

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Recycling and Waste Partnership Board held at Online via the Zoom app on 14 July 2021

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.45 pm

1 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Recycling and Waste Partnership Board meeting held on 28 April 2021 were confirmed as a true record.

2 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Denise Bickley, Personal, Chair of Sidmouth Plastic Warriors.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Eleanor Rylance, Personal, Ward member for Broadclyst, which included Hill Barton Business Park.

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Geoff Jung, Personal, Ward member for Woodbury and Lypstone, which included Greendale.

3 Matters arising

There were no matters arising or questions submitted in advance of the meeting.

4 Devon County Council & Coastal Waste - green waste composting

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager introduced Chris Chandler, Senior Waste Manager, Devon County Council and Lyn Chadwick, Compost Contract Manager, Coastal Waste. They had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss composting operations and outputs from the composting contract at Hill Barton Business Park.

Chris explained that EDDC was the collection authority and that DCC was the disposal authority for the district. Approximately 5,500 tonnes of garden waste was collected in East Devon per year and the composting facility at Hill Barton was operated by Coastal Waste on a ten year contract. Green waste from East Devon, Exeter and Mid Devon was processed at the Hill Barton centre. Lyn went on to explain the composting process and what happened to the compost once finished.

There was 25,500 tonnes of green waste taken on site per year and composting was a 12 week process. The product needed to be off site after these 12 weeks in order to enable more material to be taken. The facility was reliant on farmers collecting the end product and they were reluctant to expand on capacity as the service was working well. The local farmers did their own haulage which was beneficial to them as they tended to collect in bulk. It was felt that this was more beneficial to the environment than trying to market the compost to a retail market as members of the public would only collect small

amounts at a time. Also, for a retail market the compost would need to be matured for 9 months, which was not practical on the site.

In response to a question about potential environmental damage from the compost being spread thickly on fields, Lyn replied that there had never been an issue with run off from the compost. Farmers received the results of the compost tests before they spread it and it was their responsibility to report it to the Environment Agency.

It was noted that plastics was a huge issue across the industry at present. The process removed as much plastic as possible and there was a screening process at the end. No more than 0.12% of plastic was permitted in the end product. Although many products were labelled as 'compostable' this was only possible where the correct facilities existed. Devon County Council had previously made representations to Government that it was disingenuous to produce these things without any ability to process them. The Recycling and Waste Manager added that this would become part of Extended Producer Responsibility, with a binary labelling system for what was practically recyclable rather than just possibly recyclable.

Members were advised that it was not necessary to purchase food waste bags as the plastic packaging was removed at the start of the process. Infact the food waste bags often got caught up in the anaerobic digestion system. It was better to reuse existing plastic bags, or ideally use no bags at all. It was requested that contact be made with Vegware to investigate options and actively work with the waste sector to grow their routes.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked Lyn and Chris for attending the meeting and answering members' questions. He felt that a visit to the Hill Barton site would be useful for the Board.

RESOLVED:

1. that members of the Partnership Board visit the Coastal Waste composting site at Hill Barton.
2. that the Chair and the Recycling and Waste Contract Manager raise the issue of plastic bags and 'compostable' labelling at the next Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee (DASWC) meeting.
3. that the Chair request that DASWC contact Vegware to investigate potential routes.

5 Joint operational and contract report

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager and the SUEZ Contract Manager gave the Board a joint report on a contract and operational update for the period March to June 2021. The quarter started well, but from early May staff shortages and recruitment difficulties had led to problems such as non-deployment of rounds, incomplete rounds, high levels of missed collections and disrupted services. There was no easy solution to this sector wide problem, but training and recruitment measures were being put in place to improve the situation. The teams were being flexible on a day to day basis to make the best use of the resources available and communicate disruption to services. It was reported that recruitment advertising was being approached differently, using EDDC social media links in a joint way of finding staff. A bonus scheme had been implemented to retain current staff and pay reviews were underway to meet a highly competitive market, where there was a high demand for drivers and limited availability.

The clinical waste review had produced positive outcomes and the communal recycling facilities at EDDC blocks of flats had been improved. The milestone of 16,000 green waste subscriptions had been passed. Property count continued to rise. Record sales values for dry recyclable materials were being achieved as markets became more buoyant. The partnership sold 4540 tonnes at a value of £520,622. During June it sold £117,388 which was the best performing month since the contract began.

The SUEZ Contract Manager explained that the high number of accidents in March was mainly due to fatigue of drivers. There was concern that staff fatigue would occur again if crews had to continue with Saturday catch up collections. Following crew behaviour training which was rolled out in May the safety statistics decreased in June, along with customer complaints. It was noted that there had been a huge increase in access issues due to people being at home with their cars parked on the roads. Increased home working had created artificial narrow access which the crews could not predict. SUEZ reported that collection points and additional narrow access vehicles were being considered. It was hoped that residents could be encouraged to park more responsibly on collection days. Crews also had new devices with better photo ability for reporting of issues.

It was noted that although missed collections had increased, complaints had not. Complaints regarding spillages had reduced and communication levels were high. Councillors found the end of day reports very helpful as a way of keeping people informed.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the officers for keeping the service running and for their efforts in recruiting staff.

6 **Update on SUEZ recruitment progress and plans**

The issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of staff were discussed throughout the meeting. At a contract level SUEZ were approaching recruitment advertising differently. EDDC social media links were being used in a joint way of finding staff, there was a Radio Exe advert and approaches had been made to the Royal Marines charity and to the Fire Service.

A bonus scheme had been implemented and trialled to retain current staff. Pay reviews were also in the process to meet a highly competitive market, where there was high demand for drivers and limited availability.

SUEZ was running an apprenticeship scheme to train member of staff to gain their LGV licenses, with three loaders due to take their driving tests soon

7 **Suez bridging solution regarding contract tipping point**

The SUEZ Principal Commercial Manager outlined a number of key changes that had impacted service delivery of recycling collections in East Devon. These were more significant than allowed for under the terms of the contract and would be relevant to the end of the contract term:

- Property numbers were rising more steeply than anticipated.
- Residents were recycling in larger volumes by around 10% than in previous years.
- The current round structure could not keep up with increased demand, resulting in:
 - Increased missed/late collections.

- Reduction in service levels.

As a result of this, along with a number of assumptions, a bridging solution to end of the contract was proposed to bridge the gap between now and when the rolling out of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation and Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) would change requirements again. The proposal was:

- 1 additional supervisor.
- 9 additional drivers.
- 16 additional loaders.
- 6 additional vehicles (4 Romaquips and 2 narrow access vehicles).

The risks of this bridging solution were:

- Property growth increased faster than forecast.
- Recruitment of additional staff.
- Availability and delivery of more vehicles.

It was noted that EDDC had been meeting with SUEZ to address the bridging solution. It was acknowledged that the tonnages currently being collected were what would have been expected from 73,000 properties (contract tipping point) and that a bridging solution was required. This would need to be addressed through the Council's governance and constitutional process. The Board were reassured that this had always been envisaged in the contract and the officers were doing due diligence before finalising a fully costed proposal. More detailed information was required from SUEZ, to include a detailed build-up of costs and a timeline plan for vehicle deliveries. Following this, reports would be taken to the Partnership Board, Cabinet and full Council.

In response to a question about the use of electric vehicles the Regional Director South West reported that as a company SUEZ was trialling all sorts of electric vehicles and that the market was developing. The biggest consideration/challenge was the space requirements for how and where the vehicles would be charged. It was felt that the large scale purchase of fleet would be the best time to address this. The Service Lead – StreetScene confirmed that officers were actively looking at the decarbonisation of the fleet and that the target end date was 2026, which was the end of the contract and the life scale of the existing fleet.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet note that the Board had received the presentation regarding the bridging solution and had requested more detail in a written report.
2. that Cabinet note that a more detailed report on a bridging solution would be brought forward for its consideration in due course.

8 **SUEZ report on current collection issues and action plan**

The SUEZ Principal Commercial Manager explained that during recent weeks there had been an increase in the volume of complaints made about the service. These had been made directly to councillors, via the customer service centre and on social media. He gave the Board a summary of what had happened and what SUEZ were doing about it. There had been a number of operational challenges:

- The Covid 19 pandemic had impacted both the composition and quantity of material being collected.
- Home working has meant more parked cars, increasing access issues.
- The job market has changed – more companies were competing to recruit drivers.
- National shortage of drivers:

- Covid – a number of drivers returned to their country of origin and had not yet returned.
- Brexit – legal changes to rights to live and work in the UK and UK access to labour.
- Covid – driving test centres were shut, resulting in 41% less drivers taking tests.
- Challenging market to recruit drivers, both full time and agency.

In addition to this:

- Rounds had been impacted by property increases.
- Relaxing of lockdown allowed access to pubs and restaurants.
- There were currently 4 driver vacancies – 13% of the driving requirement.
- Disciplinary issues having a larger impact than they would in a steady state.
- The service was reliant on staff availability and a large requirement for human resources.
- Potential to get worse as the driver market continued to be under resourced during the summer months.

A key problem was the lack of availability of agency staff. Previously agencies had been used to cover vacancies in the short term, but this hadn't been possible in recent months. The agencies often did not have drivers available when they were needed.

The Board acknowledged that the root cause of the collection issue was the driver shortage and noted SUEZ's plans to address this:

- Detailed review of agency agreements.
- Recruitment of drivers – 3 currently being interviewed.
- Internal driver training – 4 staff currently being trained to drive.
- Manage and reduce absenteeism and encourage teams to help to complete outstanding work – trialling a bonus scheme, which if successful would be rolled forward.

The Board were presented with a number of service curtailment options to consider and were advised that these had been assessed and discussed at a local level. For now the service was getting by weekly. It was acknowledged that there was no quick fix. SUEZ were requested to provide a written improvement plan.

The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment expressed frustration at the lack of innovation. The report provided good analysis, but required more action and 'thinking outside of the box'. He was concerned that the complaints and missed collections were damaging the reputation of the service, which the partnership had worked hard on and taken a long time to build up. He hoped the partnership could work on some wider solutions and was keen for SUEZ to use its power/influence. The action plan required something more radical in order to avoid further summer disruption.

It was noted that residents could help crews increase their pick rate and speed of rounds by sorting their materials in the recycling box. SUEZ were trialling various areas and issues to enhance this.

The Board agreed that a visit to the Greendale depot site for its members would help increase understanding of all the activities that were undertaken there. It would also be helpful and informative for Board members to shadow collection crews on their rounds.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that Cabinet approve that SUEZ be requested to provide a written improvement and action plan to deal with current collection issues, including further material segregation trials, in discussion with crews and EDDC officers.
2. that Cabinet approve that members visit the Greendale depot site to observe the work that was undertaken there, with members also shadowing collection crews on their rounds.

9 **SUEZ crew customer care/behaviours training programme**

The Recycling Officer, SUEZ outlined the toolbox talks given to crews as part of their customer care/behaviours training programme. It was important for the crews to learn how the way they did their job affected the service the contract delivered to the residents of East Devon and how this affected residents' behaviour. It also affected the image and credibility of EDDC and SUEZ, as well as their day to day work life.

The 5 golden rules of crew behaviour were:

1. Never litter.
2. Always return bins neatly.
3. Always behave responsibly.
4. Drive with care.
5. Use social media responsibly.

The training provided the crews with reasons why they were being asked to follow the rules, as well as examples of social media complaints. A training video would also be produced.

Overall crews had received the training well and it was hoped that the positive effects would continue. This toolbox training would be given to crews every six months, and used for the induction of all staff, including agency. Other incentives were also being devised to help keep staff morale up.

The Recycling Officer was thanked for a brilliant presentation and it was noted that an improvement had been seen in container returns, and complaints in general were coming down. Positive customer feedback was also passed onto the crews.

RESOLVED: that the Recycling Officer be thanked for her hard work and the toolbox training continued.

10 **Force majeure position and performance framework**

The Board noted the performance point summary and the financial deduction summary and the importance of tracking these to monitor performance of the contract, even during a pandemic. The Board also noted that a force majeure had been called (from 23 March 2020 for the duration of the Covid 19 pandemic) that no financial penalties should be levied on SUEZ. The Board discussed the ending of the current force majeure and agreed that it should coincide with the end of coronavirus restrictions (planned for 19 July 2021). This would not prevent SUEZ from requesting another force majeure in the future, if required. SUEZ requested a cautious approach initially as the service was still feeling the effects of lockdown legislation, such as the requirement for crews to self isolate.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet approve the current force majeure position with SUEZ cease with the ending of coronavirus restrictions on 19 July 2021.

11 **Green waste quarterly accounts**

The Recycling and Waste Manager thanked the Accountant and the StreetScene Budget and Equipment Monitoring Officer for producing the accounts. It was noted it had not yet been possible to build depreciation into the accounts. The teams were thanked for their hard work.

12 **Clinical collections review**

The Recycling and Waste Officer EDDC explained that the aim of the project was to divert non-infectious waste from the clinical waste stream to the domestic refuse stream, reducing costs for the Waste Disposal Authority (DCC), to bring EDDC in line with other Local Authorities who undertook this review 4 years ago.

Resident surveys were sent to all properties that received weekly collections, the responses then enabled the officers to ascertain if households were producing infectious waste or not.

Prior to the review in April 2021 275 weekly bag collections were made. There were two stages to the project, which resulted in 237 collections being removed, with 16 residents yet to respond to the two letters. Only a few complaints were received following the removal of the collections, all of which were negated following further discussions with the officers.

The positive outcomes from the project were:

- Reduced clinical collections.
- Reduced clinical tonnage sent for high temperature disposal – this also resulted in carbon savings.
- Staff productivity gains – prior to the project there was one driver working full time making collections. The workload of the driver had now significantly reduced and he was able to deliver refuse and recycling containers alongside the clinical work, which in turn had allowed the service to keep these deliveries on track.
- Carbon savings – fewer collections had resulted in less travelling and lower fuel consumption.
- Reduced costs for the waste disposal authority.
- EDDC was now aligned with other Devon district authorities.

On behalf of the Board the Recycling and Waste Officer was thanked for her report. The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager commented that removal of clinical collections had been expected to be contentious, but very few complaints had been received, mainly due to the excellent communications from the Recycling and Waste Officer.

13 **Resources and Waste Strategy update - progress and implications**

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager updated the Board on the Resources and Waste Strategy. The consultation phase had now ended on 4 July. Two responses had been submitted for each of the three consultations. One on behalf of EDDC and one through DASWC as a Devon group of authorities. The timetable was still vague but the Environment Bill was expected to get Royal Assent in Autumn 2021. Early 2022 (possibly April) would be the anticipated publication of the regulations and it was hoped that plans could start to be made once the content of the regulations were known. The

requirements of the regulations would determine what communications would be required and how and where they would be targeted.

Attendance List

Board Members:

Councillors present:

G Jung (Chair)
D Bickley
E Rylance (Vice-Chair)
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
N Tandy
J Gatter

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
O Davey
B De Saram

Officers in attendance:

Andrew Hopkins, Communications and Events Consultant
Lou Hodges, Recycling and Waste Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Suez representatives in attendance:

Lily Morton, Recycling Officer

Board Member apologies:

Chairman

Date: