

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25 FEBRUARY 2014

EXECUTIVE – 4 MARCH 2014

REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY
AND ENVIRONMENT

UPDATE ON THE COMINGLED RECYCLING SCHEME (SPARC) &
BUILDING ON ITS SUCCESS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To update the Committee of the initial outcomes of the introduction of the Comingled Recycling Service (SPARC)
- To propose measures that will enhance the recycling service and its performance further

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY:

That:

(A)	Members receive and comment upon the update on the successful implementation and performance of the Comingled recycling service (SPARC);
(B)	Members recommend to the Executive that the service be extended to as many communal properties as is practically possible;
(C)	Members recommend to the Executive that a communication programme to remove soft plastics from the Comingled mix is commenced, with a view to removing the soft plastics by May 2014; and
(D)	Members recommend to the Executive that a communication programme to promote the use of caddy liners to improve the capture of food waste be undertaken, in tandem with Recommendation B.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EXECUTIVE:

That:

(A)	the service is extended to as many communal properties as is practically possible;
(B)	a communication programme to remove soft plastics from the Comingled mix is commenced, with a view to removing the soft plastics by May 2014; and
(C)	a communication programme to promote the use of caddy liners to improve the capture of food waste be undertaken, in tandem with Recommendation (A).

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 in wheeled bins.
- 1.2 The primary motive behind this change was to enable cardboard to be moved from the organic waste stream into the dry recycling, as 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.
- 1.3 The new collection scheme was entitled 'SPARC' (Separate Paper and Recycling Collections).
- 1.4 The service became active on 11 November 2013 following an implementation programme over some months.

2 Report

- 2.1 The report details the initial results from the introduction of the new service and makes recommendations regarding extending the scheme to flats, measures to remove soft plastics from the Comingled mix and the use of caddy liners to increase the composting of food waste.
- 2.2 The new service started well, was on time and within budget. Over 48,000 wheeled bins and nearly 28,000 inner paper boxes have been delivered. Around 800 properties are not able to use the blue

lidded bin for their Comingled recycling, as, for operational reasons, these properties cannot accommodate wheeled bins. Comingled material is collected from these properties via their blue kerbside boxes. Very few residents did not wish to participate and accept the new bin and the Service was able to satisfactorily resolve the matter with most of those who initially declined the bin, finding ways to enable them to accommodate the bin or share with neighbours.

- 2.3 Part of the communication programme included a series of 'road shows' at which not only were officers able to explain the service to the public. This also provided useful feed back, both about the acceptance level and enthusiasm for the new service, which was very high, but also about the barriers to food waste composting.
- 2.4 In the third quarter of 2013/14 the amount of non compostable material received at the composting facility, from East Herts collections, was under 3%. It is anticipated that the level of card in the organics stream will reduce still further this quarter. The composting facility owners have expressed their satisfaction with this reduction and also believe that it will reduce further. This has ensured that the compost continues to be compliant with statutory standards and regulations.
- 2.5 Up to the end of January, 12 weeks into the new service, the Comingled tonnage collected totalled 2,160 tonnes and the separate paper amounted to 888 tonnes. Both show an increase over the corresponding period in 2012/13. Although the increase in paper is marginal it is significant in that it has been achieved against a background of a steady 8 – 9% decline in paper collections as more people access their news through electronic media. It is hoped that the increase in paper recovery is due to the simplicity of the new service with only paper having to be separated from the rest of the recycling. With the card being moved from the organics bin to the new recycling bins a reduction in the amount of waste collected for composting may have been expected. However there was an increase. It should be noted that the level of organic waste collected is subject to the seasons and the weather. With this winter having been milder, although wetter, than last year gardening activity has continued at a higher level, which may well account for this increase. Whilst the foregoing results are encouraging a note of caution should be made as these levels may have been inflated by residents stockpiling material before the start of the service and possibly due to more material being generated over Christmas.

2.6 The collection services contractor had to revise all the rounds for the new service and took the opportunity to reorganise the refuse and composting rounds more efficiently as well. With some 90% of residents experiencing a day change, and in some cases a change of week, to their collection routine, and crews working in areas which they had no previous experience, the level of missed collections rose sharply. These “teething” problems were to be expected. From April to October a very high performance of only 32 missed collections per 100,000 was experienced. In November this rose to 188 and in December was 116. Through January performance improved further with an overall performance level of 57 missed collections per 100,000. It is anticipated that this will improve further still and currently the year to date performance is 57 against a target of 47. These performance levels compare favourably with the figures when ARC was first introduced in 2009. Over the 12 weeks to the end of January that the new service has been operating there have been just over 800 missed collections from nearly 341,000 recycling service collections.

2.7 Call volumes were initially very high, with the Service handling almost double the usual level of calls, whilst retaining a very high level of performance in answering these calls. Most calls related to collection day changes and requests for containers, particularly for the inner paper boxes but the number of calls was some 25% lower than when waste collections moved to alternate weekly in 2009. In the first week in February calls had returned to the normal level.

3 Building on the Success of SPARC – Improving Performance Further

3.1 The foregoing statistics are strong indicators of a positive response by the public to the service changes and their willingness and desire to help their environment through recycling and composting. This is reflected in the Residents Survey, held in 2013, at a time when the new service was being promoted. The satisfaction levels for our waste services overall rose by 6 points, from an already satisfactorily high level of 77% to 83%.

3.2 Consideration should now be given to how this response and positive public attitude can be built upon to maximise the benefits of SPARC and move the Council to the next level of performance. There are some opportunities to capitalise on this situation, which can be taken in the relatively short term.

4 SPARC for Communal Properties

4.1 The SPARC project plan allowed for the conversion of 49,000 houses to the Comingled service first with the next step to be enabling the 10,000 communal style property residents to recycle, for the first time, card as well as cartons and foil, from their homes. This will be undertaken on a property by property basis with a number of possible configurations dependent on the characteristics of each development, taking into account any history with a property regarding the level of use and misuse of the current recycling containers. Some developments may only require the labelling on bins to be changed. Others may require more bins where it is possible to accommodate them within the bin stores. In some instances changing the size and type of container will be the solution. All communal residents will be provided with information, advice and guidance on the improved service and officers will liaise with Housing Associations, property management groups and residents associations regarding these changes. It is expected that this staff intensive programme could be completed by the end of September 2014.

5. Removing Soft Plastics from the Comingled Recycling Stream

5.1 Although the publicity material for SPARC did not specifically mention which bin plastic bags should be placed in, some residents have been including them in the blue lidded bin. This has not been an issue from a collection perspective as the sorting facility is able to separate the bags from the other materials. However with the market for soft plastics in the UK drying up there is no outlet for the material so the company are forced to landfill this unwanted secondary material, at a significant additional cost. The company has also found that the specification for reusable soft plastics is quite high and the material needs to be clean, which is not often achievable.

5.2 The reprocessing or sorting contracts for dry recyclables are let through a County wide contract by the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership. A new contract was prepared in early 2013 in preparation for the current contract ending in November 2013, but the original tender had to be relet, when the successful tenderer failed to sign the contract, wishing to enter into post tender negotiation. As a consequence the value of the various material mixes was not known until the SPARC project was well advanced. The current material mix, under this contract, includes soft plastics such as carrier bags, film, and other plastic bags. On 1 February 2014 the new contract is enacted (at present there is a temporary extension to the previous arrangement, which otherwise would have expired on 1 November 2013).

- 5.3 Under the new contract, if the Council includes soft plastics it will receive £2.10 per tonne. If the soft plastics are excluded then it would be paid £15.89 per tonne. Based on the 2013/14 estimate of 6,800 tonnes this means the Council would lose income of £92,400 per annum. With the growth in recycling expected from SPARC this could be considerably higher.
- 5.4 Consideration of this action is not solely financial. A carrier bag tax of 5 pence per bag is to be introduced in England in the autumn of 2015. Such measures in other countries have seen the use of carrier bags dramatically reduced. If the soft plastics are not excluded from the mix this would result in the Council receiving a much lower income from the material sales for a mix that actually contains very few carrier bags. The imminent arrival of the bag tax should make this change more acceptable and understandable. Changing the system now allows time for people to acclimatise to the time when the use of a plastic bag would cost 5 pence. It is doubtful that many people would pay 5 pence for a bag and then wish to recycle it after one use.
- 5.5 There is currently a limited UK market for recovered household plastic film and most of it goes to landfill, energy from waste or may be exported for reprocessing. Material for reprocessing needs to comply with a British Standard but as a lot of this material is contaminated, usually with food waste; it has to be disposed of. By continuing to collect bags and film in the blue lidded bin rather than the black waste bin its eventual disposal could cost more than accepting it is a problematic material with very limited secondary market potential. A further factor impacting on the price differential between mixes including or excluding soft plastics is that with the bags included the materials are harder to sort and they often mask material of higher value, whilst on the sorting lines.
- 5.6 SPARC has been implemented very successfully and welcomed by the vast majority of residents. The level of Comingled material collected so far has exceeded expectations and the amount of paper collected, which has a high resale value, has also risen. The rise in paper goes against the local and national trend of an 8 – 9 % decline in paper recovered. These are positive indicators that East Herts residents want to help the environment and our services are enabling them to do so, conveniently, from their homes. Welwyn Hatfield with the same service profile as East Herts has already run a campaign to remove bags from the Comingled material. The sorting facility is happy with the improvement in their material and there has been little adverse public reaction.

6. Increasing Food Waste capture

- 6.1 It is estimated that some 30% of residual waste is food waste. This is borne out by the waste analysis undertaken in North Herts in 2010, where it was found that 33% of their residual waste was food. Our observations when conducting audits at the composting facility note low levels of food waste being included with the garden waste. In short food waste capture is low. Research nationally has shown that ability for householders to use liners in a kitchen caddy, greatly increase the likelihood that food waste will be captured at the point of generation. This view has been supported by feed back from residents at the SPARC road shows that were held throughout the summer of 2013. As part of the road shows informing residents about the new Comingled service we were also promoting Love Food, Hate Waste, to reduce the amount of food that is wasted, some of it quite unnecessarily and also offering some free trial sample paper liners. Numerous people said that they did not collect their food waste for composting because it was messy. Officers received a clear message that people would be more inclined to capture their food waste if they could do so “hygienically”, easily, without mess and many asked why they could not use compostable caddy liners. Some accepted the samples of paper liners but a good number declined, concerned that they may disintegrate in the caddy, leaving them with a mess.
- 6.2 The composting facility that receives the collected organic material, Cumberlow Green Farm, Rushden, Nr Buntingford, already receives food waste in compostable caddy liners from North Herts Council and would welcome our promotion of their use as they believe this may reduce the amount of food waste people are putting in carrier bags, which do not break down in the composting process. The liners will need to comply with BS EN 13432 and bear the ‘seedling’ logo.
- 6.3 The public will be advised as to where they can obtain the liners and the Council will also provide links to suppliers on our website so people can order the correct type directly with suppliers and have them delivered to their home.
- 6.4 A number of other authorities have provided similar advice to residents. St. Albans Council for instance, which is part of the Herts Waste Partnership and delivers its organic waste to Agrivert, Ridge, nr Potters Bar., which also accepts starch caddy liners.

- 6.5 A number of the local supermarkets, including Tesco, Sainsbury, Morrison and Waitrose stock their own brand of caddy liners, all of which have the seedling logo on them.
- 6.6 Allowing the use of caddy liners, with the appropriate guidance about type and where they can be purchased will be seen as a positive move by residents and encourage them to capture, for composting, more food waste, improving recycling performance and reducing waste to landfill at no additional cost to the Council.
7. Implications / Consultations
- 7.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None

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