

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
1 FEBRUARY 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote attendance meeting on Wednesday 1 February, 2023

PRESENT: Councillor David Evans (Chairman)

Councillors: Mike Allport,

APOLOGIES: Councillor Carol Ellis (one of the initiators of the call in)

SUBSTITUTIONS: Councillor Tina Claydon (for Councillor Richard Lloyd)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors: Bernie Attridge, Glyn Banks, Helen Brown, Richard Jones and David Richardson (initiators of the call in)

Councillor Richard Lloyd attended as an observer

CONTRIBUTORS: Councillor Dave Hughes (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Streetscene and the Regional Transport Strategy); Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation); Regulatory Services Manager; Streetscene Service Manager and Waste Operations Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Democratic Services Manager and Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

49. CONSIDERATION OF A MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE CALL IN ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman advised that the Cabinet had considered a report on 'Waste Strategy Review' at a meeting held on 17 January 2023. The decision (Record of Decision 4056) had been called in by Councillors Bernie Attridge, Helen Brown, David Richardson, Carol Ellis, Richard Jones and Glyn Banks. Copies of the Cabinet report, Record of Decision and Endorsement of Call in, which identified three reasons for the call in, were included in the agenda pack.

The Democratic Services Manager explained the procedure for the call in of a Cabinet decision as detailed in the supporting document which was included in the agenda.

The Chairman invited the signatories to present the reasons for the call-in to the Committee.

50. WASTE STRATEGY REVIEW

Representations from call in signatories

Councillor Richard Jones outlined the reasons for the call in as detailed within the Agenda. Whilst commenting on the reasons relating to the proposed pilot, he outlined the comments made by Cabinet Members during consideration of the Waste Strategy Review report, which had been around the need for better education and the fact that residents had worked with the Council in the past in ensuring high recycling rates and that this could happen again. The signatories of the call in did not support the introduction of a pilot scheme without knowing the costs, especially given the Chief Officer's comments that this could be tricky, logistically challenging and would add additional cost and feel that education and awareness for residents could work again.

Councillor Jones referred to data provided to Members during the Waste Strategy Workshop held on 9 November, 2022 which showed that the Council had the same collection frequencies as 2 other Council's with the highest recycling collection rates across Wales. He commented on the recycling collection rates at Wrexham Council which currently stood at 68% and that they had 240lr bins and a 2 weekly collection frequency. He felt that this demonstrated that achieving a better recycling rate had nothing to do with the frequency of collections or the size of the black bin and everything to do with education around recycling.

Councillor Glyn Banks recognised that at present the recycling collection rates were disappoint but felt that the 70% target rate was not only achievable but passable by implementation of the proposals put forward to the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet back in September 2021 and without the need to change the frequency of collections. In outlining each of the proposals included within the September 2021 report, he did not believe that they had been fully implemented, especially around education and enhanced enforcement. He said that the Council was following the WG Strategy to the letter but was not implement it and did not feel that the WG could fine the Council for not hitting the target, especially given the increase in home working as a result of the Pandemic.

In relation to Absorbent Hygiene Products (AHP), Councillor Banks welcomed the collection of these products but raised concern that they were being taken to Parc Adfer and not being recycled. He said that the weight of this collection could have a positive increase on the recycling rates and cited Gwynedd Council as an example of a Council who sent their produce to South Wales for recycling. He felt that this was an area that the Council could improve on. He also commented on the Household Recycling Centres and whilst praising the staff at the centres, more work needed to be done to ensure all general waste was being checked for recycling. He said that before any consideration was given to moving to 3 or 4 weekly waste collection service, he wanted to see that all of the proposals within the September 2021 report had been implemented and a further report brought back to the Committee. If these proposals were implemented and they had no effect on the recycling targets then he appreciated that the frequency of collections may need to be considered further.

Councillor Helen Brown commented on the AHP and felt that if this was recycled the Council could be reaching its recycling target. She said that many

residents were complaining about the length of time taken to receive caddies which were not always available and that residents were also not aware that this waste was not being recycled.

Councillor David Richardson asked why changing the frequency of collections was being considered as part of the pilot when areas, such as, education and enforcement could be improved. He said that since becoming a Councillor he had not seen any enforcement within his ward and commented on enforcement within the private sector which he said was proactive instead of reactive. He felt that the Council should make recycling easier for residents, commenting on the recycling bags which many residents complained about and also the opening times of Household Recycling Centres which were not accessible for residents working full time.

Councillor Bernie Attridge felt that there was a lack of consistency with waste collections, commenting on cardboard and side waste being collected at some properties and not at others. He commented on the partnership working between the Council and Housing Associations and the lack of recycling being carried out at Housing Association flats due to the lack of communal bins provided. He suggested that the Council withhold the Social Housing Grant to Housing Associations until they provided adequate bins for recycling as he felt that this would assist with the Council's recycling target. He said that he had been proud during his time as Deputy Leader that the Council was one of the top performing Councils across Wales in terms of recycling targets and said he was confident that the Council could meet the targets again without changing the frequency of collections which he felt penalized residents.

Responses from the decision makers

The Chief Officer (Streetscene & Transportation) gave a detailed presentation in response to the concerns and comments made by the signatories of the call-in, which covered the following areas:-

- Reasons provided for call-in
- Response to the Call-In
- Education
- Enforcement
- Other local authority performance

The Regulatory Services Manager responded to the comments around the volume of AHP collected and reported that the volume was 470 tonnes per annum which was not a significant enough volume to meet the 64% recycling target rate let alone the future target of 70%. She said that whilst the service had been embraced by members of the public and that they continued to work with WG to look for long term sustainable recycling solutions, this waste alone would not be sufficient to reach the recycling targets. She advised that the recycling waste being placed in black bins should be targeted and reported that 27% of food waste was being placed in black bins. This amounted to 6,620 tonnes of food waste last year where only 4,470 tonnes of food waste was collected through the weekly collection service provided to residents. Ensuring this type of waste was placed out for recycling would have a significant impact on recycling collection rates.

The Regulatory Services Manager also reported that, following a commitment to increase the number of Enforcement Officers, 3 additional Officers had been appointed to assist with tackling additional fly tipping issues.

The Chief Officer commented on the suggestion to send AHP waste to South Wales as was being carried out by Gwynedd Council and advised that early cost benefit analysis carried out suggested that it was not economical for the Council to send this waste to South Wales. She reported that the waste sent to Parc Adfer did count towards the recycling collection figures. All options on how this waste was disposed would continue to be explored.

The Chief Officer also reported that providing that cardboard was flat packed and not contaminated this would be collected for recycling by the operatives.

The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to ask questions of the decision makers.

Councillor Mike Peers said that it seemed Cabinet voted to support the proposal to pilot a reduction in the frequency of collections without considering a detailed report on the pilot scheme. He said that during consideration of the report at the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 January Members were advised that reducing the weekly capacity in the black bin would force residents to recycle. He said that he had not agreed with this statement at the time and did not agree with it now having done further research and cited the recycling collection rates at Wrexham Council as an example of why he felt this statement was flawed. He commented on the enforcement of side waste and that 6 fixed penalty notices had been issued since September 2021, which he felt gave the impression that side waste wasn't a significant issue.

In referring to the Waste Strategy Review report to Scrutiny and Cabinet in January, Councillor Peers commented on the blueprint, as outlined within the report, which stated that if adopted, would result in high rates of high quality recycling and questioned whether the blueprint was not working or not being followed, as the high rates and high quality recycling was not being met. On a composite analysis, he felt that the problem lied with household not recycling properly and not about reducing bin capacity and changing the frequency of collections was not the answer. He said that if residents currently put food waste in an 180lr black bin with 2 weekly collections, they will still do the same with a 3 weekly collection.

The Chief Officer said that Councillor Peers was correct that Cabinet would not have supported a pilot without detail and that Cabinet had recommended that a further report be brought back to a future meeting to outline specific details of the proposed pilot prior to a decision being made on whether to proceed. She said that she could not comment on the collection rates at Wrexham Council as they did not operate their service in-house but she said that she could approach them to ascertain what they did differently as they were the only Council bucking the trend of all Local Authorities across Wales. From the data collected all 4 best performing Councils had reduced the size of the black bin to 60lr with 1 Council increasing their recycling rates by 11%.

The Chief Officer also agreed with the comments made by Councillor Peers that the reason the Council were not meeting their recycling target was because some members of the public were not recycling properly and that residual waste had increased by 9% and therefore it was necessary for the Council to look at restrictions to encourage recycling.

The Regulatory Services Manager responded to comments that members of the public who recycled regularly could feel punished unnecessarily through the changes to waste collection frequency. She did not feel that this was a valid argument as they would not need the capacity within their black bin. She said that all members of the public should be encouraged to use the comprehensive recycling service, provided weekly, to its full capacity.

Councillor Richard Jones commented on food waste being the densest waste and the concern around the weight of the waste if residents continued to place this waste in their black bin. He commented on the recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee in January around the pilot but said Members were not aware that there would be a change to the frequency of collections without further information being presented.

Councillor Glyn Banks commented on the number of residents using the AHP service which he said worked out less than 0.1kg per person per week. He said that even allowing for that weight of 470 tonnes, this was still a £61,000 gate fee at Parc Adfer and felt that looking at sending this waste to South Wales in conjunction with Gwynedd Council should be considered.

Councillor David Richardson asked whether officers enforced side waste only or whether they also checked waste within the black bins. He said that some families had 6 members in one household and others lived on their own and that those that lived on their own may continue to put all waste in the black bin even with smaller bins.

Councillor Roy Wakleman said that when he seconded the proposal for a pilot at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in January, the discussion had been around educating residents and he questioned how the change in frequency of collections to 3 weekly had been included in the pilot when considered by Cabinet. The Chairman said that his recollection from the Committee meeting was that there wasn't a one size fits all solution but it was also suggested that a pilot be considered.

Councillor Chris Dolphin supported the comments of officers around food waste and said that there needed to be more education and enforcement. He spoke of his personal experience of being able to recycle fully with 4 adults and 2 babies in one household and the need for education which could be carried out through leaflets to residents outlining the fines which could be imposed on the Council if recycling targets were not met. He spoke in favour of Option 3 as a recommendation from the Committee, that the decision should be reconsidered by Cabinet as he was not in favour of a pilot and felt that the Council should get on with introducing a 3 weekly collection as those residents who currently recycle would not be affected.

Councillor Ian Hodge spoke on the need for education, citing a recent situation where he had visited schools and was disappointed with the lack of education at schools and at home, when questioning children on their knowledge of recycling.

The Chairman said that education would be a great thing but the 70% recycling target was coming around quicker than all of the education could be carried out.

Councillor Mared Eastwood asked where reducing the black bins to 60l sat within the blueprint that WG expected the Council to deliver on. The Chief Officer advised that the size of the bins did not sit within the blueprint as WG did not specify litres per week. The Council had collected a great deal of data and evidence that those Councils who had moved to reducing the black bins to 60l had higher recycling rates. WG were reviewing the blueprint but additional responsibilities, such as the AHP waste collection, had been placed on Local Authorities as part of the current blueprint.

Councillor Dan Rose said that when proposing the pilot at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in January, the Committee were discussing education and that the methodology used for the pilot was an important detail for Members to know. He said that the Council needed to look at all options available in order to give Officers confidence when meeting with WG Ministers to demonstrate what actions were being considered/taken. He felt that the purpose of the pilot should be to dig deeper in understanding why residents were not recycling and that the area chosen would be important given the 47% of recycling waste currently being put in the back bin. He asked if the 47% of recycling waste was based on weight or volume.

The Regulatory Services Manager advised that the data was based on weight. The Chief Officer also added that during consideration of the Waste Strategy at the Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet meetings, it was not specified what the frequency of collections would be during the pilot. The intention of presenting a further report to Cabinet on the pilot would be to consider various options around frequency and size of bin.

The Cabinet Member for Streetscene and the Regional Transport Strategy outlined the financial implications to the Council in not meeting the recycling targets which equated to 0.7% of Council Tax. He said that no decision had been made to pilot a 3 weekly waste collection service but said that a pilot, once agreed by Cabinet, would provide data and evidence on the impact any changes would have.

The Chairman invited the initiators of the call in to sum up.

Councillor Richard Jones, in summing up, said that it was unfair for officers to say that other options, alongside changing the frequency of collections was being considered by Cabinet, as during the Cabinet meeting, piloting a 3 weekly collection was all that was discussed. During the Cabinet meeting, the Chief Officer had offered to bring back a report on the pilot but this would include information on the area selected and other data relating to 3 weekly collection and not different types of pilot schemes. He did not feel that changing the

frequency of collections would have a positive effect as this could antagonise and disenfranchise residents to do the right thing. He also felt that the signatories of the call in had provided enough evidence that there was doubt with the Cabinet decision around the pilot and that there was a need to change residents behaviour which would be a better course of action to increase recycling rates.

Councillor Glyn Banks asked the Committee to consider Option 3 or 4 as a recommendation and said that if Cabinet were minded to go ahead with a pilot, all options around frequency of collections and size of bins should be considered in order to provide accurate data to the Council.

The Chief Officer, in summarising, said that regardless of what action the Council took it was still facing a fine of £663,000 for not achieving the recycling targets set by WG last year and were likely to be fined further within this financial year. She advised that the Council was educating people and carrying out enforcement but members of the public who refused to recycle were not changing their behaviour and this posed a significant financial risk to the Council.

The Chairman invited the Democratic Service Manager to remind Members of the options for decision-making as detailed in item 3 of the agenda.

Councillor Mared Eastwood asked if Members wanted to see detailed proposals on how the pilot would work, which Option would this be for the recommendation. The Chairman advised that this would be Option 3 to ask Cabinet to look at the decision again.

Councillor Mike Peers proposed Option 3 and this was seconded by Councillor Ian Hodge. When put to the vote the proposal was carried.

Councillor Mike Peers asked that the nature of Members concerns be set out in writing to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the decision, the Committee is still concerned about it and refers this decision back to Cabinet to be reconsidered at the earliest scheduled meeting.

51. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.35 am)

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Chairman