

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 6 June 2023**

Present:- Councillors Wyatt (Chair), Atkin, Aveyard, C Carter, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Khan, McNeely, Reynolds, Taylor and Tinsley, and co-optees representing Rotherfed, Ms. K. Bacon and Ms. M. Jacques

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

74. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 9 MAY 2023

Resolved:-

- 1) That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 May 2023 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

76. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

77. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there was no reason to exclude members of the press or public from observing the discussion of any items on the agenda.

78. ENVIRONMENT ACT 2021 UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Assistant Director Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Environmental Services in respect of the Council's response to changes pursuant to the Environment Act 2021. The Environment Act 2021 (the Act) strengthened the vision of the Environment Act 1995 and set new legally binding environmental targets. These targets would be monitored and enforced by a newly appointed independent body, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP). Several policies, plans and strategies were in place to ensure these targets would be met. Implementations of the requirements of the Act could result in increased costs to the Council due to increased reporting requirements, increased collection costs, increased disposal costs and increased resource requirements. There were also income streams that could be accessed for complying with the requirements, but to ensure the maximum payment, the Service needed to be efficient and

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effective. To ensure that material was managed in compliance with the law, the consultations indicated there would be more emphasis on competent persons and good quality data. This would require ongoing staff training and better data capture systems. Efficient and effective management of waste would contribute to the Council's Carbon Neutral by 2030 target.

In discussion, Members expressed support for a deposit return scheme and requested to know whether the Service were on target to implement such a scheme by the October 2025 target. The response from the Assistant Director affirmed this was in the hands of Central Government. Officers observed that the original target had been 2024, and the response to the formal consultation undertaken in 2021 had yet to be seen, which raised doubts with regard to timescales.

Further clarification was requested around the potential for technological innovation. The response from officers noted the opportunity for reduction in single use items such as coffee cups which could instead be made of fully recyclable materials or materials that could have recyclable use. The deposit scheme focussed on plastic return schemes and cans, with extended producer responsibility regarding packaging.

Members requested more information around the consideration that had been given to pictorial guidance on recycling and waste receptacles. The response from officers noted that pictures offer a quicker reference, but sometimes not with the level of nuance required, for example, in the range of types of plastics. The waste calendar did utilise pictures.

Members noted the very challenging position of Waste Services all over the country where preparation for the future had to be undertaken without the benefit of full information or timelines. In view of this, Members sought clarification of when Rotherham will know if the exemption sought would be granted and the level of risk that the existing contract could become unviable if the exemption were not granted. The response from officers noted that the exemption is included in the Service's risk register, as it is the most significant risk in the short term. DEFRA was supportive of the exemption. The timeline previously posited for ministerial signoff had been during the springtime. Receiving the exemption would mean Rotherham, along with other authorities seeking a similar exemption, would receive specific mention in the legislation that would be laid before Parliament.

The current waste contract had a further seventeen years' lifespan, with the option for a further five-year extension. However, if the Council alter the collection arrangements, this will require entering negotiation. The figure of the disposal costs associated with the Private Finance Initiative was £8 million per year.

The chair emphasised the environmental as well as financial disadvantage that would come about if the contract were to cease. Members sought clarification of costs to the Council in the event that

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release from the contract were sought if the risk materialised. Officers noted the hypothetical cost in that circumstance would be in the tens of millions. There would then be significant further costs in terms of infrastructure needs.

In view of the risk, Members sought additional assurances that the Council was working collaboratively with other local authorities to bring about the exemption. Officers described the activity of the jointly funded Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham (BDR) Joint Waste Partnership and Board that spearheads the engagement with Government. Rotherham's Cllr Beck had fulfilled a stint this year as Chair on behalf of all three local authorities to lobby Central Government for the needed changes.

Members requested further details of the actions taken by the Council to work efficiently and effectively. The response from officers noted the significant growth in this area and the need to optimise carbon impact and fuel efficiency. Clarity around recycling rates was also an area of importance. Rotherham was one of the best in the region in terms of recycling rates. Fleet replacement had been a further area of work in pursuit of more environmentally friendly ways to run bin wagons. Collection methods, optimisation, and recycling were key. There was a need to be flexible regarding methods and also realistic regarding wider participation.

Members sought more information regarding the potential impact of deposit schemes on recycling. The response from officers noted that currently, the rules would not allow the Council to claim the deposit return for fly tipped or littered items. It was also noted that recycling rates are higher where there are food waste collections. This introduces challenges around how Rotherham keeps the public informed of progress in respect of the recycling agenda. The Service monitored conversations between Government and Scotland regarding the faster implementation than in the rest of the UK. Scotland had also requested to include glass. Scotland had received clearance to bring implementation online ahead of the UK, but Scotland had not been allowed to include glass. It was noted that regarding milk, some communities were returning to the ways milk had formerly been marketed.

Members noted the need for high organic matter content to aid the anaerobic process. Officers confirmed that anaerobic treatment requires the food waste. Because of the way the processing and treatment facility was set up with multiple funding streams, changes in the factors that influence the financial streams can jeopardise these streams. Renewi was regarded as very innovative. There was a need to fully appreciate operational benefits as well as what delivers the best results in terms of environmental impacts.

Members requested more information from the Service about the future of polystyrene use and the collection and processing of mattresses, specifically. The response from officers affirmed that polystyrene in

takeaways should be discouraged. It was felt that the likelihood was high that the scheme would promote seeking out more environmentally friendly solutions to packaging. Mattresses were collected by bulky waste services, and they were incinerated. They could not go to Renewi because the springs jeopardise the mechanical phase of the processing which involves machinery.

Members sought to know whether the Service communicate to residents the local savings achieved by recycling. The response from officers confirmed that Rotherham's recycling rate was comparable to similar authorities who handle waste in similar ways. The service consistently sought opportunities to widen engagement with the public to communicate the benefits of recycling.

Members sought additional information regarding producer responsibility under the Act. The response from officers noted that the scheme administrator was Central Government. The right level of information was not yet available, although it was felt that the Government would not put local authorities in a position of financial harm.

Members sought further clarification around the financial implications around collection of refuse on behalf of people. The response from officers clarified that it was a separate service that collects fly tipped refuse. This service would not receive money. These considerations would likely be reflected in what producers would pay.

The Chair affirmed the desire Members expressed at the recent Scrutiny Strategy Day to consider how household waste recycling centres might divert reusable things locally through a designated facility where local people could source reusable items. The response from officer noted much potential at this time to work on projects like this.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the risk manager consider moving the departmental risk, associated with the exemption to the requirement of separate food waste collection, to a corporate risk based the potential financial impact.
- 2) That the significant changes proposed through the Environment Act, ongoing uncertainties, and the business operations of community recycling be noted.
- 3) That the next update on implementation of the Council's duties under the Environment Act 2021 be received at an appropriate time.

79. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring a decision at the meeting.

80. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

- 1) That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 11 July 2023 commencing at 1.30 pm.