

Extract from the minutes of the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 12 December 2016

96. Colchester Waste Collection Strategy

Councillor Graham, Portfolio Holder for Waste and Sustainability, Ann Hedges, Chief Operating Officer and Chris Dowsing, Group Manager, Recycling, Waste and Fleet presented the report. The report requests that the Scrutiny Panel provide comment to Cabinet on the proposed series of changes to the way in which the Borough collects waste and recycling.

Councillor Willetts

Councillor Willetts welcomed the opportunity for the Scrutiny Panel to review the report prior to the decision going to Cabinet. Councillor Willetts commented on the need for the Council to improve its performance and highlighted other local authorities' performance in Essex. Councillor Willetts stated that he believed that changes in the recycling arrangements for Colchester should be driven by the green agenda, rather than saving money, which he alleged was the main focus for this change.

Councillor Willetts requested that the Scrutiny Panel question how the performance of the waste and recycling service will be measured following the changes proposed. Councillor Willetts was concerned that the report did not outline in detail how or when this would be measured; which is extremely important for the long-term waste strategy. Councillor Willetts believed that the Scrutiny Panel should highlight when it wishes to receive performance updates and what type of measurements would be required.

Nick Chilvers

Nick Chilvers questioned why the report to the Panel did not include further information from Councillors justifying their response to the question about introducing wheelie bins in their wards.

Nick Chilvers felt that; whilst his ward was likely to receive wheelie bins, which would affect the street scene, others with similar profiles were not due to receive wheelie bins because of input from Councillors. This led to a feeling that the consultation was superficial and that responses received from Councillors were based on political reasoning rather than focusing on the requirements of waste collection. In a question directed to the Portfolio Holder Mr Chilvers asked how long it would be until a consistent policy of wheelie bins was introduced in areas of the Borough with similar

profiles. Mr Chilvers also requested confirmation of the colours of the different receptacles proposed to ensure that the street scene would not be further damaged.

Paul Clark

Paul Clark stated that the public had not been properly notified or consulted about the proposed changes to the waste collection service in Colchester. Mr Clark felt that the process leading up to the Panel meeting was flawed, as the Colchester waste strategy document does not reflect the views collated in the survey and is incomplete missing key information required for decision-making. In addition, Mr Clark believed that the report fails in its attempts to achieve the stated aim of providing a waste collection service as requested by residents.

Mr Clark stated that he was unaware that the consultation was taking place, and was only informed a few months ago that changes were going to occur. He felt that additional information should have been circulated with Council tax bills at the beginning of the year. Mr Clark also believed that the number of respondents to the consultation in Tiptree, 67 people approximately 0.5% of the population of Tiptree, made the consultation statistically irrelevant.

Mr Clark also believed that the key driver behind the four proposals, which could have been taken in isolation, was cost savings rather than a goal to increase recycling. Mr Clark also felt that the questions in the survey were skewed towards an outcome that would benefit the introduction of wheelie bins, and that the 82% satisfaction rate of the current waste system and the ability to increase recycling through co-mingling had also been ignored. Mr Clark also questioned why no alternatives to the strategy document had been presented.

Peter Thompson

Former Councillor and Chairman of the Waste Management Committee, Peter Thompson, stated that he was disappointed with the lack of public involvement in the matter of waste management. Mr Thompson believed that members of the public are interested and need to engage with how the waste system is managed, in particular where recyclable material goes once it has been collected from a property.

Peter Thompson also stated that the aim of the waste collection strategy should be to increase the value of the recyclable material that can be collected, rather than the tonnage. Peter Thompson commented that the report did not contain any information about the value of recyclables.

Councillor L.Scott-Boutell

Councillor Scott-Boutell informed the Panel that she had been asking residents questions about their views on wheelie bins for a number of years, even prior to the

introduction of the waste task and finish group. Councillor Scott-Boutell highlighted to the Panel that it used to be the case that many residents were against the introduction of wheelie bins, however that this had recently begun to change.

Councillor Scott-Boutell informed the Panel that she and Councillor Jessica Scott-Boutell had responded to the Councillor consultation stating that wheelie bins could be introduced in certain areas of the ward. However, Councillor Scott-Boutell requested clarification on how properties would be deemed unsuitable, and asked for confirmation that terraced houses with small front gardens would not get wheelie bins. Councillor Scott-Boutell also highlighted the need to inform members of the public about the exemptions and assisted collections policies.

In addition, Councillor Scott-Boutell informed the Panel that many residents already have high recycling rates and produce minimal residual waste. Given the animosity towards wheelie bins in some areas, would those who only produce limited waste be exempt from having to have a wheelie bin.

Councillor Scott-Boutell also requested that further information be provided to Councillors and members of the public about where the recycle waste goes, what to do with waste that has more than one type of recycle material in it and what can and cannot be recycled.

Cllr Jessica Scott-Boutell

Councillor Jessica Scott-Boutell informed the Panel that the survey conducted with Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell provided similar results to that of the Council's own consultation, highlighting that not all locations would want wheelie bins. The consultation provided contrasting viewpoints, some residents believed that they would be an eyesore whereas others would have wanted the system in the first place.

Councillor Scott-Boutell commented that the communication plan was very reliant on the use of social media or individuals contacting the council themselves and questioned whether the Council had considered holding roadshows to provide more information. Roadshows would provide additional interaction with residents and provide an opportunity to advertise the assisted collection scheme. Councillor Scott-Boutell also suggested that work could also be done with Parish Councils to help provide information about assisted collections. Councillor Scott-Boutell suggested that a frequently asked questions section be added to the leaflet drop in February.

Councillor Lissimore

Councillor Lissimore questioned the decision to stop providing black sacks, as many residents feel that this is on the only provision they receive from the Council. Councillor Lissimore also asked for clarification on what would happen if numerous

households collate their rubbish in a certain area, and one of those households puts out more than the allocated three bags of residual rubbish.

Councillor Lissimore was also concerned that adding another box for collecting recyclate material is yet another box that residents will have to find a place to store. Councillor Lissimore also requested the Council ensures that enough garden waste sacks are provided to cope with the expected surge in demand; how the distribution of the garden sacks would be monitored was also questioned.

Councillor Lissimore raised concerns that the report contained no details about which roads were expected to receive wheelie bins, and which roads were not. A further question was asked about what the Council plans to do about those wheelie bins that are left out after collections have taken place.

With regard to the recycling sacks, Councillor Lissimore stated that it was necessary to ensure that the sacks are thick enough for purpose. With regard to the exemption, Councillor Lissimore questioned how many would be expected in a normal collection round, and how residents would be able to get hold of the exemption stickers; Councillor Lissimore also recommended that the stickers should not just be available online.

Councillor Lissimore also suggested that the 6-month period should be extended given that following the introduction of the system in June, the grace period would cease at Christmas time 2017. Councillor Lissimore also questioned whether the introduction of wheelie bins would actually increase recycling.

Councillor Lissimore concluded by highlighted the requirement to educate residents and provide more information. Councillor Lissimore also stressed that refuse collections should not be rushed to ensure that crews could take the time to secure green waste bags and inform residents when recycling is not sorted correctly.

Councillor Buston

Councillor Buston responded to comments by Nick Chilvers by stating that the response provided by Councillors in Prettygate ward was the result of a survey conducted by Councillors with residents, which received more responses than the Council survey.

Councillor Buston, as a former Portfolio Holder for Waste and Street Services stated that he understood the difficulty of any major change to waste collection and acknowledged the amount of work required.

Councillor Buston questioned how the inconsistencies with operational round not being co-terminus with ward boundaries would be resolved, and whether there would be confusion regarding the requirement to collect waste bins or bags.

With regard to the provision of an addition box for glass, Councillor Buston suggested that this should be in a different colour to make it easier to identify.

Councillor Oxford

Councillor Oxford stated that a majority of residents in Highwoods Ward had been opposed to wheelie bins, and that approximately three quarters of the households in the ward would not have the space to store the bins.

Councillor Oxford highlighted a local resident who, due to a disability, has a significant number of items delivered to her property, creating a significant amount of recyclable packaging. These residents may require assisted collections due to the significant amount of recyclable waste created.

Councillor Oxford also raised concern about the exemptions provided to larger families, which may not encourage them to recycle.

Councillor Oxford also commended the local stockist of rubbish bags in Highwoods Ward.

Councillor Graham, Portfolio Holder for Waste

Councillor Graham, provided responses to a number of questions raised as part of the Have Your Say section. In response to Nick Chilvers, Councillor Graham stated that the Councillor responses included within the report relate to whether they have indicated their support for wheelie bins rather than the proposals as a whole.

Councillor Graham stated that the aim of the waste collection strategy is to provide a solution based on what residents want, following recommendations from local ward councillors, and within the operational requirements of the service. In response to a query about whether the rest of the Borough would receive wheelie bins in due course, Councillor Graham informed the Panel that there are currently no plans to introduce wheelie bins in other areas across the Borough. This situation would only change if the performance is significantly improved, and residents supported the introduction of wheelie bins.

With regard to providing receptacles of different colour, Councillor Graham informed the Panel that this had yet to be decided and that the selection would be open to further suggestion.

In response to Mr Clarke, Councillor Graham stated that Colchester Borough Council had provided information to members of the public about the consultation through the local press and media, and many political parties were informing residents in the run up to the local elections. In addition, the consultation received 2,600 responses, which is one of the biggest responses that Colchester Borough Council had

received. The responses from Tiptree provide indicative information rather than definitive.

Councillor Graham also confirmed that cost saving was not the key driver in changing the waste collection system. The main driver is to decrease the level of residual waste and increase the amount of recyclate material collected.

In response to the queries raised by Mr Thompson, Councillor Graham confirmed that the Council does want members of the public engaged in the waste process, and this is part of the communications plan going forward.

With regard to the point raised about value of the recyclate material compared to the tonnage, Councillor Graham agreed and confirmed that this was the reason that the proposals are to keep the recyclate material separate. Introducing co-mingling would have a cost implication on the material received. Councillor Graham also stated that further information on the amount of each type of waste received can be provided if requested.

Panel Questions

- Councillor Davies – Raised concerns about value for money, and suggested that it would be better value in continuing to provide black sacks to all residents, rather than green sacks to just those residents without wheelie bins.
 - In response Ann Hedges stated that the proposals are aiming to be equitable across the Borough regardless of whether you have a wheeled bin collection or a black bag collection.
- Councillor Fox – Questioned whether local residents would be required to accept a second recycled waste receptacle even if they were only recycling a small amount of waste.
 - Councillor Graham stated that the second box would be the only additional receptacle required for members of the public. This particular solution is a recommendation from staff members who are required to separate the waste collected at the kerbside. The Council will encourage residents to use the additional box and zones teams will visit to provide assistance to those who are not using the receptacles at all. Ann Hedges confirmed that this step would also improve the health and safety for staff.
- Councillor Scordis – Questioned whether a weekly collection of recyclable waste had been considered and asked for information on the cost of employing the additional zone wardens.
 - In response Councillor Graham stated that introducing a weekly collection of recycling waste would be at a significant cost.

- Ann Hedges added that three additional zone wardens would be brought in for 8 months, 2 months before the scheme was put in place and 6 months after. Existing zone teams will be able to provide assistance in identifying those properties that may require assisted collections. The costs of the additional zone wardens would be approximately £50,000.
- Councillor Davies - Requested a breakdown of revenue finances and one off costs associated with the waste collection strategy.
 - Officers confirmed that further information would be provided after the meeting.
- Councillor Wood – Questioned whether black sacks could be printed with instructions for food waste not to be placed within them.
 - Councillor Graham confirmed that this would not be necessary as black sacks are no longer being provided. Ann Hedges informed the Panel that in other local authority areas, if crews identify incorrect waste in a certain bin they would put a sticker on that bin to inform the resident.
- Councillor Arnold - Asked for clarification regarding the three-bag limit and whether residents would be visited by the zone teams if it is exceeded. Councillor Arnold also questioned how the message would be provided to the most hard to reach individuals, given the reliance on electronic marketing.
 - In response Councillor Graham stated that for the first six months of the project the focus will be with education and training. If there are households that are not recycling and are refusing offers of assistance there will be more stringent checks. This situation may eventually lead to waste from that household not being collected by waste crews.
 - With regard to the communications plan, Councillor Graham stated that this includes use of the press, printed advertisements and roadshows to provide residents with further information. Councillor Graham did stress the cost-effectiveness and ever increasingly uptake of digital media. Ann Hedges confirmed that work had been undertaken with the research department to identify those residents who may need additional support and information, particularly around assisted collections. Members of the Panel were informed that all residents in the Borough would receive two pieces of mail to their households to inform them of the changes. The Council are also intending to use display banners when visiting a number of locations across the Borough to highlight the changes to residents. In addition, Ann Hedges stated that she hoped that the 51 Councillors would support communication with local residents.
- Councillor Davies – Questioned the reason behind the introduction of wheelie bins when the limit on black bags and change to fortnightly collections may deliver the results required.

- Chris Dowsing responded and stated that whilst the receptacle used may not make a significant difference, there were a number of requests to introduce wheelie bins. The focus on increasing recycling is the limitation on residual waste that can be collected. Councillor Graham added that providing wheelie bins will assist with the manual handling of waste.
- Councillor Davies - Questioned what would happen if residents do not engage with the process.
 - In response, Councillor Graham stated that enforcement for those households that do not recycle is being considered. However further decisions would need to be made in order for this to be in place.
- Councillor Coleman - Highlighted the need to create a culture of recycling, and suggested that there should be further work undertaken with schools to educate pupils on the new recycling arrangements.
 - Councillor Graham welcomed the suggestion from Councillor Coleman to target schools.
- Councillor Davies - Questioned how the performance, following the change in waste collection strategy, would be measured and asked for confirmation on whether those terraced houses with small gardens would be required to have wheelie bins.
 - In response, Councillor Graham acknowledged the requirement to measure performance, and Chris Dowsing confirmed that it will be possible to measure the performance of the areas that have wheeled bins and compare these with the rest of the Borough using sacks.
 - With regard to terraced housing, Councillor Graham confirmed that if the front of a household goes straight onto a path the likelihood is that the household would not have a wheelie bin, however if they have a small garden the introduction of wheelie bins would could be possible.
- Councillor Davies - Queried whether if a resident has a low amount of residual waste whether they would be required to have a wheelie bin and whether a high number of exemptions are expected.
 - Councillor Graham stated that providing bespoke waste collection for each resident would cause issues for waste collection crews.
 - In response to the query about exemptions, Chris Dowsing stated that it is expected that the number of exemptions will remain at similar level regardless of the change of collection. Chris Dowsing confirmed that the bin remains with the property rather than the resident. There could be additional arrangements between neighbours such as bin sharing for garden waste if required.

- Councillor Arnold - Questioned whether if you lived in area where wheelie bins are allocated, whether there would be a complete restriction on collecting any black bags.
 - Chris Dowsing confirmed that for the first six months there would be a flexible approach, however if the area was a wheeled bin area then residents would be expected to place their waste out for collection in the wheeled bin. If we had a scenario of some houses on bins and sacks this would cause difficulties for crew members to remember the individual details of each household. Exemptions will be in place for households that cannot have a bin.

- Councillor Davies - Questioned how exemption stickers would be used, whether the 6-month trial period could be extended as suggested by Councillor Lissimore and queried the disabled exemptions criteria as questioned by Councillor Oxford.
 - Councillor Graham stated that the exemption stickers would be small and placed on the black bag to inform members of the crew that there is an exemption.
 - With regard to the 6-month trial period, Ann Hedges confirmed that the trial period would be reviewed as it proceeds and that following discussions with the Portfolio Holder and potentially the Scrutiny Panel it may be that it is extended.
 - With regard to the exemptions policy, it was confirmed that there is a current assisted collection policy in place and this will remain for the new system.

- Councillor Arnold - Highlighted concern that following the introduction of wheelie bins, refuse collector crews would not be able to identify those residents who are not recycling. In addition, Councillor Arnold asked for clarification on the Council's position on recycling Tetra Paks.
 - Ann Hedges stated that crews currently help to identify those households who do not recycle, and it is not expected that changing to wheelie bins would affect this. Crews will still be able to identify those households who do not recycle and reach or exceed the three-bag limit. Once households are identified, members of the zone team will speak to the local resident to attempt to increase the amount they recycle. Ann Hedges stated that the intention is to hire those members of the zones teams who are passionate about recycling and encourage residents to do so. Councillor Graham confirmed that the aim within the first six months is to focus on the households that are creating the most waste.
 - With regard to Tetra Paks, Chris Dowsing stated that there is significant difficulty in recycling Tetra Paks as the issue is around these being collected with paper as the makeup of the materials in the tetra Pak cause difficulties with paper making machinery. The end destination for the bulk of the material is Sweden and has had funding issues in the past and led to the decision that

Colchester will not be recycling Tetra Paks from kerbside collection. Moving forward the focus will be on changing the packaging for these products.

- Councillor Scordis - Commented on the importance of communication through leaflets and casework responses. In addition, Councillor Scordis questioned whether the speed of the collection would be impacted when using wheelie bins and queried what happens with new developments, and garden communities.
 - In response, Councillor Graham agreed with the requirements for communication, and stated that there are differences of opinion between waste officers across the country on how to collect waste most efficiently, but the collection of wheelie bins would not significantly affect collection times. With regard to new developments, in order to have a new route this requires 1,800 households; it is too early in the process for garden communities to be considered.
- Councillor Coleman - Questioned whether there had been comparisons with other similar Towns and Borough to Colchester and whether they had had issues or successes in changing the waste service.
 - Councillor Graham confirmed that there had been a significant number of comparisons as part of the Task and Finish Group. A number of experiences from other local authorities have been used to influence the policies proposed, such as Swansea Council's three-bag limit. Councillor Graham also highlighted that a number of Essex District Council's have implemented wheelie bins, with Maldon being the most recent, which has subsequently seen double digit improvements in recycling. With regard to offensive waste, Harlow District Council introduced a weekly collections policy.
- Councillor Davies questioned why recycling for flats had not been introduced as part of this policy.
 - In response Councillor Graham stated that improving recycling for flats was next on the list of aims as part of the waste strategy. It was not included within this report due to the complex nature. Following further questions, Councillor Graham confirmed that it would require a separate decision, and the intention would be for a decision to be made in early 2018.

RESOLVED that;

- a) The Scrutiny Panel considered and reviewed the Colchester Waste Collection Strategy proposals.
- b) Thanked the officers for attending the meeting.