

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 9 SEPTEMBER 2014

REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

CHANGES TO RECYCLING SERVICES – REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To provide members with a review of the implementation of the changes to the recycling service, made in November 2013, and an update on the outcomes of these changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY

COMMITTEE: That:

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| (A) | The Committee scrutinise and comment upon the implementation and outcomes of the recycling service changes |
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1.0 Background

1.1 On 6 March 2013, Council approved a scheme to change the current kerbside sorting of dry recyclables using boxes to a dual stream comingled system, with paper being kept separate in a box and all other dry recyclables placed into a wheeled bin.

1.2 The primary motive behind this change was to enable cardboard to be moved from the organic waste stream into the dry recycling. It was proving difficult to compost the card and with changing standards for compost quality it would be impossible for processors to meet the new standards with the level of coated card being collected. Aluminium foil and tetra packs were also added to the range of materials residents could recycle from home.

2.0 Report

2.1 The report reviews the implementation of the new service and provides an analysis of the results to date.

Implementation

2.2 Preparation for the new service began as soon as the change was approved by the Council in March 2013, with the procurement of six new “twin pack” vehicles, 49,000 wheeled bins and 28,500 inner paper boxes, which were offered to residents on an ‘opt-in’ basis.

2.3 Container deliveries by the bin provider’s distribution team started at the beginning of October 2013 and ran into November beyond the start date for the service change of 11 November. The deadline for residents to request an inner paper box was 30th August 2013. Residents requesting a box later than we could arrange for the distribution team to deliver continued to use their kerbside boxes until the Council’s waste contractor Veolia delivered their inner box.

2.4 To accommodate the changes required in reducing from eight to six recycling rounds and to make all collection services more efficient there were major changes to people’s day of collection, with some 90% having their day changed.

2.5 The changes to the service and days of collection were communicated in a variety of ways using different media. These included a new service leaflet and collection calendar, opt-in card for the inner paper box, “Yes Please/No Thanks” stickers stuck to inside of bin lid, A5 flyer left with bins on delivery, advertisements in both local papers, articles in the two Link magazines prior to service launch. All details were also on the Council’s web site.

2.6 In addition, officers ran ‘road shows’ at various events including: Bishop’s Stortford Carnival; Hertford Carnival ; Ware Festival; Buntingford Classic Car Show; Sawbridgeworth and Hertford Farmers Markets; Circle Anglia Residents Fun Day and the Council’s ‘Get Park Active’ events in Southern Country Park and Pishiobury Park.

- 2.7 The service started on its scheduled date of 11 November with residents having their first new collection under the new service in the weeks that followed.
- 2.8 Customer enquiries call volumes were high, although not as high as anticipated, and below the levels experienced when waste collections moved to Alternate Weekly Collections (ARC) in November 2009.
- 2.9 Two additional staff were employed on short term contracts in the Waste Services Team as Recycling Advisors, providing on site advice as to how bins could be stored, resolving any misunderstandings about what could or could not be put in the new bins and advising residents to move their card from the brown to the blue lidded bin. An additional member of staff was employed, via an agency, to assist with the anticipated increased work load in telephone calls. However as calls tapered off to near normal levels sooner than expected it was feasible to discontinue with this additional resource earlier than planned.

Satisfaction Levels

- 2.10 The Residents' Survey, undertaken in September/October 2013, showed a 3 point increase in satisfaction from 77% in 2011 to 80% in 2013. Allied to this waste services satisfaction levels rose by 6 points, 77% up to 83%. Survey respondents would have been aware of the impending changes to the service, through advanced publicity and a series of nine road shows through the summer. The planned changes did not have an adverse effect on satisfaction levels, if anything quite the opposite. Feedback at these events was very positively in favour of the changes.

Removal of Card from the Organic Waste Stream

- 2.11 The levels of non - compostable card being received in loads at the processing plant are now very low. Latest audits conducted in late July 2014 showed an acceptable level of 3.96%. Without the action taken by the Council, this would have been close to 20%. The composting plant assesses each load for the level of unwanted material, with the vast majority of loads being graded at 1 (no contaminants), with the occasional level 2 (minor amount).
- 2.12 In this respect the scheme has been highly successful and achieved the primary aim of removing the card from the compostable waste, thus avoiding the very real and serious threat

of the plants no longer being able to accept the material. Such action would have had a major adverse impact upon services, performance levels, resident's satisfaction levels and the Council's reputation.

Increase in Recycling/Waste Performance

- 2.13 The change in the service has engendered a marked increase in recycling performance allied to a reduction in waste levels. From November 2013, when the new service started through to June 2014 the comingled material has seen an increase of over 2,600 tonnes compared to same period in 2012 – 2013, when glass was collected separately from plastics and cans. Whilst undoubtedly some of this growth is card moved from the organic stream into the dry recycling bin, the capture rate for other materials has increased. Residents have said that they find the new system easier to use, with only paper having to be kept separate. The amount of paper collected in the same period is slightly below the 2012/13 levels (4.3%) but this is much better than expected. Nationally and in East Herts the quantity of paper being captured for recycling has been falling for several years due to people moving to electronic media. In East Herts, the 2012/13 level for November to March was 11% below the 2011/12 figure same period.
- 2.14 Whilst the card in the compostable waste is now at a negligible level the amount of material collected for composting since the new service began has increased by 9% compared with the previous year, having a positive effect on the Councils recycling performance statistics. However, the amount of compostable waste, the vast majority of which is garden waste, is affected by the weather conditions and last spring was exceptionally wet. This would have suppressed garden waste levels in the early part of the growing season.
- 2.15 The amount of waste sent for disposal (mainly to landfill) has fallen by 2% since November 2013 and although this is only a small reduction it is against current trends. Encouragingly the reduction in the first quarter of 2014/15 is over 4%.
- 2.16 Overall in performance terms with the virtual elimination of card from the compostable waste stream, the increase in dry recycling and the reduction in waste being disposed of the scheme has been highly successful and has exceeded expectations. Since SPARC began in November 2013 to June 2014 the

recycling/composting rate has been 50.14%, compared to 45.42% for November 2012 – June 2013, exceeding the 4% growth expectation. It is estimated that performance for the full financial year of 2014/15 will be 51%, which would be 4.3% above the 2012/2013 level.

Communal Properties

- 2.17 The comingled service is being extended to the communal properties and their residents have received a letter and service leaflet to let them know what they can now include in the recycling bins. This means for the first time residents in communal properties are able to recycle their card. There is an on-going programme to re-label the communal recycling bins and provide additional capacity where this is required.

Removing Soft Plastics

- 2.18 In February 2014 the Council approved a communication programme to encourage residents to exclude soft plastics, e.g. carrier and other plastic bags, cling film and shrink wrap from the comingled recycling. This decision was taken as this material was usually too heavily contaminated with food waste to meet the specification to allow it to be reprocessed and was being landfilled. It also presented the materials reclamation facility (MRF) that sorts our material with a problem in that the bags etc. often masked or became entangled with other materials and as a result there was a significant price difference between material with or without the soft plastics in the mix. This change is still on-going with the quality of the material improving. The level of soft plastics is reducing and it is anticipated that the MRF company will shortly upgrade our material to being acceptable as virtually free of this unwanted material and increase the price paid. This will help to keep the cost of the service down.

Financial Performance

- 2.19 The capital estimate for the procurement of the new blue lidded bins and inner paper boxes was £1,100,000 and the project came in within budget with an expenditure of £1,094,850. The balance has been carried forward into 2014/15 to support further demand and replacement of inner paper boxes.
- 2.20 The cost of procuring a new recycling vehicle fleet was £1,049,800 against an estimate of £1,100,000.

- 2.21 The Council applied to Hertfordshire County Council for £680,000 of capital support. However, due to a high demand from other Hertfordshire district councils the actual award was £235,789.
- 2.22 The ongoing revenue budget impact at the start of project was estimated as a full year saving on collection costs of £25,800. In fact, the smaller recycling vehicle fleet and associated collection round efficiencies will deliver a saving of around £94,300 for 2014/15 compared with the previous year.
- 2.23 However, the additional income expected from higher recycling performance has not been forthcoming. It was hoped to generate an additional £125,000 per annum from additional material sales and recycling credits. Unfortunately, the value of the comingled material has been well below expectation. A Herts Waste Partnership consortium contract, upon which the estimates were based, proved abortive when the winning tenderer withdrew. Retendered prices were considerably lower than the abortive tender. In addition, the amount of paper being collected is falling, due to residents preferences for electronic media, which also has a significant adverse effect upon income. As a result income in 2013/2014 was some £70,000 below estimate and is likely to fall further this year. As noted in 2.13, the amount of material collected has increased significantly as a result of the service changes and the removal of soft plastics will help by increasing the price paid for comingled material.
- 2.24 While the financial benefits of the project to date are not as good as had been hoped it should be noted that overall net cost of the Council's recycling services has fallen by around £71,000 (excluding capital charges) between 2013/14 and 2014/15 and are therefore delivering better value for tax payers and improved services. The project also delivered its primary objective of protecting the brown bin composting service while continuing to allow residents to recycle cardboard at the kerbside.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Report to Environmental Scrutiny Update on the Comingled Recycling Scheme (SPARC) & Building on its Success 25 February 2014

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