

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Looking After the Environment** held at the County Hall, Durham on **Monday 17 September 2007** at **10.00 a.m.**

COUNCILLOR N FOSTER in the Chair

Members:

Councillors Armstrong, R Carr, Gray, Holroyd, Knox, Manton, Morgan, Ord, Porter, Pye, Stradling, Trippett and Wade

Co-opted:

Mr D Easton and Councillor Meikle

Other Members:

Councillors Barker, C Carr, Mason and Priestley

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tennant and Young and M Jones.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

A3 Items from Co-opted Members

There were no items from Co-opted Members.

A4 1st Quarter Performance 2007/08

The Sub Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Policy providing information on performance for the 1st quarter of 2007/08 relevant to Looking After the Environment (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Head of Corporate Policy explained that they were reporting on twenty indicators. Eleven indicators have improved since the year end and of these six are on target or are expected to achieve up to 10% more than target. Five indicators have achieved 10% more than the target. At the present time 9 indicators are below target. Overall of the fourteen indicators with year end predictions, thirteen are expected to achieve target.

In relation to BV178 rights of way easy to use, it was explained that performance has deteriorated. A 5% random survey is used over the 3,000km

of the network which is carried out in May and November. There are a number of reasons which have contributed to the fall in performance. These include budgetary constraints and unseasonal weather. There is an Action Plan in place for this BVPI and the November survey result is expected to show an improvement. It is unlikely however that the year end target will be achieved.

In relation to the Corporate Priorities for Improvement including recycling, composting, landfill and waste collected it was explained that performance for recycling had improved since the year end but was slightly below target of 17% but is expected to meet target by the year end. Reasons for this include the two towers at Thornley being out of operation for a while. The third tower is now complete and being tested. The third tower is expected to bring a 3.5% increase to the recycling and composting rates.

There has been a slight deterioration in the composting rate but the service is predicting that it will reach target by the year end. There has also been a slight deterioration in the amount of waste collected. Performance has improved in the 1st quarter and it is expected to be better than target by the end of 2007/08.

Performance in relation to major planning applications determined has improved significantly since the 3rd quartile position in 2005/06. Performance in the 1st quarter has improved further to 88.5%.

Responding to a question about the quality of the compost produced by the digester it was explained it has no nutrient value and when blended with heavy soil could improve soil structure. Only 20% of the input material is not composted.

In relation to enforcing householders to recycle it was explained that there are currently three different methods of collecting materials for recycling. There is a need for closer co-operation between the Waste Collection Authorities and the Waste Disposal Authority to prevent waste being diverted to Household Waste Sites. The Waste Collection Authorities have not gone as far as authorities in other parts of the country to enforce recycling. It was further explained that additional treatment facilities are needed to increase recycling rates and this will be provided as part of the waste procurement process.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and that further quarterly reports be submitted.

A5 Waste Strategy

The Sub Committee received presentations from Rod Lugg, Head of Service Environment and Planning on the Waste Strategy and from David Greenwell, Project Director on the Waste Solution Project (for copies see file of Minutes)

It was explained that the County Council produced a municipal waste management strategy in 2002. A review of the strategy is being undertaken because of changes in legislation and the increase in landfill tax. The County Council has been working with District Councils to develop the strategy through the Waste Partnership Steering Group. The adoption of the strategy has been delayed pending the publication of Waste Strategy for England and local government reorganisation. The Waste Strategy sets the scene of where the

County Council is at present, how waste is treated at present, and existing facilities and initiatives.

The main drivers for updating the strategy are legislation, changes in policy, landfill is running out, costs are increasing and public expectations are growing. In 2006/07 the County Council dealt with 294,000 tonnes of waste. Of that amount, 89% came from households and 11% from industrial activities. Currently the County Council is recycling and composting 29%. This is a big improvement on 2002 when the rate was 5%.

In terms of facilities the Council operates 15 Household Waste Centres, 4 transfer stations and 2 landfill sites. The Council also has its own digester plant which treated 33,000 tonnes of waste annually.

The County Council faces different options and different models and combinations of treatment and technologies to be examined. There are also the economic, environmental, social and health implications to be considered. The strategy will be subject to a substantial appraisal of all the options.

As part of the implementation, work is underway on an action plan. In addition the Authority will need to subject the strategy to a risk management process.

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- Provide sustainable integrated waste collection and disposal services that protect human health and the environment.
- Provide value for money in all waste management services while achieving and exceeding government targets for waste.
- Manage material, as far as possible, in accordance with the waste hierarchy, maximising the amount managed at the higher levels of the hierarchy.
- Manage municipal waste, as far as possible, within the boundaries of County Durham.
- Enable flexibility to allow for new technology developments and changing legislation.

The Strategy covers four main options:

- Minimise more
- Recycle and compost more
- Add more capacity for treatment of residual waste
- Investigate alternative thermal treatment with energy recovery.

Each option is assessed against objectives and criteria such as Air, Water and Soil Quality, Biodiversity, Landscape, Transport, Amenity and Value for Money. Defra has also funded a separate Health Impact Assessment.

In relation to current issues it was explained that there will be a continued need for landfill while there is an issue of capacity. There are a range of new technologies available to the County Council though not all of them are proven. The Council will continue to press to minimise waste and needs to work with businesses to reduce trade and commercial waste. There is also a need for wider stakeholder involvement, including schools.

The Waste Strategy for England 2007 will set higher national targets for recycling, recovery and re-use of waste and these will be incorporated into our strategy. It is also looking for a more joined up approach to the reduction in the amount of waste sent to landfill and more sustainable production and consumption of goods. The Strategy is also looking towards a greater commitment of closer working between local authorities and the regulatory and community sectors.

Local Government Review (LGR) and the establishment of a unitary authority will offer opportunities in delivering a cohesive and value for money waste management solution.

The key messages arising from the draft strategy are as follows:

1. We have to have a robust formally adopted Strategy to form the cornerstone of a future waste management solution
2. We are unable to delay any further and now need to agree the final document with the District/Borough Councils and then adopt the Strategy.
3. Public consultation has already occurred and the options in the Strategy have not changed.
4. The current draft Strategy is user friendly, incorporates 'Waste Strategy for England 2007' recommendations and remains sufficiently flexible to accommodate future changes brought about by LGR and progress with the Waste Project.

A meeting is to take place shortly with the District Councils. If the content of the strategy is agreed it is hoped to submit the strategy to a meeting of the County Council in December.

Concern was expressed by members of the Sub Committee about the possibility that the number of household waste recycling centres could be reduced. It was explained that the current fifteen sites are expensive to maintain and many do not have basic services such as water or electricity. An exercise is underway to look at the costs and benefits of modernising the existing sites and or consolidating and improving the household waste sites.

In relation to the reduction of packaging it was explained that the Government are examining this issue at the present time. There is legislation that imposes a duty and sets targets for the recycling and recovery of packaging. Industry has slimmed down the amount of packaging in recent years but it needs to work with collection authorities to recover waste packaging.

Members asked whether it was possible to work with neighbouring authorities to commission joint facilities. It was explained that other authorities are at different stages in the procurement process and have different approaches.

In response to a question about variable charging it was explained that consultants had completed their work before the Government published their proposals. However this is an issue which will need to be considered.

David Greenwell explained the background to the waste procurement process. The graphs within the presentation and the key points on cost and timing were also explained. The Authority needs to meet the key cut off dates to increase capacity to avoid being fined £150 per tonne, potentially costing around £5M. Therefore the project has a timeline until around 2012/2013 to comply with all procurement guidelines (including complying with the Gateway Process) and commission a functioning solution in order to reduce costs and avoid substantial fines.

The key issues to realising the projected were explained as follows:

- Intellectual resource , internal & external
- Project funding for backfilling and for external advice
- Realisation of the scale of the project
- Realisation of the project timeline
- Risks centred on the project
- High level officer support to the project

The project will be split up into defined work streams such as finance issues, waste issues, communication and they will be the responsibility of individual team members.

The key risks were outlined as follows:

- Project Budget is not sufficient to ensure the required financial, legal and procedural advice and day job post backfilling. Current estimates are in the order of £300,000 per annum
- The project timeline may run approximate 2 to 3 years before the realisation phase (Phase 6) which may take anything up to 4 years
- An inability on the part of the County Council to reach a decision on the Local Authority Waste Disposal Company (LAWDC)
- The timing of the project, in relation to market capacity.
- Legal challenge to the process.
- Key officers are already delivering substantive day jobs and need additional support.

At the present time the project is proceeding as follows:

- Board formed
- Project Initiation Document (PID) submitted to Board and agreed as way of working
- Initial funding in place
- Team appointed
- Sub group Work streams agreed and active
- LAWDC issues being investigated
- Gateway project registration complete, gate "0" to review the Strategic Business Case (SBC).
- Planning to secure dedicated project resource, in the meantime Officers delivering day job and project work.

In response to questions about the LAWDC David Greenwell advised that a decision on the future of the LAWDC needs to be made as soon as possible and preferably within the next 6 weeks. If no decision is made then work on the project needs to continue.

It was suggested that the Sub Committee should write to the Leader of the Council and the appropriate portfolio holders urging that greater progress is made on the project.

In response to a question about the capacity of Joint Stocks quarry it was explained that at the current rate of fill this should last between 11 and 15 years. It was however hoped to reduce the rate of fill to ensure that the site capacity would be available for a longer period.

Resolved:

That the presentations be noted and the Leader/Portfolio holder be invited to comment upon timing issues linked to the waste procurement process.

A6 Medium Term Improvement Priorities

The Sub Committee considered a verbal report of the Head of Corporate Policy on the Medium Term Improvement Priorities in relation to Looking after the Environment which was included in the Corporate Plan for 2007/08.

The Sub-Committee was asked to consider whether the improvement priorities were still relevant, and if there were other areas for improvement that should be considered.

Members suggested that improvement of footpaths should also include rights of way. In addition it was suggested that the waste project should also be included as a priority.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.