Food Waste Collection Improvement Project - Outcome and Next Steps

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**Summary:**

This reports findings of a project to improve food waste collections, particularly to increase recycling yields.

Following a survey to identify barriers to using the service, a number of options to encourage greater participation were tested. A combination of initiatives was found to be the most successful, involving ‘no food waste please’ reminder stickers on refuse bins, supplying free caddy liners and a leaflet about the service, including the benefits of recycling.

WRAP funding was awarded to roll out this combination to 115,000 households in half the county (Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and the Chard and Ilminster zone in South Somerset), which has increased food waste yields in these areas by 20%.

This report seeks confirmation that the SWP’s liner policy will reapply in these areas and approval to extend the project to the rest of the county (Mendip, West Somerset and the rest of South Somerset), funded from the savings made by the County Council as a result of diverting additional food waste from landfill to recycling.

**Recommendations:**

1. Notes the results of the food waste collections improvement trials and project, as reported in section 2.1.
2. Confirms that further free liners will not be delivered to householders in areas covered by the improvement project and that this will be communicated, as described in section 2.2.
3. Subject to further costings presented to the meeting, extend the project to the remainder of the county, as described in section 2.3.
| Reasons for recommendations: | Although there has been a significant increase in food waste recycled as a result of the project, the increase is not big enough for the savings to justify the on-going costs of providing free liners. Therefore, householders will be asked to return to using newspaper or purchasing their own compostable liners from local shops.

Extending the food waste collections improvement project to the other half of the county should result in further increases in food waste recycling and savings by diverting this material from landfill. |
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| Links to Priorities and Impact on Annual Business Plan: | This report links to the following action in the Annual Business Plan 2015-20:

3.5) Round improvement project using successful trial elements, including 'no food waste' stickers on refuse bins. |
| Financial, Legal and HR Implications: | There will be a cost of £7,000 to communicate to residents covered by the current project, as outlined in section 2.2.

It would cost £43,000 to extend the project to 111,000 households in the other half of the county, as outlined in section 2.3.

Increasing the diversion of food waste from refuse bins and landfill to recycling by anaerobic digestion creates a saving for Somerset County Council. There is a saving of over £105 per tonne in landfill costs, offset by additional haulage and processing costs for food waste of £60-80 per tonne (depending on the location of the collection depot).

Based on current increases, an additional 2,000-3,100 tonnes of food waste is forecast to be recycled in 2015/16, resulting in a net saving to the County Council of £42,000-63,000.

It is forecast that extending the project to the other half of the county, as outlined in section 2.3, may lead to an extra 1,500-2,300 tonnes of food waste being recycled per annum. Due to higher haulage costs, the net annual saving should be £16,000-31,000.

There are no legal or HR implications arising from this report. |
| Equalities Implications: | An impact assessment has been undertaken for this project, which is summarised in section 4.2. |
| Risk Assessment: | The key risk is increases in food waste recycled are insufficient to make savings indicated above. On the basis of the project |
results achieved so far, it is believed this risk is low and any shortfall should be relatively small. The situation can be monitored by comparing additional food waste recycled during this year to the amount collected last year.

1. Background

1.1. Analysis (see background paper in 5.1) of Somerset’s refuse in 2012 showed that 50% could be recycled through Somerset’s current kerbside recycling collections. The biggest contribution, by far, could be made by food waste, which was found to be 29%, by weight, of refuse put out for disposal.

1.2. Somerset Waste Partnership pioneered separate food waste collections in the UK with roll-outs starting in 2004. As shown in the chart below, there has been a slow decline in food waste yields since 2007/08. This is partly related to less food waste being produced following the credit crunch in 2008, but also to reduced use of the food waste recycling service.

1.3. SWP successfully applied in September 2013 to WRAP for project funding “to run pilots which test improvements to the performance of weekly food waste collections provided to households”. Five other local authority areas were also selected. In Somerset, four towns were identified as suitable for the pilots, where food waste recycling performance was 24% lower than the Somerset average: Burnham-on-Sea, Chard, Street and Wellington.

1.4. The first stage of the project involved face-to-face surveys being carried out by ICM Direct in November 2013, which included 393 interviews in Chard, Street and Wellington. Findings of the survey for Somerset included:

i) Ratings for the collection service, compared to the other pilot authorities, were the highest or joint highest in every category so this did not appear to be a concern.

ii) There were a significant amount of low users and many cited the cost of liners as one of the elements they are less satisfied with.

iii) A significant proportion of low users were not using the service for raw
meat/fish and mouldy food wastes.
iv) ‘Making liners free of charge and delivered in larger rolls’ was the most frequently suggested idea by householders.
v) Unlike other areas, lapsed users have tended to persist using the collections for much longer in Somerset. When they finally do quit, this is mainly down to not feeling like they should have to pay for the liners or a hygiene issue. A good amount of non-users also simply need a caddy.
vi) Somerset respondents were the most positive about a number of suggested interventions and clearly cared about not wasting too much in the first place. So it doesn’t appear that they need too much of a nudge to improve.

1.5. Following the survey, pilots were established in March 2014, covering four rounds in Street (2,900 houses), where ‘no food waste please’ reminder stickers were attached to refuse bins and service leaflets delivered, and all rounds in the Thursday zone covering the Wellington area (10,500 houses), where packs of caddy liners were provided and service leaflets delivered.

1.6. The Street rounds in Mendip were selected for the bin stickers because Mendip was the only Somerset district with wheeled refuse bins before the roll-out of the Sort It services and, as common at the time, provided 240 litre bins. For Sort It roll-outs in the other districts, 180 litre wheeled bins were provided as standard, which resulted in high levels of food waste recycling and less refuse put out for disposal. So it was thought that targeting a message on refuse bins in Mendip may prove a good intervention.

1.7. The survey had showed that the cost of liners was a key issue for many households as well as, for some, the lack of food bins, due to these being lost or broken. This is why the provision of free caddy liners was tested on the Wellington rounds and information was provided on ordering replacement bins.

1.8. SWP were also keen to test the combined provision of stickers, liners and leaflets, but WRAP would not agree to fund this for Somerset and this combination was tested by other pilots.

1.9. During the SWP-funded Recycle More trials from September-December 2014, stickers, liners and leaflets were provided on one round in Wellington.

1.10. SWP were awarded further funding by WRAP for an extension of the original pilots to test the district-wide provision of stickers, free liners and leaflets to 115,000 households in Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and the Chard/Ilminster zone in South Somerset (which is served from the same depot as Taunton Deane rounds). In a major exercise, the extension was completed using agency staff managed by SWP during March 2015.
2. Trial Results and Project Continuation and Extension

2.1. a) Results of the initial pilots in Somerset showed:

- Street (stickers on refuse bins and leaflets) - 20.8% increase in food waste.
- Wellington (free liners and leaflets) - 1.9% increase in food waste.

b) Results in other WRAP pilot areas were similar and increases of up to 40% were found from the combination of providing stickers, liners and leaflets.

c) As part of the Recycle More trials in late 2014, SWP provided the same combination on one round in Wellington, which, during the trials, achieved a 63.7% increase in food waste on a previously very low performing round. Further monitoring, after the trials were completed, in April 2015 found that the food waste increase had fallen back, but was still 42% higher than before the intervention.

d) It is still early days since the delivery of reminder stickers, liners and leaflets throughout Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and the Chard/Ilminster zone in March 2015, but results so far indicate food waste recycling has increased by 20%, as shown in the chart below.

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\text{Before and After Intervention - Food Waste Collected per Week}
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\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{Round} & \text{2013/14 (52 weeks)} & \text{BEFORE (4 weeks)} & \text{AFTER (8 weeks)} \\
\hline
\text{Sedgemoor} & 60 & 55 & 45 \\
\text{Taunton Deane} & 70 & 65 & 60 \\
\text{Chard & Ilminster} & 80 & 75 & 70 \\
\end{array}
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e) Judging by the number of leaflets and liner stocks remaining, it is estimated that the extension project may only have covered 80% of the 115,000 households intended. This may have been related to round lists, supplied by Kier, not including all households, but it has not yet been possible to verify if this is the case. Since, work has been undertaken to improve these lists.

f) Checks have been undertaken on the delivery work, which have confirmed it was mostly completed correctly. Further verification of the round lists is planned to see if gaps can be identified, probably by mapping all confirmed delivery roads.
h) If the 80% estimate of coverage is correct, then full coverage may enable a 25% increase in food waste yield to be achieved.

i) Increasing the diversion of food waste from refuse bins and landfill to recycling by anaerobic digestion creates a saving for Somerset County Council. There is a saving of over £105 per tonne in landfill costs, offset by additional haulage and processing costs of £60-80 per tonne (depending on collection depot).

j) Based on current increases, an additional 2,000-3,100 tonnes of food waste should be recycled in 2015/16, resulting in a net saving to the County Council of £42,000-63,000.

2.2. a) Householders in the areas covered by the improvement project need to be informed that further supplies of caddy liners will not be delivered and that, as previously, these will need to be purchased from local shops or newspaper used to line caddies of wrap food waste.

b) Tags with this message will be attached to refuse bins by Kier collection crews or, where refuse bins are not used, attached to a food bin or recycling box put out on collection day. Kier are required to deliver this form of communication under the terms of their contract with SWP. The cost of producing the tags for distribution is £7,000.

c) The message on liners will also be communicated through a press release, social media and the SWP’s website.

d) If approved, this communication will start as soon as possible and the tags will be attached to refuse bins during July.

2.3. a) External funding is not available to further extend the project to Mendip, West Somerset and the rest of South Somerset served from the Evercreech depot, which is a total of 111,000 households. Also, due to higher food waste haulage costs, the savings from additional food waste recycled are lower in these areas.

b) Therefore, lower costs are needed for an extension of the project to the other half of County. The most cost-effective method should be to attach stickers to refuse bins, which appear to provide the important trigger that encourages more food waste recycling, and to provide further information, including on container ordering, by collection crews attaching tags to refuse bins or other containers put out for collection.

c) Delivering free liners or leaflets would incur significant additional costs, which could not be justified by the additional recycling achieved. Stickers with tags should prove to be nearly as effective.

d) It is expected that a further extension of the improvement project in this way should result in an increase in food waste yields of at least 10-15%.
3. Consultations undertaken

3.1. Initial face-to-face surveys in targeted low performing areas were undertaken as outlined in section 1.

3.2. No further consultation has been undertaken, but some feedback was received through phone calls to customer services helplines from people covered by the project extension to all of Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and the Chard/Ilminster zone in South Somerset. Most calls were to order new or replacement food waste bins. A small number of people complained because they thought they were being individually targeted for not recycling food waste, which included both people who were already recycling their food waste and those who were not. Possibly, they feared some sort of enforcement action may follow, but this was not part of the project and has not been suggested by SWP.

3.3. Most people were satisfied when they realised they were not being individually targeted and many were surprised when it was explained how much food waste is thrown away in Somerset’s refuse bins and how much this costs Council tax payers, when it could be put to good use through recycling.

4. Implications

4.1. The key risk to an extension of this project, as outlined in 2.3, is resultant increases in food waste recycled being insufficient to make the savings identified.

4.2. On the basis of results achieved so far, it is believed this risk is low. The situation can be monitored by comparing additional food waste recycled during this year to the amount collected last year, before project interventions were made by supplying stickers, liners and leaflets.

4.3. There is also a risk that the additional food waste recycled will not be maintained over time. Experience shows that once most people start recycling and especially if the habit can be maintained over a few weeks, then they continue. Further checks of the Wellington round four months after the end of the Recycle More trials, were that two-thirds of the extra food waste was still being collected. This is despite the withdrawal of additional materials being recycled with those trials and a delay in providing a further supply of liners.

4.4. An assessment concluded that this project should have few equality impacts, as it provides information on current services rather than changes current service arrangements. The main outcome expected is more people being encouraged to recycle.

5. Background papers


5.2. WRAP, December 2013 - Improving household food waste collections: Barriers to recycling food waste survey findings