

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – PLACE
Date of Meeting: 10 NOVEMBER 2016
Report of: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - ENVIRONMENT
Title: RECYCLING PLAN REVIEW

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report updates Scrutiny Committee Place on our current performance in waste reduction and recycling, and the reasons for current trends. It also provides an update on progress on the annual Recycling Plan, and seeks ongoing support and suggestions from Scrutiny for recycling initiatives.

2. Recommendations:

- 1) That Scrutiny Committee Place notes the current trends on waste reduction and recycling, and supports the ongoing actions planned for 2016/17 that are described in this report.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 The actions described in this report are necessary in order to progress towards our recycling targets.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

- 4.1 The actions described in the report are being implemented within the budget allocated to the recycling strategy.
- 4.2 Operating recycling collections and our own Materials Reclamation Facility (MRF) in-house enables the Council to sort materials to a high standard and sell directly to reprocessors, achieving good prices. Overall income from material sales and Devon County Council recycling credits in 2015/15 was £867,900.
- 4.3 Recycling income is largely influenced by the international market for paper, card, metals, plastics and glass. Price fluctuations can be mitigated by continuing to provide reprocessors with clean, well-sorted materials from our MRF. Increasing our recycling rate will also increase our income.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no financial implications contained in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 There are no statutory recycling targets that currently apply to waste collection authorities. The Household Recycling Act 2003 requires the Council to offer a kerbside recycling collection of at least two materials.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

7.1 This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

8. Report details:

8.1 Household waste reduction and recycling performance

8.2 The amount of household waste sent for disposal in Exeter dropped from 25,083 tonnes in 2014/15 to 23,673 tonnes in 2015/16. This is very encouraging, given that waste reduction sits above recycling in the waste management hierarchy. DEFRA reported that in 2015/16, non-recycled waste collected by UK local authorities increased by 0.6% on average, compared to Exeter's reduction of 5.6%. The overall reduction in waste collected per head of population is likely to keep Exeter in the top 10% of local authorities for this indicator. Waste reduction has been promoted in the last 12 months through extending biweekly rubbish collections to more properties where appropriate, and a strengthening of the 'no side waste' policy by not collecting extra waste that is placed on top of rubbish bins.

8.3 The 2016 annual recycling statistics for Devon indicate that Exeter's recycling rate dropped slightly from 33.8% in 2014/15 to 33.3% in 2015/16. The Council's Corporate Plan includes a target to increase our recycling rate by one percentage point each year. Our reduction last year of 0.5% should be viewed in the context of an average drop of 0.7% drop among all UK local authorities. This national trend suggests that a plateau has been reached after significant progress in the last two decades, and further improvement will depend on improving the way we engage with communities, and increasing the range of materials collected for recycling.

8.4 Exeter is one of five Devon district councils to experience a drop in tonnes recycled last year. Those councils that have increased their recycling tonnage have done so mainly through a significant change of service: introduction of weekly food waste collection and/or addition of new materials to their recycling scheme.

8.5 The waste that is taken by householders to Devon County Council's two bulky waste Recycling Centres in Exeter is excluded from our recycling statistics. Including the recycling centre tonnage (as Unitary authorities are able to do) would have increased our 2015/16 recycling rate to 48%. This indicates that Exeter residents are not necessarily poor recyclers.

9. Reasons for the trend in recycling performance

- 9.1 The quantity of waste sent for recycling dropped by 1,011 tonnes. Half of this reduction is due to a drop in kerbside recycling tonnage, principally paper and plastic. The continued decline in paper consumption due to more online reading of newspapers and magazines is a long term trend that is likely to continue.
- 9.2 We continue to monitor the composition of material collected for recycling, for example the first full year of the 5p carrier bag charge has greatly reduced the volume of bags collected for recycling and we are assessing the potential to divert resources into capturing other materials.
- 9.3 The remaining drop in recycling tonnage is due to:
- (i) A drop in material collected by voluntary groups and charities, largely because Devon County Council no longer pays recycling credits for textiles collected by these groups
 - (ii) Composted leaf sweepings are now measured on weight delivered to the composting site in North Devon, rather than on material collected in Exeter. The moisture loss during storage and transport reduces the weight counting towards our recycling rate.
- 9.4 While disappointing, the Exeter's reduction in recycling rate is slightly less than the UK-wide drop of 0.7 percentage points reported by DEFRA earlier this year. DEFRA also reported a 0.6% increase in non-recycled waste, with Exeter being an exception to this upward trend.
- 9.5 Data for the recycling rate during 2016/17 to date is unavailable. However, Quarters 1 and 2, the Materials Reclamation Facility processed 4,099 tonnes compared 4,107 tonnes the previous year, indicating that the downward trend of the previous year has been halted.
- 9.6 Exeter's published recycling rate of 33.8% refers only to scheduled waste collection and street sweepings, and excludes waste from Devon County Council's two Recycling Centres in Exeter. If the Recycling Centres were included in our statistics (as is the case in unitary authorities) our household waste recycling rate would be 48%.
- 9.7 Education measures aimed at improving our capture of recyclable materials are described in paragraph 8.4 below. While our waste minimisation policies have been successful, our challenge is to divert more of the waste from 'grey bin' to 'green bin'.

10. Food waste collection

- 10.1 Following a procurement exercise, Eunomia was appointed as the consultant to model a range of options for the separate collection of food waste. Eunomia's final report is due in December 2016, and this will consider the financial and operational considerations of these options. The introduction of weekly food waste reductions is expected to divert more than 3,000 tonnes of food waste from disposal to recycling, lifting our recycling rate to over 40%.
- 10.2 Introduction of a food waste collection also tends to prompt an increase in recycling of materials already included in our kerbside recycling scheme (paper, card, plastic & cans), due to the publicity and extra profile resulting from a service change.

11. Commercial waste recycling

- 11.1 In 12 months, Exeter City Council's commercial recycling scheme achieved 12% growth and now has 500 customers. The amount of material recycled increased by 48% to 328 tonnes thanks to increased take-up of commingled and glass recycling. Our pricing structure makes recycling cheaper than rubbish collection, and we are revising the structure to make the saving larger and more transparent.
- 11.2 In 2016 we have provided temporary waste management services at 30 events, including the Radio 1 Big Weekend and the Great West Run, ensuring that wherever practicable, packaging materials and cups are captured for recycling.
- 11.3 We have submitted a tender to the Exeter Business Improvement District to be the preferred supplier of waste and recycling services to BID members, offering a preferential rate for recycling collections.

12. Recycling behavioural change

- 12.1 Although kerbside recycling collections are now well-established in the UK, with Exeter's scheme being rolled out from 1996, lack of understanding of which materials to recycle remains a barrier to improving recycling rates. The WRAP 2016 Recycling Tracker survey reports that 66% of householders feel uncertain about whether or not to recycle at least one item of waste, and 49% put at least one item in the rubbish bin that could have been recycled.
- 12.2 Our recycling education messages this year have concentrated on overcoming this confusion so that our residents can be confident, well-informed recyclers. This is complemented by targeted messages aimed at specific communities.
- 12.3 The 'Recycling Times' two page spread of information, facts and figures and call to action has run in four editions of the Exeter Citizen. The articles have highlighted in particular plastics and cans – materials which tend to have lower capture rates due to confusion about what can be recycled and how clean the items need to be.
- 12.4 The Twitter page launched in July 2016 @dustcartdenis contains updates, news recycling information and fun facts all designed to promote recycling in a light-hearted way. It currently has 259 followers, resulting in 100,000 'impressions' to individual users and 1,400 responses or 'engagements'.
- 12.5 With our Facebook page Denis the Dustcart launched in September 2016, this promotes more in-depth discussion about recycling and reaches out to a broader demographic than Twitter. It is easier for groups and societies to get on board with the messages on Facebook, enabling us to link to other campaigns. In its first three weeks the Facebook page achieved 102 'likes' and 2,027 post reaches which led to 643 'engagements'. Examples of the positive feedback to our social media output are shown in the Appendix.
- 12.6 We use the Council's Gov Delivery facility to send out a recycling newsletter, which has 1,800 subscribers and is still growing. As well as repeated the messages about what to recycle, the newsletter highlights what happens to the materials we collect for recycling. According to WRAP's research this is something residents are keen to know and helps encourage recycling participation.

- 12.7 The two specific communities targeted so far this year with more tailored messages are Exeter University students and our own housing tenants. In partnership with the Student Guild, in September we repeated the house to house visits with our Recycling Officer, reaching 247 households to ensure these had the correct information about recycling, waste presentation and access to waste and recycling containers. We have provided appropriate information for the student handbook and enabled the Guild's iExeter phone app to link directly with the Council's online waste & recycling collection day look-up facility. We have also provided copy for an article in the Expose student magazine, with the aim of providing more balanced coverage of our waste and recycling service. Working with the Council's private sector housing team we have communicated with 900 landlords to seek their assistance and remind them of their duties around management of domestic waste by their tenants.
- 12.8 We provide articles for the quarterly Insight council tenants' magazine, which reaches approximately 4,500 households. These articles give straightforward information about what and how to recycle, and our policies for the correct presentation of waste which is helpful in areas where high density and communal bin stores cause particular challenges. This complements the work done by the Waste Operations team liaising with Housing Services to improve bin storage and waste presentation & collection arrangements in 'hot spots' where waste accumulates or is wrongly presented.
- 12.9 Waste reduction is promoted using the range of media listed above and in partnership with the Recycle Devon campaign. When food waste collections are introduced it is important that the waste reduction message is not lost; we will encourage households to reduce food waste, compost at home if they can, and only then use their food waste recycling bin. The Senior Recycling Officer has arranged for 'round table' meetings involving the Exeter Food Network and other local stakeholders to promote a community-led approach to reducing food waste that is sent for disposal.
- 12.10 Over the coming months we will work to grow the social media presence by targeting local groups and postcode areas as well as promoting the core message of 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle' including minimising the waste produced at home. This will be complemented by campaigns at local community level, targeting those areas identified in last year's analysis of kerbside recycling yields, which identified communities where participation in recycling is low.

12.11 A recent survey by the Recycle Now campaign shows 44% of all plastic bottles in the UK end up being disposed of as rubbish instead of recycled. While recycling more of these bottles is one of our objectives, we remain committed to waste reduction. 'Refill Devon' is a practical campaign which aims to stem the tide of single-use plastic bottle pollution by making Devon a county in which refilling your water bottle becomes a cultural norm. In time we plan to roll this project out across Devon but are launching it first in Exeter. The Senior Recycling Officer is working with Exeter BID and a colleague in the waste team at Devon County Council to encourage local businesses to sign up. Participating cafes, shops, hotels and other businesses can become Refill Stations simply by displaying a round, blue Refill sticker in their window. This will alert passers-by that they're welcome to come on in and fill up their water bottle – for free.



12.12 The post of full-time Recycling Officer is currently vacant, with recruitment in progress. Once this post is filled it is anticipated that the other measures identified in the report to Scrutiny Committee – Community on 1 March 2016 will be implemented.

13. Recycling infrastructure

13.1 One additional glass recycling bank will be installed in Prince of Wales Road in 2016/17. This will serve the University student community living in the city by providing them with a bottle bank on their route to the campus. An increase in the number of textile banks has been delayed by the termination of the arrangement with Devon's previous contractor and the appointment of the Salvation Army as the new contractor. The Salvation Army has confirmed its willingness to work with the Council to establish more textile recycling sites.

14. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

14.1 Achieving a one percentage point increase in recycling rate per year is part of the corporate management work programme. Completing the business case for food waste collection and introducing a food waste collection as soon as possible was a manifesto pledge in this year's Council elections.

15. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

15.1 Recycling generates a significant income to the Council. The risk of failing to meet income targets arises from stagnating or reduced recycling tonnages, and from the volatile markets for recyclable materials. The measures outlined above and in the previous report to Scrutiny Committee – Community on 1 March 2016 are planned to increase the amount of material collected for recycling. Exeter's Materials Reclamation Facility already achieves best possible income by sorting materials to a high standard and selling materials directly to reprocessors.

16. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?

16.1 Recycling ranks above disposal in the 'waste management hierarchy', which considers the environmental impacts of all methods of dealing with waste. No other impacts have been identified.

17. Are there any other options?

17.1 There are no other options that will achieve the objectives identified in this report.

Robert Norley, Assistant Director Environment

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

None

Contact for enquires:
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Appendix 1

Examples of social media posts supporting recycling education

You Retweeted

 **Recycle Devon** @RecycleDevon · Sep 16
Last but by no means least, keep an eye out for today's cunning
[#UnusualSuspect](#) bit.ly/2cdsvK5 [#RecycleWeek](#)



Unusual Suspect Number Five

WANTED FOR RECYCLING

NAME: Toilet Roll Tube
CASE NUMBER: #0178789
DESCRIPTION: Around 10cm tall, straight build, beige in colour.
CRIME: Disguises themselves as a non-recyclable and ends up in the bathroom bin.

You can RECYCLE items from your BATHROOM

Did you know?
Toilet roll tubes are the number one recyclable item that doesn't get recycled, with 25% ending up in rubbish bins?

← 2 1 ...

 **Denis the Dustcart** @DustcartDenis · Sep 13
There's a bunch of [#UnusualSuspects](#) in your [#Bathroom](#). Can you name one? (Hint: toothpaste boxes) [#RecycleWeek](#) bit.ly/2bdXoZA

← ↻ ❤️ ||| ...



Denis the Dustcart @DustcartDenis · Sep 30

Looks prettier out, but keeping the packets on till you're ready to eat will stop your veg going soft so quickly
#WorldVegetarianDay



Example of feedback from our Facebook page:

https://www.facebook.com/DustcartDenis/posts/202475830182009?notif_t=page_wall&n CityNet -

Shillingford Organics ▸ **Denis the Dustcart** Like Page

13 October at 22:17 · 🌐

What a very resourceful page, some people really struggle to know what is / what is not recyclable - graphics is always a great way to get the message out. It would be nice if all councils did it the same way so as not to confuse people. 😊

Like Comment Share Message

Denis the Dustcart Chronological

Denis the Dustcart Thanks! That'll go to Denis' head 😊
Like · Reply · Commented on by Merrick Palmer (?) · 14 October at 12:22

Write a comment...