

Report to: Joint Budget meeting of the Scrutiny Committee & Overview Committee

Date of Meeting 15 January 2025

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Recommendation from the meeting of the Recycling & Waste Partnership Board 12 November 2024

Report summary:

This report sets out a recommendation to the joint budget meeting of the Scrutiny Committee and Overview Committee from the meeting of the Recycling & Waste Partnership Board held on 12 November 2024. The minutes of that meeting were received and noted by Cabinet on 27 November 2024.

The relevant minute of the Recycling & Waste Partnership Board meeting is set out below.

Minute 13 Joint operations and contract report

The Recycling and Waste Service Manager and the SUEZ Contract Manager gave the Board a joint contract and operational update for the second quarter of 2024/25. During this quarter operations had been consistent and service levels had remained excellent. The summer months had historically been a difficult period with staffing shortages, but there had been no impact this year, with full staff resources and no occasions of in-complete rounds.

The main focus of the quarter was preparing for the absorbent hygiene products (AHP) recycling trial which started in mid September and was going well. Also in September the first of two electric recycling vehicles purchased as part of the bridging solutions was received. The electric vehicles would primarily be tested in the growth zone area (Cranbrook and Tithebarn), making this area a fully electric round, but would also be used in other areas across the district to assist with the decision making for when a large proportion of the fleet was due for renewal in 2026/27. There was currently only one other local authority in the country using electric collection vehicles. A proposal had also been put forward for an electric refuse collection vehicle. Options for electric vehicles had been vigorously trialled, with Romaquip being generally better built and more robust. The vehicle tipping system also worked with the system at the depot. It was noted that the electric recycling vehicles carried as much as the standard vehicles, with the configuration providing additional cardboard capacity. They also offered other benefits including reduced emissions and lower maintenance costs. The Board requested that there be proactive communications to highlight the use of the first electric Romaquip vehicle in the district and suggested organising a photo call and involving the local media to promote the initiative.

Recycling rates were around 62%, with the potential for a good year if this rate was maintained for the remainder of the year. It was noted that the rates were a quarter behind due to the validation process.

The SUEZ Contract Manager highlighted the success of reducing sickness levels from 9.21% in September 2023 to 2.77% in September 2024 through effective management and medical dismissals. This included immediate follow-up on day one of sickness and addressing long-term sickness. The reduction in sickness positively impacted operations. Complaints and missed collections remained below the performance framework thresholds, along with health and safety

issues. Crew stability had improved and recruitment efforts were successful. There was good staffing levels, but these were slightly down on contract staff, with spaces filled by agency staff. The agency staff were on a temporary to permanent basis, with the aim of transferring them over to SUEZ staff in the next few months.

The material recycling facility (MRF) was fully staffed, following a period of under staffing pressures due to a successful recruitment drive. The MRF was working well dealing with waste flows. The SUEZ Contract Manager explained the fire watch procedures at the MRF, where staff conducted two-hour fire watches after shutting down operations. This included taking heat readings of motors and machines to ensure safety before leaving the site. There were also five thermal cameras which activated if temperatures exceeded a certain threshold.

The Board discussed risks associated with incorrect battery disposal and the need for more communications to residents. Disposing of lithium batteries in general waste could start fires. The Board agreed on the need for a public awareness campaign to educate residents about the proper disposal of batteries, including using the East Devon app, social media and bin tags to communicate this message effectively. There should be a push on all communications channels to ensure that batteries were in plastic bags and placed on the top of the recycling box, visible for crew collection. Small electricals should be placed in the recycling box and not the grey waste bins. The SUEZ Contract Manager agreed to provide figures on fires at the depot.

The Board noted that revenue was falling for materials across the market, nationally, but that the partnership was still receiving competitive prices. Budget setting for the forthcoming year had recently been undertaken, with a cautious approach taken as the fluctuation in material prices impacted the overall budget and required careful monitoring. The volatility of the materials market was a risk on EDDC. It was suggested that the joint Overview and Scrutiny committee should review the budget volatility around materials income during the budget setting process to ensure that the budget was set realistically, considering the fluctuations in the national market.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the Recycling and Waste team run a communications campaign to promote greater awareness amongst residents on the safe disposal of batteries.
2. that the Recycling and Waste team undertake proactive communications to promote the use of the first electric recycling collection vehicle.
3. that the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the budget volatility of material prices during the budget setting process.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the budget volatility of material prices during the budget setting process.

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