

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held at County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Monday, 16th January, 2017 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: County Councillor S. Howarth (Chairman)
County Councillor A. Easson (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: V. Smith and D. Dovey

Also in attendance County Councillor(s): D. Blakebrough, R. Chapman, D. Edwards, R. Harris, S.B. Jones, P. Murphy and J. Prosser

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Hazel Ilett	Scrutiny Manager
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Rachel Jowitt	Head of Waste and Street Services
Roger Hoggins	Head of Operations
Laura Carter	Technical and Policy Officer
Carl Touhig	Recycling and Business Strategy Officer

APOLOGIES:

County Councillors S. Jones, A. Webb, S. White and P. Watts.

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

2. Review of Recycling

Context:

The purpose of the meeting is to provide Select Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise the final proposals for the future of recycling collections prior to submission to Cabinet in March 2017. All Members were invited to attend the meeting and were permitted to participate throughout the meeting.

Key Issues:

The proposals under consideration are:

- i. That the principles of the existing recycling service (red and purple bags collected weekly) be maintained;
- ii. That glass be collected fortnightly in a separate container (green box)
 - a) Where a residents raise concern over ability to carry a box the service will offer a green caddy (similar to the outside food waste caddy) and if needed further assistance;
- iii. Food and green waste will be collected separately as previously approved;
- iv. That grey bags are re-introduced for residual waste;
- v. That changes are introduced between April – July 2018;

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- vi. That revenue savings generated from the service change cover the cost of prudential borrowing to allow capital expenditure e.g. changes to the Transfer Stations, purchase of boxes etc.;
- vii. That Cabinet give approval so the procurement process for the new fleet and design and construction of the Transfer Stations can begin;
- viii. Delegate approval for decision making to the Head of Waste & Street Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member & S151 Officer on any technical details, subject to changes remaining within the existing funding envelope of the service; and
- ix. That Select Committee and Cabinet receive a report on implementation of the service changes after July 2018 quantifying the full benefits and cost incurred and modelled cost of the service for its proposed 7 year life.

Member Scrutiny:

In response to a query, it was confirmed that Welsh Government officials are in agreement with the proposed approach in recognising residents' views. The good response rates to the survey were acknowledged.

A question was asked and it was confirmed that the premises costs refer to business rates for depots, Usk and Civic Amenity sites, water and electricity.

It was queried and confirmed that the majority of Welsh Councils alter their collection dates for bank holidays.

A Member commented that 20% of recycling issues are related to a failure to recycle food waste properly and that there is therefore a need for further engagement with the public regarding contamination. It was understood that there was also contamination in the red and purple bags resulting in 10% being rejected. It was queried if there was a way to reclaim the contaminated bags to make fit for recycling. In response, it was acknowledged that food waste and residual waste are in the highest quantum after general waste (items that can't be recycled). It was confirmed that food recycling was a priority for the Communications Team in future, noting that there is a percentage of residents who are happy to recycle but don't want to recycle food. It was explained that the 8-10% reject statistic was below average; most other co-mingled authorities have a 15-20% rejection rate. It was clarified that dealing with rejected waste is part of the contractor's gate fee. The return of rejected waste would involve an additional cost. Some items, such as textiles or small electricals can be recycled but the majority of residual be disposed of by the contractor within their price.

The point was raised that, 2/3 years ago, the Select Committee suggested that red/purple bags and glass were collected every two weeks, but it was considered at that time, that the bags/boxes would be too heavy and there would be too many route runs. It was queried why the proposal was being suggested again contrary to the previous view. It was advised that previously, consideration had been given to all waste being collected fortnightly but analysis has shown that there would be no operational efficiencies. The proposal is that red and purple bags will continue to be collected weekly, with glass and residual waste collected fortnightly.

It was commented that grey bags had also been discussed and whilst considered a good idea, were judged too expensive as residents placed mixed waste in them. It was suggested that grey bags should not be reintroduced and should be considered as a saving now and for the future.

A question was asked about the capital cost of changes to transfer stations and purchase of new fleet on the basis of a trial in N. Monmouthshire only, questioning if the trial had provided the best results. In terms of costs, it was clarified that there was little change required at

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Llanfoist where the trial has been based and a bay is available for use for glass recycling. It was confirmed that more major work would be required at Five Lanes estimated at £300,000 - £400,000 offset over 20 years' prudential borrowing. Regarding the trial since September in N. Monmouthshire, confidence was expressed that this was the best way forward. Additionally, it was reported that liaison with vehicle manufacturers confirms that timescales are viable

A Member was not convinced of the feasibility of the grey bag proposal referring to the small proportion of responses to the survey. It was queried if it was accurate that having grey bags increased recycling and food waste, suggesting that raising awareness was what helped. It was suggested it would be effective to concentrate on annual training and communication, and also to focus on food waste. As the target of 70% recycling has already been met, it was commented that the emphasis should now be on steady progress and glass recycling rather than further expenditure as the £90,000 could be spent on other priorities.

A member queried the reduced value of recycled glass. It was explained that recycling glass is not about income generation but impact on environmental performance and it is accepted that if glass was not recycled, costs would be substantially reduced. The Committee was referred to the financial analysis of various models of waste management and was provided with further information regarding markets and potential income levels.

It was commented that it must be made as easy as possible for residents to recycle.

A County Councillor commented that the Council should be proud of the success of its recycling initiatives and was impressed with the data presented. It was queried if educational slogans could be added to e.g. the glass recycling box, with incentives for recycling (saves money, protects the environment etc.).

A Member asked why green boxes have been distributed when a black box has already been supplied. It was also queried what the arrangements are for small businesses that have lot of glass to dispose of. It was confirmed that some comments have been received from householders regarding the green and black boxes and most accept the suitability of the smaller green box. It was further explained that manual handling was the issue of collecting glass separately, and the green box also represents the new initiative.

It was explained that separate glass collection will allow a better service offer to smaller businesses and will assist compliance with new legislation.

The capital cost of introducing the green box was questioned. It was explained that the cost is £2.07 per box funded through prudential borrowing over ten years which will be cheaper in the long term than the purchase of plastic bags. It was queried if there was a financial impact arising from changing the vehicles. It was explained that the vehicles are leased or obtained through prudential borrowing so that cost will be ongoing. The numbers of vehicles won't change, only the vehicle design.

In response to a question, it was agreed that residents would be able to have two boxes if they required them.

It was commented that compliant households get upset with those that are non-compliant, and queried if that is a problem. It was explained that staff are aware of problem areas and education officers undertake proactive work accordingly. They have also been given delegated enforcement powers, training and are able to issue fixed penalty notices. It was suggested that education and enforcement could be a topic for future discussion by the Select Committee.

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It was suggested that council tax demands could include information for residents free of charge.

It was queried if residual crews could pick up fly-tipping instead of sending out separate teams. In response, it was confirmed that refuse crews don't pick up fly-tipping as routes are carefully scheduled and there is no time available for this additional work. The use of a separate team can provide opportunities to obtain evidence that may lead to prosecution which can act as a future deterrent. In response to a question, it was advised that enforcement powers have only recently been given to the team, so there have not been any prosecutions. The Committee were informed that Environmental Health currently undertake prosecutions and prosecution figures could be presented at a future committee.

It was confirmed that the opinion of the crews was sought regarding design of vehicles and the intention is to invest in the best design for the crews and the service.

It was commented by a Member that criticism has been received regarding the slowness of the collection service and consequent traffic queues.

A Member commented that the brown bag for garden waste can deteriorate and queried if obsolete bags can be recycled? It was explained that procurement of the brown bags is currently out to tender because the UV protection has run out. The new bags will have higher UV protection. It was noted that the card can be lost risking non collection. It was explained that a trial is in progress of an electronic database that lists which households have a license etc.

It was commented that bags are sometimes put out too early and can be an eyesore, and suggested that a timetable of dates for households would be useful.

It was confirmed that the remaining recycling bins in car parks will be removed when contracts end in April 2017.

A Member commented that the proposed recycling arrangements will take longer but a decrease in crew numbers (one driver and two crew) is planned. It was agreed that recycling will take longer but assurance provided that there will be more resources for dry recycling and food, as the gardening waste crews will only be visiting registered properties. It was explained that red and purple bags, and food will be on the same lorry and commented that there will be more opportunity to monitor the quality of the recycling.

A Member queried if glass is separated by colour.

In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that vehicle design has been futureproofed as far as possible but recycling requirements will undoubtedly change noting that the vehicles have a seven year replacement cycle. The vehicles are leased or obtained through prudential borrowing according to financial advice.

Regarding the potential reintroduction of grey bags and the potential cost of £90,000, it was explained that analysis was carried out first in 2013, and indicated 72% participation. Before the trial, food waste participation was 70% rising to 73% post trial. The weight of residual waste also reduced. It was noted that when householder black bags were introduced they were bigger, opaque and contained more mixed waste. Capture analysis indicated reduction by 2% through use of grey bags.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that it would not be possible to add a snow plough to the vehicle front to increase versatility.

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It was noted that there is a proposed £23,000 saving on glass, and a potential £155,000 saving from paper. It was added that plastic and tins will still go to the MERF at a reduced net tonnage cost per annum. It was questioned if this was guaranteed and why the contractor would charge less. It was commented that the paper appeared to be of most value. It was responded that the figures were based on soft market testing and based on the worst case not on our current contract, and takes into consideration market trends. Some scepticism of the potential savings to be made was voiced. It was explained that the industry is continually fluctuating and influencing factors (participation levels, vehicle design etc.) have been built into the models presented, with the most cost effective and flexible service being preferred. It was agreed that there are arguments for and against the various models.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the period of prudential borrowing would be 7 years, the anticipated lifetime of the vehicles, and added that prudential borrowing for Five Lanes will be over 20 years as an infrastructure change.

A Member asked if there was a residual value to vehicles at their end of their useful life and confirmed that they are sold off at auction and income returns to the authority.

A Member questioned where plastic goes, and if there is a market for it. It was explained that it is reprocessed as eco plastics broken down into various grades, chemically treated and sold in UK based markets. Assurance was provided that plastic is not sent to third world countries. In terms of contamination, it was explained that this is eliminated as part of the melting down process, but householders are recommended to wash out plastics to reduce food waste. It was confirmed that the rejection by NRW of Caerphilly County Borough Council's plan for an incineration plant is not down to any authority in Wales. It was advised that our residual waste is sent to an Energy from Waste plant in Cardiff. Food waste is currently out to procurement with Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils to provide an anaerobic digestion plant that produces methane to burn for electricity.

A Member questioned and it was confirmed that for the glass separation model, investment will be less than the return over seven years and will be WG and market compliant. It was added that the public participation risk was taken into consideration, hence the trial which has demonstrated support. Additionally, the market is a risk factor, especially because of the level of investment and the need to futureproof. Additionally, legislative change is a risk but WG have committed that if there is change, authorities can see out the length of their investments.

In response to queries, it was confirmed that other co-mingling authorities share their data and are also conducting reviews. Some have expressed an interest in collaborative procurement of vehicles.

In terms of glass collected during the trial, it is deposited at Llanfoist Transfer Station and bulked up with glass from Civic Amenity sites, and the total is managed by Viridor.

Cabinet Member, County Operations, thanked the team for their work on the report and all those involved in the service.

Recommendations

1. Members scrutinised and commented on the proposals outlined in this report.
 - i. That the principles of the existing recycling service (red and purple bags collected weekly) be maintained;
 - ii. That glass be collected fortnightly in a separate container (green box)

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- a) Where a residents raise concern over ability to carry a box the service will offer a green caddy (similar to the outside food waste caddy) and if needed further assistance;
- iii. Food and green waste will be collected separately as previously approved;

Regarding the following proposal:

- iv. That grey bags are re-introduced for residual waste.

It was agreed to defer a decision on the re-introduction of grey bags pending provision of further information.

A vote to defer reintroduction of grey bags was carried.

The following proposals were agreed:

- v. That changes are introduced between April – July 2018;
 - vi. That revenue savings generated from the service change cover the cost of prudential borrowing to allow capital expenditure e.g. changes to the Transfer Stations, purchase of boxes etc.;
 - vii. That Cabinet give approval so the procurement process for the new fleet and design and construction of the Transfer Stations can begin;
 - viii. Delegate approval for decision making to the Head of Waste & Street Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member & S151 Officer on any technical details, subject to changes remaining within the existing funding envelope of the service; and
 - ix. That Select Committee and Cabinet receive a report on implementation of the service changes after July 2018 quantifying the full benefits and cost incurred and modelled cost of the service for its proposed 7 year life
2. Members agreed to receive a further report later in 2018 quantifying the full benefits and costs associated with the change.

In response to a query, it was agreed that more detailed information on prudential borrowing would be provided in the report to Cabinet and will be circulated to Select Committee Members, with the opportunity for questions to be asked.

Chair's Comments

The Chair thanked all present for their participation in consideration of the report. The Chair reminded members that the committee had agreed with the majority of the proposals outlined in the report, specifically 2 (i) to 2 (ix), the exception being 2 (iv) "that grey bags are re-introduced for residual waste" requesting further research be undertaken with scrutiny to be held in the autumn of 2017.

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The meeting ended at 4.00 pm