



PART A REPORT

Report to: South London Waste Partnership (SLWP) Joint Committee

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Report title: **Communications and engagement update**

Summary

This paper provides an update to Members of the South London Waste Partnership Joint Committee on communications and stakeholder engagement activities relating to the Partnership's residual waste treatment services; Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) services; food and green waste treatment services; and marketing of recyclates.

This report focuses on activity that has taken place between June and August 2023.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and comment on any aspects of communications and engagement activities relating to the residual waste treatment services; Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) services; food and green waste treatment services; and marketing of recyclates.

1. FOOD AND GREEN WASTE TREATMENT CONTRACTS

- 1.1 A visit to the Bio Collectors anaerobic digestion (AD) facility in Mitcham was arranged and took place on 24 July 2023 for Members of the Joint Committee and Sutton Council Ward Members. This was in response to concerns raised by local residents about odour from the site being detectable on occasions in the nearby Poulter Park.
- 1.2 Up to 5,000 tonnes per annum of SLWP food waste is treated at the Bio Collectors facility (around 5% of the facility's total capacity – the remaining 95% being mostly local commercial food waste collections).

- 1.3 The site visit was attended by councillors Lewis, Woolmer and Munday as well as officers from Sutton Council's Environmental Health and Sustainability teams and the SLWP Contract Manager.
- 1.4 Attendees were provided with a thorough and informative tour of the site by Bio Collectors' Head of Commercial and saw the AD process in action for themselves. Odours were minimal on the day of the visit.
- 1.5 Bio Collectors stressed that they have controls in place, that they work hard-to-minimise odours and that they believe odours are often attributed to their site unfairly (pointing out that the Willow Lane industrial estate is home to many companies whose operations could result in odours). Recent upgrades to one of the digestate storage tanks will have led to the potential for more odours whilst the work was taking place, but Bio Collectors confirmed that these improvements should improve odour control at the site going forward.
- 1.6 Councillors acknowledged the points made by Bio Collectors but stressed that that the odour from the AD process is distinctive and that some residents living near the site that contact them are certain that this is where the smells are emanating from. It was agreed that Bio Collectors would explore ways to improve two-way communication with residents who live in the immediate vicinity of site.

2. HOUSEHOLD REUSE AND RECYCLING CENTRES (HRRCs)

- 2.1 This contract is operated by Veolia on behalf of the Partnership boroughs.
- 2.2 Site user satisfaction - Site user satisfaction surveys continue to be conducted at the six HRRC sites on a rolling basis.
- 2.3 A summary of the findings from these surveys is reported to this Committee in the Contract Management Reports, and uploaded to the SLWP website.

3. BEDDINGTON ENERGY RECOVERY FACILITY (ERF)

- 3.1 The Residual Waste Treatment Contract was awarded to Viridor in 2012. In order to fulfil the requirements of the contract, Viridor has constructed a £205m state-of-the-art Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) in Beddington, Sutton. Household waste from the four Partner boroughs that either cannot be recycled or has not been sorted for recycling is treated at the facility and used to generate electricity.
- 3.2 The SLWP Communications Advisor continues to work closely with Viridor to:
 - Ensure Viridor are meeting their contractual requirements with regards to communications and stakeholder engagement around the operation of the Beddington ERF

- Ensure local people understand why it is we need an ERF and provide reassurance around the safety of modern, well-run facilities such as this
- Ensure the Partnership understands the views of local people with regards to waste treatment and ERF technologies in particular.

- 3.3 Permit variation application – On 20 July 2023, the Environment Agency confirmed that they were 'minded to issue' an application made by Viridor to increase the amount of waste the Beddington ERF can treat each year by 10%. This followed a public consultation held between October and November 2022, during which the SLWP boroughs made their objection to the application clear.
- 3.4 The EA confirmed that a second round of consultation would start on 21 July 2023 and run for six weeks. The SLWP quickly published a statement on its website to raise awareness of the EA decision and the second phase of consultation. The SLWP requested (on 20 July 2023) that the EA extend the length of the consultation as it would run through August, when many people are away. The EA initially declined this request (pointing out that the standard four-week consultation period had already been extended to six weeks). On 30 August 2023, Sutton Council repeated the request to the EA (to extend the consultation deadline to 15 September); a request which this time the EA agreed to.
- 3.5 A Beddington Community Liaison Group meeting was hosted by Viridor at the ERF visitor centre on 20 July 2023. It was attended by the SLWP Communications Advisor and provided an opportunity for Viridor to brief members of the group with an update on the permit variation process and second round of consultation being run by the EA.
- 3.6 Meetings were arranged with senior representatives of the EA's permitting team for Sutton Councillors and Members of the SLWP Joint Committee. These took place on 8 September (Sutton Council) and 12 September (SLWP) and provided an opportunity for Members to discuss their concerns in more detail with the EA and ensure the views of local people have been heard.
- 3.7 Following these meetings, the SLWP submitted its formal consultation response to the EA and published a follow-up statement on its website (www.slwp.org.uk/latest-news) in which the boroughs' continued opposition to the Viridor proposal was made clear.
- 3.8 The EA is expected to confirm its final decision on Viridor's permit variation application in the coming weeks.
- 3.9 Emissions – the environmental performance of the Beddington ERF is reported to this Committee in the Contract Management Report. Viridor uploads Emissions Monitoring Reports to the Beddington ERF Virtual Visitor Centre (www.beddingtonerf.info) twice per month.

- 3.10 The SLWP Communications Advisor continues to work with Viridor to ensure local residents have access to timely and accurate information about the environmental performance of the facility via the Virtual Visitor Centre. The publication of July and August (part 1) emissions reports were delayed due to annual leave, but they are now available on the Beddington ERF website.
- 3.11 Site visits – the following community visits to the Beddington ERF took place during the reporting period:
- 20 June 2023 – Public open day attended by five members of the public
 - 21 June 2023 – Sutton Secondary School Heads meeting
 - 4 July 2023 – Sutton Community Environment Champions Group visit
 - 6 July 2023 – Sutton Community Environment Champions Group visit
 - 18 August – Sunray Recycle Community Group visit
 - 23 August - Public open day attended by nine members of the public
- 3.12 A rolling programme of public open days has been agreed with Viridor. These are published on the SLWP website (www.slwp.org.uk/visit). They have proven very popular with tours on 8 September, 9 September and 30 November fully booked. Two additional dates (25 October and 7 December) have been added to the programme to cope with the high demand.

4. Collections and street cleansing

- 4.1 Communication and engagement activities relating to recycling & waste collections and street cleansing are not formally under the remit of this Joint Committee. Nevertheless, this summary of recent activity is provided to Members in order to provide a more complete picture of SLWP communication and engagement efforts.
- 4.2 Food waste recycling participation campaign – work to deliver the latest SLWP food waste recycling participation campaign is progressing well:
- A ‘nudge letter’ has been sent to 3,900 households in Croydon, Merton and Sutton that were targeted by the campaign last year. The professionally designed letter updates residents on the success of the campaign (reporting a 10% increase in participation) and reminds them of the importance of continuing to recycle their food waste. Participation monitoring is taking place to evaluate the impact this nudge letter has on food waste recycling participation, and this will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.

- The core campaign interventions are due to be delivered to 38,300 properties in Croydon, Merton and Sutton during the weeks commencing 25 September and 2 October 2023. Targeted properties will be visited on their collection day. A 'No food waste sticker' will be placed on the lid of their rubbish bin and a branded envelope will be posted through the letterbox containing a leaflet on the benefits of recycling food waste and a free supply of 12 biodegradable liners. This approach has been shown in recent years to deliver a 10% increase in participation in targeted areas.
- A dedicated delivery team and vehicle has been arranged over a three-week period to ensure that any households that request a replacement food waste bin as a result of being targeted by this campaign receive delivery of that bin promptly.
- The recent waste composition analysis showed that food waste makes up just under 30% (by weight) of the 'average' SLWP rubbish bin. Diverting that waste out of the residual waste stream and into the recycling (anaerobic digestion) waste stream delivers significant environmental benefits. In addition, because food waste treatment costs are significantly cheaper than residual waste treatment charges, the campaign effectively pays for itself through avoided waste treatment costs.
- Pop-up food waste minimisation and recycling events will be held in each of the three boroughs during October. The letters sent to properties targeted by this campaign will include a QR code linking residents to the dedicated campaign page on the SLWP website, where the dates and locations of these events will be publicised. Residents will be encouraged to attend if they have any questions about food waste minimisation or recycling.

4.3 Kingston eRCV launch – The SLWP and Veolia are currently supporting RB Kingston with the launch of their new fleet of electric refuse collection vehicles (eRCVs), which will roll-out from late September 2023:

- Kingston has chosen to reallocate SLWP resources and budgets from the food waste participation campaign in order to support the eRCV launch (food waste recycling messaging will be incorporated into the campaign messaging as the fleet change will see dedicated food waste collection vehicles introduced across the borough and therefore additional capacity for the separate collection of food waste).
- Information about the new electric collection fleet was sent to every property in the borough and a 'No food waste sticker' was applied to all residual waste bins during week commencing 4 September 2023.

- Participation monitoring is taking place to assess whether the information sent has had an impact on food waste recycling participation.

- 4.4 Plastic waste and carbon awareness campaign – Working with Veolia, the SLWP plans to run a large-scale campaign starting autumn 2023 raising awareness amongst residents of the direct link between plastic waste and carbon emissions.
- 4.5 A detailed campaign brief has been prepared and is being used to try and secure additional funding from partners and suitable commercial parties.
- 4.6 The campaign will be delivered under the headline **‘What’s your plastic solution?’** This positive, proactive headline infers that there’s a challenge around plastic without demonising it as a material *per se*. It will be supported with the strapline: **‘Change your relationship with plastic to reduce your carbon footprint’**.
- 4.7 The campaign will be photo-led (the concept sketch below is just to illustrate the approach being taken). All images will be taken by a professional photographer. There will be four key assets, each one featuring a resident in the background and their ‘plastic solution’ message appearing on an item they are holding in the foreground:



4.8 The four assets will communicate the following messages:

- **“I use my local refill shop”** (reduce your reliance on plastic) - photo of resident in a refill shop with the message appearing on a glass jar full of rice (or similar)
- **“I reuse my water bottle”** (reuse containers whenever possible) - photo of resident in high street / in the office with the message appearing on a reusable water bottle
- **“I recycle plastic from around the home”** (recycle plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays from every room in your home using your council’s collection service) - photo of a resident in their bathroom with message appearing on a brand-neutral shampoo bottle
- **“I recycle plastic bags and wrapping at my local supermarket”** (be flexible with your recycling) - photo of a resident in a supermarket with message appearing on a brand-neutral crisp packet

4.9 For print materials, the resident and item featuring the ‘plastic solution’ message will be ‘cut out’ from the background and placed on a brightly coloured background so the image and message really stands out. The on-location backgrounds (e.g. refill shop) will feature in the digital and social media adverts, where there will also be a little movement to attract attention (with the resident briefly walking up to the camera and moving the item containing the plastic solution message into the foreground of the frame).

4.10 A URL and QR code will direct people to a dedicated campaign page on the SLWP website, where more details about the link between plastic waste and carbon will be provided and additional tips on how to reduce plastic waste shared.

Residents will be encouraged to engage with the campaign by sharing their hints and tips on social media using the hashtag #PlasticSolution.

4.11 The campaign will be delivered across various medium:

- **Print** - a square six-page z-fold leaflet, containing all the images and campaign messages in one place. This will be made available to residents in council reception areas, libraries, leisure centres etc.
- **Out of Home (OOH) advertising** - street side adverts sharing one of the campaign key messages at a time. The SLWP boroughs have access to preferential rates on many JCDecaux print and digital advertising boards across the region. We would also like to explore bus and tram advertising if budgets allow.

- **Digital** - a targeted social media advertising campaign; ads could either share standalone messages (reflecting the OOH campaign) or in a series such as a carousel format on Instagram. We would also like to explore targeted TV advertising (Sky AdSmart) if budgets allow.

- 4.13 Facility tours – In June 2023, Veolia ran the first in a series of tours of their materials recycling facility (MRF) in Southwark, providing residents with the opportunity to see how their dry mixed recycling is sorted. The dates for these tours are published on the SLWP website (www.slwp.org.uk/visit). The June tour was attended by 13 residents.
- 4.14 The next MRF tour will take place on 28 September, and is fully booked. Further tours are scheduled for December and March 2024.
- 4.15 Schools engagement – in June, Veolia launched the latest round of their Veolia Orchard project. This enables local schools to apply for a free supply of fruit trees (or if space is tight, strawberry plants). In 2022, 65 free fruit trees were delivered to 13 schools across the four SLWP boroughs.
- 4.16 Schools had until 24 July 2023 to submit their applications. The SLWP published a press release on its website (www.slwp.org.uk/latest-news). A total of 43 applications were received and trees/strawberry plants will be delivered to 16 schools in the autumn.
- 4.17 June also saw Veolia send their first schools e-newsletter to primary and junior schools across the SLWP region. The newsletter featured stories on how schools can sign up for a Recycling Rockstars school assembly, how to apply for a Veolia Orchard and how to submit applications for the Veolia Sustainability Fund.
- 4.18 The newsletter was very well received with 12 schools immediately booking in a Recycling Rockstars assembly. These will be delivered during the autumn term. The Veolia team was also invited by Holy Trinity C of E School in Merton to help celebrate their eco day. The event was attended by 120 students.
- 4.19 The second schools newsletter will be distributed in September and will focus on how schools can get involved in the SLWP borough's plans for Recycle Week (16-20 October)

5. Legal impacts and implications

- 5.1 None

6. Communications

- 6.1 This report has been drafted by the Partnership's Communications Advisor, who works closely with the four SLWP boroughs and the

partnership's commercial partners to ensure communications and engagements activities support the themes agreed in the SLWP Communications Strategy 2023/24-2024/25.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report and comment on any aspects of communications and engagement activities relating to the residual waste treatment services; Household Reuse and Recycling Centre (HRRC) services; food and green waste treatment services; and marketing of recyclates.