

Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Board Waste Forum meeting St Michael's Centre, Abergavenny 9th July 2009.

The Waste Forum meeting was arranged by Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Board to coincide with the consultation period for the Welsh Assembly Government's draft waste strategy "Towards Zero Waste", and the opportunity was also taken to receive a presentation about Monmouthshire County Council's Waste and Recycling Review which will result in various changes to waste management and recycling services.

The meeting was open to the public with an invited expert panel made up of representatives from Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Local Government Association and Monmouthshire County Council who had first opportunity to ask questions and comment on the presentations received. The meeting attracted an audience of 27 people, many representing environmental groups and town and community Councils; others were local residents. The meeting was chaired by Sue Mabberley, chair of the Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Board.

Presentations were made by Russell Owens WAG and David Harris MCC.

1. Presentation by Russell Owens Waste Strategy Officer Welsh Assembly Government.

Russell emphasised the link between the Towards Zero Waste strategy and the One Wales document which will move Wales as a nation towards sustainable 'One Planet' living. The Towards Zero Waste Strategy is very much about resource conservation, rather than simply about waste management and recycling. It was acknowledged as an ambitious strategy, and is showing the leadership that has been requested by local government. Although it is ambitious it is achievable, with other parts of Europe proving that substantial reductions in waste can be achieved in a relatively short timescale using a combination of approaches. Flanders was cited as an example, where recycling rates have increased by more than 70% in 10-12 years.

Major points of the presentation:

- Landfill will virtually disappear as an option by 2025
- Maximum residual household waste will be reduced to 150kg per annum.
- A ceiling of 30% will be set on material that may be used to fuel Energy from Waste plants to maximise recycling, and minimum efficiency targets will be set for Energy from Waste plants.
- High targets had been set for food waste recycling in the consultation document, and these are likely to be lowered in the final strategy following representations from the WLGA.
- High recycling is the most sustainable option – it creates more jobs and is more economical than either Energy from Waste or landfill and is best environmentally.
- Kerb side collections (pre-sorted by householders) is the cheapest option of recycling collection, followed by twin-stream (some separation of waste streams, eg paper and card in one sack and other materials in a separate bag), and single co-mingled bags are the most expensive. WRAP have undertaken a survey of 400 local authorities to assess the costs and these were their results.
- Supermarkets are reducing the number of different types of plastics used in packaging to make recycling easier.
- Food waste tends to reduce when people separate this portion of their waste and realise the quantities produced.
- Home composting is a good option for those that can do it.

1.1 Questions were invited from the panel:

Tim Peppin WLGA – commented that the WLGA represents all local authorities in Wales and are encouraging local authorities to adopt sustainable development in policies and practices. He also commented that only 10% of waste is from municipal sources (ie domestic, household waste) for which local authorities have management responsibility. He asked how

sustainable development is to be balanced across all service areas, and raised questions about the costs to local government and if some areas were to be 'gold plated'.

Russell Owens responded that the benefits of sustainable waste management will be economic as well environmental, and that local authorities will need to see the costs and benefits holistically rather than departmentally. He appreciates that there will be additional costs, but added that Jane Davidson has pledged to protect the waste budget.

David Harris MCC - raised a question about Energy from Waste, and if we will need more of it in tight economic times.

Russell Owens responded that the focus needs to move to a more integrated way of thinking about sustainable development across service areas.

1.2 Questions to the panel from the audience

Eliza Davies of Transition Chepstow asked a question about the current kerbside collection that operates in Chepstow describing it as high quality. She asked if WAG will reduce funding for those authorities that choose co-mingled collections?

Russell Owens responded that there are no plans to do this at present, and that the Assembly would prefer to work with local authorities, but no decision has yet been made.

Jeremy Gass an Abergavenny resident asked about packaging. He wanted to know why takeaway food outlets in particular use plastic and polystyrene packaging which cause litter problems, when cardboard is an acceptable alternative, and if anything can be done to require such outlets to use recyclable or biodegradable packaging.

He also asked why, if England can have achieved reductions of household waste to 150kg per household already, this is a future target for Wales?

Russell Owens responded that WAG has no powers over packaging, but sympathised with the sentiments, particularly over litter problems. He added that the Minister is very keen on reducing single use plastic bags.

On the 150kg target, he said that some local authorities still believe it is not achievable, while others think that it is. It has to be done in a way that takes people and local authorities with them. (**NB** – it has since been pointed out that caution should be exercised comparing recycling and waste collection results in England and Wales, as many English local authorities are still two-tier, with waste collection undertaken by District Councils and disposal by County Councils. Being Unitary, Welsh authorities deal with the whole waste management process making comparison between Welsh authorities more useful than between English and Welsh.)

Tim Peppin (WLGA) added that such a target would mean a 90% participation rate and 90% recycling, which is some way off in Wales. On the ground, the reality of encouraging more people to recycle more, is actually more difficult to achieve.

Janet Rawlings from Chepstow Friends of the Earth asked about the definition of Energy from Waste, and what is the definition?

Russell Owens responded that it excludes Anaerobic Digestion but includes gasification and pyrolysis and is defined by a process that produces methane that can be burned to create energy.

Henry Widdicombe from Cylch was concerned that a lot of local authorities are moving from kerbside collection to co-mingled recyclable collections. He also asked how it is possible for the strategy to promote action on a local level when the strategy is national in scale.

Russell Owens responded that at the moment it is a 50/50 split more or less between local authorities using kerbside sorted collections and co-mingled collections. He added that it is an issue that probably won't be addressed quickly as investments have been made by local authorities. He has heard that one authority will be moving back to kerbside sorted collection, and is hopeful that others will do so by 2025.

Russell Owens cited the example of Prosiect Gwyrdd where a group of local authorities in South East Wales have been working towards a solution that all authorities can use. David Harris (MCC) expanded by explaining that MCC have been working on Prosiect Gwyrdd with 4 other local authorities to develop a facility to deal with residual waste and have recently agreed to move to the procurement phase. He explained that each of the authorities have to receive approval from their own Councils, and the project has involved a joint Member group of Councillors. Public dialogue will be undertaken, and the type of facility has not yet been decided on.

Russell Jones from Grosmont asked where the landfill site is for Monmouthshire waste?

David Harris (MCC) responded that household waste is currently taken to Calne in Wiltshire by Viridor. In the longer term the Council is looking for Prosiect Gwyrdd to take residual waste by 2015. A potential site for a facility has been identified in Newport, which could be offered to companies bidding to deal with Monmouthshire's waste during a tendering process, thus providing a level playing field for a range of companies – some with their own facilities and some with none locally.

Haydn Cullen-Jones from Monmouth questioned the economics on which the decision to adopt the co-mingled recycling scheme had been made. He argued that the co-mingled scheme will be more expensive than the existing kerbside collection.

David Harris (MCC) disputed the figures provided by Mr Cullen-Jones and argued that the co-mingled scheme will be more cost-effective because it will involve more households and will be cheaper.

Haydn Cullen-Jones also raised a question about the ecological footprinting that has been used to support the WAG strategy, and asked what the implications of this are for the MCC review?

David Harris responded that this is a new technique that is developing, it is in the WAG consultation document which has yet to be adopted.

2.1 Presentation from David Harris on the Monmouthshire Review of Waste and Recycling

David Harris, Head of Waste Management MCC described the changes that will result from the review, and clarified some of the changes that had been incorrectly reported. He explained that Monmouthshire's recycling rate for 2008-9 was 38.9%, and they aim to beat the 40% target set for 2009-10. The main changes are as follows:

- Food and green waste will continue to be collected weekly where households are already provided with this service
- A single sack collection for recyclables will replace the existing black box over time, ideally phased in gradually by March next year, depending on negotiations with the existing provider.
- The Council is looking at the possibility of a twin sack service, one for paper and card and the other for glass and other materials.

- Residual waste will continue to be collected weekly for households without food waste collections
- Fortnightly collections will be introduced where food waste is collected, probably starting early in 2010 and completed over the next 18 months.
- There will be further promotion and advice before the changes are introduced.
- Around 6000 homes are not included in any kerbside collection recycling scheme for dry materials or food. It is intended that further expansion of both recyclables and food waste collections will be introduced over time.
- Mini bring sites will be introduced with a mixed bin/bag at small sites where there is currently no service.
- Household waste sites are being upgraded, starting with Llanfoist. They will be able to accept a wider range of materials – wood has already been added at Llanfoist and there will be more space for reusable items. Opening hours will change to 8am from October and closing at 6pm all year round, and opening will continue for 363 days a year – exceeding those of most other parts of Wales. The site at Llanfoist will include an education centre.

2.2 Questions were invited from the panel:

Tim Peppin from the WLGA asked about MCC's educational work with schools?

David Harris responded that the Council already has 2 part-time staff, and that funding has been obtained to increase it by one person.

2.3 Questions from the audience

Richard Lewis from Adventa's Supporting Community Enterprise and Board member for Homemakers Furniture Recycling asked Russell Owens if the current study by the Treasury looking at reclassifying incinerator ash as hazardous would be helpful, and if it would affect Prosiect Gwyrdd?

Russell Owens responded that as non-hazardous waste it can be reused to make breeze blocks etc, so a reclassification would make this re-use less attractive. He also mentioned Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) where household waste is treated to make it safe and turned into energy pellets for burning or spread on land) has not been favoured by WAG as an option as household waste is so mixed (everything from nappies to batteries and household chemicals) that it still has lots of toxins in it, making it unsafe for landspreading as a fertiliser. (**NB** – this has since been clarified, Russell's understanding is that MBT residue can be applied to land under certain conditions imposed by the regulatory authority the Environment Agency.)

David Roman from Monmouthshire Community Recycling (MCR) commented on the importance of public engagement in increasing participation rates in recycling. He mentioned the direct communication with individual households that he had undertaken in pilot areas to achieve dramatic increases in participation with the black box scheme.

He also raised the lower cost of the kerbside collection, citing the WRAP study where a cost of £93 had been identified as typical for a rural authority.

David Harris agreed that it is important to engage with local people, and praised the achievements of MCR in achieving high participation rates within the pilot area due to the communication methods used.

Aidan Reynolds from Operation Noah and resident of Abergavenny suggested that the existing arrangements are already too complicated, with different collections on different days, and is also complicated for the collection roundsmen too. He suggested that all notices sent out from MCC should be dated, so that local people know which ones are current. He also pointed out that success of the service is reliant on public participation so clear messages are even more important.

David Harris said that the new service should be simpler.

Sue Harrison of Abergavenny Friends of the Earth, and Chepstow resident commented that that the new system will be a departure from the current kerbside, sorted collection and not necessarily an improvement as people are used to cleaning and sorting recyclables into different categories. She asked if materials will now be contaminated by being collected all together, for example baked beans in the recycling and items not properly cleaned.

David Harris stressed the importance of getting the message across with the new system, and that it will still be important to clean recyclables.

Sue Harrison followed by saying that the Council should be raising the standard to that of St Arvans, that has reached 'gold standard' status, not reducing the standards.

David Harris re-stated that awareness raising will be important, and that with the new simpler system more residents will participate.

Alison Johns, who works for MCC raised a question about the change from white starch bags to the single dumpy bag for green waste, as these reusable bags will blow away or will not be returned properly by collectors.

David Harris responded that the cost of the current system is economically unsustainable, and has been abused. The Council had looked at wheeled bins for green waste, but in other areas this results in more contamination. Overall it was felt the dumpy bags were the best option, and would welcome any suggestions to the problem of the bags blowing away.

Henry Hodges from Chepstow Society questioned the lack of consultation over the changes, in contrast to the current ongoing consultation on the Local Development Plan. He felt that there should have been some consultation before the waste & recycling strategy was adopted.

David Harris disagreed as consultation meetings were held to get public views 12-18 months ago, and the resulting strategy was created following this consultation phase.

Keith Weller from Chepstow asked why a tendering exercise had not been undertaken for dry recycling, as it has been for green bag (food) waste. He stated that the chosen co-mingled system is not best practice.

David Harris said that a tendering exercise will be undertaken once the changes are in place, and that this tendering will be for the combined service. It is not necessarily the intention for the collection to remain in-house.

Keith Weller suggested that the decision had been taken for the convenience of the Council, and not in the best interests of recycling or local people.

David Harris said that the new scheme will make recycling simpler, and that the Council will be better able to specify what they want once the new system has bedded in.

Katrina Gass from Abergavenny asked what the collection bags are made from, and asked what the real costs of the new scheme are in terms of the planet? She further suggested that co-mingling leads to reduced value, especially if the material is mixed up with litter. She also asked if there is a review stage for the Cabinet decision?

David Harris responded that householders provide their own sacks for residual waste. The purple bags are made from recycled plastic and will be recycled again. Starch sacks for food caddies and purple sacks are provided by the Council. He went on to say that the economics are looked at in terms of the costs of collection, but when the WAG strategy is finalised the County Council will need to respond because sustainable development issues are likely to be a bigger driver than they have been in the past.

The final question/comment was from Val Smith, Monmouthshire County Councillor who mentioned that the consultation exercise concerned bring sites and extending recycling services. She went on to say that Councils need to be more inspirational and aspirational. She said that there was cross-party opposition to the MCC strategy and pressure on this issue needs to be maintained.

3. Closing remarks

Sue Maberley closed the meeting by thanking the panellists and Russell Owens and David Harris for their presentations. She reminded the audience how much has changed in the last 20 years when recycling was still considered a fringe activity.