

## Consistency in Staffordshire; a proposal for WRAP project support

### Background

Staffordshire Waste Partnership (SWP) is the informal collaboration of all 10 authorities in Staffordshire (eight WCAs, one WDA, one UA), working jointly on waste management projects. SWP has a dedicated resource to project manage the variety of joint working initiatives, such as joint procurement / contracts, communications and legal compliance. Our main aim in collaboration is to improve the quality and quantity of material collected for recycling whilst improving operational efficiency and achieving holistic savings for the tax payer.

At present, aside from the Lichfield and Tamworth joint waste service, all councils are responsible for their own waste collection / disposal, with a variety of collection methodologies, including fully source segregated, fully commingled and commingled with separate paper. There is no political appetite to alter collection methodologies at present, however all authorities are keen to move towards a more consistent approach to the materials collected for recycling.

### Proposal outline

SWP are keen to improve recycling rates and the quality of recyclate collected, which have plateaued in recent years. There are three key areas of investigation for joint working which will result in greater consistency between councils and improve public engagement in recycling. These are;

1. Collection of the same materials,
2. Introducing separate food waste collections (potentially in concert with a reduction in the frequency of non-recyclable waste collection),
3. Development of a new financial mechanism across the two tiers of authorities, to incentivise an increase of the proportion of household waste recycled and composted and minimise residual waste requiring disposal.

#### *Collection of the same materials*

Currently, material acceptance across SWP varies, with particular emphasis on plastics, but by collecting a comprehensive and common set of materials, residents would be more engaged / less confused, thus increasing capture and reducing contamination / costs. The scope for cross boundary working then extends to operations and standard communication messages. SWP will seek to extend this further, by working with neighbouring authorities outside Staffordshire, building on a number of links which already exist.

#### *Separate food waste collections*

Currently, with the exception of one WCA which collects food waste separately and one WCA which collects combined food and garden waste, the majority of WCAs offer no form of food waste recycling. Aware of the current low gate fees for the processing of food waste resulting from the number of local processing facilities, there is potential for councils to enter into joint procurement / contracts to collect and process food waste separately. Collaboration offers potential cost efficiencies from cross boundary working and robust rationalisation of services to deliver a consistent message to residents. There is potential for the collection of food waste as a separate waste stream to provide the opportunity to collectively reduce residual waste collection frequency / capacity, to further improve recycling rates and material quality. Whilst each council could undertake such changes alone, a collaborative approach offers potential greater financial savings at all stages, to include scoping, service development, contract award and mobilisation,

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scheme inception and ongoing monitoring to include communications campaigns to engage with local residents.

### *Financial mechanism*

Whilst the current recycling credit system in place in Staffordshire has supported the increase in the proportion of waste recycled and composted, and subsequent decrease in non-recyclable waste requiring disposal, in its present form it is felt to inhibit the step change that is now needed to deliver further service efficiencies whilst improving the quality and quantity of material collected for recycling and composting. The creation of a pseudo Joint Waste Authority on a financial basis only (not legally) by the devolution of the recycling credit budget from the WDA to the WCAs would ensure that service changes are made with consideration for both collection and disposal costs, supporting more holistic, evidence based decision making. It is therefore proposed that devising a new financial mechanism would offer greater opportunity for service efficiencies and improvements that meet the requirements of all parties.

### **Requirements**

Set against national performance figures, the SWP performs very well, with all but one collection authority achieving above 50% recycling and composting, coupled with very low waste disposal costs through Energy from Waste.

However as a partnership we wish to see if we can achieve more, by protecting and if possible enhancing services, through reduced costs, therefore achieving better value for the residents of Staffordshire. This work requires a full service review, which also recognises the current financial limitations and outdated processes.

Support is required to model operational and financial scenarios, and provide market intelligence which can aid the development of a proof of concept, which achieves consistency in the materials collected for recycling and minimises the disposal of residual waste in a cost beneficial way.

### **Contact details**

Kay Cocks, Partnership Manager, Staffordshire Waste Partnership  
Tel 01283 508022 Mob 07966 342127 [kay.cocks@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk](mailto:kay.cocks@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk)  
Based at East Staffordshire Borough Council, Millers Lane Depot, Burton-upon-Trent, DE14 2NS.