wheelie bins, could provide information on where wheelie bins would be appropriate within their wards. Councillor Graham welcomed the suggestion, and informed the Panel of the complexity of redesigning the routes, given that they will need to be efficient and operationally sound and would not be coterminous with ward boundaries.

Councillor Hogg questioned whether Colchester Borough Council would consider using a contracted company to collect the medical waste. Chris Dowsing confirmed that this is something that the Essex Waste Partnership are currently looking into and may be a solution in future.

With regard to the use of black sacks, Councillor Fox raised the point that those who use wheelie bins are likely to continue to purchase black sacks.

Councillor Scordis questioned whether there were proposals on what would be a suitable space for storage of wheelie bins, to which Councillor Graham responded that the proposals did not currently include a definition on what would be suitable. Councillor Graham highlighted that whilst many people dislike the impact on the street scene it has become the norm in many areas across the country.

The Panel also heard that Maldon District Council had recently switched to wheelie bins, and had seen an increase in recycling of between 15-20%. Maldon District Council had also run a number of roadshows to inform local residents. In delivering the proposals, Colchester Borough Council would require additional resources in the first few months to assist in education and culture change; savings from stopping providing black sacks would assist in providing the additional resources. The Council also has a good track record in delivering culture change across the organisation. The Panel welcomed the aim to provide education to residents on the changes to waste collection in Colchester. Following a question from Councillor Arnold, Chris Dowsing confirmed that the education campaigns in the past have been coordinated with the Essex Waste Partnership

In response to a question regarding whether the Council would provide advice on the location of storing wheelie bins, officers confirmed that they were not aware of any local authority that had provided that advice. In those areas that have wheelie bins, the majority of residents put the bins away when the waste has been collected; this would be a community and personal responsibility.

With regard to waste collection for those living in flats, Councillor Graham stated that the current proposals are not aimed at flats. Chris Dowsing confirmed that there will need to be different provisions for the different types of flat and numbers of flats within Colchester. Councillor Arnold stated that having flats within the waste collection proposals would greatly assist the vision and requested that when further work is completed with regard to flats the information should come back to scrutiny.

With regard to penalties, which some Panel members commented in support of, Councillor Graham confirmed that there would need to be a balance to provide

education but also to enforce the change in the waste collection strategy. Following questions regarding incentives, Councillor Graham stated that evidence suggested that they did not work in other areas to improve recycling.

Councillor Arnold questioned whether the proposals would include provision of food waste caddy liners. Councillor Graham responded and stated that providing one role per household at the beginning would cost approximately £65,000, which may assist in the uptake of those using the food waste. Tendring District Council attempted this, which resulted in good initial improvements, however it is too recent to assess whether this will have a positive ongoing effect.

In response to a question around the addition of another box for recyclable material, Councillor Graham confirmed that this had evolved from the current system, and that waste collection staff prefer the separate boxes as it is easier to process the waste.

Councillor Graham also confirmed that he did not expect the amount of waste from each household to change significantly, but a shift to the amount of waste recycled. Chris Dowsing stated that following any change Colchester Borough Council would work with Essex County Council to see whether there is an increase in waste being taken to the Household Waste Recycling sites.

Following the questions, the Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting, and highlighted the importance of bringing the waste collection strategy back to Scrutiny.

RESOLVED;

- a. That the results of the recent waste consultation be noted.
- b. That the Panel commented on the proposed changes to the waste and recycling service.