

ITS NOT WASTE!!

The report of the Waste Task Group

September 2019

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1.BACKGROUND

Surrey County Council (SCC) has had increasing budget pressures over recent years, mainly due to a combination of reducing central government finance and increasing demand, particularly for Adult Social Care and Children’s Services. This has resulted in significant reductions in the budget for waste management.

In 2018, SCC, at the instigation of the then Leader, consulted the public on options to close either four or six of the smaller Community Recycling Centres (CRC) as a possible way of saving around £1m from the total waste management budget of approximately £68m.

Following petitions received by the Council alongside objections made by many County Councillors, the Cabinet, now under a new leadership, decided in Feb 2019 to postpone the decision on closure and to set up this Task Group with a remit (see **appendix one**) broadly to find alternative savings, to increase the recycling rate and to set out a waste strategy going forwards especially in the light of the DEFRA consultation paper –

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf

Appendix two gives a very brief summary of the DEFRA consultation paper.

Subsequently, SCC has demonstrated its commitment to preserving the environment by declaring a ‘Climate Emergency’ and is producing an environmental charter for Surrey and specific proposals for SCC to become carbon neutral by 2030. The charter will include commitments cutting across all of the council’s services including waste management. Our future policy on how SCC handles household waste will need to reflect this commitment.

In addition, the Surrey 2030 vision emphasises the importance of working in partnership with Surrey district and borough councils and waste management is an area of work in which this is particularly important.

Surrey’s Community Vision for 2030 contains the ambition that:

Residents live in clean, safe and green communities, where people and organisations embrace their environmental responsibilities

This is particularly important to people reducing unwanted materials and recycling to the maximum.

2.INTRODUCTION

The Task Group was set up with cross party representation and included the then chairman of the Surrey Waste Partnership, now renamed the Surrey Environmental Partnership, (SEP) **Appendix three** gives an outline of the purpose and objectives of this group.

All of Surrey's district and borough councils, together with selected relevant town and parish councils, voluntary bodies and commercial organisations were invited to give evidence to the Task Group. Various industry reports were circulated to the group and financial spreadsheets giving the breakdown of costs of all the CRCs were provided.

A selection of voluntary sector reuse organisations were invited to present to the Task Group to explain their work. The case studies presented exemplify what they achieve and the potential to extend such activities.

Members of the Task Group were invited to visit some of the CRCs and individual members made visits to other facilities.

3.CURRENT SITUATION

It is very clear that there is much good practice in Surrey.

Separate food waste collections were introduced in Surrey by the districts and boroughs from 2010 with financial support and encouragement from the County Council. This has significantly taken a lot of the food waste into a separate waste stream.

In 2009 SCC decided that it would not support a large scale EFW plant in the county of Surrey. Instead Investment was directed towards an Ecopark, this would consist of a smaller-scale gasification plant and an anaerobic digester plus an education centre in Shepperton as well as recycling bulking facilities at the four largest CRCs. At the same time a recycling target of 70% by weight was set. Central government imposed a landfill tax on a rising scale (over time) to encourage more recycling and to discourage landfill.

The current breakdown of how SCC manages its household waste is set out in **appendix four**. **Appendix five** provides the relative costs of different waste management options. Some of these figures are subject to change with market pressures.

Waste disposal by landfill or incineration at about £110 per tonne is the most expensive option for treating and disposing of waste.

Recycling costs vary depending on the quality of the recyclate (how well it is separated and its level of contamination). For example, if paper is collected separately from other materials it has a higher value, and heavily contaminated loads may not be able to be recycled at all and will instead be sent for disposal.

Waste reduction and reuse of material/goods removes waste from the waste stream completely which avoids the cost of waste management from the council and therefore the taxpayer.

For many years SCC has sought to encourage waste minimisation, re-use and recycling. All eleven districts and boroughs operate kerbside recycling schemes but they differ in their approach. Around 80% of municipal solid waste is collected by kerbside collections. The recycling rates across the collection authorities are given in **appendix six**. The Districts and Boroughs also operate chargeable services for garden waste and large 'bulky waste' items (e.g. sofas). Much of this could be reused or recycled. The charges for bulky waste vary from council to council across Surrey.

There are also a range of voluntary sector organisations that share, reuse, repair and recycle household items across Surrey. These include furniture reuse, bicycle repair, reuse of baby items, libraries of things, toy libraries and repair cafes. SCC supports the Surrey Reuse Network and provides reuse recycling credits.

Community Recycling Centres

In addition, there are 15 CRCs across Surrey with a wide range of capacity, **appendix seven** lists this. There are also small collection points serviced by the district and borough councils (known as bring sites) often sited in car parks. Some of these are charity collection points for textiles and shoes.

DEFRA Resource and Waste Strategy 2018

The overall purpose of the DEFRA draft strategy is to maximise the value of resources we use, minimise the waste we create, cut emissions and help create a cleaner, greener, healthier planet. The goal is to move to a more circular economy which keeps resources in use for longer - for that to happen we must all reduce, reuse and recycle more than we do now.

The *specific* proposals in the recent consultation papers include:

- The possibility of central government regulating which materials will have to be collected by waste collection authorities. This may include garden waste and authorities may not be able to charge for this service. This would remove a considerable tonnage from the CRCs.
- A deposit return scheme (DRS) is also likely to remove bottles from the waste stream, as they will almost certainly be collected at points in supermarket car parks.
- The proposed levy on packaging that would be payable by manufacturers to cover the cost of disposal would encourage manufacturers to minimise packaging or possibly to set up their own recycling scheme. This levy is proposed to come to local authorities which could finance improved services.

- Extra charges could be made on plastic that contains less than 30% recycled material.
- A requirement for business to sort their waste and recycle may also be introduced.
- The final details and timescales for implementing these proposals is not yet clear.

4. LOOKING FORWARD

There is a clear imperative to minimise waste, improve the recycling rate and scale-up re-use. This is worthwhile on cost grounds, environmental and climate impacts and social benefits.

Surrey residents are generally very supportive of initiatives that help the environment and have demonstrated their desire for easily accessible CRCs.

Indeed it is felt that improvements to waste management services that give our residents the help that they desire to improve local opportunities to share, repair and reuse, compost and recycle as much as possible are popular whilst delivering social, environmental and economic benefits both to the council and more widely.

The current trial at some sites that discourage the public from bringing black bag rubbish to the CRC needs to be re-examined. Experience suggests that a large percentage of black bag rubbish can in fact be recycled. This illustrates the lack of knowledge or possibly confusion in the public mind.

Residents who currently make a trip to a CRC with a mixed load of materials end up frustrated when only part of it can be accepted. This tends to discourage responsible behaviour if residents give up on recycling as a result.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

SCC should commit to a strong, environmentally friendly policy with respect to how it handles unwanted household materials. It could seek to be the local authority with the highest recycling performance and the lowest tonnage of residual waste per capita in the country. A new vision recognizing the importance of the circular economy needs to be supported by investment and a strong consistent marketing campaign.

Changes at Community Recycling Centres

1) All current CRCs should be kept open.

The public is appreciative of these and they should form a vital part of our core service offer to provide local facilities to support and encourage recycling and re-use and avoid the higher cost and environmental impact of disposal of waste.

Furthermore, measures need to be taken to enhance the service offerings at the CRCs under threat, where possible.

In the case of Warlingham CRC it is reasonably close to the Caterham CRC. Both have capacity issues and they could be viewed as a whole with a suite of services offered across both of them. For example, one could accept wood and one rubble, and one could have a reuse shop and one a storage area for large bulky items.

2) Some sites may be sufficiently valuable for development that the Council should consider whether giving up a site and re-providing it nearby would be financially viable with a net gain for the Surrey taxpayer.

3) **Charges for small quantities of wood and rubble should be discontinued** as it is causing confusion to the public, this would allow the smaller sites to take these materials and a more consistent approach makes it easier for the public. Both these materials have some value, for example, wood chip as a fuel and rubble for hard core or foundations.

4) The re-use shops at CRCs should be reviewed after one year's operation and if the current model is successful then consideration should be given to expansion and improved profitability. The contribution from these shops in 2019/20 is £200k per annum. The option of delivering these via Surrey's voluntary sector should be considered.

5) A rebranding of the CRCs should be considered. The title Community Recycling Centre is longwinded and not well used. People still call them the 'tip' or the 'dump'. One possible suggestion is to build on the Drive Smart campaign and use the term 'Waste Smart'.

Scaling-Up of Waste Reduction, Reuse and Community Composting

6) **A clear, consistent message to the public is required.** An ongoing public education/information campaign is essential to maximise waste reduction, reuse and recycling. This could include:

- Bringing all share, reuse and repair organisations under the umbrella of the Surrey Reuse Network, supported by SCC.
- Better promotion of reuse across Surrey including advertising reuse organisations.

- Encourage the district and borough councils and private landlords to include a commitment to recycling in tenancy agreements. Council procurement contracts could also include environmental obligations.

7) The voluntary/charity sector plays a key role in the reuse of larger items. Better links between these organisations and SCC would strengthen this contribution. There is a social benefit in some of the current work e.g. bicycles being repaired at a prison, volunteers securing long-term employment and household goods being provided to disadvantaged households (*see case studies in section 6 of this report*).

Raising Recycling and its Quality

8) The range of recycling rates achieved by different boroughs and districts is quite wide (appendix six). The Surrey Environmental Partnership needs to be turbo-charged to improve performance in terms of both participation rates and rates of recycling of different types of waste. The SEP annual plan and performance should be scrutinised by the Communities, Environment and Highways SCC select committee. This would deliver strong financial benefits to both SCC and the district and borough councils.

9) The collection authorities vary as to what materials they collect and their contractual arrangements; the SEP could usefully encourage a more common approach and all contractual arrangements should incentivize recycling. A more consistent approach across the whole county will raise the quality and quantity of recycling. Reigate and Banstead Council add value by having a separate paper collection. This paper has a higher value and its separation also increases the revenue generated by the dry mixed recycling.

Most councils operate bring sites, mainly for textiles, shoes and small electrical items. A more consistent approach to bring sites across Surrey would be beneficial.

Street bins provided by councils should incorporate recycling bins that are clearly marked for that purpose.

Targets for improved increases in recycling rates should be set. A 1% increase in recycling rate would save around £230,000 a year to SCC. The payments for recycling that are currently paid to the districts and boroughs should be re-examined to increase the incentive. This could move performance towards the 70% target.

Consideration should be given as to whether SCC should invest in its own materials recycling facility (sorting plant) as a means of improving the value and quantity of recycle.

10) Commercial Services to Business and other Public Service Organisations should be investigated and pursued including the following.

Guildford Borough Council offers a service to local businesses in the town. This waste is transported to Slyfield and SCC receives a payment for this. This model could be replicated elsewhere.

11) The CRCs are not at capacity in the sense that more material could be processed through them, the limiting factor would be the rate at which materials can be collected and moved on to the next stage and/or the current waste licence. A paid-for service to schools and small businesses could be provided that would take up capacity at the CRCs and defray part of their cost.

In effect the CRC assets are currently underutilised. The tonnage passing through the CRCs has dropped by about 80,000tpa over the last few years so there is considerable capacity.

12) Private waste disposal companies operate throughout Surrey. There is scope for more working together. Household waste at 0.5m tonnes per annum is a small component of the total waste produced in Surrey (3.7million tonnes per annum (mtpa), commercial waste 0.68 mtpa, construction, demolition, excavation waste 2.5mtpa).

6.CASE STUDIES

6.1. Bicycle Refurbishment

The Bike Project, Guildford

Established in 2012 as a social enterprise to *'help and support a sustainable route out of poverty in two former council estates'*. Used redundant Guildford BC workshop and 2002 long-wheel base transit. SCC provided a £7k grant for tools. The launch was promoted by Surrey Matters. Second outlet now run in Surrey CC youth centre in Walton-upon-Thames. Run as a trading arm of Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership who aim to deliver adult learning in communities. Now financially sustainable but need grant funding to shadow management as founder retires. Need secure tenure of low-cost workshop/storage space.

Operations. We have 9 workstations and refurbish around 20 bikes a week in a depot and then sold in a shop. All recycling of other bikes/parts is done in-house. Collection is around 15 miles around Guildford (add mid and west Surrey). Bikes Revived cover East Surrey (but are less able to collect). Carry around bike servicing and deliver training. Could extend to do children's bike but that would require more space. Could reuse twice as many bikes.

Staff and volunteers. Currently 2 staff and 37 volunteers. Also deliver City and Guilds level 2 cycling qualifications to year 10 and 11 students.

Sales. One third sold to enable access to work/college. Rest locally and to university students. Key message: *'this is the preferred way to dispose of your pre-loved, no longer used bike'*

Recycling of tyres is a problem as current recycling technology focuses on car tyres.

6.2 Furniture Re-use

Guildford Furniture Link

History. Established in 2010, previously part of Guildford Action for Families.

Location. Furniture Link has moved three times in the past five years to keep running costs as low as possible. Currently have a 5-year lease, 3000 sqft Unit at Merrow Business Park, Guildford.

Staffing. 6 staff (4 full time and 2 part time). Five volunteers are now employed.

Logistics. A van is used five days/week with around 100 collections, deliveries, house clearances and small home moves. Operations need to generate £16-£17k income per month to break even. Warehouse is open to all. Contract for returns from John Lewis.

Helping those in need. 50% discount to any person receiving benefits on our already low price of furniture. Work closely with local councils (including family support workers) and have a high number of referrals from other charities. Establishing own fund to help clients in extreme cases.

Promotion. www.furniturelinksurrey.co.uk, Instagram (Furniturelink2010), Facebook (Furniturelink surrey). Leaflets to connect with other charities etc.

Impact. Divert ~7.5 tonnes from landfill and receive ~£370 a month of reuse credits from SCC.



6.3. Community Composting

Tatsfield Community Composting Centre is a volunteer run service that has been operating for about 15 years.

The centre accepts residents green garden waste (wood diameter less than 3cm) and puts it through a process of shredding, storing in bins, natural heat production and turning to produce compost ready to be sold for use. This total process takes about a year.

The set-up costs included a shredder (£10,000), about 40 bins (£50 each) and three receiving bays. There is a shipping container for storage of equipment and tools.

The centre is run entirely by volunteers (approx 15) plus a workforce of local students on the Duke of Edinburgh programme.

It is open from the first Saturday in April until the last Saturday in September. Some volunteers work in March and October in setting up and shutting down.

20,000 litres of compost are made per year which is sold as a contribution to costs. Some small grants are received each year.

The benefits of community composting are:

- Dealing with waste locally - reduced car use, reduce green waste cost to the council.
- Social - volunteer led, alleviating loneliness and isolation.

Community composting at Tatsfield.....



6.4 Baby Bank Reuse

Stripey Stork – Reigate-based “Baby Bank”.



Stripey Stork are – a Reigate-based baby bank. Since 2013 Stripey stock have distributed goods with a value of over £2.5m to meet over 7500 requests for help.

“Both the Centre and our families are truly grateful for the amazing service you provide.” Red Oak Sure Start Centre, Merstham (March 2019)

- Reigate-based baby bank based in a 4000 sqft warehouse
- There are 6 part time staff, 50 regular and a wider pool of 100 ad hoc volunteers
- The team respond to 50-60 requests a week for help from over 400 referral partners. Rely on grants and our own fundraising.

Proven model now aiming to become a Surrey-wide service. We want to focus on servicing areas that we believe would benefit most and build relationships with



7. Potential Cost Savings Identified at the CRCs

1. The reuse shops have proved successful but income and profitability could be improved by the use of volunteers in the reuse shops as opposed to paid staff. This could be achieved by a charity managing the shops (potential saving £40k - £70k).
2. The use of Electric Machinery at CRCs (as opposed to diesel powered) has been suggested as cheaper and environmentally better.
3. Vans that wish to visit the CRCs require a permit. At present these are issued free of charge. Whilst there needs to be a clear message to the public to encourage reuse and recycling it was felt that a charge for the van permits was reasonable (potential contribution £100k - £200k).
4. The house and grounds at the Charlton Lane site is largely unused and apparently cannot be used for residential purposes. It could be used for small businesses, in general there is a shortage of single rooms for small businesses (potential contribution £50k).
5. Local composting centres to reduce the cost of processing green waste.

8. Discussion

There needs to be a consistent and simple message to the public that residents should aim to minimise waste, maximise reuse and recycling. It must be made easy for citizens to do this. The provision of kerbside collections, bring sites and CRCs provide the opportunity for this.

In addition, the voluntary sector can help with e.g. bicycles, furniture etc but these organisations need a much higher profile and SCC can help with this. Many of these voluntary organisations also provide social benefits e.g. by helping people back into work and providing work experience.

Educating children about reuse and recycling is a great way of influencing adults. There could be a better offer to schools in terms of educational materials, visits to the education centre at the EcoPark and the offer of compost bins/food digesters. Schools do not in general separate out their waste, a paid for service allowing them to take to the CRCs may be of interest.

Fly tipping is a criminal offence but still occurs regularly across Surrey. Unfortunately, the public makes a connection between a perceived increase in fly tipping and the reduction in opening hours at the CRCs. In general, this is not felt to be valid. Emphasising the means of householders to send large items to reuse organisations will help with this.

Community composting could be a way of reducing the cost of dealing with green waste. It also has the benefit of being local and reducing transport costs and the environmental cost. A relatively modest capital investment is required but ongoing costs are very low.

The impact of the DEFRA proposals may alter the composition of material collected at the kerbside e.g. more garden waste (if it becomes a free service) but less plastic if this goes to deposit return banks. The value of used plastic may increase if new plastic has to include 30% recycled material. The quantity of packaging may decrease due to the producer responsibility charge.

The requirement on businesses to separate their waste and recycle is an opportunity to offer a paid for service via the CRCs to help cover the overheads.

Some of the funds raised by Central Government charges on manufacturers will be given to local authorities to help meet the cost of waste management.

The decisions to reduce the availability of recycling centres were deeply unpopular with Surrey residents. There is a compelling case, having declared a climate emergency to take a more environmentally sensitive approach. It is essential to make it easy for residents to choose the best environmental option.

A culture change is required to embrace the circular economy, to view unwanted items as materials with an ongoing use rather than 'waste' which implies no value.

The mantra of reduce, reuse, recycle is still a strong message and fits well with the Community Vision for 2030.

It's not waste!

Appendices

1. Terms of Reference of the Task Group
2. Summary of the DEFRA consultation
3. Purpose and Objectives of SEP
4. Disposal Tonnages by Type of Disposal
5. Relative cost of Disposal
6. Recycling Rates by District and Borough
7. Current CRCs in Surrey and their Coverage