

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Recycling and Waste Partnership Board held at online via Zoom on 27 April 2022

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.10 pm

35 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous consultative meeting held on 26 January 2022 were received and noted.

36 Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest.

Councillor Geoff Jung, Personal, ward member for Woodbury and Lypstone, which included Greendale Business Park.

8. Cartons trial.

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

37 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

38 Joint operations and contract report

The Recycling and Waste Manager and the SUEZ Contract Manager gave the Board a joint report on a contract and operational update for the period January to March 2022. Performance was strong, with recycling rates remaining high. The main feature had been the day to day management of the pressure on operations caused by a combination of external pressures:

- Covid.
- Employment and recruitment pressures.
- Property growth.

Reliability had suffered, however incomplete rounds had been recovered as quickly as possible.

Missed bin collections had been below the threshold since January. Complaints were remaining lower. It was aimed to keep this low with regular targeting of problem areas and crew education. The waste flow continued to remain high and the service was starting to feel the pressure with the growth zone areas. It was noted that the performance thresholds were set in the contract and used as a benchmark. The focus was on performance and looking at trends and areas for improvement, rather than imposing penalties.

Recruitment was being pushed strongly and there had been a welcomed pay increase across the manual workforce, bringing them in line with other local authorities. Bonus payments had been introduced to help employees keep up with the cost of living increases and there was a strong incentive scheme. Four loaders had become LGV

drivers and a team leader had been welcomed to a supervisor role. It was noted that no SUEZ trained drivers had left the company.

Commercial performance had been very strong with high commodity prices giving record material sales income and the green waste service had produced a significant profit for the year.

The bridging solution had been approved by Council, to give the partnership a pathway to manage the existing pressures until 2026 and expand the operational resources for the next few years to cope with the growth of the district.

It was noted that there had been one RIDDOR, which was investigated and had resulted in a broken bone in the hand due to an IP not following the correct handling techniques.

SUEZ had many ongoing sustainability projects and had recently provided volunteers at a local tree planting event, and beach cleans. A wellbeing area had also been developed onsite.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the officers for their report and for the SUEZ volunteers who had recently taken part in the sustainability projects.

In response to a question from a member the Board were informed that there had been a delay with the electric Romaquip vehicles so these had not yet been received or trialled by SUEZ.

A request was made for statistics on the kilograms per household of refuse in order to assess whether overall waste was being reduced. The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager reported that this was a statistic collected for DEFRA and therefore easily available to provide to the Board. It was previously around 256kg/household in East Devon – the lowest in the country.

It was hoped that recycling facilities on the seafronts and other busy public areas could be improved. Street Scene were aware of this and a potential way of helping overcome the problem of contamination was the use of better signage and educating the public. It was noted that Extended Producer Responsibility and Deposit Return Schemes are likely to have an effect on the on-street waste would have a big incentive and feed into these solutions to encourage recycling and reduce contamination in public bins.

39 **Performance framework**

The Board noted the performance framework which showed performance across the contract for the Board's review and information.

40 **Environment Act update**

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager updated the Board on the Government response to the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) consultation. There had been two consultation phases, in 2019 and 2022. The Government responses to consistency in collections and Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) had not yet been issued, although there were some references to consistency and DRS where these were needed to explain the approach to parts of EPR. DRS had been confirmed as an 'all-in' scheme but would exclude glass. The Government response to EPR was generally welcomed by the

sector as a whole, which would only apply to household waste (business waste removed). There was no information on measurement or monitoring.

The key points of the EPR response were summarised in the Recycling and Waste Contract Manager's report and included:

- The scheme administrator would be a public body, set up in 2023 and operational in 2024.
- EPR funding would support consistency in collections and DRS.
- Estimates were that it would not be a significant cost to consumers.
- EPR full net cost recovery would be in place in April 2024.
- Payments to local authorities would be quarterly in arrears, based on previous 12 months data. From 1 April 2024 fees would be paid based on an apportionment from producer data reported in 2023. Modulated fees would come into place in 2025.
- Payments to waste disposal authorities and waste collection authorities would be made separately in two tier areas.
- EPR for businesses would be delayed until 2026/27.

In terms of performance the system administrator would assess if each local authority was delivering an effective and efficient system and would set cost and performance benchmarks for each local authority. It was unknown at present what 'an efficient system' was, but it was likely to be performance based. Population, demographics, geography and rurality would be taken into account.

Other points to note included:

- Local authority owned depots/MRFs would not need to sample as first point on consolidation.
- Single labelling format would be mandatory using binary labelling – 'recycle' or 'do not recycle'. 'Do not recycle' would apply to all materials that could not currently be recycled, including compostable packaging. Universal labelling would be in place by March 2026.
- Plastic film recycling would be in place by March 2027 for local authorities and businesses.
- Fibre based composite cups were not included in EPR.
- DRS would be 'all in' for single use drinks containers.
- Compostable and bio-degradable items would have a 'do not recycle' label until infrastructure was in place to enable these materials to be composted at industrial scale.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the Recycling and Waste Contract Manager for his update and expressed his own frustrations over the delays and continuing unknowns. This was endorsed by the Board, which agreed that certainty was needed, particularly for effective planning and budgeting. The Board wanted to lobby the Government for recognition that tetra paks were so difficult to recycle. The Strategic Lead – Housing, Health and Environment, the Recycling and Waste Contract Manager and the Chair of the Recycling and Waste Partnership Board agreed to formulate a letter of response to the Government, to include the difficulties of recycling tetra pak.

41 **Cartons trial**

The Board received a presentation from two SUEZ Recycling Officers which gave a summary of the cartons trial undertaken to sort cartons separately and gain understanding of the current usage/presentation of cartons within the recycling stream.

Cartons were a core recycled material in the SUEZ bid and were currently collected in the green recycling sack as part of mixed plastics, tins and cans stream. As a result cartons were sold to re-processors within the mixed plastics stream. There was only one

place in the UK that recycled cartons (ACE UK) and they had confirmed to EDDC and DCC that they never received cartons from the contract. It was unsure whether the cartons were recycled as part of the mixed plastics stream or sent as residual to an energy from waste plant. Cartons' complex makeup made them hard to separate and therefore hard to recycle and reprocess. They were not part of a circular economy and there was currently no waste legislation on carton material.

Officers highlighted that recycling of cartons specifically had not been promoted by EDDC and that pre-trial data concluded that just 2-4% of the plastics stream were cartons.

The Recycling Officers explained the trial which ran for 9 weeks in the Byron Way loop, Exmouth, and covered 490 properties. A letter was sent to all residents asking them to place any cartons within a blue cartons bag (survival bag) and then place this inside the green recycling sack, once the survival bag was approximately half full of cartons. Reminder letters were sent to some residents after two weeks. At the end of each week the total number of bags and individual cartons were counted and weighed.

Data collected from the trial included:

- Resident participation – number of bags collected and resident feedback.
- Material.
- Contamination.
- Volume.
- Use of receptacles.
- Crew efficiency, including crew pick rate.

Findings from the trial were that only 6-9% of households presented cartons in their recycling (on average each household would present less than one carton) and resident participation was low. Residents were willing to separate, but did not use many cartons. There was no real impact on crew efficiency.

Issues with the trial were:

- Available space on the Romaquip vehicles.
- Use of a single use blue plastic bag.
- The small amount of cartons presented.
- Storage at the depot – it was estimated to take 5 months to get a full load of cartons to the re-processor, so another bay would be required.
- Transporting the cartons to ACE UK.
- Contamination in the cartons – straws, card, coffee cups.
- Operational issues at the MRF.

It was hoped that Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) would move the full cost of dealing with packaging waste away from local authorities to packaging producers, encouraging the producers to use less packaging in general and material that was easier to recycle. Initial proposals in the Government's consultation on consistency was to include food and drink cartons in the plastics recycling stream, with recognition that there may be large investment into MRF facilities if cartons were included in consistency. The Government's consultation response on consistency was still awaited.

Four post trial options (with pros and cons) were presented to the Board for consideration and discussion:

1. Continue as currently collecting.
2. Stop collecting cartons altogether. Cartons would be put into the refuse bin and taken to the local energy from waste plant.

3. Separate cartons as per the trial.
4. Do nothing until EPR is implemented in 2024.

The Board thanked the SUEZ officers for the trial and presentation. Members were disappointed that cartons were not being recycled and were concerned about negative public relations. The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager stated that cartons were a core material in the SUEZ bid. They had been collected kerbside and the partnership had believed that the mixed plastic re-processors were passing the cartons on for recycling, and were hugely disappointed to discover that this was not happening. It was noted that this was an industry wide issue, not unique to East Devon. The initial stages of the Environment Act consultation indicated that cartons would be a core material, therefore it may not be sensible to take it out of the recycling stream now, only to reintroduce it in the future. Alternatively the tetra pak materials may be phased out altogether with EPR.

The Board discussed in depth which of the four post trial options to implement. They agreed that it was important to be open and transparent with residents and that some information on the website would be useful. It was also considered pragmatic to wait to see whether cartons would be included as a core material in consistency of collections. In the meantime it was suggested that officers investigate alternative options for dealing with tetra pak cartons and that pressure be put on the industry to use alternative forms of packaging.

The SUEZ Contract Manager would discuss with the SUEZ trading team to find more information about what other authorities did with their cartons, for a review at a future meeting. The SUEZ team would also review whether there was any financial advantage of removing tetra paks from the mixed plastics recycling stream.

RECOMMENDED: that Cabinet recommend that the Recycling and Waste Service continue to collect cartons from the kerbside as part of the recycling collections, as detailed in option 4 of the report, with the following additional actions:

1. A clear and honest communications message be provided to residents explaining the difficulties of recycling tetra pak cartons.
2. SUEZ investigate how other contracts handled their tetra pak materials and whether there was any financial advantage in removing cartons from mixed plastics recycling.
3. Officers work with Devon County Council waste team to find out what other local authorities did with their tetra pak materials and to put pressure on the industry to use alternative methods of packaging.

(Councillor Tom Wright requested that his abstention from the vote be recorded).

42 **Bridging solution**

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager and the SUEZ Contract Manager updated the Board on the bridging solution. This had been through the governance process and had been approved by Council. Skeleton plans were in place and the SUEZ Contract Manager was starting to look at phase 1 planning rounds. Vehicle delivery dates were important and manufacturers had been contacted to get updated prices and delivery dates to allow the capital allocation to be updated and orders to be placed.

The Recycling and Waste Partnership Board noted the bridging solution update.

43 **Green waste accounts**

The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager gave the Board a verbal update on the draft green waste accounts as the full set of accounts was not yet available. The Recycling and Waste Contract Manager assured the Board that the green waste scheme was viable, with the draft accounts showing an income of around £357,000, which resulted in potential profit of £143,000 to SUEZ and £240,000 to EDDC. It was noted that there were currently 17,753 green bins being used by the service.

The Chair thanked all those present for attending the meeting and the Board noted that the next meeting would be held on 13 July 2022.

Attendance List

Board Members:

Councillors present:

G Jung (Chair)
D Bickley
E Rylance (Vice-Chair)
T Wright
M Rixson

Officers present:

G Bourton, Recycling and Waste Contract Manager
J Golding, Strategic Lead Housing, Health and Environment

Suez present:

J Pike, Regional Director
J Gatter, Contract Manager

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
B De Saram
P Faithfull

Officers in attendance:

Lou Hodges, Recycling Officer
Alethea Thompson, Democratic Services Officer

Suez representatives in attendance:

Lily Morton, Recycling Officer
Jess Prosser, Recycling Officer

Board Member apologies:

Nick Tandy, Principal Commercial Manager
Andrew Hancock, Service Lead Street Scene, EDDC

Chair

Date: