

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER at Place Scrutiny Committee – 8 November 2018 - Questions from Councillor Mitchell

Response to be made by Councillor David Harvey Portfolio Holder Place & Commercialisation

Question 1

It was recently revealed Exeter's recycling rate has now fallen by over 6% since the current administration took back control of the Council in 2010 and now sits just above 30%. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why there has been such a drop?

Response

This has been due to several factors:

The Controlled Waste Regulations 2012 clarified the types of waste that should be included in our domestic waste figures that are used to calculate the recycling rate. In accordance with statutory guidance, the non-recycled waste from schools, charity shops and residential homes is now included in our figures; this wasn't the case in 2010. As a result, the reported amount of non-recycled waste has increased in relation to the tonnage recycled, which reduces our recycling rate. This is something we had no control over.

'Lightweighting' of packaging materials such as glass and metal, and the ongoing decline in newsprint and magazine consumption, mean there is less material available for capture.

This affects Exeter more than neighbouring authorities because we rely mainly on 'dry' recycling rather than organic waste collection for our recycling rate.

As the machinery at our MRF has become older, the plant is less efficient at sorting materials to the standard required by reprocessors. At the same time, these reprocessors are becoming more demanding about quality standards so the proportion of rejected material has increased. There has always been a proportion of input material that was too fine for us to sort cost-effectively. We were able to send this material to commercial MRFs to process for us. However, this option is becoming more expensive due to the wider changes in market conditions.

The many new purpose-built student blocks are a challenge for our recycling system. Bin stores are often built too small to accommodate enough green and grey bins, and the building managers can opt to pay for extra rubbish collections rather than require their tenants to recycle. This increases the amount of non-recycled waste collected.

Paper, textiles and other materials collected by local community groups counts towards our recycling rate. These groups have seen the value per tonne of their materials drop so they are collecting less for recycling.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Mitchell asked a supplementary question about recycling rates in other authorities, and what they did that was different to Exeter City Council.

Supplementary Response

Councillor Harvey, Portfolio Holder Place & Commercialisation responded that he didn't know what other authorities did to increase their recycling rates.

Question 2

Over the same period neighbouring authorities recycling rates have risen. What lessons can we learn from those authorities?

Response -

Exeter's recycling rate for 'dry' materials (paper, glass, card, plastics and metal) is comparable with most of our neighbours. The higher recycling rates achieved by our neighbours are largely due to the provision of separate food waste collection and greater participation in garden waste collections in districts where more people have gardens.

Question 3

How does the Portfolio Holder intend to reverse the decline in our recycling rate?

Response -

The business case for investment in the MRF was due to be presented to Executive and full Council in Quarter 4 of this financial year. This will address the issues that have led to our higher rejection rate. We have removed the charge for new or replacement recycling bins. Through the DASWC-support Recycling Advisors contract we have paid particular emphasis on visiting flats and areas of low participation to ensure those residents have adequate access to recycling containers.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Mitchell asked a supplementary question about seeing what other authorities do with recycling and see if there was anything the City council could adopt to help the authorities recycling rate?

Supplementary Response

Councillor Harvey, Portfolio Holder Place & Commercialisation responded that they could look at what other authorities do.

Question 4

Will this administration urgently review its decision not to imminently introduce a food waste collection service for the City?

Response -

The decision not to proceed with introducing food waste recycling was made on cost grounds.

In March 2018 Executive Committee agreed "That officers provide an annual update on the food waste business case in the Recycling Plan that is submitted to Place Scrutiny Committee". This update will take place as part of the business case for MRF investment currently being carried out.