

Cllr Dan Poole District Councillor's Report – February 2016

Since Council last met, I have attended a meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, plus a meeting of the New Forest Environmental Protection Liaison Committee. On the latter, members from this Council were also in attendance, representing this Council as Outside Body representatives, so I will leave it those members to report on that meeting.

At the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, I can report on the following subjects:

HAMPSHIRE HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES: The Panel received a presentation from Vicky Beechey and Dan Hunt of Hampshire County Council on the proposals that would shortly be going out to public consultation on various options to save £1.2 million, from 2017, from the budget to operate Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in the County. Further savings would be required from 2019 and beyond. This was within the context of savings across the wider waste management programme, which would include a review of the disposal contract; waste prevention strategies (e.g. diverting bulky items such as furniture towards re-use); consideration of the whole system cost of waste management and looking for efficiencies; and the implementation of the new Household Waste Recovery Centre contract (operational from 1 April 2016).

Other issues, such as securing some income in respect of Dorset residents using the Somerley centre; charging for non-household waste such as soil, rubble and tyres; and reviewing the markets available for recyclable materials, were also under consideration.

The savings must be made. It was however recognised that the household waste recycling centres were highly valued and appreciated by local people. It was also important to avoid any unintended consequences, such as increasing fly-tipping, from any changes that were introduced. This followed the reduction in opening hours introduced on 1 April 2015. Problems with road congestion associated with the new 9.00 a.m. opening time had subsequently been reported, with the clash of queueing traffic with rush hour and school times. The County Council was therefore proposing to consult on a range of options to establish public preferences.

The review had already established that Hampshire enjoyed a higher level of provision than equivalent counties such as Essex, Lancashire and Kent, where each HWRC served around 75,000 people. In Hampshire each HWRC served around 50,000 people.

The options for consultation included, at the most extreme, the proposal of closing 10 sites or introducing nominal charges. There was 33% less traffic through the HWRCs in the winter.

The public would be asked about the criteria for selecting the 10 smallest sites; which could include visitor numbers; tonnages handled; recycling performance; distance to an alternative centre; and a cost-benefit analysis of the site.

It was expected that the 8 week consultation period would start in early February using the normal methods to publicise the process. Placing a link on the District Council's website would be appreciated.

It was expected that there would be a lead in time of 12-18 months for any significant changes.

A special e-mail link had been set up for this exercise:
hwrc.consultation@hants.gov.uk

In the ensuing debate the following points were covered:

- Increased fly-tipping was a significant concern in this area where the remoteness of the national park landscapes and surrounding countryside made fly-tipping more attractive than in more supervised areas. Although it was recognised that, overall, fly-tipping had reduced by 2% following the reduction in opening hours of the HWRCs, the situation in the Forest was uniquely vulnerable;
- Queueing at some sites, such as Marchwood, already caused significant road congestion and this situation was likely to be exacerbated by further reductions in hours;
- The New Forest National Park Authority, Forestry Commission and the National Farmers' Union could all be significantly affected by the proposals and should be included in the consultees;
- There was dismay that the proposed upgrading at Marchwood was not planned to progress at this time. Implementation had already been delayed and there were health and safety issues, and questions about accessibility for people with disabilities that should be resolved at this site. It was agreed that the County officers would investigate and respond to the Executive Head Operations on this matter;
- Introducing charging for non-residents of the District could cause road congestion as users were sorted and charged at the entrance to the site. Charges could also cause resentment in the light of previous undertakings to adjoining residents who suffered the disadvantages of the presence of the HWRC. It would be better to recover an income for the County Council whose residents benefitted from the service. There had already been some discussion with Dorset County Council;
- Charging for non-household waste could disadvantage Small and Medium Sized businesses, and people doing DIY, and promote further fly-tipping;
- It was important that the whole system cost of waste handling was taken into account to ensure that costs were not merely shifted onto another authority, for example through greater costs from clearing up fly tips.

Members considered that it was important that as much information as possible – for example identifying those sites that may be subject to closure/designation as a “smaller” site – should be included in the consultation in order that responses could be meaningful.

This Council would respond in due course. It was expected that the formal consultation would be considered at the next meeting of the Panel.

PROJECT INTEGRA - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW: The Panel received a presentation from Chris Noble, Head of Project Integra, on performance during 2015.

While it remained a key priority for Project Integra to reduce its costs, it was also important to retain awareness of the challenges that would be faced. There was an EU target of 50% recycling by 2020. Actual performance had been consistently of the order of 45% for the last 4 years. It was possible that the UK Government could be fined for failure to meet the target, and under the Localism Act 2011 these fines could be passed on to local authorities. While Defra remained committed to the target, they had been stepping back from proactive waste management policy making in the last 5 years. They were also facing 40% budget cuts over the next 4 years. In addition to continuing to advise and encourage further recycling of plastics and food waste, it was understood that Defra were undertaking a review of definitions of recycling to ensure a commonality of approach across Europe and to maximise the UK's chances of meeting its targets; and also reviewing waste collection systems with a view to seeing if greater consistency, perhaps with 5 or 6 collection methods nationally, would achieve efficiencies.

There was also greater encouragement of a "circular economy", maximising the use of each item and then ensuring full recovery and regeneration of constituent parts to support the production of replacements. This would improve the use of scarce resources, reduce environmental impacts and strengthen the UK economy.

Another factor for the future was the increase in house building in Hampshire, with the projected additional 76,000 households each likely to produce £1 ton of waste each year, costing an additional £9.78 million to handle and process.

Changes in the materials coming forwards for recycling and the markets available for processing and resale would remain fluid in the world economy.

The Project Integra Strategic Board would shortly be reviewing the first year's performance against the Action Plan for 2015-18, with particular reference to the 9 defined key actions. Recycle for Hampshire no longer served all the Project Integra Partners, with emphasis now placed back with individual authorities. The Recycle for Hampshire website had been updated to continue to provide essential messages, and there was good support through social media.

Education was one of the means through which Project Integra wished to achieve its action of improving the quality and quantity of recyclable materials collected. They were promoting common standards for the training of collection crews; seeking to reduce contamination; improving sampling from the Materials Recovery Facilities and Materials Analysis Facility; and also benchmarking against others.

Recycle for Hampshire was now supported by 7 funding partners (not including this Council) and they continued to carry out school visits and distribute promotional materials. There were discussions about their future programme.

Waste prevention was another key activity, with bulky items such as furniture being diverted to charities for reuse whenever possible; and a number of waste minimisation promotions such as home composting, reducing food waste and revised waste collection policies.

It was important that the whole system cost of waste handling in Hampshire was kept clearly in mind to ensure that action to save costs in one area did not just divert costs or reduce income. A review was underway looking at ways of reducing the overall cost burden on the taxpayers in Hampshire, exploring options and developing a business case. The project was being sponsored by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Association of Local Authorities and had appointed Atkins Consultancy to carry out the work, with a timetable of 6 months for delivery. The outcome of this review would also inform the future refit of the Materials Recycling Facility at Alton. It was possible that the materials collected might be altered.

The contract with Veolia for processing Hampshire's waste had been extended to 2030, leading to a cost saving and allowing greater certainty for the future. This would allow the Materials Recycling Facility at Alton to be refitted.

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- The "Love Food Hate Waste" campaign and WRAP both looked at issues relating to over packaging and also that certain food items were not sold in quantities that were suitable for one person. In addition to lobbying the supermarkets "Love Food Hate Waste" circulated advice on how to deal with larger quantities in order to avoid waste. At present 1/3 of the contents of black bags was food waste.
- While some people were confused about which items to place in each of the waste collection sacks, some people wilfully refused to separate their recyclables and to use the appropriate sacks. This Council had always taken a light touch on enforcement on this issue and would continue to meet the cost of mistakes by the public. The issue of people refusing to comply with correct waste handling may have to be given further thought however, as margins tightened, recognising that there were costs associated with contamination and the loss of high quality materials, which it may be unfair for taxpayers to meet when the omission was deliberate.
- At present the UK was around the middle of performance for recycling across Europe. The models used in other countries were reviewed to adopt suitable measure here to improve performance. In general terms, high performing countries used a higher proportion of Energy Recovery Facilities; they often used source separated collections and there was legislative support, with penalties, available to enforce compliance. □ While Veolia would continue to look for opportunities to secure UK based recycling for paper, they must maximise the financial returns received by the partnership and at present the key demand remained in China.
- Bottom ash from the Energy Recover Plant was recycled into building aggregate. Fly ash from the chimney was collected and stored in a slate mine in Cheshire.