

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT
GROUP HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON THURSDAY, 8 JULY 2004**

MEMBERS

* Cllr R W Hallett - Chairman

Ø Cllr A R Vale - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr J Brazil

* Cllr M Stone

* Cllr R J Carter

* Cllr A Ward

* Cllr S L Rankin

* Cllr J A Westacott

* Denotes attendance

Ø Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

Cllr R F Croad

(Cllr Carson, the Executive Member with responsibility for a clean environment, sent his apologies).

EPDG.1/04 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Environment Policy Development Group held on 18 March 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EPDG.2/04 **BUSINESS BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman advised the Group that he had one item of urgent business regarding genetically modified crops. This item, which was to be taken as item 4(b) (see minute EPDG.4/04 below), was considered urgent because of recent developments of interest to the Group.

EPDG.3/04 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but none was made.

EPDG.4/04 **GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) CROPS**

The Group welcomed the news that recent developments, as reported in the media, indicated that there was no immediate threat of applications being submitted for the cultivation of GM crops in the district.

In addition, Members were advised about the promising responses to the GM questionnaire produced by the joint GM Steering Group. It was noted, however, that a worrying outcome of the survey was the apparent

absence of base line data concerning the impact of GM crops on local ecosystems.

In order to regularise the receipt of regular updates, the Group agreed to include the following as standard items on its future agendas:-

- GM crops
- Climate Change
- Community Plans

EPDG.5/04 **INTRODUCTION TO BRIEFING NOTES: DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS (DEFRA) WASTE MINIMISATION AND RECYCLING FUND/DEVON COMPOSTING PARTNERSHIP**

A report was considered which sought to provide Members with further information on the background to the DEFRA £135 million 'Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund', specifically the 'Devon Composting Partnership Bid' which involved the Council. It was intended that the information provided in the briefing papers would assist the Group when considering the 'Outcome of the Waste Review' (see minute EPDG.5/04 below).

A. Devon Composting Partnership Briefing Note – Composting Note

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) some Members grave disappointment at the absence of the Executive Member responsible for a 'clean environment'. In response, Members were advised that the Executive Member regretted that he was not able to attend due to a prior commitment. The Executive Member had, however, participated fully in the preparation of the reports before the Group;
- (b) the rationale behind the future of waste collection systems, which a Member questioned in addition to expressing concern about the detrimental impact of some of the proposals relating to organic collections on community composting schemes.

The Group was reminded of the importance of exploiting economies of scale in order to achieve an efficient and cost effective service across the eclectic communities served by the Devon Partnership and thereby satisfy the requirements of the Landfill Directive. Furthermore, it was intended that the proposals would embrace both home and community composting schemes as complimentary to the overall approach.

B. Communication Plan Briefing Note

Prior to discussion, the Group was advised that the briefing made no assumptions concerning the outcome of the decision on the future of waste collection. Rather it sought to provide a plan to inform local communities about a new scheme and engage them in its implementation. The plan had, therefore, been drafted on the basis of a scenario of the choice of proposals for waste collection which carried the greatest impact.

In discussion, reference was made to:-

- (a) a Member's view that the plan constituted an exercise in damage limitation and utilised patronising language. In response, the Group noted that the plan had been drafted to be proactive and to directly support Members and help the Council to retain the initiative, particularly in media terms;
- (b) support for public meetings to appraise communities of the issues. It was noted that the wider Devon Partnership had prepared a communication plan involving road-shows and leafleting for this very purpose. Local initiatives, however, remained the responsibility of each of the participating districts as part of their plans;
- (c) the need to acknowledge the distinct profile of the residents of the South Hams in terms of their involvement in recycling;
- (d) support for the view that, in relation to the proposal to undertake home visits/inspections as a means to encourage residents involvement, Ward Members should be invited to attend;
- (e) the anticipated future integration of the proposed waste collection helpline with the Council's, at present embryonic, Customer Services Unit. It was noted that during the interim, funding was available for the helpline;
- (f) some Members' concern that the plan was too negative by focusing on financial sanctions rather than celebrating the merits of recycling. It was agreed that the final plan would be a more positive document.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be **RECOMMENDED** that the EPDG has considered and noted the report and the briefing papers.

EPDG.5/04 **OUTCOME OF WASTE REVIEW: OPTIONS FOR FUTURE WASTE & RECYCLING COLLECTION**

A report was considered which reviewed the options open to the Council in the pursuit of an improved equitable waste collection and recycling service for households across the district.

The report highlighted the need for the chosen option to be capable of ensuring that the Council fulfilled its obligations to its employees and the public in relation to health and safety; achieved its statutory recycling/composting targets and contributed to achieving the requirements of the Landfill Directive.

In the report, particular mention was made of the following:-

- (a) the key drivers for change, including environmental imperatives, the risk to the Council of financial penalties and issues surrounding the health and safety of Council's waste operatives;
- (b) a description of the current waste collection services;
- (c) research into waste collection systems;
- (d) six options for future waste collection schemes, incorporating outline costings for each;
- (e) the officers preference for option 6 (alternate weekly collection from all households from the kerbside) as the most cost effective and equitable solution to meet the key drivers for change in the long term. However, in view of the time it would take to fully implement this option, it was proposed that option 5 (alternate weekly collection from 80% of households) provide the starting point for the change in the first year (2005/2006), followed by the introduction of option 6 in year 2 (2006/2007).

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- i) the problem of holiday lets missing the collection service. It was suggested that a central location for the collection of waste in these areas would address the problem; However officers advised members that these locations would require waste management licences and could encourage fly tipping.
- ii) the suitability of wheeled bins in terms of satisfying health and safety issues. It was confirmed that the bins proposed had a life expectancy of around 10-15 years;
- iii) confirmation that the proposals would not result in the lose of recycling credits to community composting groups;

- iv) support for the proposal for a phased introduction of the new scheme commencing with an area of 2,000 households. Members did not, however, support the identification of a particular location at this stage. Concern was also expressed that the envisaged start date for phase 1 of November 2004, would not enable the Council to assess the scheme during the summer season or a holiday; It was however explained by officers that the new Organic process plant at Heathfield would not be operational until that date.
- v) a Member's support for kerbside collections, although it was felt that a clear definition of what was meant by 'kerbside' was required;
- vi) some opposition to the proposal to introduce two weekly collections of domestic waste in place of the current weekly collection;
- vii) charging for rental of the wheeled bins for organic collection would make the service ineffective;
- viii) Members view that the refuse service had been under-invested for many years although it was a high priority;
- ix) the non-Group Member's belief that, whichever scheme was selected, it was vital to consult with the operations team;
- x) notwithstanding the advice that option 5 represented a greater revenue shortfall year on year than option 6, Members supported option 5.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive RESOLVES that:-

1. All waste and recycling collection services throughout the district should be undertaken from the kerbside, boundary of properties, or other reasonable location as defined by the Council, as opposed to the current backdoor operation.
2. A redirection of revenue funding of £25,000 be made from the refuse collection budget and a transfer of £375,000 capital be made from the Vehicle Renewals Reserve to the Sustainable Waste Management Reserve.
3. The Executive recommend to Full Council that a provision of £195,000 be made within the Capital Programme towards the purchase of wheeled bins.

4. Subject to a suitable level of redirection of revenue budget, the waste collection systems contained in Option 5 be implemented:-
 - a. The current household recycling scheme is extended to the rest of the district using the coloured bag system.
 - b. The policy of issuing each household with a small wheeled bin for separated organic materials and a small wheeled bin for residual mixed waste be adopted where possible.
 - c. Recyclable materials, organic material and any remaining mixed refuse will be collected from households as three separate waste material streams over a two-week cycle of alternate weekly collections.
 - d. Properties unable to accommodate wheeled bins will remain on a weekly sack collection service for mixed waste until they can be brought in line with the alternate weekly services. No container will be supplied in this instance.
5. Phase one of the new 3-stream alternate weekly collection service be introduced for upwards of 2,000 properties during 2004 with roll-out across the district during 2005/06.
6. A proactive communication campaign be implemented to explain the reasons for the changes and provide householders with information on how to use the new schemes.
7. A programme of education and enforcement be undertaken to reinforce a policy which prevents additional 'side' waste being presented for collection with wheeled bins and wheeled bins remaining on the highway beyond the nominated collection day.
8. Council policy of collecting one sack of garden waste per week cease once the separate organic material scheme is introduced.

EPDG.6/04 **OUTCOME FROM REVIEW OF STREET CLEANING**

A report was considered detailing options for the re-modelling of street cleaning operations. The options listed reflected both an appreciation of the high quality of cleanliness across the district and the need for the Council to identify revenue savings inline with budget pressures.

In the report, the following issues were highlighted:-

- (a) the background to the current service delivery being undertaken by the in-house Operations Team as part of a contract won in 2001 with the present waste collection service;
- (b) the composition of the street cleaning operation and the contract specification which requires cleaning to a minimum standard of A/B classification under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 – Litter Code of Practice;
- (c) the cost of the street cleaning services, which for 2004/05 was estimated as £966,800;
- (d) the results of the “Common Size Comparison” survey in 2002/03 which indicated that the cost of street cleaning calculated per head of population for South Hams was £12.11 compared to an average £7.77 per head of population in the 13 other local authorities participating in the survey;
- (e) the identification of six potential services alterations and the anticipated savings in each case. In response, Members were advised that, due to redeployment, no permanent jobs would be lost;

During discussion, particular reference was made to:-

- i) a Member’s concern about the impact of any of the proposed alterations on jobs and any detrimental impact on customer satisfaction which currently stood at 82%;
- ii) the non-EPDG Member’s desire to achieve a reduction in cost per head of population, which currently stood at nearly double then that of neighbouring authorities;
- iii) Members concern regarding some element of the proposals, such as the abolition of the Sunday Morning service. Members felt this should be retained to cope with the extravagancies of Saturday nights, particularly in the district’s towns. It was agreed the projected savings should be re-calculated to reflect this concern;
- iv) confirmation that the cleaning service for market towns remained separate from the proposals before the Group;

- v) the suggestion that any savings achieved through this process be ring-fenced for investment in the work of the Operations Team.

RECOMMENDED

That the EXECUTIVE be RECOMMENDED that:-

1. the recalculated savings as referred to above be ring-fenced for investment in the Operations Team Services; and
2. authority be delegated to the relevant officers to amend the targets for performance with respect to the street cleaning service in light of the reduction in resources, notwithstanding the need to remain in the top quartile of the service.

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.30 pm).

Chairman