

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 24 MAY 2018

HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING DEEP DIVE REPORT

Report by Councillor Liz Leffman, Deep dive lead member

Introduction

1. On 4 January 2018 the Performance Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a deep dive into the falling household recycling rates in Oxfordshire.
2. Cllr Liz Leffman agreed to lead the deep dive with officer support from the Strategic Manager for Waste and Transport; the Waste Strategy Officer; and a Senior Policy Officer.
3. This report presents the findings of the deep dive for review by the Performance Scrutiny Committee. A series of suggested recommendations for committee members to consider will also be presented at the May Committee meeting by Cllr Leffman.

Context

4. One of the County Council's core priorities is to help provide services that enhance the quality of life in our communities, and protect the local environment. Reducing waste and increasing recycling particularly benefits the environment as fewer raw materials are required, saving energy, reducing emissions and protecting natural resources. As such, the Council aims to ensure household waste is disposed of efficiently and effectively.
5. Recycling targets of 50% by 2020 have been set nationally and by 2015 authorities were required to provide separate collections of paper, plastic, metal and glass. In Oxfordshire the Council's target is for 59% of household waste to be reused, recycled or composted, and 60% of waste from Household Waste Recycling Centres to be recycled.
6. The County Council works closely with the district and city councils to ensure the whole county has kerbside services that collect a wide range of materials, and where possible, waste is managed within the county. For some years the county has been one of the best at recycling in England, recycling almost 60% of household waste and having one of the lowest levels of waste per household.
7. However, recent performance reports (2017/18) have indicated that household recycling rates are below target and on a falling trajectory. In particular, reductions in composting and dry recycling have been reported, linked to waste collection issues and the introduction of charging for green waste in some districts. The situation continues to be closely monitored by the Oxfordshire Environment Partnership and is in line with national trends. The introduction of a new contract for Household Waste Recycling Centres is also expected to drive up performance.

Background

8. On 4 January 2018 the Performance Scrutiny Committee reviewed performance for quarter 2 of 2017/18 (July – September 2017) and raised concerns about household recycling rates falling below target with a deteriorating outlook.
9. The Committee agreed to establish a deep dive to investigate:
 - a) the key issues affecting the performance downturn,
 - b) the impact of District / City Council waste collection strategies, and
 - c) how the County Council and District / City Councils jointly plan to improve performance.
10. To gather evidence and intelligence Cllr Leffman met with lead officers and was briefed on the key national and local issues affecting household recycling rates, as well as the work of the Oxfordshire Environment Partnership. Building on this briefing, further written information was supplied, which has informed the deep dive findings and recommendations.

Findings

National issues

11. Nationally it has been reported that recycling rates are slowing and for the first time in 2016 rates fell. Officers shared that there have been a number of changes in legislation which have impacted on all authorities (e.g. composting of street sweepings, recovery of waste wood) and overall there is general lack of national policy on waste (unlike in Wales and Scotland). This means that many authorities have focused attention and resources away from waste management.
12. At the start of 2018 the Chinese Government also adopted new import rules banning the import of certain waste products, including mixed paper and post-consumer plastics, and imposed a prohibitive contamination limit on all other waste imports. The UK currently sends almost 500,000 tonnes of plastics and 1.4 million tonnes of recovered paper to China each year. China's decision has placed huge pressure on the UK to seek new markets and has led to greater stock piling. As such, there is now a renewed emphasis on working with residents and businesses to ensure that material sent for recycling is of good quality.
13. To challenge a waste industry driven by recycling rates, officers explained the national move towards a circular economy. The circular economy aims to keep resources in use for much longer, extracting the maximum value whilst they are in use, and ensuring they can be recovered and recycled easily at the end of their life. This change will create opportunities for growth and jobs, whilst also reducing waste, saving natural resources, protecting the UK from resource scarcity/security issues, and reducing the environmental impacts of our activities. It will put more pressure on retailers and manufacturers to change the way their packaging is designed, produced, used and disposed of.
14. The concept of 'pay as you throw' was discussed as a potential approach to driving up recycling rates. Officers confirmed that although recycling rates would increase,

UK law prohibits local authorities from charging for the collection of residual waste. However, collection authorities can specify the collection container used and when combined with the stringent enforcement of local waste policy, residual rubbish can be successfully restricted.

Local policy

15. In 2014 the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership was dissolved as part of budget savings and collective communications and education work was also reduced. Officers reported that the results of a recent waste analysis¹ indicate around 48% of waste in people's general rubbish bin could have been recycled using kerbside services. The largest portion of this recyclable material is food waste. The Council is working in a directive way with 'Love Food Hate Waste' to encourage food waste reduction and collection, but targeted communications about recycling other materials are normally led by each district / the city.
16. It is estimated that if all of this recycling was put in the correct bin, the County Council could save around £3 million annually and the countywide recycling rate could rise to around 80% (it is currently 58%). This is significant because with the county's planned population growth the County Council's waste bill could grow by up to £10 million per year by 2040. Currently, the Council's budget for waste management is approximately £27m)
17. The results of a countywide waste consultation on a new Joint Waste Management Strategy carried out in January and February 2018 (see details below) show that residents are confused about what can be recycled, and they require more information to better engage with their current kerbside recycling services. Despite the county having a comprehensive kerbside collection service, there is no uniform policy across the districts / city on what and how materials are collected and this could be contributing to residents' confusion. The recycling rates also vary significantly from just over 50% in the City to 64% in South Oxfordshire (See Appendix 1 for an overview of collection schemes across the County).

Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy

18. The ambitious targets and partnership approach of a joint strategy have been the driving force behind the rise in recycling rates from 33% in 2005/6 to over 60% within 10 years. Officers reported that Oxfordshire's Joint Waste Strategy is currently being reviewed and is expected to be agreed by the Oxfordshire Environment Partnership (OEP) in the summer/autumn 2018. It will then be adopted by all councils.
19. A public consultation held at the start of 2018 - "Talk rubbish with us" - informed the development of the 5-year Strategy. Over 2,200 responses were received and there was a clear message that residents want to recycle, but need more information about the materials they should be recycling and how best to do this. As such, the Strategy will include a renewed focus on communications and public awareness

¹ Waste analysis involves hand sorting waste from a sample of kerbside bins into categories. The results can then be used to estimate the contents of all the bins across the area using weighting for demographics.

raising, as well as consideration of operational changes that could help increase recycling rates.

20. In March the OEP agreed a proposal in principle to establish a joint communication resource, funded by all partners.

Community Action Group Project

21. The Community Action Group (CAG) Project was highlighted as a particularly effective initiative for tackling waste and recycling issues in Oxfordshire. The County Council supports around 60 community groups to take local action on environmental issues, including waste, transport, food, energy, biodiversity and social justice. The CAG achievements in 2016/17 are outlined in an Annual Report, attached as Appendix 2.
22. The Project is managed by the Waste Strategy team who oversee grant funding and the CAG network, provide guidance and advice, and sign-post where necessary. The team also links with colleagues in Public Health and other areas where the projects have dual benefits / aspects. Whilst these groups are making a difference in their local areas, the biggest challenge identified is reaching the less engaged and more apathetic population, who are less likely to reuse and recycle.

Recommendation

23. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
- a) **review and consider the findings of the deep dive into falling household recycling rates in Oxfordshire,**
 - b) **consider a series of recommendations arising from the deep dive, as presented by Cllr Leffman in the May Committee meeting.**

Councillor Liz Leffman

Lead member – Performance Scrutiny Committee Household Recycling Deep Dive

Contact Officer: Katie Read, Senior Policy Officer
May 2018

Appendix 1 – Overview of district / city collection systems

| Collection systems | Cherwell District Council | Oxford City Council | South Oxfordshire District Council | Vale of White Horse District Council | West Oxfordshire District Council |
|----------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|
| Recycling rate in 2016/17 | 58.03% | 50.13% | 64.05% | 63.74% | 62.95% |
| Dry recycling | 240l Blue bin, collected fortnightly | 240l Blue bin, collected fortnightly | 240l Green bin collected fortnightly | 240l Green bin, collected fortnightly | 240l Blue-lidded black bin collected fortnightly |
| Residual (non recycling) | 180l Green bin, collected fortnightly | 180l Green bin, collected fortnightly | 180l black bin, collected fortnightly | 180l black bin, collected fortnightly | 180l Grey bin, collected fortnightly |
| Glass | Not collected at kerbside – take to a bottle bank | Place in recycling bin | Place in recycling bin | Place in recycling bin | Placed in black box, collected fortnightly on same day as recycling bin |
| Food waste | Brown bin for garden and food waste (with indoor caddy to store your food waste – empty into your garden waste bin), collected fortnightly. Goes to IVC | Green kerbside caddy – collected weekly, goes to AD | Green kerbside caddy, collected weekly, goes to AD | Green kerbside caddy, collected weekly, goes to AD | Black kerbside caddy - collected weekly, goes to AD |
| Garden waste | Brown bin for garden and food waste (with indoor caddy to store your food waste – empty into your garden waste bin), collected fortnightly. Goes to IVC | Brown bin, £50/year (£47 direct debit) collected fortnightly with recycling. Can have sacks at £31.50 for 10 | 240l Brown bin, collected fortnightly with recycling, £40.50/year | 240l Brown bin collected fortnightly with your recycling, £40.50/year | Green-lidded black bin collected fortnightly on same day as recycling bin, (opt-in & sign up), £30 per bin per year, runs from 1 st April to 31 st March |
| Collection | Cherwell | Oxford City | South Oxfordshire | Vale of White | West |

| systems | District Council | Council | District Council | Horse District Council | Oxfordshire District Council |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Bulky waste collections | £16 for up to 3 items of old furniture and appliances | Free collection of up to 3 items twice a year | £34.50 for up to 3 items and £7 for each additional item | £34.50 for up to 3 items and £7 for each additional item, maximum of 6 items per collection | £26 for up to 4 items. £5.60 for each additional item |
| Textiles | Not collected at Kerbside | Not collected at Kerbside | Place in a tied carrier bag next to green bin on normal collection day | Place in a tied carrier bag next to green bin on normal collection day | In carrier bag (clear if possible) alongside recycling bin |
| Small electricals | Placed on top of your blue bin for recycling | Placed in carrier bag on top of a bin | Place in a tied carrier bag next to grey bin on normal collection day | Place in a tied carrier bag next to grey bin on normal collection day | Placed in black box but in a separate box to your glass bottles and jars |
| Household batteries | Place in a small clear bag on top of your bins | Place in a small clear bag on top of your bins | Place in a small clear bag on top of recycling bin | Place in a small clear bag on top of recycling bin | In a labelled, used envelope on top of recycling bin lid |
| Bring banks | Yes | Some | None | None | Yes |

AD – Anaerobic digestion, Food waste used to generate electricity and a liquid fertiliser (Digestate)

IVC – In Vessel Composting – controlled composting conditions that ensure food and garden waste reaches appropriate temperatures to kill any pathogens. Produces compost

Materials Accepted

| Materials collected for recycling & composting (including bring banks) | Cherwell District Council | Oxford City Council | South Oxfordshire District Council | Vale of White Horse District Council | West Oxfordshire District Council | Household Waste Recycling Centres |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Food | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Garden | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Paper | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Yellow pages | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Cardboard | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Tins/cans | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |

| Materials collected for recycling & composting (including bring banks) | Cherwell District Council | Oxford City Council | South Oxfordshire District Council | Vale of White Horse District Council | West Oxfordshire District Council | Household Waste Recycling Centres |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Other metals | Y | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Soft plastic (type 1&2, food containers) | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Other plastic packaging (salad bags, magazine wrapping) | N | Y | Y | Y | N | N |
| Plastic bottles | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Household Batteries | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Car batteries | N | N | N | N | Y | Y |
| Mobile phone batteries | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Mobile phones | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| WEEE | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Glass bottles and jars | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Foil | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Tetrapaks | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Carrier bags | N | Y | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Textiles | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Video's, DVD's & CD's | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Toys | Y | N | N | N | N | N |
| Bicycles | Y | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Household/ garden chemicals | N | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Hardcore/ inert | N | N | N | N | N | Y* |
| Engine oil | N | N | N | N | Y | Y |
| Fluorescent tubes | N | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Wood | N | N | N | N | N | Y* |
| Gas bottles | N | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Energy saving light bulbs | N | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Plasterboard | N | N | N | N | N | Y* |

| Materials collected for recycling & composting (including bring banks) | Cherwell District Council | Oxford City Council | South Oxfordshire District Council | Vale of White Horse District Council | West Oxfordshire District Council | Household Waste Recycling Centres |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Tools | N | N | N | N | N | Y |
| Tyres | N | N | N | N | N | Y* |

Y – Yes

N – No

* Potentially 'non- household' waste and may be subject to a charge at the Household Waste Recycling Centre See www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/chargeablewaste.gov.uk

Appendix 2 – The Community Action Group Project Annual Report 2016/17

The Community Action Group Oxfordshire Project Annual Report 2016-17

Best Community Project, OCVA Awards 2016

