

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE

1000 hours on 10th January 2019, Committee Room 6 – Actions

Present:

Councillor Liz Clements (Chair)

Councillors David Barrie, Zaker Choudhry, Kath Hartley, Josh Jones, Chaman Lal, and Hendrina Quinnen.

Also Present:

Councillor Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Waste & Recycling

Sally Wilson, Local Authority Manager, WRAP

Toby Terlet, General Manager, Veolia

Laura Harris, Communications Manager, Veolia

Martin Curtois, Deputy Director of Public Affairs, Veolia

Nigel Price, Four Ashes MRF Manager, Veolia

Philip Singleton, Project Manager, Colmore Business Improvement District

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

Rose Kiely, Overview & Scrutiny Manager

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Councillor Timothy Huxtable.

An apology for lateness was submitted on behalf of Cllr Josh Jones.

An apology was submitted on behalf of Diane Mansell, Soho Business Improvement District (BID) for being unable to attend the meeting today.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Cllr Lal declared a non-pecuniary interest as the Councillor appointed as a member of the Soho Road Business District Improvement Board.

4. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S ACTION NOTES

The action notes of 13th December 2018 were noted.

5. PLASTIC FREE BIRMINGHAM INQUIRY

(see document pack)

The Chair, Cllr Liz Clements welcomed attendees and outlined the background and purpose of the Inquiry and invited speakers to talk to the Committee as set out in the agenda about the work that they are involved in in supporting the city to become 'plastic free' specifically reducing single use plastics. Attendees were encouraged to take part in and add to the discussion with Members.

Cllr Majid Mahmood, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Waste and Recycling spoke to the Committee about the City Councils vision and ambition on plastics and made the following points:

- Plastic cups have been removed from council buildings and cafes since the motion to City Council in September. The café at Woodcock Street now penalises consumers using single use plastic cups. This is to help consumers change their behaviour and mind-set when purchasing goods and services.
- The City Council has worked with local organisations involved in the Vasaikhi Mela in Handsworth that was supported by the Soho Business Improvement District. The Mela is held annually and in 2018 it was a plastic free event and was supported by the City Council.
- Conversations have also been held with the organisers of the Frankfurt Christmas market about the possibility for the 2019 event to be plastic free.
- The City Council should aim to support and encourage event organisers across the city to hold plastic free events. Furthermore it could be made as a condition of the events licence and the Committee should investigate this further with the City Council's Licensing section.
- As part of the motion to City Council an investigation into the provision of water fountains was agreed. Cllr Mahmood spoke about how this could work in practice (for example with some Muslim charities that had shown an interest) and the City Council could further investigate this alongside other opportunities including working with young people in schools. There is also the option of exploring 'refill' stations as part of working with retailers in the city and this could be pursued further with Business Improvement Districts.
- Small retailers are crucial in getting the city to reduce its plastic waste and need to be on side and work alongside the City Council.

- The Inquiry should invite representative(s) of a trade body for small retailers (for example The Chamber of Commerce and the Asian Chamber of Commerce) to see how the City Council can help support them to reduce plastic waste. Currently small retailers don't have to charge for plastic bags however the City Council should look at how it can support these retailers to eliminate the use of plastic carrier bags.
- Walkers Crisps as part of their commitment to taking more responsibility of plastic in their packaging are introducing collection points across the country. It is hoped that one of these collection points could be based in Birmingham and the Cabinet Member has written to the Chief Executive of Walkers Crisps to request this and is awaiting feedback. It was felt that such initiatives would not only help recycling rates it would also reduce this packaging entering the main waste stream.
- This Inquiry could invite representatives such as the Commonwealth Games Local Organising Committee to ensure that sustainable use of materials and recycling are a key feature of the Games. Cllr Waseem Zaffar, who holds the portfolio for sustainability could also be invited to share with the Committee initiatives that the Council is involved in promoting. Cllr Kate Booth, Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing could provide a response on what schools could do in respect of working with the provider(s) of free school meals to introduce plastic free initiatives.
- All Councillors as community leaders could work with residents, families, businesses and other partners to promote the use of reducing plastic in their local areas. This could be done for instance by a 'plastic free' challenge month.
- The Councils refuse service has in place Waste Reduction collection officers and their role is to tackle contaminated waste and speak to residents directly or with the Waste Prevention team to prevent contamination of recycling. Officers have been in post since Sept 17th and have phones to collect data. Their role includes helping with assisted collections and looking at red card properties (those that aren't presenting bins on time for collection). Data is collected on a weekly basis and is passed to the waste prevention team.
- In response to a query on the level of recycling in Birmingham and how this can be changed it was confirmed that the city is towards the bottom of the league table of local authorities with a rate of 26.8% in 2016. Currently the waste collected is made of 36% of food waste, 11-12% plastics and paper and card make up 15%. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the recycling levels differ across the city with parts of the inner city only recycling 20% whilst in other areas it is 44%. This is a challenge as more residual waste means an increase in cost to the city in disposal to landfill. Therefore there is a need to work with and involve residents more to change this.
- There is a strategic plan to drive up recycling. Waste Prevention officers are in place to drive up levels of recycling. The City Council has a Waste Prevention Plan and is working with Veolia on a new disposal plan to increase recycling across the city that will enable the City Council to work with partners and stakeholders. Help is also being received from WRAP to increase recycling.

- Cllr Clements highlighted the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority Behavioural Change and Communication Strategy 2017-2022 that was focussed on how the authority can work with residents better to achieve change. It was noted that Birmingham has a lot of progress to make by the evidence that it took Greater Manchester 10 years to increase its recycling levels from 27% to 44% between 2007 and 2017. However the city can learn from what works elsewhere and the Manchester example shows that it is possible to improve. It was noted in the City Council's Draft Waste Strategy the target to reach a recycling rate of 70% of waste and eliminating landfill by 2040.
- Cllr Mahmood confirmed that the Council is operating in a difficult financial environment. If food waste recycling for example is made compulsory in the future then the city would need the resources to support it as the costs are high (in the region of £6m for Birmingham and due to this does not feature in the waste disposal contract or strategy). Currently 1/3 of waste collected is food (36%). There would also be confusion amongst residents as in some neighbouring authorities they do collect food waste and therefore the city would need to invest in stronger communication and engagement activities to get people on board.

Sally Wilson, Local Authority Manager, WRAP explained the work of WRAP in working with Local Authorities to try and improve existing recycling services and looking at business cases for introducing new recycling services e.g. food waste collection and improvement to household recycling services. In Birmingham WRAP are:-

- Working with the City Council alongside the contract already in place with Ricardo (a waste and environmental consultancy) and is benchmarking Birmingham alongside similar authorities geographically, demographically and of similar size. The aim is to see where improvements can be made in line with financial and political restrictions and the steer given by the new national waste strategy (DEFRA) that will help with setting targets for the city to work to going forward.
- It has been identified that household recycling centres (HRCs) need improvements on some sites and work is being undertaken on this with the City Council.
- Putting together an enforcement policy going forward to tackle kerbside contamination of dry recycle as this is quite high.
- In response to why contamination levels are high it was confirmed that communication is a key issue that the City Council could do more of and better however it does need financing. WRAP can help with this through their resources such as the 'recycle now' campaign.
- Members agreed that a regular and consistent residual waste collection service is needed and that it will be this that acts as a key driver for change in improving recycling rates. The Chair commented on the obvious impact of the industrial action on this currently however the purpose of this Inquiry was to help set a strategy in place to drive up recycling rates and this is primarily due

to a need to change behaviours and provide residents with regular and consistent information.

- WRAP have used Ricardo (who have worked in Birmingham previously) to detail the services that Birmingham currently provides and compare with other local authorities who provide similar services. A benchmarking exercise has been completed looking at details such as population levels, how built up an area is and ethnic diversity. The results show that Birmingham doesn't perform well against comparator authorities such as Solihull, Wolverhampton, London, Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle.

Martin Curtois, Veolia explained work on reducing plastic waste on a national level. He explained that:

- WRAP are part of a plastics pact looking across the supply chain to see how improvements can be made in the prevention of plastic waste and sustainability.
- WRAP have set the following targets through the plastics pact:
 - 100% of plastic packaging should be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025;
 - 70% of plastic packaging should be effectively recycled or composted by 2025;
 - 30% average recycled content across all plastic packaging by 2025; and
 - Actions to eliminate problematic or unnecessary single use packaging through re-design or innovation.
- Veolia has simplified its national strategy into a one page document known as the '7 wonders of plastic recycling' with the following key headlines:
 - The Government will be stipulating a greater recycled content in plastic bottles (minimum of 30% recycled content, currently bottles have about a 10% recyclable content) due to come into effect in April 2022. Veolia is supportive of this initiative and has a re-processing plant to enable them to undertake this.
 - The new national waste strategy states the intention for a consultation on a deposit return scheme to increase the number of plastic bottles being recycled (at the moment in the UK 59% bottles are collected for recycling). The City Council could consider this as part of its strategy to increase recycling and reduce plastic waste.
 - Labelling on products needs to be made clearer to make it instantly obvious if a plastic product is recyclable or not. The Government needs to address this issue.
 - In order to increase recycling levels and help people to understand what happens to the item they are recycling it needs to be made clear what the end product and market is of that item. All recyclables are only valuable if there is an end market and they can be put into

something new therefore making items more sustainable. Products made with fewer composites are easier to recycle.

- Veolia supports a domestic recycling infrastructure in the UK enabling a more circular economy.

In response to the Chair's question on what happens to 'refuse on the go' for example in the City Centre, Philip Singleton, Colmore BID explained the role of the Colmore BID and made the following points:

- There are over 550 businesses that employ approximately 35,000 people in the BID area.
- A discounted rate (negotiated with all the BIDS across the city) to undertake mixed recycling service via a partnership with First Mile is offered to all businesses in the BID area.
- The Colmore BID Food Festival is an annual 2-day event in July each year attended by approximately 30,000 people and is now a zero waste to landfill project. Since 2018, no single-use plastic straws are used in drinks at the Festival.
- There is an ambition to review the event each year in terms of practice to reduce the environmental impact.
- In future the BID will seek to lead by example acting with a greater degree of awareness of inputs and outputs - in terms of materials that are used and thus procured and the manner in which they are disposed of, reused or recycled.
- Communication is one of the key elements to the BIDs success and the aim is to provide consistent and clear information to the levy payers across the District.
- The BID draws in best practice from elsewhere, but often seeks to craft exemplar projects which create impact via its communication channels. This impact is attuned to the District as a place and with its businesses and the people within those businesses. Thus the BID is in a position to provide clear, up to date advice on recycling.
- The BID encourages the City Council and its partners to provide strong policy and practice that all BIDs can convey to their members.
- Currently Colmore BID is looking to work with the 'Refill' project to tackle the challenge of single use water bottles by inviting the food and beverage points across the District to join this initiative.

Cllr Clements highlighted the issue of procurement in Council processes to reduce or eliminate plastic waste. Concern was also raised about the types of packaging that manufacturers use and what alternatives can be sourced. Exemplar projects such as the Soho BID working with food suppliers to reduce plastic waste was noted and the need to share learning from best practice elsewhere in relation to food festivals. Other good practice working with partners on sustainable issues such transport bodies to ensure that people travel in a 'clean' way was also highlighted.

The issue of separate bins for recycling on the street was raised and it was confirmed that contamination levels are very high as it is very difficult to control what goes into the bins. It also varies hugely across the country. The financial cost (of putting the bins in) and educating the public versus the material quality that comes out need to be weighed up and considered carefully. An example of a project promoting 'recycling on the go' by Leeds City Council in partnership with Hubbub was given. The project known as 'Leeds by Example' has a number of initiatives helping people to recycle their plastic waste outside of their homes. 30 bins have been placed in the City Centre to dispose of plastic waste and coffee cups separately. Alongside this there are machines in place to get money back on the plastics recycled. There is also a phone application to scan bottles and cans to help users identify where they can be recycled and the nearest bin to put them in. Monitoring so far has shown that the project is working well with 73% of deposits being good plastic bottles that can be recycled. It was noted that these projects are difficult to run because of the expense incurred and the quality of the material output.

Another project mentioned was the 12 month innovative pilot in London (Villier St) introduced to reduce littering and improve recycling. This included bins that speak to the user for example by saying 'thank you'. The City Council could consider this or learn from the research and it was stated by Cllr Mahmood that a deposit scheme would help to increase recycling rates and that work to identify complete recycler wards has been undertaken with WRAP. Those wards that have poorer recycling rates have also been identified and more targeted work with residents and community groups is needed to help increase recycling levels. There is also an opportunity to work with the Council's Procurement section through the Birmingham Charter for Social responsibility.

A key issue raised was the need to look at how the Council communicates with residents. The Council needs to make it easier for residents to recycle and make clear what can and can't be recycled in a regular and consistent way. Members acknowledged that many issues contribute to the poor recycling levels including a transient population for example students and those living in HMO's (Homes of Multiple Occupation) because of the high turnover of people, some of which may only be in a property on a short-term tenancy (i.e. 6 months) and residents in tower blocks. Another challenge are those who are new to the city/country meaning practices can be different with what can or can't be recycled elsewhere. Issues with language and cultural differences were also noted as a barrier to communication. Therefore it was imperative to engage and educate residents on the process of recycling as well as the separation of waste. This includes using leaflets backed up with other methods including social media and elected members to re-iterate the message. Hard to reach communities also need to be targeted and one way could be through engaging with faith groups. The Council could also work with partners such as housing associations for those tenants living in private properties

The issue of large recycling units on the public highway was raised and Cllr Mahmood confirmed that they were removed due to issues with fly-tipping and cross contamination that were proving problematic. There is a possibility to investigate further working with businesses to house these units.

In terms of changing behaviour and raising recycling rates it was suggested that working with children and young people in schools could lead to children helping to change their parents behaviour especially where language is a barrier and therefore being the catalyst for change.

Toby Terlet confirmed that Veolia worked closely with the Council on an educational programme in 2018. The programme saw 4 open days at an educational centre with 150 people attending and over 1,000 flyers handed out. Attendees were shown a video of the facilities and what happens with their recyclates including the circular economy of a milk carton. Feedback received showed that no one really knew what happened to their recycling once they had put it in the bin. It was planned to roll out this out at HRCs and use for other initiatives. It was further noted that 1.7m vehicles use the HRCs so they are a good place to engage with people and look at where improvements can be made in communicating with people.

Members felt it would be helpful to hold sessions in the community and engage with people in their locality and at times of the day when they might not have other commitments such as work.

In response to how recycling rates are affected Sally Wilson stated that a lot of local authorities do not collect pots, tubs and trays as they do not have the Material Recycling Facility (MURF) to do so. It was noted that collecting of particular recyclates does depend on having an end market to make it feasible. However the Government will look to standardise this to help local authorities meet set targets for recycling and consultation will take place as part of a future strategy. It is further anticipated that a deposit return scheme (DRS) will come to fruition in the next 2-3 years and consultation nationally on this is expected in the next 6 months.

Standardisation is very important as it sets out how the city engages with residents. Communication is also key and the Council is looking into how Veolia can help with this especially if they are involved with flagship schemes elsewhere that could be replicated in Birmingham.

Nigel Price, Manager of the Four Ashes MURF confirmed that a separate plastic fraction is in place for plastics received from Veolia. These plastics are separated further at another site to 9 different recyclates and a decision is made on what and how they are next used. Nothing from Birmingham is taken out of the country for disposal purposes.

An example of container and deposit legislation brought in over 30 years ago in South Australia was given. The benefit of the legislation has helped not only clean the streets of waste but has also created a micro economy whereby people can get an income by collecting and depositing recycling. It was emphasised that by giving something a value it encouraged people to act on it and this was key to getting people to change their behaviour. Also the charge placed on plastic carrier bags by the Government needs to demonstrate that the money being generated is being used in further development, research and education. There is a need to show the bigger picture to people and the circular economy effect. Getting people's attention needs to be backed up with information on how they can contribute and make a difference locally and how they will benefit from that.

Consultation and feedback from research undertaken by WRAP shows that a leaflet is the best way in which people want to be informed. A simple reference point of information showing when collection days are, what can be recycled and what container to put it in is the most simplest and effective message. The message has to be delivered regularly and consistently (and tailored for specific needs or communities such as the right language).

WRAP has a suite of these materials and it was confirmed that these can be used as a free resource and tailored to the local authority as needed. The cost is in delivering the resource to the household. It was emphasised that services have to be good and effective for people to use them. Research shows that people will then engage if the kerbside waste collection service is good and reliable.

In terms of getting partners/stakeholders and others involved it was raised that further investigation should be made about the possibility of putting a condition in landlord licences that they should take responsibility on behalf of tenants for waste disposal to help stop contamination. This could be aided by the work of the Waste Prevention team and the literature from Veolia used in schools.

Furthermore there is an opportunity to create capacity of space in the design of buildings/offices/individual housing to ensure that recycling is catered for. If a policy is in place then design standards can be used to build in the capacity for example to ensure that waste vehicles can get in. This could be checked further with the Council's Planning department and agreed through the statutory Planning Committee. In terms of using sustainable materials a specification on materials at the procurement stage for house building and sourcing of recycled materials could be stipulated creating a circular economy.

RESOLVED:-

The Chair, Cllr Clements thanked the attendees for their input and time and gave notification of the second session in February.

6. SUSTAINABILITY & TRANSPORT O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

Reminder on visit to TfWM – get back to Scrutiny Officer.

7. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted.

8. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS (IF ANY)

None.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

10. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

Agreed.

RESOLVED:-

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 12:05 hours.