

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Recycling and Waste Partnership Board held at Online via the Zoom app on 21 October 2020

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.20 pm

36 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Recycling and Waste Partnership Board meeting held on 29 January 2020 were confirmed as a true record.

37 Declarations of interest

Councillor Geoff Jung – Personal interest: his district ward included the SUEZ Greendale depot site and he subscribed to the green waste service.

38 Joint contract and operational report

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager and the SUEZ Contract Manager gave the Board a joint report on a contract review and operational update. Since the last Partnership Board meeting in January 2020 the team had experienced its most challenging period since mobilising the new recycling and waste system in 2017, this time without the support and additional resources that had been available during mobilisation.

There were a number of pressures and movements that the coronavirus pandemic had exerted on the system due to household behaviour changes and the coronavirus safety measures required. There was almost no planning time available to deal with these changes and managing the changes was an ongoing process. Shifts in the waste and recycling streams would continue to be monitored to assess if the movements had become permanent and if longer term adjustments to the system were needed in future.

Despite the intensive pandemic conditions the team had also managed to plan and implement a significant round re-balancing exercise, taking 879 properties off of the Friday round and transferring them to other collection days. In addition to this the green waste service customer base had continued to grow, further increasing demand on resources. Overall it had been a very testing time, but had also highlighted the importance of the joint working partnership.

The SUEZ Contract Manager reported that there had been additional road traffic accidents, mainly attributed to more cars being parked on the roads during the Covid 19 lockdown. Personal injury statistics had remained consistent and there had been one RIDDOR in September 2020.

Record tonnages of waste and recycling had been collected during the pandemic, as well as a change in composition of kerb side materials. Many residents were producing much more cardboard than normal, resulting in crews having to make more tip runs. Throughout lockdown SUEZ suffered high staff shortages due to shielding/isolating and temporary staff were heavily relied upon. Additional rounds were also deployed to assist in coping with the increased tonnages. Post lockdown there had been a number of crew behavioural issues which was reflected in the missed collection and complaints statistics,

which were far higher than expected. This was also exacerbated by the round rebalancing exercise, which involved a number of properties either having a day change or a week change for their refuse collection. Over 11,000 properties had a crew change and there had been some disruption whilst the crews became familiar with their new routes. Behind the scenes the Contract Manager was working with the SUEZ supervisors the standards expected in order to reduce customer complaints and ensure a decent standard of service was maintained.

It was noted that the East Devon App was widely used to push messages and disseminate information to residents about round changes as well as continual messages about contamination of materials. This could currently go to round level and it was hoped that this could be developed further to road level. The app was the most direct communication route to customers.

The SUEZ Contract Manger reported that whilst exceptional tonnages of recycled materials had been collected this year, material values had generally declined. Plastic sales in particular had seen significant reductions due to weak demand for recycled polymers. The MRF at Greendale was undergoing operational review in order to improve the performance of the plant to handle current and future volumes of materials and preserve material quality.

The Board were informed by the Recycling and Waste Contract Manager that East Devon continued to be approached by local authorities wanting to seek advice and share its experience, due to the success of the partnership. It was noted that the team had been in constant touch with other Devon authorities throughout the pandemic and that every authority apart from Plymouth Unitary had visited East Devon at least once.

East Devon had been short listed for the National Recycling Awards under the innovation category for its 'Ask East Devon' project and Alexa recycling skill.

National performance indicators showed that East Devon had a recycling rate of 60.5% and that the kg/residual/household/year had improved since the previous year. DEFRA had yet to release the league tables for 2019/20, but the partnership had made incredible progress.

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager reported that they were constantly working on a restricted capacity system and applying downward pressure on the amount of waste people produced at home. Recycling Officers did a huge amount of work behind the scenes. During lockdown there had been more home cooking and less eating out, generating more food waste. It was yet to be seen whether this was a permanent shift in behaviour. A food waste campaign was about to begin to encourage people to recycle their food waste.

In response to a question about ensuring business continuity and what SUEZ's plans were if there was a potential Covid 19 outbreak at the depot, the SUEZ Contract Manager advised that there it would be the same principles applied as in lockdown, with a hierarchy of services that could be prioritised and a pool of staff available from elsewhere. SUEZ felt well prepared to contend with such an event and confident they could deal with any issues.

It was noted that if there was another lockdown the DASWC (Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee) would be insisting that household waste centres should stay open.

On behalf of the Board the Chairman thanked SUEZ and the partnership team for all of their efforts and achievements during the pandemic. This was reiterated throughout the meeting by members.

RESOLVED:

1. that the Board consider key performance indicators and the performance framework at its next meeting in order to track the impact of SUEZ improvement measures.
2. that further consideration be given to communication message to reduce missed collections and encourage more food waste recycling.

39 **SUEZ Covid costs**

The Board considered a draft report to Cabinet seeking extraordinary additional costs by SUEZ incurred during the Covid 19 pandemic. The Government's instruction to stay at home during the lockdown meant that households generated high levels of recyclables and waste during a very short space of time. The only outlet households had for their recycling and waste was through kerb-side collections, with the usual alternatives of household waste and recycling centres, bring banks and donation organisations not being available. The increase volume of kerbside collections was compounded by the loss of key frontline staff through shielding and self-isolation. This demanded a rapid operational response to ensure collection services were maintained and the extra tonnages dealt with.

The overall effects of lockdown meant that East Devon waste and recycling streams increased significantly in volume and changed greatly in terms of composition. None of this had been planned or budgeted for and the service was working outside of normal contract arrangements. SUEZ had submitted a claim to EDDC for reimbursement of additional costs that had arisen through operating in pandemic conditions. This included itemised costs for additional labour, vehicles and fuel costs during the peak lockdown period. The cost information had been jointly reviewed by the EDDC Recycling and Waste Contract Manager and the SUEZ Contract Manager. As the costs had arisen through the response to extraordinary and unforeseeable circumstances they were unbudgeted.

Although the additional costs were reducing consistently, it was uncertain whether costs were now stable as it was not known what the long term effects of Covid 19 would be. It was too early to tell whether the kerbside composition change was long term. The route changes had also blurred the lines between operational costs and covid costs. It was acknowledged that there was likely to be an additional increase in cardboard with more people online shopping for Christmas.

RECOMMENDED: that the Board support the recommendation to Cabinet that the extraordinary additional cost claim submitted by SUEZ for costs incurred in responding to the coronavirus pandemic conditions are met by EDDC.

40 **Green waste - quarterly accounts update**

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager thanked the Accountant and the Streetscene Budget and Equipment Monitoring Officer for compiling the accounts and explained them to the Board. It was noted that there had been a suspension period to

the service due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Rather rebating customers for this period the subscription dates had been moved forward, resulting in the peak of subscription renewals falling into quarter 2 instead of quarter 1. He reported that as of 20 October 2020 the green waste service had 14,372 customers.

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager was asked whether the decision not to charge a deposit for the green waste bins should be reviewed. He reported that the cost of a bin was around £17 and had a depreciation cost over 20 years, so the cost of the bins were covered under the current subscription. There were no plans to introduce a charge for the bins as it could effect uptake on a profitable business. It was noted that no other Devon authorities made a charge for their green waste bins either. The Board then went on discuss whether the annual charge of £48 for the service should be increased. It was noted that the other Devon district authorities were not increasing their charge and that as the business would remain profitable EDDC's charge should not increase either. This would be good marketing for the service, which continued to remain good value for money.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that no deposit charge be made for the green waste bins.
2. that the annual subscription charge for the green waste service during 2021/22 remain at £48.

41 Update on round changes

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager updated the Board on significant round changes which had recently been implemented. Around 1900 properties had been affected with 879 properties being moved off of the Friday round. This was mainly due to the pressure of property growth in the west of the district.

The round changes had been very disruptive, with crews having to deal with 11000 changes within their round. This had inevitably led to some problems, but these were improving. It was acknowledged that the round changes had been implemented following a very challenging pandemic period, when the crews were already fatigued and without the previous mobilisation support.

RESOLVED: that the round changes be noted and the teams involved thanked for their hard work.

42 Tipping point 3 negotiation

The Streetscene Service Lead advised the Partnership Board that the tipping point for contract renegotiation was 73,000 properties. Pre-Covid 19 this was anticipated to occur around September 2022, but due to the council's budgeting timescales negotiations with SUEZ would need to begin in spring/early summer 2021.

However, during the Covid 19 pandemic tonnages collected had massively increased to levels that would be expected with around 73,000 properties. Therefore negotiations needed to begin sooner than previously anticipated.

It was important to establish whether the current collection tonnages were now the 'new norm'. A report on base line tonnages and whether the tipping point had been reached for additional tonnages and resources would be brought back to the Board.

RECOMMENDED: that tipping point negotiations begin now with SUEZ regarding collection tonnages to establish what are and aren't Covid 19 costs and that a report be brought back to the next Board meeting.

43 **Composition/card/glass - update on fleet decisions**

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager advised the Board that if the changes to the composition of recycling materials being collected was permanent then future consideration may need to be given to how the fleet vehicles were configured, in order to accommodate the shift in recycling materials pattern. More data was required before this was reviewed in order to decide whether this was now 'normal behaviour' or still 'covid behaviour'.

Following this the Streetscene Service Lead informed members that 15% of the council's own vehicle fleet was electric and that in light of the climate change action plan the intention was to move toward more environmentally sustainable vehicles. He advised that the SUEZ fleet was owned by EDDC and the vehicles had been written in until 2026, the end of the contract. It would cost £7 million to change the current fleet, therefore 2026 would be the appropriate time to consider this.

RESOLVED: that the Board note the update on fleet decisions and that further composition data analysis be brought back to the Board to inform future vehicle decisions.

44 **Veolia's acquisition of SUEZ shares**

Consideration was given to a letter included with the agenda papers concerning Veolia's acquisition of 29.9% of SUEZ shares. The SUEZ Regional Director South West explained to the Board the context of this and that SUEZ would strongly resist any future attempts by Veolia to acquire SUEZ as a company. SUEZ would continue to keep their customers informed and assured them that service delivery would not be affected. It was noted that within the industry SUEZ and Veolia provided a very similar service so it was unlikely that customers would see a big service change or disruption.

RESOLVED: that the update on Veolia's acquisition of 29.9% of SUEZ shares be noted by the Board.

45 **Christmas communications**

The Board received a preview of the forthcoming Christmas communications bin hanger. It included information on seasonal collection changes as well as added messages on food waste and recycling. The focus was on the quality of recycling as well as the quantity.

It was noted that the hangers would be delivered by the refuse crews over a three week period up to 18 December 2020. If the weather was particularly windy the hangers would be stuck down on the inside of the bin lids.

RESOLVED: that the Christmas communications bin hanger be noted.

46 **Food waste communications**

The Board received food waste communications aimed at encouraging residents to recycle their food waste. A bin hanger had been created to be used opportunistically rather than widely distributed. The information would be disseminated in other formats too such as via social media and in the Housing Matters magazine to council housing tenants.

Food waste was a valuable resource and from Halloween until New Year was the peak time for tonnages. It was noted that contamination of food waste was very low.

A request was made for the partnership to promote cooking oil being disposed of in the food waste caddies rather than being poured down kitchen sinks and into the water stream.

RESOLVED: that the food waste communications be noted.

Attendance List

Board Members:

Councillors present:

G Jung (Chairman)

D Bickley

E Rylance

T Wright

G Pook

M Rixson

Officers present:

G Bourton, Recycling and Waste Contract Manager

J Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment

A Hancock, Service Lead StreetScene

Suez present:

J Pike, Regional Director South West

N Tandy, Principal Commercial Manager

H Mcleman, Contract Manager

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott

P Faithfull

P Millar

K McLauchlan

Officers in attendance:

Tammy Down, Streetscene Budget and Equipment Monitoring Officer

Lou Hodges, Recycling Officer

Christopher Lane, Democratic Services Officer

Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Suez representatives in attendance:

Board Member apologies:

Chairman

Date: