

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

14 April 2015

Final Report of the Waste Task Group

Purpose

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the Waste Task Group for endorsement by the committee and referral to the Cabinet Member for response.

Background

2. On 28 October 2014 the Environment Select Committee agreed that communications to householders regarding waste and recycling was a work priority and resolved to reconvene the Waste Task Group to review this area.

3. This priority relates to the following aspiration in the council's Business Plan 2013-17:

"We will increase recycling and reduce our carbon footprint – we will encourage waste prevention and re-use and reduce the carbon footprint of our buildings, fleet and street lighting and support our staff and schools to become more carbon efficient."

4. The task group adopted the following terms of reference:
 - a) To investigate how improved communications with householders on the council's waste services may facilitate an improved rate of recycling (including garden waste);
 - b) To investigate how to increase the awareness of the range of services and resources available to assist in achieving improved recycling rates; with clear information on how to access the available resources and services.

5. The task group met on four occasions between January and March 2015 with the following membership:

Cllr Pat Aves
Cllr Rosemary Brown
Cllr Peter Evans

Cllr Mollie Groom
Cllr Jose Green (Chairman)
Cllr Jacqui Lay

6. The task group received information from the following witnesses and is grateful for their input:

Tracy Carter	Associate Director for Waste and Environment
Alan Clarke	Communications Officer
Marc Cooper	Communications Officer
Donna Mountford	Communications Officer

Evidence

National and local context

- For European Union (EU) member states the EU Landfill Directive (1999) set targets for the reduction of biodegradable waste sent to landfill as
 - By 2010, 75% of that sent in 1995
 - By 2013, 50% of that sent in 1995
 - By 2015, 35% of that sent in 1995
- There is the potential for member states to be fined if they do not meet these targets. A fine imposed on the UK could be passed to local authorities at rate proportionate with their landfill performance in relation to targets. The Government has set local authorities the target of recycling or composting 33% of household waste by 2015. They are also targeted to recover value from two thirds of municipal waste by 2015, at least half of that through recycling and composting.
- In Wiltshire the tonnage of materials being recycled, and rates of dry recycling and composting as a percentage of household waste, have increased overall during the last few years (Tables 1 and 2 below). In the last two years the tonnage of waste produced overall has also increased as the economy has strengthened and as the number of households in Wiltshire has grown.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Q3 2014/15
Total tonnage	87,011	90,853	99,920	97,298	88,634

Does not include street sweepings, bulky recycle or trade recycle.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15				End of Year
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Total	40.9%	46.9%	42.6%	44.1%	51.8%*	52.5%*	49.2%		50.2%
PI Target	40%	41.5%	45%	50%	50%				

*Recycling and composting of garden waste tends to decrease towards the end of the year.
Wiltshire Targets – 40% by 2010/11 and 50% by 2014 (Council Business Plan target)

10. The Standard Rate Landfill tax rises each year on an escalator that is set in the national budget. In 2010, the Chancellor stated that the tax would increase annually by £8 per tonne until 2014. For 2015, the rate has been increased in line with inflation, a rise of 3.25% to £82.60 per tonne.

Table 3 – Landfill Tax rates per tonne – standard waste									
2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
£21	£24	£32	£40	£48	£56	£64	£72	£80	£82.60

Waste management contracts

11. The council is procuring replacement contracts for some waste management services, which will come into effect in August 2017. This is the next opportunity for such alterations to the waste contract without the cost being prohibitively expensive. There will be a two-year mobilisation plan to ensure smooth transition to the new contract in 2017.
12. The specification for collection and management of dry recyclable materials will include collection plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays. There is also an option to include collection and management of waxed cartons (for example, Tetrapaks). However, it was also reported that there is a threshold beyond which it will be difficult to keep increasing plastic recycling rates due to the declining plastics recycling market. The task group understands that new, unused plastics are currently cheaper than recycled plastics due to the low price of oil.

Household recycling centres (HRCs)

13. The council proposes to change the opening hours of its 11 household recycling centres (HRCs). The proposed changes will see at least one HRC open on all seven days in each of the four areas (north, east, south and west Wiltshire). All HRCs would be open on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, which are the days when usage is at its highest, along with two additional week days. It is also proposed to reduce HRC opening hours to 10am to 4pm. The proposed changes are expected to come into operation on 8 June 2015.

Garden waste

14. Approximately 141,000 Wiltshire households have garden waste bins (this figure may be significantly more than the number actually used). As agreed by Full Council an annual charge of £40 per year will be introduced for the fortnightly collection of garden waste, with the new collections starting on 15 June. Free collections will continue until then and mid-year applications will be charged on a pro-rata basis. Although residents can sign up for the new collections at any time from 1 April they are being encouraged to sign up by 17 May to ensure continuity of service. For those households that cannot accommodate a wheeled bin, four garden waste bags (with the same total volume as a bin) can be provided for the same charge.

15. Residents who sign up for garden waste collections will be sent a sticker to place on their garden waste bin to identify which households have paid. Bins without a sticker will not be emptied. Residents who do not want to sign up can keep their bins in case they change their minds and to encourage continued use. A phased collection of unwanted bins is planned for late 2015.
16. Residents were sent their 2015 Council tax bills from 12 March and a flyer about the introduction of a charge for garden waste collections was included.

Food waste

17. Wiltshire Council work with Great Green Systems to offer subsidised food waste digesters to Wiltshire residents and help reduce the amount of food waste sent to landfill. Two food waste digesters are available, both of which take all cooked and uncooked food waste including meat, fish, bones, dairy products, vegetables and fruit:

Green Cone

The green cone can digest all cooked and uncooked food waste. Designed for a sunny position in a well-drained garden, the cone breaks down all food waste leaving only water, carbon dioxide and a tiny organic residue.

Green Johanna

This can digest both garden and all cooked and uncooked food waste and produces a quality compost. Designed for a shady position, the Green Johanna is a hot composter and therefore breaks down the waste quickly.

18. With food waste a further aim is to encourage people not to waste food unnecessarily rather than just adopt better methods of disposal. The task group discussed how this related to public health considerations around healthy eating and portion control.

Voluntary and Community Sector

19. Currently Wiltshire Wildlife Trust receive £110,000 per annum under the terms of a Joint Venture Agreement with the council, funding activities such as educational work in schools, pop-up shops, repair shops and compost and recycling champions. The task group understands that the council is currently working with the Trust to review its business plan.

Area Boards

20. Westbury Area Board will be running a series of events over the next 12 months to develop a toolkit for recycling and composting. The Area Board agreed to focus on recycling after the Joint Strategic Assessment showed that Westbury had one of the lowest recycling rates in Wiltshire. Subsequent work in this area has included a recycling awareness stall at Westbury's 2014 summer street fayre and a schools awareness programme on recycling.

Kerbside waste collection

21. The task group are aware that some local authorities use decals (stickers) applied to bins as a way of communicating changes to waste collection arrangements and as reminders of good recycling practices. The task group was not able to establish the impact of these in terms of increasing recycling levels versus the cost of producing and applying the decals themselves. The potential benefits of decals may therefore need further consideration.

Council website

22. The task group reviewed the current waste and recycling pages of the council website, which are now being redesigned as part of the first tranche of an overall redesign of the website. The new pages are due to go live in April or May. Details of the task group's conclusions are included under paragraph 34.

Conclusions

General

23. Landfill Tax rates have increased year on year since its introduction and there may be a risk of financial penalties for local authorities who do not meet their recycling targets. The task group concludes that communications that increase recycling rates will be key in counterbalancing the increasing cost of putting waste into landfill, as well as in protecting the environment.
24. Anecdotally there appears to be public awareness of the environmental benefits of recycling. However, the rising cost to the public purse of poor waste disposal practices is not promoted heavily. With the increasing financial pressures on all councils, it will be important to deliver clear messages to the public about the various benefits of disposing of their waste correctly. The approach should be varied to reflect the different mind-sets of residents and the different motivating factors. A dual approach would comprise;
 - Positive messages that acknowledge, affirm and reinforce good practice (for example, celebrating Wiltshire recycling performance, perhaps by illustrating this in an engaging graphic form on the council website and at HRCs; and
 - Harder messages that set out the costs and possible implications for poor disposal of waste.
25. Broadly speaking some people are already pro-recycling, some may benefit from some additional encouragement and for some their current approach will be difficult to change. Certain customer groups have been cited as being particularly 'hard to reach' in terms of recycling. Those in the 18 to 35 year old age bracket and home leavers are identified as important groups to target.
26. Desirable waste disposal practices must be quick, simple and convenient to ensure that those residents who want recycle can do so easily. To maximise

recycling rates, residents need to be provided with clear and accessible information explaining;

- The various bins and waste services available
- How the bins and services can be requested and details of any charges
- What kinds of waste should be placed in each bin or bag
- Up-to-date collection dates for every area
- Early and clear notice regarding forthcoming changes to waste collection services.

27. Kerbside collections is an area where good communications can help residents understand recycling arrangements, for example:

- Clarity about which plastics are recyclable and can be placed in the blue-lidded bins to reduce the risk of contamination.
- Ensuring clarity around what materials can be placed in the black box.
- Promoting the offer that a second blue-lidded bin and black box can be provided at no additional charge.
- Early information that plastics other than bottles will be kerbside recycled from 2017 as part of new waste contract.

28. However, the cost of publicity campaigns must be weighed against their likely impact. The task group have remained mindful of the financial constraints when considering possible new approaches to communications. Individual mailshots to residents are expensive and so existing channels must be used effectively, for example:

- Information sent with council tax bills (see paragraph 16)
- Your Wiltshire magazine (see paragraph 32)
- The council website (see paragraph 34);
- Area Boards and parish newsletters.

Household recycling centres (HRCs)

29. Given the proposed changes to HRC opening hours, their locations and opening hours must be widely communicated to avoid inconveniencing customers, reducing overall recycling rates and increasing incidences of fly-tipping by customers who would otherwise have used an HRC. Communicating successful prosecutions for fly-tipping may also help discourage it as an alternative to using an HRC or, where appropriate, garden waste bin.

Garden waste

30. Effective communications are required around the changes to garden waste collection to ensure:

- Residents who wish to continue using the service can do so;
- The service is promoted, reducing the risk of garden waste going into general waste bins and other disposal routes;

- The amount of garden waste being fly-tipped is minimised.
31. The task group concludes that the change to garden waste collections present a communications opportunity, not only to publicise the introduction of charging, but also to promote alternative options for the disposal of garden waste. For example, good gardening practice, guidance on composting, how to set up a community composting scheme and on the safe and legal use of bonfires.
 32. The task group recommended that information about waste and recycling should be included in the Spring edition of the Your Wiltshire magazine and an article about new arrangements for garden waste collection was subsequently included.

Voluntary and Community Sector

33. The task group would welcome further information about how the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust uses the £110,000 funding provided by the council in terms of maximising recycling.

Council website and ICT

34. Following a presentation of the council's waste and recycling website pages, the task group identified that a number of improvements could be made to the overall appearance and presentation of information. A list of the task group's observations is provided below, including where issues have now been addressed in the redesigned webpages:

Issues with the existing waste and recycling webpages identified by the task group	How issues have been addressed in the redesign
<p>The overall look of the homepage was too busy and the key information regarding Waste Collections and Recycling was too far down the page.</p> <p>The section on how to order additional recycling boxes could be made more prominent and simplified.</p>	<p>The redesign has focused on improving the user journey. The more popular sections have been made more prominent and will change in line with seasonal variations. The garden waste bin sign-up page is currently clearly accessible, for example.</p> <p>The previous webpages had too many levels of navigation, which sometimes made finding information complex. This has been simplified.</p>
<p>Overall the information on waste collections is clear and intuitive to use. However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there has been a delay in getting the 	<p>Information about waste collection dates is now derived directly from the system used by the waste collection teams, improving accuracy.</p>

<p>revised 2014 Christmas Collections up on the website. This needs to be done much earlier.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There also needs to be a permanent and prominent piece of text that explains which Bank Holidays are affected by changed collections and those where collections remain the same. 	<p>Entering a postcode brings up a calendar showing all relevant waste collection dates. This calendar can be easily downloaded for printing.</p>
<p>The images used on the recycling pages are of commercial recycling skips. These need to be changed to better reflect kerbside recycling.</p>	<p>This is in progress. Designated officers within the Waste and Recycling team will be able to edit content without support from Communications, making it easier to amend.</p>
<p>The current council website is not configured to be viewed properly using mobiles and tablets.</p>	<p>The new webpages are mobile responsive. When they are loaded on a smartphone or other mobile device the content re-orders to fit the screen.</p>
<p>The benefits of recycling to the environment and to the public purse are not made clear.</p>	<p>This is recommended by the task group under Recommendation 1.</p>
<p>There is no information illustrating Wiltshire's recycling performance or progress against targets.</p>	<p>This is recommended by the task group under Recommendation 2.</p>

35. The task group noted how QR (Quick Response) Codes can enable people to download information quickly by scanning the code with their smartphone. It was considered whether these should be included on council literature to download information about waste disposal, such as collection dates.

Proposal

36. To endorse the report of the Waste Task Group and refer it to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, Strategic Housing, Property and Waste for response at the Committee's next meeting.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, Strategic Housing, Property and Waste;

- 1. Alongside the environmental benefits, considers promoting the financial benefits of reducing, reusing and recycling in council communications about waste and recycling.**
- 2. Considers illustrating Wiltshire's recycling performance in an engaging graphic form on the council website and at HRCs.**
- 3. In terms of kerbside collections, indicates how the following areas will be addressed:**
 - Ensuring clarity around which plastics are recyclable and can be placed in the blue-lidded bins to avoid contamination;**
 - Ensuring clarity around what recyclables can be placed in the black box;**
 - Promotion of the council's offer of a second blue-lidded bin and black box at no additional charge to residents;**
 - Early information that plastics other than bottles will be kerbside recycled from 2017 as part of new waste contract.**
- 4. Investigates whether decals (stickers) applied to bins are a cost-effective method of communicating waste collection arrangements and good recycling practices.**
- 5. Indicates how changes to garden waste collection arrangements will be:**
 - Effectively communicated to residents; and**
 - Used as an opportunity to provide information about alternative options for garden waste, for example, good garden practice, composting, household recycling centres and the safe and legal use of bonfires.**
- 6. Considers increasing communications around successful prosecutions for fly-tipping.**
- 7. Indicates how changes to HRC opening hours, their locations and opening hours will be widely communicated to avoid:**
 - inconveniencing customers;**
 - reducing overall recycling rates; and**
 - increasing incidences of fly-tipping.**
- 8. Provides further details of the recycling promotion work currently undertaken by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust under the joint venture agreement with the council and the implications for recycling of the Trust's business plan review.**
- 9. Provides any further details of the initiative being run by Westbury Area Board to develop a toolkit for recycling and composting and how other area boards might be supported to take forward similar initiatives and increase local recycling rates.**
- 10. Notes the task group's comments on the waste and recycling pages of the council website and the improvements being made in the redesign.**

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Appendices

None