

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF WASTE MANAGEMENT TASK & FINISH PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 2019
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 7.00 - 8.45 PM**

Members Present:	L Burrows (Chairman), S Rackham (Vice-Chairman), R Morgan, S Neville, C C Pond, M Sartin, J H Whitehouse and D Wixley
Other members present:	N Avey and A Lion
Apologies for Absence:	C McCredie
Officers Present	Q Durrani (Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services)), D Marsh (Waste and Recycling Manager), J Warwick (Service Manager (Contracts)) and V Messenger (Democratic Services Officer)

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Panel noted its terms of reference, which had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 16 July 2019.

8. MINUTES

The notes of the meeting of the Task and Finish Panel held on 20 August 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

9. WASTE MANAGEMENT REVIEW REPORT

The Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services) Q Durrani, introduced the report which detailed the work officers had undertaken to investigate further the options the Panel had focussed on at the first Panel meeting in August 2019.

(1) Likely impact of any government decision following the recently concluded Resource and Waste Strategy Consultation

The Service Manager (Contracts), J Warwick, reported that the Government's Resource and Waste Strategy consultations aimed to make the country a world leader in resource efficiency and waste reduction. There had been four consultations on reforming the UK packaging producer responsibility system, a plastic packaging tax, a deposit return scheme for drink containers, and consistency in household and business recycling. The Environment Bill 2019-20 had received its first reading in the House of Commons. The Government was also planning further waste strategy consultations during 2020 that would lead to new legislation being adopted. This would impact on local authorities by 2023, but officers would keep members informed of any potential changes.

Questions from the Panel included the following concerns.

- That the Environment Bill was in abeyance as a General Election had been called for 12 December 2019;

- That any preliminary decision by the Panel might need to be revisited in a couple of months because of the General Election;
- That the Government had given a strong steer that garden waste should be collected and free of charge;
- That it was a bit too early to be doing research into the collection of food waste separately;
- That the report referred to flats not having gardens, but some did have communal gardens;

The Waste and Recycling Manager, D Marsh, replied that in flats, unless they had individual gardens, the green waste from communal gardens was commercial waste as the managing agents undertook the work. Food waste was defined as any type of food waste whether it was cooked or uncooked.

There were more questions around food waste and what the definition of food waste was because apple cores, for instance, could be composted. There was general consent that more effort could be made to encourage people to compost some of their food waste, i.e. vegetable food waste.

The Waste and Recycling Manager supported composting of vegetable food waste. However, the focus was on the removal of food waste from residual waste into the food waste caddy and likewise with recyclables. Therefore, the recycling of waste and correct disposal of food waste by households was being encouraged.

Councillor C C Pond commented on the further processing of waste by the residual waste further materials recovery plant at Basildon, also known as Dirty MRF, and that this recycling was a matter for discussion. Could an Essex County Council (ECC) waste disposal officer be invited to attend the next Panel meeting? The Service Director (Contract & Technical Services) replied that an invitation would be extended to the ECC Waste Disposal Team, but also our Waste and Recycling Manager would delve into past research that had been carried out by officers on this issue.

Resolved:

(1) That officers keep members informed of any further Government consultations and/or potential changes to the Resource and Waste Strategy, as well as any progress made on the Environment Bill 2019-20; and

(2) That the Service Manager (Contracts) extends an invitation to the ECC Waste Disposal Team to attend the next Panel meeting in December 2019.

(2a) Option to introduce a third wheelie bin to replace the current clear recycling sacks for the collection of dry recycling materials

The Service Manager (Contracts) explained that three options were being proposed in this report – full implementation, voluntary wheelie bin scheme and no implementation of a wheelie bin. If full implementation was the preferred option, the cost implications, negotiations with Biffa on the contract, and a public consultation with the District's households would need to be held.

Panel members raised the following points:

- How was bin contamination handled currently?

- Wheelie bins would likely improve recycling rates but were stronger sacks an option?
- During the recent tour of the Biffa Edmonton Depot, a contamination rate of between 5% to 7% was usual in bins, which was a disadvantage to using a third bin. Would side recycling waste be collected as cardboard packaging had increased substantially and it was difficult to squash bulky cardboard into a bin?
- Similarly, could polystyrene be put next to the residual waste bin?
- People usually had storage for two bins, but a third might be a challenge;
- One neighbouring London Borough had three wheelie bins but only achieved a very low recycling rate of just over 30 per cent, so a third bin might be counterproductive;
- As people would have several bins, could a third wheelie bin be issued on a voluntary basis?
- At planning committees, members would check that appropriate space on the plans was being provided for two bins but accommodating three might prove more difficult;
- Many other local authorities' households already used three wheelie bins;
- People were keen to recycle to help the environment and bins were much tidier than plastic sacks;
- Different collection routes had different issues, so some rounds might have properties with space for three bins but others not; also
- Were less qualified drivers needed, if collection vehicles were smaller?

The Waste and Recycling Manager replied that communal contaminated bins were left by the Biffa operatives until the following week, but a 'contaminated waste' sticker was stuck onto that bin for the resident/managing agent to sort out. Individual households could be offered more wheelie bins for recycling but only certain side waste materials would be collected, such as cardboard, textiles, batteries and WEEE, if placed beside their bins to be collected by Biffa. Drivers of smaller 7.5-tonne trucks could work for longer and had fewer regulations than the drivers of larger tonnage trucks had to comply with.

There was general consensus that members were in favour of more detailed proposals to be able to evaluate the merits of a third wheelie bin, but it might have to be accepted that some properties might not have space for a third bin. More basic information on contamination was needed as this was quite a big issue. Therefore, the costs of sacks against the costs of bins would help, but not enough information had been provided to make decision.

Resolved:

(1) That the Service Director (Contract & Technical Services) provide further information for a third wheelie bin District-wide. This was to include:

- Implementation costs;
- Operational costs with Biffa; and
- To research wheelie bin contamination levels with other neighbouring local authorities.

(2) That if members decided to pursue the option of introducing a third wheelie bin, the operational costs and contractual implications with Biffa would be looked at through an innovation forum. This would be done outside of the timeframe of the Task and Finish Panel.

(2b) Future collection of food and garden waste in separate containers and the option of charging for the collection of garden waste

The Council had always had a garden waste collection - both as free and chargeable services. However, a considerable element in residual bins was food waste and this had been verified over the past decade by ECC officers' analysis of waste disposal data. However, the Government might make food collections compulsory.

The Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services) explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked that a Task and Finish Panel review waste management. As the waste disposal authority, ECC processed the Council's food and garden waste together, which was expensive. It would be better and less costly for ECC if only food waste was handled, as food treatment processes were expensive. Garden waste by comparison was less expensive and could be composted. ECC had offered to provide significant support to the Council if only food waste was sent.

Members raised the following concerns regarding garden waste:

- To stop garden collections at the end of September was too early;
- Garden collections for six months from March to September was too short;
- Households should be encouraged to compost garden waste;
- By how much did garden waste cost fall during the winter months and could more information be provided on this?
- It was likely that the Council's recycling rate would fall if it went to fortnightly garden waste collections;
- If separate food collection was by caddies, would these be strong enough to deter foxes but still allow elderly people to use them?

The Panel was advised that the Council could get ahead of the Government, as separation of food and garden waste was likely. This would require a renegotiation of the waste collection service with Biffa and ECC. Waste Management could provide the Panel with some indication of what the financial upside would be if the Council implemented separate food and garden waste collections. This would have to be decided as a District and public consultation would be helpful, but it would be a decision for the Cabinet to agree on how far the consultation went. Also, regarding the Essex Municipal Waste Strategy, any change had to be with the consent of every Essex local authority, as it could not be a unilateral decision and was also a legal and binding agreement.

Resolved:

That the Council wait for further Government guidance before a decision was made on the future collection of garden and food waste separately.

(2c) Possibility of not collecting garden waste in certain months of the year when demand was low

The Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services) reported that the larger refuse trucks were sent out on collection rounds and there was not much garden waste collected during the winter. Residents needed encouragement to compost garden waste.

The Panel raised the following points:

- How were households to dispose of garden waste if collections stopped during the winter months and people could not cope with a larger bin?
- More information was needed on which months had lower collections of garden waste;
- In the weeks after Christmas the green bins were usually filled with Christmas trees;
- Many neighbouring local authorities charged for fortnightly collections of garden waste; and
- A suggestion to curtail garden collections from December to the end of February.

There was support by members for not collecting garden waste for a short period over the winter months. The Waste and Recycling Manager acknowledged that gardening was dependant on the weather, and that Christmas trees were taken by Biffa. However, the Council had previously had drop off points for Christmas trees and/or special collections.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Waste and Recycling Manager look at the merits and cost savings of not collecting garden waste in certain months of the year.

(2d) Review of street cleansing arrangements with a view to achieve improvements in cleansing standards

Waste Management officers felt there were more effective and efficient ways of dealing with the District's litter. This could be achieved by creating litter picks routes on its major through roads and reduce the frequency of full cleansing in residential roads. This would not include roads off the high roads or underground stations. There were two options:

- To reduce the frequency from every two weeks to three weeks; and
- To change the cleansing schedule from full cleanse every two weeks to every four weeks with other scheduled cleansing undertaken by litter picking.

The Panel identified the following points:

- Most complaints from residents were about residential roads so these new arrangements might be unpopular, but could a more detailed breakdown of the costs be supplied?
- The Council kept the District very clean and officers did a superb job in this regard.
- The use of dashcams by the Environment and Neighbourhood officers was a very good tactic to combat littering.
- Were fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued?
- Did the Council need more Environment and Neighbourhood officers to help enforce littering?
- When the verges were cut, the litter appeared;
- A member who had walked down Clays Lane in Loughton had been horrified by the amount of litter by the roadside. Was land ownership an issue?

The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that it was not about doing less. Biffa did full cleanses with the mechanical sweepers picking up detritus. Under an inspection regime, places were cleaned where necessary. With the through roads, they could be cleansed but then within a few days litter thrown from vehicles along these routes would return it back to the state it was before the cleanse. This Council had a very high level of service, so the proposal was to move resources where there was a high level of white litter on verges, which was getting worse. FPNs were issued. If the frequency of clearing litter thrown from vehicles on these through roads was increased, then the Council needed to look at two-weekly frequencies/inspections to free up resources. The Council had an efficient Environment and Neighbourhood Team. Also, an officer from Braintree District Council had recently reported three such littering incidences to the Council. Members could also be provided with training to help increase reports of littering. It was acknowledged that there were ownership issues and some areas of the District came under the Epping Forest Conservators. Also, some roads were dangerous for litter picking crews, such as the Crooked Mile (Waltham Abbey / Nazeing). When verges were mown, the Council received complaints about littering so better co-ordination on litter picking would help. However, this was difficult because the verges were not on a fixed schedule. Therefore, a trial of the new street cleansing arrangements would be carried out to enable Waste Management officers to monitor and evaluate improvements made to cleansing standards.

Resolved:

That a trial of the new street cleansing arrangements be carried out to enable Waste Management officers to monitor and evaluate improvements made to cleansing standards.

(2e) Improvements in the provision of waste and recycling containers and cleansing operations on the high street, including the segregation of recycling materials

The Service Manager (Contracts) explained that litter bins were a regular feature on the District's streets to help combat littering. The current 311 bins in high street zones were emptied daily either by static or crew street cleansing workers. The proposal was to replace the bin design to reinforce the Council's drive to recycle waste, and help educate the public by encouraging the separation of waste. This would be phased in over a five-year period to keep costs manageable. The current bins would be put into storage.

Members commented that:

- Waltham Forest Borough Council used a particularly good bin design in Leyton High Road. Could the Council partner with Waltham Forest to buy these bins in bulk to reduce the cost?
- Which bins would the Council decide to buy?
- What were the costs of the other bin designs?
- Bin capacity was important so bins did not overflow.
- Certain locations needed more litter bins.
- Where was the bin waste taken?
- Recycling our own waste could be done by ECC at the Basildon MRF Depot?

The Service Director (Contracts & Technical Services) replied that The Broadway in Loughton had a new style bins installed during the Town Centre enhancement

scheme. However, the cost of bins had dropped now. Loughton High Road also had some wooden bins but the repair costs were expensive. The Council needed to invest and if the footfall for a bin was evident, bins would be changed, as and when required.

The Waste and Recycling Manager said that officers would be looking at what other local authorities did. It was cheaper to take out the existing Brunel bins and replace with purpose made recycling litter bins and reuse the Brunel bins elsewhere. Officers needed to look at the options for a robust bin. Residual waste went to the Harlow Recycling Centre and then onto Basildon MRF Depot, which helped ECC's revenue. Recycled waste was combined with the Council's other recycled waste. The Council was keen to encourage recycling, which would also strengthen the behaviour change that was needed going forward. A publicity drive would also be undertaken.

The Panel was supportive of a new bin design to segregate recycling from residual waste on the streets to increase recycled waste and help educate the public. Officers would continue look at the costs of the various bin designs and report their findings to the Panel at the next meeting in December 2019.

Resolved:

- (1) That the costs of new bin designs to segregate recycling from residual waste be investigated by the next Panel meeting in December 2019;
- (2) That comparable research on bins other local authorities used be undertaken before the next Panel meeting; and
- (3) That a publicity campaign be undertaken when the new bin designs were rolled out, to help educate the public.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

The work programme was noted.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business reported.

12. DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 16 December 2019 at 7.00pm.

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