

PART A REPORT

Report to: South London Waste Partnership (SLWP) Joint Committee

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Report title: **Communications and Engagement Update**

Summary

This paper provides an update to Members of the South London Waste Partnership Joint Committee on communications and stakeholder engagement activities relating to the Partnership's residual waste treatment services; Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) services; food and green waste treatment services; and marketing of recyclates.

This report focuses on activity that took place between June and November 2023.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and comment on any aspects of communications and engagement activities relating to the residual waste treatment services; Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) services; food and green waste treatment services; and marketing of recyclates.

1. FOOD AND GREEN WASTE TREATMENT CONTRACTS

- 1.1 A visit to the Bio Collectors anaerobic digestion (AD) facility in Mitcham was arranged and took place on 24 July 2023 for Members of the Joint Committee and Sutton Council Ward Members. This was in response to concerns raised by local residents about odour from the site being detectable on occasions in nearby Poulter Park.
- 1.2 Up to 5,000 tonnes per annum of SLWP food waste is treated at the Bio Collectors facility (around 5% of the facility's total capacity – the remaining 95% being mostly local commercial food waste collections).
- 1.3 The site visit was attended by councillors Lewis, Woolmer and Munday as well as officers from Sutton Council's Environmental Health and

Sustainability teams and the SLWP's Contract Manager and Communications Advisor.

- 1.4 Attendees were provided with a thorough and informative tour of the site by Bio Collectors' Head of Commercial and saw the AD process in action for themselves. Odours were minimal on the day of the visit.
- 1.5 Bio Collectors stressed that they have controls in place, that they work hard-to-minimise odours and that they believe odours are often attributed to their site unfairly (pointing out that the Willow Lane industrial estate is home to many companies whose operations could result in odours). Recent upgrades to one of the digestate storage tanks will have led to the potential for more odours whilst the work was taking place, but Bio Collectors confirmed that these improvements should improve odour control at the site going forward.
- 1.6 Councillors acknowledged the points made by Bio Collectors but stressed that that the odour from the AD process is distinctive and that some residents living near the site that contact them are certain that this is where the smells are emanating from. It was agreed that Bio Collectors would explore ways to improve two-way communication with residents who live in the immediate vicinity of site.
- 1.7 The activities on the site are regulated by the Environment Agency (EA). Councillors or residents with any concerns are advised to raise them with the EA via the 24-hour incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60.

2. HOUSEHOLD REUSE AND RECYCLING CENTRES (HRRCs)

- 2.1 This contract is operated by Veolia on behalf of the Partnership boroughs.
- 2.2 Site user satisfaction - Site user satisfaction surveys continue to be conducted at the six HRRC sites on a rolling basis.
- 2.3 A summary of the findings from these surveys is reported to this Committee in the Contract Performance Reports, and uploaded to the SLWP website.

3. BEDDINGTON ENERGY RECOVERY FACILITY (ERF)

- 3.1 A Residual Waste Treatment Contract was awarded to Viridor in 2012. In order to fulfil the requirements of the contract, Viridor has constructed a £205m state-of-the-art Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) in Beddington, Sutton. Household waste from the four Partner boroughs that either cannot be recycled or has not been sorted for recycling is treated at the facility and used to generate electricity.

- 3.2 The SLWP Communications Advisor continues to work closely with Viridor to:
- Ensure Viridor are meeting their contractual requirements with regards to communications and stakeholder engagement around the operation of the Beddington ERF
 - Ensure local people understand why it is we need an ERF and provide reassurance around the safety of modern, well-run facilities such as this
 - Ensure the Partnership understands the views of local people with regards to waste treatment and ERF technologies in particular.
- 3.3 Permit variation application – On 20 July 2023, the Environment Agency confirmed that they were ‘minded to issue’ an application made by Viridor to increase the amount of waste the Beddington ERF can treat each year by 10%. This followed a public consultation held between October and November 2022, during which the SLWP boroughs made their objection to the application clear.
- 3.4 The EA confirmed that a second round of consultation would start on 21 July 2023 and run for six weeks. The SLWP quickly published a statement on its website to raise awareness of the EA decision and the second phase of consultation. The SLWP requested (on 20 July 2023) that the EA extend the length of the consultation as it would run through August, when many people are away. The EA initially declined this request (pointing out that the standard four-week consultation period had already been extended to six weeks). On 30 August 2023, Sutton Council repeated the request to the EA (to extend the consultation deadline to 15 September); a request which, this time, the EA agreed to.
- 3.5 A Beddington Community Liaison Group meeting was hosted by Viridor at the ERF Visitor Centre on 20 July 2023. It was attended by the SLWP Communications Advisor and provided an opportunity for Viridor to brief members of the group with an update on the permit variation process and second round of consultation being run by the EA.
- 3.6 Meetings were arranged by the SLWP with senior representatives of the EA’s permitting team for Sutton Councillors and Members of the SLWP Joint Committee. These took place on 8 September (Sutton Council) and 12 September (SLWP) and provided an opportunity for Members to discuss their concerns in more detail with the EA and ensure the views of local people have been heard.
- 3.7 Following these meetings, the SLWP submitted its formal consultation response to the EA and published a follow-up statement on its website (www.slwp.org.uk/latest-news) in which the boroughs’ continued opposition to the Viridor proposal was made clear.
- 3.8 The EA is expected to confirm its final decision on Viridor’s permit variation application in the coming weeks.

3.9 Beddington ERF power outage – On 16 October 2023, a failure in the UK Power Network supply to the Beddington ERF site resulted in a power outage at the facility. A further power failure occurred on 3 November. Further details of these events can be found in the Contract Performance Report being presented to this Committee.

- The SLWP Communications Lead attended a meeting of the Beddington Community Liaison Group (CLG) at the ERF Visitor Centre on 19 October, where the incident was discussed. Members of the Beddington CLG were also sent updates by Viridor via email.
- Viridor and the Environment Agency are conducting investigations into what caused the outage on 16 October and the likely impacts. Viridor has made a commitment to the Beddington CLG that it will report back to them on the outcomes of those investigations.
- From a communications and engagement perspective, the events of the 16 October, and the days immediately following, revealed some weaknesses, gaps, and inconsistencies in the channels of communication between Viridor and the SLWP boroughs and between Viridor and local residents. The SLWP is working with Viridor to review and strengthen the communication protocols to ensure that events like the one that occurred on 16 October are communicated more effectively in the future.

3.10 Emissions – the environmental performance of the Beddington ERF is reported to this Committee in the Contract Management Report. Viridor uploads Emissions Monitoring Reports to the Beddington ERF Virtual Visitor Centre (www.beddingtonerf.info) twice per month.

3.11 The SLWP Communications Advisor continues to work with Viridor to ensure local residents have access to timely and accurate information about the environmental performance of the facility via the Virtual Visitor Centre.

3.12 Site visits – the following community visits to the Beddington ERF took place during the reporting period:

Date (2023)	Group
20 June	Public open day
21 June	Sutton Secondary School Heads meeting
4 July	Sutton Community Environment Champions
6 July	Sutton Community Environment Champions
18 August	Sunray Community Group
23 August	Public open day
8 September	Public open day
9 September	Public open day
19 September	Carshalton Boys School
25 October	Public open day
8 November	Sutton u3a community group
15 November	Wandle Valley Academy School
21 November	Wandle Valley Academy School
30 November	Public open day

- 3.13 A rolling programme of public open days has been agreed with Viridor. These are published on the SLWP website (www.slwp.org.uk/visit). They have proven very popular with additional dates being added to cope with demand. Open day dates for 2024 are currently being confirmed with Viridor and will be published on the SLWP website.

4. Collections and street cleansing

- 4.1 Communication and engagement activities relating to recycling & waste collections and street cleansing are not formally under the remit of this Joint Committee. Nevertheless, this summary of recent activity is provided to Members in order to provide a more complete picture of SLWP communications and engagement efforts.
- 4.2 Food waste recycling participation campaign ('nudge letter') – the latest SLWP food waste recycling participation campaign has been delivered successfully.
- A 'nudge letter' was sent in August to 3,900 households in Croydon, Merton and Sutton that were targeted by the campaign in 2022. The professionally designed letter updated residents on the success of the campaign (reporting a 10% increase in participation) and reminded them of the importance of continuing to recycle their food waste.
 - Participation monitoring (of 1,585 properties, plus a control area of a similar size) took place to evaluate the impact this 'nudge letter' had on food waste recycling participation:
 - ⇒ Baseline – 35.6% participation (565 households of 1,585 monitored presented)
 - ⇒ One week after the 'nudge letter' – 36.5% participation (579 households presented)
 - ⇒ Four weeks after the 'nudge letter' – 37.2% participation (589 households presented)
 - The participation monitoring revealed that the 'nudge letter' resulted in a 4.25% increase in participation in food waste recycling. This compared to a -0.48% decrease in the control area.
 - Further analysis of the baseline data suggests that participation had dropped by c.4% since these properties were targeted by the campaign 12 months earlier, highlighting the importance of regular and repeated communication if we are to successfully change behaviour and then sustain that change.

- To summarise:
 - The food waste recycling core campaign ('No food waste sticker' on the lid of the rubbish bin, plus information leaflet and a roll of free biodegradable liners through the door) has been shown to increase food waste recycling participation by 10%
 - Over the course of the next 12 months, participation falls by 4%
 - Sending a 'nudge letter' to those properties after 12 months brings the participation back up (+4%) to where it had been immediately after the core campaign was delivered.

4.3

Food waste recycling participation campaign ('core campaign') - The core campaign interventions were delivered to 38,300 properties in Croydon, Merton and Sutton during the weeks commencing 25 September and 2 October 2023.

- Targeted properties were visited on their collection day. A 'No food waste sticker' was placed on the lid of their rubbish bin and a branded envelope was posted through the letterbox containing a leaflet on the benefits of recycling food waste and a free supply of 12 biodegradable liners. This approach has been shown in recent years to deliver a 10% increase in participation in targeted areas.
- A dedicated Veolia container delivery team and vehicle worked over a three-week period to ensure that any households that requested a replacement food waste bin as a result of being targeted by this campaign received delivery of that bin promptly. 4.3% (1,666) of the properties targeted by the campaign requested a food waste container. The graphs found at Appendix 1 illustrate the spike in food waste container requests during the campaign period.
- Pop-up food waste minimisation and recycling events were held in each of the three boroughs during October. The letters sent to properties targeted by this campaign included a QR code linking residents to the dedicated campaign page on the SLWP website, where the dates and locations of these events were publicised. Residents were encouraged to attend if they had any questions about food waste minimisation or recycling.
- More than 100,000 households across the SLWP region have now been targeted by the food waste recycling campaign since 2020.
- The 2022 SLWP waste composition analysis showed that food waste makes up just under 30% (by weight) of the 'average' SLWP rubbish bin. Diverting that waste out of the residual waste

stream and into the recycling (anaerobic digestion) waste stream delivers significant environmental benefits. In addition, because food waste treatment costs are significantly cheaper than residual waste treatment charges, the campaign effectively pays for itself through avoided waste treatment costs.

4.4 Kingston eRCV launch – The SLWP and Veolia have been supporting RB Kingston with the launch of their new fleet of electric refuse collection vehicles (eRCVs), which were roll-out from late September 2023:

- Kingston chose to reallocate SLWP resources and budgets from the food waste participation campaign in order to support the eRCV launch (food waste recycling messaging was incorporated into the campaign messaging as the fleet change will see dedicated food waste collection vehicles introduced across the borough and therefore additional capacity for the separate collection of food waste).
- Information about the new electric collection fleet was sent to every property in the borough and a ‘No food waste sticker’ was applied to all residual waste bins during week commencing 4 September 2023.
- Participation monitoring shows that the campaign increased food waste recycling participation by around 11.5%.

4.5 Plastic waste and carbon awareness campaign – Working with Veolia, the SLWP will be launching a campaign in early 2024 raising awareness amongst residents of the direct link between plastic waste and carbon emissions.

4.6 Viridor has also agreed to provide financial support for the campaign; reducing plastic waste is key to them achieving their target of being a net zero carbon company by 2040 and a carbon positive business by 2045.

4.7 The campaign will be delivered under the headline ***‘What’s your plastic solution?’*** This positive, proactive headline infers that there’s a challenge around plastic without demonising it as a material *per se*. It will be supported with the strapline: ***‘Change your relationship with plastic to reduce your carbon footprint’***.

4.8 The campaign will be photo-led (the concept sketch overleaf is just to illustrate the approach being taken). All images will be taken by a professional photographer. There will be four key assets, each one featuring a resident in the background and their ‘plastic solution’ message appearing on an item they are holding in the foreground:

4.9



The four assets will communicate the following messages:

- **“I use my local refill shop”** (reduce your reliance on plastic) - photo of resident in a refill shop with the message appearing on a glass jar full of rice (or similar)
- **“I reuse my water bottle”** (reuse containers whenever possible) - photo of resident in high street / in the office with the message appearing on a reusable water bottle
- **“I recycle plastic from around the home”** (recycle plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays from every room in your home using your council’s collection service) - photo of a resident in their bathroom with message appearing on a brand-neutral shampoo bottle
- **“I recycle plastic bags and wrapping at my local supermarket”** (be flexible with your recycling) - photo of a resident in a supermarket with message appearing on a brand-neutral crisp packet

4.10

For print materials, the resident and item featuring the ‘plastic solution’ message will be ‘cut out’ from the background and placed on a brightly coloured background so the image and message really stands out. The on-location backgrounds (e.g. refill shop) will feature in the digital and

4.11 social media adverts, where there will also be a little movement to attract attention (with the resident briefly walking up to the camera and moving the item containing the plastic solution message into the foreground of the frame).

4.12 A URL and QR code will direct people to a dedicated campaign page on the SLWP website, where more details about the link between plastic waste and carbon will be provided and additional tips on how to reduce plastic waste shared.

4.13 Residents will be encouraged to engage with the campaign by sharing their hints and tips on social media using the hashtag #PlasticSolution.

The campaign will be delivered across various medium including:

- **Print** - a square six-page z-fold leaflet, containing all the images and campaign messages in one place. This will be made available to residents in council reception areas, libraries, leisure centres etc.
- **Out of Home (OOH) advertising** - street side adverts sharing one of the campaign key messages at a time. The SLWP boroughs have access to preferential rates on many JCDecaux print and digital advertising boards across the region. We would also like to explore bus and tram advertising if budgets allow.
- **Digital** - a targeted social media advertising campaign; ads could either share standalone messages (reflecting the OOH campaign) or in a series such as a carousel format on Instagram.

4.14 Facility tours – In June and September 2023, Veolia ran the first in a series of tours of their materials recycling facility (MRF) in Southwark, providing SLWP residents with the opportunity to see how their dry mixed recycling is sorted. A tour for SLWP residents is also scheduled to take place on 7 December.

4.15 Further tours for SLWP residents are scheduled for 2024 in March, June, September and December. The dates for these tours are published on the SLWP website (www.slwp.org.uk/visit) where residents can use an online form to sign up.

4.16 Recycling newsletters and 2024 collection calendars – Four editions (one per borough) of the Recycling Newsletter were distributed to properties across the SLWP region in late November / early December.

The newsletters featured:

- Changes to collections and HRRC opening times over the Christmas and New Year period
- Details on how to download a 2024 collection calendar using the councils' online postcode search tools
- Details of the free Christmas tree collection service
- Tips on how to reduce food waste over the festive season

- A reminder of how to use the recycling collection service correctly
- Information on how to report a waste or street cleansing problem

Copies of the four newsletters can be found at Appendix 2.

- 4.17 A total of 94 versions of the 2024 collection calendars were produced and sent to boroughs for them to be uploaded to the council websites. Residents can download the version of the calendar that relates to their collection round by using the 'Find my collections day' postcode search tool on their council's website.
- 4.18 Schools engagement – in June, Veolia launched the latest round of their Veolia Orchard project. This enables local schools to apply for a free supply of fruit trees (or if space is tight, strawberry plants). In 2022, 65 free fruit trees were delivered to 13 schools across the four SLWP boroughs.
- 4.19 Schools had until 24 July 2023 to submit their applications. The SLWP published a press release on its website (www.slwp.org.uk/latest-news). A total of 43 applications were received and trees/strawberry plants will be delivered to 16 schools in the spring.
- 4.20 June also saw Veolia send their first schools e-newsletter to primary and junior schools across the SLWP region. The newsletter featured stories on how schools can sign up for a Recycling Rockstars school assembly, how to apply for a Veolia Orchard and how to submit applications for the Veolia Sustainability Fund.
- 4.21 The newsletter was very well received with 12 schools immediately booking in a Recycling Rockstars assembly. These are being delivered during the autumn term. The Veolia team was also invited by Holy Trinity C of E School in Merton to help celebrate their eco day. The event was attended by 120 students.
- 4.22 A second edition of the schools newsletter was distributed in September and focused on how schools could get involved in the SLWP boroughs' plans for Recycle Week (16-20 October).
- 4.23 Recycle Week 2023 – Recycle Week took place between 16-20 October. The theme was the 'Big Recycling Hunt' and encouraged people to 'recycle more of the right things, more often'. The SLWP boroughs were provided with bespoke social media content, including videos recorded with local school children showing their thoughts and tips on the importance of recycling. The videos were well used by the boroughs and proved popular with residents, returning high viewing figures and positive interactions.

5. Legal impacts and implications

5.1 None

6. Communications

6.1 This report has been drafted by the Partnership's Communications Advisor, who works closely with the four SLWP boroughs and the partnership's commercial partners to ensure communications and engagements activities support the themes agreed in the SLWP Communications Strategy 2023/24-2024/25.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and comment on any aspects of communications and engagement activities relating to the residual waste treatment services; Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) services; food and green waste treatment services; and marketing of recyclates.