

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOUTH TYNE AND WEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP JOINT
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Friday, 12 June 2020

PRESENT: Councillor Linda Green (Gateshead Council) (Chair)

Gateshead Council Councillor Angela Douglas,

South Tyneside Council Councillor Jim Foreman

Sunderland Council Councillor Michael Mordey
Councillor Paul Stewart

IN ATTENDANCE:

Gateshead Council Colin Huntington, Marc Morley, Helen Conway

South Tyneside Council Andrew Whittaker

Sunderland Council Colin Curtis

South Tyne and Wear
Waste Management
Partnership Chris Wilson, Fiona Swinburne, Gary Smith

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mark Walsh

85 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED - That the Joint Executive Committee agreed that the Chair for 2020/21 would be Councillor Linda Green (Gateshead)

86 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIRS

RESOLVED - That the Joint Executive Committee agreed that the Vice Chairs for 2020/21 would be Councillor Mark Walsh (South Tyneside) and Councillor Michael Mordey (Sunderland)

The Joint Executive Committee agreed to send a letter of thanks to Councillor Amy Wilson, who has recently stood down, for her time spent on the JEC and to wish her well for the future.

87 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

88 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received

89 CONTRACTS UPDATE

The Committee received a report on the latest position regarding the Residual Waste Treatment Contract and other ancillary waste joint contracts and activities managed by South Tyne and Wear Waste Management Partnership (STWWMP).

The 2019/20 year end contract year performance was reported and across the contract year service availability was strong with plant availability 94.26% and turbine availability 93.11%. 89% of the 194,881 MWh of electricity generated by Lines 4 & 5 was exported to the National Grid.

Both the contractual recycling and recovery performance targets were exceeded and the unprocessed landfill diversion rate was once again 100%.

No environmental issues were reported during 2019/20 contract year and all Incinerator Bottom Ash samples returned compliant results.

No further progress was reported with SUEZ's potential construction of a sixth EfW Line at Haverton Hill.

The exercise to replace the Debt Service Reserve Account (DSRA) with a contingent Debt Service Reserve Facility (DSRF) is still progressing.

The third Joint Insurance Cost Review (JICR) was previously submitted by Willis Towers Watson and reviewed by STWWMP. Initial indications are that due to movements in the insurance market in relation to our technology the position is not as good as it has been previously. A response from STWER to the feedback previously provided is still awaited.

The Committee were advised that all three of the WTS were available for the entire 2019/20 contract period. Recycling outputs from the sites include segregated street sweepings, wood, scrap metals.

Routine maintenance of buildings, plant and control systems was undertaken as scheduled at all three transfer stations during the year.

The RWTC affords provision for SUEZ to help to improve local prosperity across the partnership area by promoting vacant posts within their facilities. Local vacancies are circulated to partner authority economic development services for circulation to their client bases. Vacancies are also highlighted at the Jack Crawford House and Campground Community Liaison Groups enable opportunities to be circulated across community contacts.

STWWMP remains committed to an ongoing programme of community education and engagement, managed by Groundwork North East & Cumbria (GNEC) at the visitor and education centre, the energy from waste facility, and through outreach activities held in local schools and community settings.

The final results of the 2019/20 programme were impacted by the coronavirus pandemic restrictions and the remaining activities that had been scheduled for late March were cancelled immediately.

Therefore, between April 2019 and March 2020, a total of 6,268 local residents, children & young people, and community group members took part in waste awareness events, activities and site visits to different facilities. Of this, 5,872 were held through outreach sessions in local schools and community settings.

Recently, the Visitor and Education Centre co-ordinator employed by GNEC submitted their resignation to take up an employment opportunity elsewhere. STWWMP are discussing with SUEZ and GNEC how a recruitment process to identify a suitable replacement can be undertaken in due course within the current pandemic situation.

No Community Liaison Group meetings were held during February or March.

The Joint Committee were advised that the MRF contracts continue to be monitored closely by the Joint Partnership team. Table A at Appendix B highlighted the 2019/20 year end performance for each partner authority for the materials collected in the kerbside 'blue-bin' recycling service, in comparison to service results since 2014/15. The results are also broken down into tonnages and percentage content to demonstrate the levels of paper collected separately in the inner box and the comingled materials collected in the main section of the bin.

Comingled recycling tonnages in each partner authority have fluctuated over recent years but demonstrate that paper tonnages collected separately in the inner caddy have continued to fall year on year.

Appendix B, also contains Table B, which highlights MRF recycling and recovery rates (for comingled materials only) since Quarter 1 2018/19. Recycling performance has generally remained at similar levels in each partner authority.

Sunderland City Council continue to identify actions to help increase their recycling rates and reduce contamination rates, including direct engagement with the public. The rate shows a significant drop in the recovery rate to 17.39%. However, it should be noted that the method for calculating this data is now based on inputs into the MRF rather than outputs.

The recycling trial that commenced in February 2019 on a single collection round in both Gateshead and South Tyneside is enabling around 2,400 households to recycle paper and cardboard materials together in a separate, additional, wheeled bin. Table C at Appendix B provided details of the tonnage of paper and cardboard (known as mixed fibre) that has been collected since the start of the trial.

Although the trial is taking place in Gateshead and South Tyneside, the trial feedback and results will benefit all three partner authorities and will be used when evaluating future service delivery models.

Table A at Appendix C highlights the year-end HWRC recycling performance for 2019/20, excluding inert materials, such as rubble.

During the 2019/20 contract year, the actual tonnage of recycled materials received at HWRCs increased in comparison to the previous year. However, the amount of residual waste also significantly increased which impacted on the percentage based annual recycling targets, which were subsequently not achieved.

The Committee were informed that the new WEEE regional contract continued to operate without incident during the remainder of the 2019/20 financial year.

The formal launch of the STWWMP WEE Repair and Reuse Project, originally scheduled for 18 March 2020 at the Visitor and Education Centre, had to be cancelled at late notice due to restrictions introduced because of the coronavirus pandemic. This also resulted in the two employees delivering the project being furloughed by GNEC. However, the project funders have agreed that STWWMP can extend the timeline for the delivery of the project to reflect the period where activities are unable to be delivered because of the pandemic.

A second project, focusing on kerbside WEEE recycling, will commence once the grant has been received from the funding body. However, this is still awaited due to further delays in the launch of the 'Recycle Your Electricals' campaign and the implications of the ongoing pandemic situation.

RESOLVED - That the JEC noted the contents of the report.

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC - STWWMP SERVICE DELIVERY

The JEC received a report which provided an overview of household waste service delivery and associated challenges in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Since the beginning of the national lockdown and the subsequent ongoing restrictions on all aspects of daily life, each of the partner authorities have faced numerous challenges in ensuring that as many as possible of the range of waste services that are usually available can continue to be delivered to residents.

However, despite such challenging times, the team effort and professionalism demonstrated by the partner authorities – fully supported by the different external waste contractors and advice and guidance from other organisations across the waste sector – has meant that all residents across Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland have continued to receive their key waste collection services. This has enabled the statutory kerbside services, such as household residual and recycling collections, to be maintained without interruption. This continues to be achieved

whilst ensuring that the health and safety of all staff and members of the public is of paramount importance and the highest priority in the ongoing service delivery.

During the initial stages of the lockdown the majority of residents were required to stay at home, so the amount of waste that households presented for collection increased. Since Easter, analysis indicates an average increase in recycling tonnages presented by households is 24% in Gateshead, 30% in South Tyneside and 28% in Sunderland. Despite this, the support received from contractors ensured that all waste transfer stations and facilities, both material recovery facilities, and the energy from waste facility continued to accept waste and operate as close to as normal as possible, with no impact on service delivery.

Mechanisms have been put in place by all authorities across the partnership to ensure staff safety, the temporary suspension of services where necessary and the introduction of alternative service delivery models. However, as lockdown eases, services are slowly being re-introduced across the partnership.

The challenges that the partner authorities have faced during the pandemic are not uncommon and most other local authorities around the country have also had to focus on maintaining statutory waste services.

Alongside local authority residual waste collection services, the national energy-from-waste (EfW) availability has remained consistent during pandemic, as have waste transfer stations for the different waste streams.

Across the country Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) have seen greater levels of disruption in comparison to residual waste treatment options such as EfW, but almost

Four in five MRFs are now reporting to be operating as normal.

Similarly, 79% of Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) are now reporting minor or moderate levels of disruption to services (92% of which have identified operational capacity of 30-40%), with only 3% remaining closed. In mid April, 92% of HWRCs across the country were closed.

By mid-May, 15% of local authorities were experiencing 'no impact' on operational staffing levels. 78% of local authorities reported a 'less than 20% reduction on staffing levels, a similar level to the two weeks prior. 6% reported that a 20-40 reduction, which is less than a fifth of the absence levels that were reported in the last week of March.

The greatest reported causes for disruption to collection services nationally continues to be staff absence due to self isolation (highlighted by 45% of local authorities, although this has fallen in recent weeks) 41% have identified the effects of social distancing is the next greatest reported cause for service disruption, followed by absence due to sickness (32%).

As the pandemic continues, across the partnership, waste service operatives continue to receive positive feedback and thanks from all sectors of society, whether this is thank you posters in windows or notices and cards left on bins. It would

appear that residents are recognising that alongside social care staff, shop workers, NHS staff, and many other key workers, local authority waste services are essential to the functioning of society, whether this is in a period of crisis or not.

As more waste services continue to expand and become closer to 'normal' service delivery, further interim risk assessments will be required to be developed through close working between the three partner authorities and relevant service contractors. This will also enable contract management roles such as site inspections to be reintroduced and routinely delivered.

The partner authorities will also be subject to steep learning curve on the implications of the new 'track and trace' procedures and how this could impact on increased staff absences and, therefore, the continued delivery of waste services.

In addition, all local authorities have incurred significant additional financial costs to ensure services across all areas of their activities can be delivered safely within the current situation. The ongoing lockdown restrictions will prevent partner authorities from returning to pre-pandemic service arrangements and associated service delivery costs.

However, the longer some form of restrictions remain in place, the additional financial pressures could begin to impact on the services that the partner authorities are able to provide. The local government sector and their support organisations remain in dialogue with government regarding the additional costs required to support all aspects of local authority services during the pandemic. Within the waste services sector, feedback from support organisations such as LARAC suggests that their discussions with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have indicated that the department is keen to identify evidence of extra costs that local authority waste services are incurring. STWWMP will therefore continue to engage with relevant waste sector organisations and surveys and ensure that the service delivery challenges and associated additional costs will be highlighted as appropriate.

- RESOLVED -
- i) That the information be noted
 - ii) The JEC agreed to receive further updates on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the delivery of waste services, as appropriate.
 - iii) That changes to the operational risk register due to the impact of coronavirus be brought to the next meeting of the JEC
 - iv) That a letter of thanks be sent on behalf of the JEC to all staff who have continued to provide waste services during the pandemic.

RESOURCES & WASTE STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The JEC received a report advising of the government response to the recent Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry on the implications for local authorities of the Resources and Waste Strategy.

The JEC were advised that some of the Committee's key findings from the inquiry included:

- Concerns by reports from local authority representatives that they were not sufficiently consulted in advance of the publication of the Strategy, particularly around recycling targets, financial implications and the 'desirability' of the proposed changes to waste management services.
- An agreement for the proposal to implement an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme so that producers bear a greater responsibility for the disposal costs of the materials that they introduce into the waste system. The Committee also recommended that the government commits to undertaking a review of funding levels at least every two years, providing top-up funding to local authorities if this becomes necessary.
- An acknowledgement that despite 'strong opposition' from many to the incineration of waste, producing energy-from-waste has a role to play within the waste hierarchy. Consequently, an incineration tax should not be introduced in the short term, as this would simply increase costs for local authorities and council tax payers. However, the Committee considers that the government is right to keep an incineration tax under review, but only insofar as it will encourage local authorities to prioritise long-term investment in the recycling infrastructure and must not lead to a transfer of waste from incineration to landfill.

The Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) provided evidence to the inquiry in both written and in person at the select committee.

The JEC were advised that the government's response to the report acknowledged that there is a balance to be struck between local decision making and what is considered necessary to increase the quantity and quality of recycling nationally. However, they disagreed with the Committee's conclusion that the Strategy has sought to dictate from the centre what is best decided at local level.

Therefore, whilst government highlighted that local decision making is key to effectively implementing their reforms, they also highlighted that in recent decades, various EU Directive have imposed top-down requirements on local authorities and how local waste services are provided. Furthermore, they also emphasised that Parliament has also previously legislated directly to set minimum requirements on household recycling.

Close working with local authorities to implement reforms will continue through Defra and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and government confirmed its commitment to fund any new burdens on local government in line with the New Burdens Doctrine.

The key responses from Government included details on:

- Consultation
- Standardisation
- Food Waste

- Deposit Return Scheme
- EPR Funding

The JEC were advised that it is clear that the full impact of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will not be known for some time. There will however, be significant challenges that local authorities will continue to face for the foreseeable future in continuing to ensure that key services, such as waste management, can continue to be delivered safely.

The impact of the pandemic on future local authority funding cannot yet be predicted. This includes the impact on the national waste policy direction and the further implementation of the Resources and Waste Strategy proposals, as well as the potential availability of additional funding through the New Burdens Doctrine.

However, STWWMP will seek to fully engage in the forthcoming consultation exercises when they are released by government and ensure that potential local challenges arising for the implementation of the Strategy's proposals are clearly identified, costed and communicated.

- RESOLVED -
- i) That the information be noted.
 - ii) The JEC agreed to receive further updates on the implementation of the Resources & Waste Strategy proposals, as appropriate.

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DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Friday 11 September 2020 at 1.30 pm – venue to be confirmed in due course.