

DRAFT SCRUTINY PANEL MINUTE EXTRACT 12 DECEMBER 2017

143. Review of Waste Collection Strategy

Councillor Jessica Scott-Boutell, Portfolio Holder for Waste and Sustainability, and Ann Hedges, Chief Operating Officer presented the Review of Waste Collection Strategy Report. The report requests that the Panel consider and comment on the information in the report which outlines the implementation process, the impact of the waste collection strategy and the next steps.

Councillor Jessica Scott-Boutell informed the Panel that the review is taking place following six months of operation. The Waste service required changes to improve the recycling rates and reduce the levels of residual waste collected. Improvements as a result of the change have been significant and immediate.

Councillor Scott-Boutell praised the hard work of the Crews, Zones Teams and Customer Services in delivering the changes and also thanked the residents for their cooperation.

Ann Hedges provided the Panel with a presentation containing figures and information on the first six months of operation. Ann Hedges confirmed that the performance of the service has improved dramatically and that the vast majority of residents are receiving the service as planned. Ann Hedges highlighted the success of the roadshows and the use of social media in communicating the changes and the support from the zones teams in implementing the new exemptions policy.

The Panel received further information about the IT developments, including in-cab technology, which have been put in place under the new system. This has removed the dependency on paper and allowed for immediate capture of information which can be shared between the customer service centre and the Crews.

The level of missed bins so far is currently higher than the target for the service, with 143 reported in a previous week, which equates to 0.2% of total collections. Ann Hedges commented that the reason behind the slightly higher missed bin rate could be as a result of the move from weekly to fortnightly collections, which is likely to have led to an increase in reporting given the time before the next collection date.

Ann Hedges highlighted that whilst it was necessary to get a full years data, particularly given seasonal variances, the performance so far has been pleasing. The level of residual waste has reduced by 34% and kilograms per household has reduced a further 12% from the target set. The level of recyclate collected compared to residual waste has increased to 55% from last year's total of 44%. If the current collection levels are sustained, this would result in Colchester Borough Council moving from twelfth to third in the Essex authorities benchmarking table. In terms of recyclates, the amount of paper, plastic cans and garden waste collected has increased. The amount of food waste collected has increased by a total of 81% compared to the previous year. Glass collection however, has reduced by 91 tonnes.

The next steps for the strategy are to use the new technology available to reduce the number of missed bin collections to only 100 per week and improve the management information available. Education visits will also continue, as well as the potential for starting some form of enforcement as well as simplifying the exemptions process and making it a yearly review. With regard to recycling in flats, conversations have commenced with Colchester Borough Homes to collect intelligence prior to doing a full review. Fixed Penalty Notice powers are also being used to fine who are fly tipping.

Ann Hedges highlighted that the Panel may wish to consider whether the implementation of a voucher system for containers is appropriate, as a method to ensure unnecessary containers are not provided.

Cllr Feltham

Councillor Feltham attended the meeting and confirmed that as a Cabinet member, she supported the policy change, design and implementation of the strategy. Councillor Feltham informed the Panel that whilst it had taken time to adjust to the changes the hard work between the Waste and Zones teams had assisted greatly. Councillor Feltham highlighted that those properties occupied by multiple tenants or students were not the best at recycling and that a full year of the service would provide further detail and ensure that people are used to how it operates. Councillor Feltham expressed thanks for the work done to date, especially given the complicated issues in her ward.

Cllr Lissimore

Councillor Lissimore congratulated the Council for the recycling figures achieved to date and for the hard work from officers from the waste team through the year.

Councillor Lissimore raised a number of questions and concerns about the new waste collection service and the contents of the report. With regard to the introduction of wheelie bins, Councillor Lissimore questioned whether the reduction

in residual waste collections was a result of wheelie bins or a result of the restriction on amount of waste that can be collected under the new system. Councillor Lissimore also stressed that until statistics show the benefit of wheelie bins, no further roll outs should take place.

With regard to the issue of garden waste, Councillor Lissimore felt that the eight bag limit on garden waste should be reintroduced. This would ensure that many residents were not deterred from collecting leaves and other elements of garden waste outside their boundary. Charging for collection could deter residents and increase the number of requests for street cleaning. Councillor Lissimore also questioned whether the strategy should be changed in light of the Portfolio Holder using their locality budget to pay for a collection in their ward.

Councillor Lissimore requested further information on the impact of the waste changes for both Essex County Council Household Waste Recycling Centres and on the level of fly tipping, and questioned whether fixed penalty notices have been used. Councillor Lissimore also expressed concern that there might be future reductions in funding for street wardens, which could reduce the education and support provided to residents. With regard to policy exemptions, Councillor Lissimore requested information on the number of households that had been refused an exemption.

Councillor Lissimore welcomed the move to improve the technology used by the service and the reduction in paper, however stressed that this should not detriment the service. Councillor Lissimore also questioned how the system connected to the internet, and requested confirmation that the operatives would not be using the system when driving.

Councillor Lissimore raised concerns that the roadshows were not stocked adequately with containers and requested that further assistance be provided to those who do not have an internet connection.

Councillor Lissimore also questioned whether there would be a satisfaction survey undertaken in future, how long crews had spent in overtime as a result of the changes and whether letting agents had been informed of the changes to waste collection.

With regard to the next steps for the service, Councillor Lissimore expressed concern about the introduction of a voucher system, as this could deter recycling. In addition, Councillor Lissimore felt that there should be a clear five year plan to increase the recycling rates as well as an annual renewal of exemptions that takes into account those who do not have access to the internet. Furthermore there should be an annual review of the service.

Councillor Scott-Boutell

Councillor Scott-Boutell thanked those who attended to have their say. In response to the points raised by Councillor Lissimore, Councillor Scott-Boutell confirmed that wheelie bins were only introduced in wards where agreement was provided from the local Councillors. No further roll out is intended, unless there are statistics that warrant their introduction. Information on the performance of wheelie bins so far would need to be looked at following a longer period of operation.

Responding to points raised about garden waste, there is only capacity in the system for collection of four garden waste bags during the year. Councillor Scott-Boutell stated that the locality budget was used at her own discretion.

With regard to the impact on Essex County Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), Councillor Scott-Boutell confirmed that there had only been a small increase in the tonnage received at the Shrub End site. Ann Hedges stated that in terms of fly tipping, this has increased, however it is difficult to ascertain what the cause of this is due to changes in waste collected at HWRC's at a similar time. Over a period of three months last year there were around 400 incidences of fly tipping, under 100 of which were black bags. During the same three months this year, this increased to over 900, of which 600 were bulky items and the remainder were black bags, however the tonnage was very similar. Ann Hedges confirmed that the Council is issuing fixed penalty notices for fly tipping infringements.

In terms of the waste that had been removed from the system, there was no current evidence to suggest that it had been diverted elsewhere. Other authorities, such as Chelmsford City Council had experienced the same issues when changing their waste systems.

In response to the issues raised regarding the zones teams and education, Councillor Young, Portfolio Holder for Business and Culture, with responsibility for the zones teams addressed the Panel. Councillor Young confirmed that the budget for this service is protected and that the role of the zones teams is likely to be expanded and not reduced. Ann Hedges also provided assurance that the zone wardens would continue with the education visits, of which they were doing around 500 per year even before the changes.

With regard to the exemptions policy, 700 households out of 1800 had said that they would try to deal with the three bag limit. A total of a 100 applications were declined and in these situations zone wardens visited to try and provide education and support.

Ann Hedges acknowledged that there were slightly longer hours for crews during the first few weeks as the new routes began and the new technology was being implemented. The majority of crews are back by 4pm, and the overtime budget had

not been significant. Satisfaction rates would also be looked at in the future once the system has been fully embedded.

Councillor Scott-Boutell also confirmed that comments received regarding the voucher schemes for containers would be considered prior to the completion of the Cabinet report due next year.

The Panel thanked the Portfolio Holder and Officers for attending, and were pleased with the increase in recycling rates and the introduction of technology. The Panel also expressed their thanks for the hard work by all Officers involved in the new waste collection strategy and that it came in under budget.

Concerns were raised by the Panel regarding the charge for the extra four garden waste sacks, particularly considering that the resident may be assisting the Council in clearing the leaves from the footway and carriageway. In addition, Panel members highlighted that some residents will have already purchased the sacks and would now have to pay an additional fee for them to be collected. There was a further suggestion, made by a member of the Panel, of whether there could be an incentive for those communities that do clear up the leaves.

In response, Councillor Scott-Boutell stated that garden waste would be reviewed next year. The current limit was set for the new waste collection strategy as it was linked to the capacity available.

Responding to a question regarding recycling participation, Ann Hedges stated that experience from zone wardens suggests that the majority of households have changed their behaviours. Additional recycling kit has been provided to households and crews can feedback information to zones on which houses are recycling and those who are not.

Gary Cole, Zone Warden, informed the Panel that he was overwhelmed when asked to be part of the project and had not fully appreciated the enormity of the project until it began. Gary Cole explained that the Zone Wardens visited those households putting more than three bin bags out to provide them with communication material and teach them about recycling. A significant amount of work was done prior to the June launch date. Gary Cole highlighted that whilst it has been difficult to get some households to recycle the majority are not putting out more than three bags. Gary Cole stated that he takes pride in the high recycling figures recorded and that the project has given him a good level of job satisfaction.

Panel members raised concerns that there could be extra tonnage going to the HWRC rather than through the waste collection service. It was requested that this be investigated. With regard to the coupon scheme, Panel members were concerned

about how this would be implemented and how it would work if recycling containers were damaged.

In response to a query of whether the technological advances could lead to an increase in missed bin reporting, Ann Hedges stated that the new technology had made it easier for the resident to report missed bins. Crew members, if still in the area, can respond immediately to the report and collect the missed bin.

Some Panel members highlighted that in their ward where wheelie bins had been rolled out, residents were pleased as it helps to improve tidiness.

Panel members also suggested further work in those student areas of Colchester to help increase the level of recycling. Ann Hedges confirmed that the Council works closely with the University and attends fresher's fairs. However, the student populations are more difficult due to the temporary basis of the accommodation. Further conversations can be held with the students, by zones teams, to assist with this.

With regards to food waste, a Panel member highlighted that they were pleased with the 81% increase in the amount collected, but questioned why this had failed before. In response, Ann Hedges stated the increase in food collection followed on from the distribution of 10,000 food caddies as well as from residents adapting to the change in collection of waste.

In response to a query regarding savings on landfill tax, Ann Hedges stated that it currently costs the County Council £86 a tonne for waste to go to landfill. The total reduction would not be available until the end of the full year, but it is likely to be high.

In terms of the next steps, Panel members stressed the importance of looking at recycling provision for flats. Ann Hedges confirmed that this is included in the plan, and that work would commence in the new year. The Panel requested that this come back to a future meeting for review and Ann Hedges confirmed that this could be brought to the March meeting highlighting the Council's current position. The Panel then discussed the different interested parties that could feed into the review, such as Colchester Borough Homes and other housing organisations. Panel members also highlighted the need to speak to private lenders and gather experience from residents. Comments were also received about the current planning process for new flats and the need to include waste and recycling areas. Councillor Scott-Boutell stated that she shared the frustration in the lack of recycling in flats. Ann Hedges confirmed that the zones and waste teams will be aware of many of the locations where recycling facilities in flats is required.

In providing feedback on the new Waste service the Panel agreed that they would not be keen to see the introduction of a voucher system, that the garden waste situation should be reviewed and that there should be a continuing education programme with cautious enforcement. The Panel would also be interested to see a longer term plan for waste and recycling and further statistics on participation rates.

Ann Hedges also highlighted that, whilst the next steps may not be overly ambitious the service is still settling down from the significant change that had previously occurred.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Panel considered and commented on the Waste Collection strategy.