

## **SOUTH LONDON WASTE PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER 2020**

**6:30 – 21:10**

### **London Borough of Croydon**

Councillor Nina Degradis – Deputy Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon

Councillor Muhammad Ali – Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon

### **Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames**

Councillor Hillary Gander - Portfolio Holder for Environment & Sustainable Transport

Councillor Tim Cobbett – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Communities and Engagement

### **London Borough of Merton**

Councillor Natasha Irons - Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Councillor Tobin Byers – Cabinet Member for Finance

### **London Borough of Sutton**

Councillor Manuel Abellan - Chair of the Environment & Neighbourhood Committee

\*Councillor Ben Andrew – Vice-Chair of the Environment & Neighbourhood Committee\*

\* Absent

Councillor Hanna Zuchowska, London Borough of Sutton, attended as substitute.

Councillor Nick Matthey, London Borough of Sutton, also attended.

#### **1. Apologies for absence and attendance of substitute members**

Councillor Andrew sent his apologies and Councillor Hanna Zuchowska attend as his substitute.

#### **2. Minutes**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 September 2020 be confirmed and approved as the correct record.

**Voting:** Unanimous

#### **3. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **4. Contract Management Report A and B Q2**

**Appendix 1**

The Interim Strategic Partnership Manager presented the update report. There were no issues to report with Contract 1 (Waste transfer station bulking and haulage, operated by Viridor Waste Management Ltd.).

An update was provided for Contract 2 (Management of the Household Reuse and Recycling Centres, operated by Veolia). It was highlighted that the HRRC sites received 47% less green waste than would normally be expected by this point in the year. This was due to the sites being closed during April and May following government guidance to help slow the spread of coronavirus.

There were no performance issues to note in regards to food and garden waste within the Contract 3 services (Materials Recycling Services, Composting, and additional treatment services carried out by Viridor Waste Management Ltd.).

An update was provided on the Phase B Residual Waste treatment Contract, operated by Viridor South London Ltd. The Partnership delivered just over 108,000 tonnes of residual waste to the Beddington plant from 1 April 2020 - 30 September 2020, an increase of 7% for the same period last year. During Q1 and Q2 Viridor treated 100% of residual waste with none being sent to landfill in the face of unprecedented challenges arising this year. 4 exceedances of the VOC half-hourly average Emissions Limit Value (ELV) were reported during the April 2020 - September 2020 period, with Viridor attributing these to the variable nature of municipal waste.

It was noted that Viridor are forecasting an exceedance of the Environment Agency's Permit for the Beddington ERF which allows Viridor to treat 302,500 tonnes of waste per annum. This is attributed to the lack of the scheduled maintenance downtime that was due to take place in spring this year which is a similar issue faced by ERF sites across the country due to the coronavirus pandemic and a restriction on travel. Viridor consequently made an application to the EA for a dispensation, allowing a 15% increase to the amount of waste they are allowed to process in 2020. The Interim Strategic Partnership Manager updated the meeting that according to Viridor it was the EA who then advised Viridor to submit a formal permit variation requesting to permanently increase the maximum amount of waste that can be processed in a calendar year as opposed to applying for a one-year dispensation.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the Environmental Permit increase. In response to why Viridor were due to exceed their current permit limit, it was suggested to be likely in part due to the 7% increase in waste produced by Partner boroughs, as well as the issue that Viridor were unable to carry out maintenance due to Covid as specialist engineers were unable to travel to the UK due to travel restrictions. It is assumed that the EA decision to request that Viridor apply for a permanent dispensation to increase the permitted waste processed was in order to afford more flexibility in the future if further adjustments were deemed necessary. It was also noted that the SLWP could not speak on behalf of the Environment Agency.

The Committee wished to note some concerns about the proposed permanent permit variation and sought further discussions with the Environment Agency to seek reassurances on, as well as question, the change in the ERF's operations and the expected emissions that could arise from this request. It was noted that Members of the Committee had written to the Environment Agency seeking reassurances about how the issues of emissions and vehicle movements would be considered when determining the permit variation application. Given the concerns raised at the meeting, Members requested that officers set up a meeting with

Environment Agency representatives to discuss these issues with them directly. The Committee also reiterated their request that Viridor be in attendance at future SLWP Committee meetings in order to directly answer questions from members and local residents.

In response to queries on the effect of the Covid lockdown tiers on the SLWP's waste management efficacy and the HRRCs, it was reiterated that there are no plans to fully close the HRRC sites again.

Councillor Nick Matthey from Sutton Council was permitted by the Chair and Committee members to attend the meeting, make a short statement and ask a question. Councillor Matthey raised concerns with the levels of Nitrous Oxide currently being emitted by the Beddington ERF and the likelihood of these increasing as a result of the EA's permit to allow the site to process up to 15% more waste.

The Interim Strategic Partnership Manager explained that the emissions levels limits are set by the Environmental Agency at a sufficiently safe level so that there is no negative impact to the local community and surrounding environment. Furthermore, the EA are responsible for regulating Viridor to ensure that they operate within those boundaries, on the occasions these levels are breached the EA are able to issue CCS scores that have both a financial and reputational impact and they have done so at the Beddington ERF. It was stressed that although the EA are proposing to allow an increase in capacity to process waste, it is not increasing the limits of permitted emissions.

Councillor Matthey also sought clarification on the apparent conflict between the 4 borough councils' aims to become carbon neutral alongside the use of a residual waste incinerator. The Interim Strategic Partnership Manager stressed the importance of reducing Carbon emissions as a global aim and not necessarily just localised to the South London area and that the carbon impact is not allocated to the treatment facility but instead to the waste producer. It was emphasised that the SLWP essentially has a choice of either landfilling waste, exporting to ERF sites elsewhere in the UK or Europe or treating waste through the Beddington ERF, which is judged to be a clean, safe and proximate solution. Continued emphasis will be placed on making sure that the amount of household waste produced is reduced and therefore reducing the need for it to go to the Beddington ERF site.

The Committee received several questions from members of the public which are outlined, alongside the Committee's responses, in **Annex 1**.

**RESOLVED:** To note the contents of the report.

**Voting:** Unanimous

## 5. Partnership Budget Update - Month 6

## Appendix 2

The head of Finance Operations and Resident Support provided an update on the SLWP's budget outturn position for month 6 (September). There is a forecasted £17,600 underspend with the major variances being the expected acceptance of the

SLWP staff resource review causing a £205,000 underspend and the Internal and External Advisors budget causing a £194,000 underspend.

The Committee did seek clarification on when the expected staffing structure will be achieved after the ongoing reviews have concluded and what the expected benefits will be from it. The head of Finance Operations and Resident Support explained that the Director role will be in place by the end of March 2021 which will then enable the recruitment of the final outstanding positions. It was explained that the new staffing structure would benefit from a more centralised knowledge base and a more holistic team approach rather than a divided structure by individual services.

**RESOLVED:** To note the contents of the report.

**Voting:** Unanimous

## 6. Partnership Budget 2021/22

Appendix 3

The head of Finance Operations and Resident Support presented the proposed Partnership draft forecast for the 2021/22 financial year. The proposed budget, if approved, delivers a saving of £28,290 (£7,073 per borough).

**RESOLVED:** To agree the proposed budget for the core activities of the Partnership.

**Voting:** Unanimous

## 7. Communications Update

Appendix 4

The Communications Advisor for the SLWP provided an update on communications and stakeholder engagement activities. The work surrounding the 'Recycle Week' initiative in September 2020 was reported to the Committee. A targeted social media advertising campaign was run using both the Partnership's own funds as well as from the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB) matched funding package. The campaign was judged to be particularly successful due to its return on investment, with an estimated cost of 1p per person 'reached' on social media. The London Repair Week 2020 used the Partnership's Borough's own organic social media content for promotion at no external cost to the respective Councils. Various communications campaigns surrounding the HRRC sites have been judged to be successful.

The Committee sought more in-depth information on the demographics and location of the people that were reached by the SLWP's social media campaign. The Communications Advisor explained that they are able to provide a further breakdown of the key data from the social media campaign and clarified that the 16-34 year old age group usually respond best to campaigns such as this one. Although, it was emphasised that the return of investment in terms of overall 'reach' is likely to diminish the more demographic/location-based targeting the advertisements are. The wider awareness campaigns required a similarly wide and generic approach.

The Communications Advisor explained that a Communications plan for 2021 was underway with Veolia to ensure that local residents were aware that the HRRC sites

were back open again and Covid-secure as well as various campaigns with the aim of reducing waste and improving recycling rates within the four boroughs.

**RESOLVED:** To note the contents of the report.

**Voting:** Unanimous

**8. Risk Report Q2**

**Appendix 5**

The Interim Strategic Partnership Manager presented the report and updated the Committee on the primary risks facing the Partnership. The risks associated with the impact of Covid was brought forward to this report as well as with the consequential 7% increase in kerbside residual waste. Similarly to what was reported at the previous meeting the ongoing risk associated with Brexit was carried forward, with the increasing likelihood of a 'No-deal Brexit'. Work is ongoing with contractors to ensure that contingency plans are in place. The Interim Strategic Partnership Manager does not anticipate any forms of Brexit will prohibit the ability for the Partnership to safely dispose of residual, food and green waste. Ongoing challenges remain with regards to strategizing and formulating responses to the impact of Covid on overall waste management.

**RESOLVED:** To note the contents of the report.

**Voting:** Unanimous

**9. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

**RESOLVED:** that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting temporarily on the basis that exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

**Voting:** Unanimous

**10. Contracts 1 and 3 Reprourement**

**Appendix 6**

**RESOLVED:** To note the progress to date on reprocurring elements of the Phase A Contracts 1 and 3 and endorse the sourcing strategy set out in paragraph 3 of this report.

**Voting:** Unanimous

**11. Urgent items authorised by the Chair**

There were no urgent items authorised by the Chair. The meeting finished at 21:10.

Signed.....Date.....  
Chair

Annex 1

Questions	Responses
<p><b>Stephen Hart</b></p> <p>Living with a global pandemic which affects the human respiratory system and having a home in the shadow of the incinerator makes for a challenging mix. This becomes more pronounced when the operator is unable to meet even the low standards set by the toothless EA. Viridor recently published its full November emissions, with yet another breach (SO<sub>2</sub>), so a total of three in November, in addition to previous months where they continually flout standards.</p> <p>What is the maximum number of breaches SLWP is happy to ignore before addressing the issue? They are building up every month. Further, when will any of the committee's Councillors stand up for their constituents and challenge their contractor to clean up their act? I am of the opinion that failure to meet legal emissions should result in a period of closure. Repeated violations should mean permanent closure. This would be an incentive for the operator and Councillors to ensure responsibility and safety for residents across London.</p>	<p>It is incorrect to describe the emissions limits set for the Beddington Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) by the Environment Agency as 'low'. They are incredibly strict. This is why, for example, the total emissions of dioxins from all energy from waste plants in the UK in 2017 was 10 times less than those from bonfire night. And it's why in 2017 domestic wood burning stoves produced 570 times more particulate emissions than all the UK's energy from waste plants combined.</p> <p>We are confident that the Beddington ERF is operating safely. Any exceedances of the permit limits must be reported to the Environment Agency (EA) by Viridor immediately. It is the EA who are responsible for regulating the facility and they would force it to suspend operations if they felt at any point it was not operating safely.</p> <p>In November 2020, there were two exceedances of the half hourly average for Sulphur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and one exceedance of the half hourly average for Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC). On all three occasions, the exceedances were momentary spikes: the issues were quickly identified and corrective action taken. This meant the daily average readings remained well within permit requirements.</p> <p>It is important to put these momentary 30-minute average exceedances into context. Between January and November 2020, the Beddington ERF has been 99.96% compliant in the case of VOCs and 99.99% compliant in the case of SO<sub>2</sub>. Of course the SLWP demands the highest standards from our commercial partners. We want the ERF to be 100% compliant, and that is why we have formally requested a Rectification Plan from Viridor.</p> <p>Any exceedance of the emissions limits is taken seriously by Viridor, the EA and SLWP. The EA can, and usually do, levy financial penalties in the form of Compliance Classification Scheme (CCS) scores, which provide Viridor with a clear financial incentive to ensure permit conditions are met.</p>

<p><b>Gina Mudge</b></p> <p>How many tonnes of Carbon Dioxide are emitted by the Beddington ERF (incinerator) each month into the atmosphere?</p> <p>How many megawatt hours of electricity are exported each month from the ERF (incinerator)?</p>	<p>Thanks to the Beddington ERF, 100% of the SLWP boroughs' residual household waste was diverted away from landfill. Treating waste in energy recovery facilities delivers significant carbon savings over landfill.</p> <p>The Beddington ERF emitted an estimated 135,898 tonnes of fossil-derived carbon emissions last year; it is variable because it depends on the composition of the waste being sent to the facility. This figure is apportioned to each of the four SLWP boroughs based on how much residual waste they sent to the ERF. In the case of Sutton, for example, their apportionment would be an estimated 18,075 tonnes.</p> <p>A Carbon Working Group has been established to explore what can be done to reduce the carbon impact of our waste treatment activities and contribute to the boroughs' ambitions of becoming carbon neutral. Residents have a really important role to play: they can help reduce the carbon impact of the ERF by reducing plastic waste and recycling as much of their unavoidable plastic waste as possible.</p> <p>The Beddington ERF produces 26MW of electricity each year – enough to power the facility itself plus 55,000 homes.</p>
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**Jim Duffy**

Can I ask what was Viridor's response to our request for an apology for the July 2019 fire?

Unfortunately the recent waste policy consultation, to which I contributed, was not discussed at the last Sutton full council meeting. I recommended that, in order to maximise recycling rates and reduce the incineration of some toxic waste materials, that kerbside waste collections be extended eg to electronics, batteries and metals. Does the committee agree this would help reduce toxin and carbon emissions? And perhaps reduce the risk of fire from batteries included in domestic waste? I also submitted that non-recyclable plastic should be landfilled instead of burnt. Plastic is inert and does not emit methane when landfilled, unlike organic matter. The plastic could be mined in the future when the technology exists to recycle the plastic. Does the committee agree this action would significantly reduce carbon dioxide, furan and dioxin emissions from the incinerator which burns about fifty percent plastic? I applaud Chair, Hilary Gander's statement in July that plastic shouldn't be incinerated.

If Viridor's request to forgo annual maintenance outages is permitted, can the committee say what effect this will have on air quality, eg if filters are not routinely replaced will clogging cause extra pollution emissions?

The issue of the fire at the Beddington Waste Transfer Station in July 2019 was discussed at great length at the July 2020 meeting of this committee. The minutes for that meeting can be found [here](#). Viridor has reiterated that the fire was an extremely regrettable and unfortunate incident.

Reducing the risk of waste transfer station fires is a top priority for the SLWP boroughs and Viridor. All our key collection service information materials make it clear to residents that electronic items and batteries should not be placed in general waste bins.

The collections contract we hold with Veolia is not in the remit of the SLWP Joint Committee, but it should be noted that:

Household batteries are already collected from the kerbside from most properties across the SLWP region, as is metal packaging such as tins, cans, aerosols and tin foil. Electronic items and larger metal items can be taken by residents for free to their local Household Reuse and Recycling Centre. We welcome the fact that from January 2021, large electronic retailers will be obliged to take back waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) in-store on an old-for-new basis. All four boroughs also offer a kerbside bulky waste collection service.

We are aware that the pros and cons of landfilling plastics is something that is being explored at a national policy level. For now, our view is that the priority should be reducing plastic waste rather than landfilling it, which feels like a backward step. The more plastic waste we can take out of the residual waste stream the better. It is by far the most effective way we can reduce the carbon impact of our waste treatment activities.

We need residents to help; by reducing their plastic waste and recycling or reusing as much of their unavoidable plastic waste as possible. We also need the government to help; by introducing legislation that incentivises manufacturers and retailers to reduce their reliance on plastic and that stimulates demand for recovered plastics amongst UK packaging manufacturers. This would allow us to collect and process a wider range of plastic materials. Residents of the SLWP region are reminded that they can already recycle plastic bottles, pots, tubs and trays using their recycling collection service.

Viridor is upgrading the ERF to enable it to operate within its permit limits with fewer planned outages. There will be no impact on air quality because the Environment Agency will continue to regulate the facility against its existing permit.

<p><b>Verity Thomson</b></p> <p>We're disappointed that Viridor is seeking a 15 percent increase in waste for incineration to 347,422 tonnes per year as it cannot perform its annual planned maintenance outage. This step is taking things in entirely the wrong direction regarding climate change. Can the committee please refuse this request?</p>	<p>This has been an extraordinary and challenging year: COVID-19 restrictions meant that Viridor's planned spring maintenance shutdown period for the Beddington ERF had to be deferred to 2021, resulting in more waste than forecast being processed.</p> <p>Having access to a secure, reliable and local waste treatment facility was a key factor in our ability to keep waste collection services running without significant disruption during the spring lockdown.</p> <p>The decision about whether or not to allow the application to vary the permit sits with the Environment Agency, not the SLWP boroughs. The Members of the SLWP Joint Committee have written to the EA seeking reassurances that issues around emissions and traffic movements will be carefully considered when determining the application.</p>
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<p><b>David Tchilingirian</b></p> <p>A proposal to levy an incineration tax is currently being considered as part of a government carbon tax bill. This would help local authorities take serious steps to make good their calls for a 'climate emergency'. Would the committee support a carbon tax on incineration to encourage a reduction in CO2 emissions and increase in recycling, if not why?</p>	<p>The government has stated that it would consider an 'incinerator tax' in the future if long-term waste ambitions to maximise the amount of waste sent for recycling are not met. The SLWP boroughs are proof that sending waste for energy recovery does not need to hamper efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle. The SLWP average recycling rate has increased by 7 percentage points over the last three years, one of the highest in the country.</p> <p>The SLWP boroughs believe the government should be prioritising legislation that helps reduce the volume of residual waste councils collect from households, rather than penalising the safest, most environmentally-sustainable option available to those councils for dealing with that waste.</p>
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