

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-027-2008/09
Date of meeting: 1 September 2008



Portfolio: Environment

Subject: Adoption of the Essex Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy

Responsible Officer: John Gilbert (01992-564062).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992-564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To agree that the Essex Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy be adopted and that Council be recommended accordingly.

Executive Summary:

The Essex Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) has been developed by the Districts, Boroughs, Southend-on-Sea and Essex County Council as the Essex Waste Partnership. The JMWMS was subject to an extensive consultation period earlier in the year (18 February until 5 May 2008) and was considered in detail by the Environmental and Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel at its meeting in April. The Panel essentially agreed with the strategy being put forwards, this being:

- (a) continued high levels of recycling, with an aspirational target of 60% by 2020;
- (b) mechanical and biological treatment of residual waste;
- (c) anaerobic digestion of separated organic wastes; and
- (d) possible use of solid recovered fuel (SRF) from the Mechanical & Biological Treatment (MBT) plant to provide energy.

The County Council was informed accordingly.

The outcome of the public consultation exercise was broadly to accept the strategy as set out, and this was formally adopted by the Southend-on-Sea and Essex County Councils at their recent Council meetings.

The decision will be a key decision.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

It is now necessary for this Council to consider formally adopting the strategy, which is a key component of the Waste Partnership's procurement strategy for the management of the County's waste over the next 25 years.

Other Options for Action:

The only option is the rejection the Strategy, which given the decision of the Panel and the Council's response to the County Council, would signal a fundamental shift in the Council's policy position.

Report:

1. The consultation exercise on the proposed strategy was considered by the Environmental & Planning Services Scrutiny Panel at its meeting in April 2008. It recommended broad acceptance of the strategy which in turn was endorsed by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. A formal response was submitted to the County Council.

2. The consultation exercise was considerable and included:

- an article and questionnaire in the Essex Works magazine;
- 25 roadshows throughout the county, supported by district officers too;
- DVD animation produced to explain strategy options to people;
- focus groups held and in particular targeting 'hard to reach groups';
- over 107 key stakeholders were individually written to with copies of the key documents included on a CD;
- 283 Parish and Town Councils were written to with key documents included on a CD;
- presentation to the Young Essex Assembly;
- strategy and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) documents were available in all libraries;
- online questionnaire, all key documents and further information available on the Essex Works website.

3. Around 4,500 questionnaires were returned with the key responses being as follows:

- (a) 83% state that they recycle as much as possible (higher than in previous surveys);
- (b) 80% thought that it would be 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to assist the Partnership in attaining its 60% aspirational recycling target;
- (c) 84% either strongly or tended to agree with the use of MBT technology to treat residual waste rather than sending it to landfill; and
- (d) 88% stated a preference of using SRF to produce energy rather than sending it to landfill.

4. There were concerns raised, particularly regarding the reliance upon technology to provide solutions rather than continuing to encourage householder participation through the provision of more local recycling facilities. In addition, and perhaps not unsurprisingly, the possible use of energy from waste plants burning the output from the MBT plants raised concerns due to peoples' perception that this was no different to mass burn incineration of waste with all the issues surrounding that.

5. As part of the statutory process for the adoption of strategies of this nature, an SEA was also undertaken. This was a complex exercise taking into account a wide range of issues and considering different options. In broad terms the SEA is supportive of the approach of the JMWMS but also sets out a detailed regime of monitoring to be undertaken throughout the life of the strategy. The details of this monitoring are attached to the agenda for information.

6. The report to the Scrutiny Panel set out how the strategy aligned with this Council's current waste management service and its future plans:

“Key elements of the proposed strategy align with what we are presently doing and our future intentions, such as:

- *continued high recycling levels*
- *the collection of food waste*
- *increasing public education & information*
- *providing more recycling facilities in flats and other communal buildings”*

7. The Partnership Board established under the new contract has now met and the Innovation Forum established, and work has started on the next stage of development of the waste management service which will bring forward recommendations to Cabinet in respect of the issues identified above.

Resource Implications:

Adoption of the JMWMS has no direct resource implications, however, its adoption clearly requires the Council to develop its own services in accordance with it, and this has potential resource implications. These will be clearly identified in the reports which will be coming forward to Cabinet ahead of the 2009/10 budget cycle.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council is required by statute (Waste & Emissions Trading Act 2003) to join with the County Council in the production and adoption of a joint waste strategy. The requirement to have a strategy has been reinforced through the recent Audit Commission inspection of the waste management service. The wider JMWMS will have to be supplemented with a detailed delivery strategy for the Council, which will be dealt with through the Council's normal business planning arrangements.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

It is a key component of the Council's "safer, cleaner, greener" initiative to continue to increase its recycling performance and provide enhanced recycling services to its residents. It is critical that these service developments are delivered within an overarching waste management strategy, which the JMWMS provides.

Consultation Undertaken:

The Council was a consultee to the draft JMWMS and its response was submitted by the Environmental & Planning Services Standing Scrutiny Panel (details of that response were placed in the Members' Bulletin). The strategy itself was the subject of extensive countywide consultation as set out in the report.

Background Papers:

Report to the Environmental & Planning Services Scrutiny Committee – April 2008.

Formal Council response to Essex County Council.

Other background information around the development of the strategy and the detailed consultation outcomes are available on the Essex County Council website or from Environment & Street Scene.

Impact Assessments:

There are no equality issues associated with this report or the recommendations.

The adoption of the JMWMS of itself presents no significant risk to the Council given its stated intentions in respect of developing the waste management service. However, having adopted it the Council will be required to ensure that all future decisions on service development are fully compliant.