

South London Waste Partnership Joint Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 4 February 2020 at 6.30 pm in F10, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

- Present:**
- London Borough of Croydon**
Councillor Stuart Collins – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon (Chair)
Councillor Stuart King – Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport & Regeneration (Job Share)
 - Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames**
Councillor Hilary Gander – Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainable Transport
 - London Borough of Merton**
Councillor Mark Allison – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Tobin Byers – Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and Environment
 - London Borough of Sutton**
Councillor Manuel Abellan – Chair of the Environment and Neighbourhood Committee
Councillor Ben Andrew – Vice-Chair of the Environment and Neighbourhood Committee
- Apologies:** Councillor Liz Green – Leader of the Councillor

PART A

1/20 Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all present including members of Extinction Rebellion Sutton and Croydon.

It was noted by the Chair that Extinction Rebellion had done a great deal of work to shine a light on the important issue of waste reduction and reuse and welcomed their activity and ideas. The four boroughs, it was stated, had shared aims of increasing reuse and recycling and managing non-recyclable waste as responsibly as possible. As such, the Chair welcomed members of Extinction Rebellion to meet with officers of the South London Waste Partnership to discuss their ideas and learn more about the technical details of the Partnership's work.

Members noted that whilst recycling rates nationally were stagnating, the South London Waste Partnership area was bucking the trend, was well above the London average and the ambition was to continue this upward trend.

Whilst it was recognised that a number of residents had concerns in relation to the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) in Beddington, it was noted that the process uses waste to generate electricity for the National Grid, low-carbon heating and hot water supplies for nearby homes and significantly reduces carbon emissions (or equivalent) when compared with landfill. As a Partnership, the Chair stated it would explore new waste treatment technology as it arose as it was important to the boroughs to continue to evolve.

Members of the public were informed that the Partnership was not a legal entity, rather it was a voluntary partnership of the four boroughs which enabled a synergy of messages and waste collection. Furthermore, the Partnership allowed for ideas to be shared, resources to be maximised and benefits achieved.

All four boroughs of the Partnership boroughs had declared a Climate Emergency and the Chair reiterated that Extinction Rebellion's attendance was welcomed and further welcomed the sharing of ideas and knowledge to achieve the shared goal of a reduction in waste and increase in recycling.

2/20 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Liz Green – Leader of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

3/20 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

4/20 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2019 were signed and agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

5/20 **Urgent Business (If Any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

6/20 **Contracts Update**

The Contract Manager for the South London Waste Partnership presented the update report to the Committee. Section 2.5 of the report was highlighted as showing that 83% of Housing Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) users experiencing a wait time of less than five minutes.

Whilst recycling markets continued to be challenging there had been a 1% increase in recycling rates at the HRRC sites which was welcomed. The Partnership additionally continued to work with Veolia to trial new ways of working to further increase recycling rates.

Bags splitting was noted as an area that the contractor continued to work on by asking residents to split their bags and the recyclable waste into the appropriate bins across the site. This work, it was hoped, would reiterate that the HRRC sites were recycling points and not just disposal sites.

The Contract Manager noted that the commercial waste clamp down corresponded with a 7% reduction in wood waste, 27% drop in rubble tonnage and 38% reduction in plasterboard tonnage. This reduction in commercial waste had helped the Partnership save over £40,000 year-to-date.

Members noted that the composting contract was operating well and that there were no issues to report.

In terms of the Viridor contract, the residual waste treatment contract, 135,000 tonnes of residual waste had been delivered to the Beddington site between 1 April 2019 and 30 November 2019 which was a drop of 5% for the same period the previous year.

In response to Member questions, the Contract Manager confirmed that the Partnership had been in discussion with the contractor to expand the reuse opportunities. The reuse shop at Kimpton was noted as taking items from all HRRC sites across the four boroughs, repairing and reselling. The Chair stated that this was excellent work and further noted the Library of Things in Upper Norwood as an example of a reuse shop. Members requested that there was a communications piece on the reuse opportunities so members of the public were aware of the opportunities.

Members noted that the commercial waste pilot had been successful in Sutton and were informed that bespoke schemes had been rolled out in all four boroughs which would respond to customer needs. Additionally, in response to Member questions officers confirmed that there had been no significant increase in flytipping in response to the clamp down of commercial waste at the HRRC sites.

Members noted at paragraph 4.5 of the report that there had been several carbon monoxide exceedances at the ERF although no enforcement or suspension notices had been issued as the site was operating in accordance with its Environmental Permit. Officers confirmed that in recent months there had been a number of temporary exceedances of a half-hourly average for carbon monoxide (CO) at the Beddington ERF. In each circumstance, the level of carbon monoxide increased above the permitted limit temporarily before quickly (usually within a matter of seconds) returning to permitted operating conditions. The Environment Agency was notified on each occasion. It was further noted by the Partnership that the Chair had written to the Environment Agency (EA) in 2019 in relation to the carbon monoxide exceedances at the ERF and the EA's response had been that *"an extremely high level of [CO] emissions over a prolonged period of time would be needed in order to have a significant impact on the environment, whereas slightly elevated emissions over a short-duration are not likely to result in any measurable environmental impact."*

The Strategic Partnership Manager provided the committee with a statement in relation to the fire at the Beddington site in the summer of 2019:

“The Chair of the Joint Committee and officers from the South London Waste Partnership (SLWP) met with Viridor on 28 January 2020 to receive an update on where we are with the investigation and report into the fire that occurred at the Beddington Waste Transfer Station in July 2019.

“Viridor has conducted a thorough investigation into what happened and presented a draft of their internal Incident Report to us. This was reassuringly thorough. We were particularly pleased to see that Viridor recognise this was a 'significant' incident and that they have implemented a number of changes to procedures on site in order to mitigate the risk of a similar event happening in the future. This includes improved management (including thermal imaging) of any residual or bulky waste being stored in the waste tunnels.

“Unfortunately Viridor are not yet in a position to finalise and formally share their Incident Report with the SLWP as they are still awaiting input from the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and the Environment Agency (EA). Both agencies have provided interim reports (in the case of the LFB, a 'Confirmation of Attendance Report' and in the case of the EA a 'Compliance Assessment Report'). But both the LFB and EA have confirmed to Viridor that further submissions will be made. We are satisfied that Viridor has cooperated fully with all relevant agencies and that any delays, whilst frustrating, cannot be attributed to them.

“We hope that by the next time the Joint Committee meets, both the LFB and EA will have made their final submissions in relation to this matter and that Viridor have been able to finalise and formally share their report with us.”

In response to the statement, the Chair informed the Committee that once the reports were available there would be an item of the Committee agenda to discuss the incident. At that meeting, the Chair would allow public questions on the report as it was recognised that it was important that information was publically available and that the contractor was held accountable.

A member of the public stated that they had been informed that the LFB had completed two reports; that the first report would cost over £100 to gain a copy of and that the second report was an internal report only. It was requested that copies of these reports were made available. Furthermore, it was stated that the EA had cleared two reports, the first of which had been shared and the second had been held up since November 2019 due to the operator (Viridor) objecting to the contents.

The Chair shared the member of the public's frustrations at not receiving the reports and confirmed that the reports would be chased and the claims investigated. It was the understanding of the Partnership that one report from

each agency (EA and LFB) had been finalised and that Viridor had not objected to these reports, however this would be looked into.

In response to a question from a member of the public relating to the ERF contract, the Strategic Partnership Manager confirmed that it was possible for the contract with Viridor to be varied and that this could, for example, enable the Partnership and provider to keep up with requirements or new technologies. The Chair informed the public that they would be invited to attend workshops to discuss future opportunities to ensure the Partnership continued to deliver for residents.

RESOLVED: To note the contents of the report.

7/20 **Budget Update 2019/20**

The Finance Lead for the South London Waste Partnership presented the updated finance position of the partnership and informed the Committee that there was a projected underspend for 2019/20 of £25,000 for Strategic Management activities.

RESOLVED: To note the contents of the report.

8/20 **Budget 2020/21**

The Strategic Partnership Manager presented the final budget for the Partnership for its core activities in 2020/21.

RESOLVED: To agree the final budget for the core activities of the Partnership as set out at paragraph 2.3 of the report.

9/20 **Communications Update**

The Chair thanked the Communications Advisor for his work in developing the 'Destination: Recycling' videos which showed the journey of waste once collected from the kerbside as it had helped residents' understanding of the importance of recycling.

The Communications Advisor outlined communications activity which had taken place since September 2019. Three campaigns had been undertaken, including 'Destination: Recycling', Recycle Week 2019 and Give Food Waste a Fright. The 'Destination: Recycling' social media campaign had been very successful with over 250,000 views of the 15 second clips, over 10,000 click-throughs to the Partnership website and over 1,800 views of 30 second+ of the videos. The videos had been well received and remained relevant so Members were requested to continue using them to support understanding of recycling.

During Recycling Week an outdoor advertising campaign was run which was funded through a £10,000 bid to Resource London. The campaign ran in all four boroughs, on the tram network and in Kingston and Croydon town

centres. Additionally, Veolia ran a series of school visits in the lead up to and during Recycling Week.

Finally, in terms of the Give Food a Fright Campaign which was a series of food waste engagement events which took place in October 2019 and were funded through a £26,000 bid to Resource London. The campaign used pumpkins as the hook as they were a good example of food waste as many people did not use the vegetable they cut up to use as a lantern. Four highly successful pop-up events were held which enabled over 1,800 face-to-face engagements to take place and almost 200 written pledges by residents to reduce their food waste.

Members were informed that user satisfaction levels at HRRCs continued to be positive. It had been noted that some residents were taking waste which could be recycled at the kerbside to these centres and so a leaflet would be developed to be handed out at the HRRC sites to inform residents of what they could recycle at home and encourage them to sort through their recycling.

The Communications Advisor informed Members that Viridor continued to provide regular community updates on progress to restore the Beddington Farmlands, including the installation of swift nesting boxes and initial work to enable wetland grasslands to be formed in spring 2020.

Emissions data from the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) continued to be uploaded to the Beddington ERF Virtual Visitor Centre; however it was noted by the Communications Advisor that there had been a delay in uploading the data from the second half of December 2019 which Viridor had advised was due to a technical difficulty. The Partnership had been assured that this had subsequently been rectified and the data had been posted to the website.

The Committee noted that a variation to the Beddington ERF permit had come into effect from 1 January and Members were informed that the reasoning was included in the Viridor January emission monitoring report. The change had been recommended by the Environment Agency (EA) and brought the site in line with industry standard monitoring periods.

The Education Centre at the Beddington site had begun to host stakeholder visits and the first school visit was due to take place in the coming weeks. The Committee were informed that school visits could be arranged via the Virtual Visitor Centre or requests could be made to the Communications Advisor.

The Chair thanked officers for their work to increase engagement with residents in regard to recycling and noted that in Croydon over 14,000 young people had been spoken to about recycling and their responses had been positive. It was noted that engaging with young people was very worthwhile to not only increase their recycling rates but also their families.

Members noted that the reach of the campaigns had been very successful and the use of the funding had been very good.

The Committee appreciated hearing the explanation for the delay in reporting the emissions data in December and sought clarification that it would be a one-off technical issue only. The Communications Advisor stated that Viridor had confirmed it had been a technical issue only but that this would be monitored by the Partnership. It was further noted that the approach taken by Viridor to publishing emissions monitoring data at the Beddington ERF was one of the most open and transparent of any facility in the country.

A member of the public noted that over the previous six months the emissions data from Viridor there had been only one month where there had not been a breach, furthermore it was stated that a number of the emissions reports had been delayed. The Chair reiterated that the Beddington ERF had a higher than normal level of transparency and the Partnership had sought an apology and explanation to the delay in publishing the data.

In response to public questions, the Chair stated that the four councils were working towards zero carbon and that the emissions from the ERF were lower than if the trucks full of waste were driven to an alternative site in the south east. As part of the commitment to work towards zero carbon, the Partnership would also look at procuring electric vehicles when a new fleet was procured.

In response to a public question, the Strategic Partnership Manager stated that there were a number of future scenarios that the Partnership would need to consider, including if there was zero waste. There had been a reduction in waste collected in south London which the Partnership was proud of and desired to see reduce further. The Strategic Partnership Manager stated that there was flexibility in the contract which would enable the Partnership to respond to future situations. The Strategic Partnership Manager stated they would be happy to meet with members of the public to discuss the scenarios and ideas to reduce waste.

The Committee stated that they were committed to reduce levels of waste and promote recycling. They welcomed the contributions of members of the public on how best to promote higher levels of recycling and lower levels of waste to help combat the four council's declared Climate Emergencies.

In terms of the scenario put forward by members of the public that there was no waste being produced by the four boroughs, members of the committee suggested that the ERF would likely not operate as there would be a national trend of reduced levels of waste. It was noted that it would be highly unlikely that south London boroughs would have zero waste and the surrounding area would continue producing waste as much of the waste levels were driven by national trends and policy.

Members of the public noted that young people were very receptive to the idea of recycling, however concerns remained in terms of contamination and as such it was suggested that more communications were required to clarify which bin certain items went into. The Communications Advisor agreed that there was uncertainty; however noted that it was important to find the right

balance in terms of the level of information provided as it was important that people were not scared away from recycling. It was noted that there was a thirst for information to avoid contamination and as such the Partnership was looking to develop the information circulated to residents. The Chair requested the support of the public in the Partnership's goal to lobby government for more messaging on recycling and anti-flytipping to further support the goal of less waste.

In response to questions regarding schools and restaurants waste the Communications Advisor informed those present that each school and restaurant would have their own commercial waste contract, many of which were not within the remit of the Partnership. It was recognised, however, that many of these organisations would find themselves under pressure to reduce their wastage and any reduction in waste was supported by the Partnership.

RESOLVED: To note the contents of the report.

10/20 **Social Research Findings**

The Communications Advisor provided the Committee with a presentation, a copy of which was included within the agenda papers. The presentation gave an overview of the results of a survey undertaken by the independent research company, DJS Research, which included over 1,000 telephone interviews across the four boroughs and 350 booster surveys around the Beddington site. The Committee were informed that the results of the survey were compared with the previous four surveys which had been undertaken and would help inform the development of the Communications Strategy which would be taken to the next meeting of the Committee.

Highlights from the survey were raised by the Communications Advisor and included; a significant increase in residents' commitment to recycle since 2010 however a lower level of commitment from those aged 16 to 34 which was concerning and would require addressing (although progress had been made with this age group since the last survey in 2016).

Driven by significant changes to collection services the survey found that residents felt they were recycling more and producing less waste. This had been reflected in the levels of tonnage of waste collected, however it was positive to see that residents felt that there had been a change in their behaviour.

It was noted that the survey raised a concern that fewer people, 38% from 43%, felt that their own individual efforts 'made a difference'. The Communications Advisor stated this would be an area of focus in future years.

Members noted that residents were increasingly becoming more realistic in terms of the amount of their waste which was being recycled and realistic ambitions for recycling rates in the next five years' time. It was felt that this would help future information campaigns. It was further encouraging that 96%

of respondents felt it was important that there was a reduction in the amount of waste sent to landfill.

The survey included a question of what should be done with non-recyclable waste and it was noted that a third of responders suggested it should be burnt/incinerated/treated to recover energy. It was stated that there was no prompting when the question was asked. A subsequent question was whether the resident was aware of the Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) in Beddington; overall 32% of respondents were aware of the site with the figure rising to 43% in the six wards closest to the site. Once prompted, it was noted that 66% of residents surveyed agreed that incineration was a good option for non-recyclable waste.

Given the large changes to the waste collection and street cleaning services, the survey included questions on these services and found a net satisfaction rate of 64% for waste collection. The Communications Advisor stated that the satisfaction rate should increase as the services bed in and that the current level was not bad given the level of change. In terms of street cleanliness the satisfaction level was only 54% on residential roads and dropped to 46% for town centre streets. It was stated that the Partnership wanted to see those levels increase as the service beds in.

Members of the public questioned whether the Communications Strategy, which was being developed, would align with the goal of zero carbon and be ambitious in encouraging people to achieve this. The view of the member of the public was that, in order to support the zero carbon ambitions, communications would need to be changed from the ERF being the best option for waste disposal at the present time. Furthermore, members of the public stated that the report was disingenuous as there had not been any information about the negative impacts of the ERF which would help to inform members of the public.

In response to questions from the public, the Strategic Partnership Manager stated that businesses had the opportunity to arrange their own waste collection contracts and so it was not always possible to encourage them to reduce their waste also, however it was an area the Partnership could look into.

The Communications Advisor, in response to questions from members of the public stated that it was in fact cheaper for the councils to recycle than to send waste to the ERF as well as being the preferred option in terms of the environment. Furthermore, it was noted that the report outlined the results of a survey on residents' views only and it would not be possible to provide information at the same time as that could skew the results. It was an information gathering exercise as opposed to a communications one - the results would inform the Partnership's Communications Strategy which would aim to inform and persuade.

Concerns were raised by members of the public in relation to the ERF and the information available, whilst the Chair stated that he personally had not

always been in total agreement regarding the ERF, the Partnership was working together as it was recognised that incineration was better than landfill. The officers of the Partnership sought to work towards the best outcomes for the four councils and to work towards the key objectives of reduce, reuse, recycle. To support those objectives and to ensure the Partnership was able to respond to changes in technology there was flexibility written into the contract.

In response to Member questions the Communications Advisor stated that they did not have the data on which respondents lived in houses or flats and the different responses. Recycling from flats was, nonetheless, an area of focus for the Partnership as it was recognised that there were greater levels of contamination at flat recycling facilities and it was imperative that contamination levels were reduced. It was further recognised that living conditions, such as communal housing, limited space and house sharing could have an impact on younger people's commitment to recycle.

RESOLVED: To note the findings of the social research project.

11/20 **Risk Report**

The Strategic Partnership Manager introduced the report which summarised the key risk areas which were facing the partnership boroughs in relation to the waste disposal functions of the Committee.

Market changes for recycling materials remained a significant risk as the value of some recycling materials had decreased considerably. This reduction in value had a potential impact on borough budgets as some materials had the potential to generate income. Members were informed that the Partnership continued to monitor the market and the risk would be managed through budget and contract management processes. Furthermore, it was noted that it was important to ensure the quality of recycled materials was maintained to reduce any potential impact on the cost of processing the materials. As such, reducing contamination of recycled material would form an important part of the Communications Strategy that was to be developed.

Members were informed that the Partnership continued to manage and monitor the impact of recycling value changes on its contracts also as it was noted that the contracts would only operate well if they were financially sustainable.

The Strategic Partnership Manager noted that Defra had run a consultation which closed in May 2019 which the Partnership had responded to. The final outcome of the consultation was to be released, however the Partnership continued to manage the risks and opportunities presented by the proposals. In response to Member questions, the Strategic Partnership Manager stated that they were of the understanding that Defra were looking at pursuing policies on plastic packaging however a timescale had not been announced.

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In terms of the risk from Brexit, the Strategic Partnership Manager noted that the report had been written before 31 January 2020, and since the UK's exit from the European Union the Partnership had not experienced or anticipated any impact during the transition. Members were informed that they would continue to work with contractors to mitigate any potential impacts once the transition period ends.

RESOLVED: To note the contents of the report.

12/20 **Date of the next Meeting**

RESOLVED: To note the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 21 April 2020 at 6.30pm at Croydon Council.

13/20 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This item was not required.

The meeting ended at 8.24 pm

Signed:

Date: