

Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

2 March 2022 – At a meeting of the Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Britton (Chairman)

Cllr Oakley, Arrived 11.50am	Cllr Greenway, Left 1.25pm	Cllr Patel
Cllr Albury, 11am- 12.30pm	Cllr Milne	Cllr Quinn
Cllr Ali	Cllr Oppler, Left 1.25pm	
Cllr Baldwin	Cllr Oxlade	

Apologies were received from Cllr Kenyon

Also in attendance: Cllrs Dennis and Urquhart

51. Declarations of Interest

51.1 In accordance with the County Council's code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made:

- Cllr Oxlade declared a personal interest as he was employed by the Manor Royal Bid which the Manor Royal recycling centre comes under.
- Cllrs Baldwin and Milne declared personal interests as a members of Horsham District Council.
- Cllr Ali declared a personal interest as a member of Crawley Borough Council.
- Cllr Oppler declared a personal interest as a member of Arun District Council who had been running a food waste trial.
- Cllr Oakley declared a personal interest as a member of Chichester District Council.

52. Urgent Matters

52.1 No urgent matters were raised.

53. Strategic Options for Processing of Separate Food Waste and Other Waste Disposal Services and Update on Joint Strategic Approach

53.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart, introduced the item giving some background for newer members on the committee. She reported that recent Government

strategies on food waste and incineration tax changes had led to a review to find the best solution for waste disposal going forward.

53.2 The Assistant Director (Environment and Public Protection), Mr Read, shared a presentation which summarised the culmination of work by officers, including in finance, procurement and legal.

53.3 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- There was a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021 to provide **food waste collection services** and this responsibility fell to district and borough councils within West Sussex. The County Council, as disposal authority, is responsible for disposing of those collections.
- The level of **funding for food waste collection services** from the Government was not yet known and was being keenly awaited by authorities and professional groups nationally. The Cabinet Member was encouraged to keep up pressure for an announcement. It was anticipated that there could be capital support to increase fleet to cope with collections as well as possible revenue support. The trial in Arun had been supported by County Council funding.
- The introduction of food waste collection services generally led to **higher recycling rates** because people realised how much they were wasting and worked harder at being less wasteful. It was suggested that residents needed to be made aware of the benefits of the scheme prior to schemes starting, to improve their perception of the process. Particular attention needed to be given to areas of multiple occupancy eg blocks of flats.
- Changes in behaviour meant that a weekly collection of food waste and absorbent hygiene products eg nappies, with a fortnightly recyclables collection and a three weekly residual waste collection could make a real difference to recycling and waste disposal rates. Reductions in collections would also assist with targets to be carbon neutral.
- The cost of dealing with waste in West Sussex was higher than some neighbouring authorities because many of them used options such as incineration. Residents had historically not wanted such disposal options in West Sussex. However, technology had moved on since then and there were now a greater range of options available.
- The glossary of terms was welcomed but there was a request to use full terms in reports instead of abbreviations.

53.4 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Accepted the premise of the report and understood and supported Option 2 – variation of the MRMC and modification of the site at Warnham.
2. Noting that the new duty to collect food waste falls to Waste Collection Authorities, stressed the importance of residents' perceptions, and of making residents aware of the need for, and benefits of, separate food waste collection, prior to its introduction.
3. Acknowledged that recycling rates improve in areas where separate food waste collection has been implemented, and that food waste tends to reduce over time in such areas.
4. Encouraged the Cabinet Member to keep pressure on Government to confirm the timing of, and funding for, implementation of the new duties arising under the Environment Act 2021.

54. Proposals to Permanently Adopt the Booking Scheme Piloted at some Recycling Centres

54.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart, introduced the item, giving some background on the trial that had been brought in during March 2021, due to concerns about congestion over the Christmas period, prior to the usual spring surge in usage usually seen at recycling centres.

54.2 The trial booking system allowed residents to book online up to 14 days in advance with call facilities available at the County Council's contact centre. Initially residents were allowed to book one slot a week but that had been increased to 5 slots a month. Data showed that 98% of bookings were made online with 2% via the contact centre. A consultation with users had been run in November 2021, by directly contacting online bookers, using flyers, social media and the press. The response rate had been very high and very positive for continuing the booking system. As an outcome of the consultation, from 1 March 2022 a trial had been set up at Worthing recycling centre, offering same day booking up to five minutes before a booking time, assuming availability. Any cancelled bookings would be freed up for use on the day.

54.3 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- Previous **usage patterns** at recycling sites showed people came often with small amounts of waste. The booking scheme encouraged the processing of more waste, less often. Residents were also encouraged to use their kerbside recycling where they could. There was sufficient capacity across the recycling sites and the booking system had helped spread demand across the day rather than it being focussed on some peak times. The configuration of sites would also be reviewed to make any improvements.

- The percentage of bookings not used varied due to season, weather and site, which was why booking on the day would be a more flexible option. There had been some migration of visits from sites which had introduced the booking system to those without. Data on visits would be reviewed.
- The Cabinet Member reported that whilst there may have been an increase in **fly-tipping** incidents since the introduction of the booking system, the volume of waste had not increased. Fly-tipping generally tended to be commercial waste from un-reputable traders or people who did not engage with the booking system. The Cabinet Member reported that the district and borough councils in West Sussex were increasing resources to run a new scheme called "Let's scrap fly-tipping", along with Sussex Police, to monitor and enforce rules to reduce fly-tipping rates. Members would be kept informed on how the scheme was progressing. The pandemic had seen a large rise in the use of skips for waste removal, a trend which may continue. Lobbying of Government would continue on waste crime in general.
- There were no reductions in **staffing levels** through the new system, although some sites were running with vacancies due to recruitment difficulties and long-term sickness.
- Despite requests from some Committee Members, for there to be a public consultation on sites recommended to move to a booking system, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Urquhart, report that public consultation was not always possible if changes were needed to be made quickly. However, Cllr Urquhart undertook to ensure that local Members were updated on any proposed changes at recycling sites in their area. Some smaller sites would not have the booking systems introduced.

54.4 Resolved – That the Committee:

1. Favoured having a flexible system, with some sites having the booking system, and others not.
2. Noted that some members felt the booking system was only required because of a reduction in opening hours.
3. Was concerned about fly-tipping around the County, and wanted efforts to tackle it to be strengthened.
4. Welcomed that the numbers of available bins and slots have increased, now that covid-related restrictions have been lifted.
5. Welcomed the roll-out in Worthing of the same-day booking system, and looks forward to this being introduced more widely as soon as possible.

6. Welcomed that the system is flexible enough to allow residents to access sites numerous times in a day, if a need can be demonstrated.
7. Acknowledged that the booking system has significantly reduced congestion at several sites, to the benefit of local residents and businesses.

54.5 The Committee voted on the recommendations in the draft decision report:

- On Recommendation 1 (That the pilot booking system is made permanent at the Bognor Regis, Crawley, Horsham, Littlehampton, Shoreham and Worthing Recycling Centres) the Committee voted in favour of the recommendation, by a majority of votes.
- On Recommendation 2 ((That there be) Delegation of authority to the Director of Environment and Public Protection, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, to extend the booking system on a site-by-site basis to Billingshurst, Burgess Hill, East Grinstead, Midhurst and/or Westhampnett Recycling Centres, on a temporary or permanent basis should this be needed to manage congestion or other issues in the future) the Committee voted by a majority of votes that the word "permanent" be removed from the last sentence.

55. Highways Improvement Programme Review

55.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Cllr Joy Dennis, introduced the item, saying that she had listened to Members' and residents' experiences and observations of the Highways Improvement Programme of the past had been listened to. The intention was to clarify the process so decisions could be made more quickly, and investment made in schemes which benefitted the entire County.

55.2 Ms Weller, Service Improvement Lead, introduced a presentation on the Highways Improvement Programme Review and a summary of questions and answers follows:

- Previous schemes in-process would be reviewed against the new assessment framework on a case-by-case basis.
- Section 106 funds would be reviewed to make sure when triggers are hit the funding comes forward for use.
- Perception of safety was an important area to be considered. The service reported that it reviewed information on near-misses, and correspondence, to highlight problem areas.
- It was intended to make information available online for applicants to help with their bids.

- The programme would help the overview of longer-term funding and projects could be programmed into the future years' funding.
- Litter picking teams had an agreed level of support for health and safety reasons. Officers would set out the arrangements for Committee members.

55.3 The Committee agreed with the recommendations in the report and resolved that -

1. Members welcomed and supported the idea of a quicker, consistent and simpler system for residents.
2. Members wished the assessment framework to be explained clearly to residents to enable more schemes to be agreed.

56. Quarterly Performance and Resources Update (Quarter 3)

56.1 The Assistant Director (Communities) reported that quarter three had been about recovery from the pandemic and getting people back into services and continuing to overcome challenges faced during pandemic where activities had ceased or had not been delivered in the same way. Two indicators highlighted were the use of the virtual and digital library which was still in high use even though libraries were now open, and the number of people reached and supported by the Community Hub, which did not include local tracing partnership work delivered by hub.

56.2 The Assistant Director (Environment and Development) highlighted that energy solar farms continued to perform above expectation due to increased electricity production and higher prices, the community Solar Together project had received an unprecedented take up this round and the service had appointed a strategic lead on climate change to accelerate our thinking on how the County Council could meet the target of carbon neutrality by 2030.

56.3 The Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning) highlighted that the Works Delivery Programme of over 500 projects was making good progress against its capital programme of £57 million and the service was expected to exceed the KPI on active travel. He also flagged that performance for the KPI on the repair of highway defects within the required timescale had been addressed with the contractor and there should be an upturn in performance in the next quarter data. Additionally, there had been a significant increase in the reporting of defects in the year and the service was looking into why that might be. Poor performance on road safety was being addressed by a new group working on a Road Safety Strategy to deliver improvements.

56.4 Members of the Committee then asked questions and a summary of those questions and answers follows:

- Data is collected from operators on **bus route usage** via their digital ticketing systems and is used along with planning decisions, particularly on housebuilding, to inform future

requirements. The data is also used to reimburse bus companies for senior citizen travel. During the pandemic the County Council reimbursed bus operators at the pre-pandemic usage levels to prevent bus operators from ceasing to run routes. This would be reviewed during the coming year.

- **Birth rates** are monitored from information collated by the Insights Team and Communities use then for the registration of births. Information is fed through to other departments for school places, planning etc. The 2021 census will also provide good quality information once it is released.
- **Road gully defects** had been on an upward trend over the last few years and policy was being reviewed on the frequency of gully emptying. The new contract was producing better data and reporting, and the Service would work with the contractor to develop a more proactive and effective programme.

56.5 The Committee welcomed the largely positive report and looked forward to receiving updates on quarter four in the summer.

57. Bus Enhancement Plan Task and Finish Group

57.1 The Committee was briefed on the proposed establishment of a Task and Finish Group (TFG) on the Bus Enhancement Plan. The Bus Back Better national strategy had required the County Council to submit an improvement plan to Government and to seek funding. The outcome of the bid was still awaited. The County Council needed to create an Enhanced Partnership Plan and an Enhanced Partnership Scheme. The TFG would look at the Enhanced Partnership Plan, and concessionary and Government funding to see if there were suitable items for scrutiny.

57.2 The Chairman reported that the TFG would meet once in mid-April 2022 and was seeking no more than seven cross-party members. Councillors Albury, Milne and Quinn volunteered to join the TFG.

57.3 The Chairman reported that other Members would be contacted to see if they wished to join the TFG.

58. Work Programme Planning and Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

58.1 The Committee agreed the draft work programme and suggested that there be a BPG update on the A27 Arundel By-Pass consultation in autumn 2022.

59. Requests for Call-in

59.1 There had been no request for call-in to the Scrutiny Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting.

60. Date of Next Meeting

60.1 The next meeting would be held on 10 June 2022 at 10.30am.

The meeting ended at 3.25 pm

Chairman