



Cheltenham Borough Council – Overview & Scrutiny Committee

26 February 2018

Waste & Recycling Performance Following Service Change

Scope

At its meeting on 30th October 2017, Cheltenham Borough Council's (CBC) Overview & Scrutiny Committee requested an update be provided on the initial results of the waste and recycling service redesign. At that time, the new service had only been recently launched and so having had the opportunity to review how the new scheme has been welcomed by residents, this briefing note sets out the performance achieved since the service launch date on 16th October 2017.

Background

CBC revised its previous waste and recycling collection service in 2011 which resulted in: refuse collections moving to a fortnightly frequency, food waste being collected separately on a weekly basis, a charge made to residents for the fortnightly collection of garden waste, and plastic bottles & kitchen card being added to the range of materials collected for recycling by way of a kerbside sort method on a fortnightly basis.

New recycling collection vehicles were purchased in 2010 to support this service change and these were at the end of their useable life in July 2017. This allowed the opportunity to make changes to the service through having to procure new vehicles.

The changes made in 2011 resulted in the authority achieving a 46% combined recycling, reuse and composting rate which was higher than the anticipated 42% (as modelled) and resulted in additional operational strain being put on the kerbside recycling service fleet and increased costs.

There were also a number of large scale property developments built during the 5 years (2011 – 2016) which increased the total property number and affected the efficiency of the collection services.

In addition, the then current type of recycling vehicle used for the kerbside sort recycling collections - 18 tonne Terberg – Kerbsiders, were no longer available, and so the procurement of an alternative type of recycling collection vehicle was required.

New Service Model

The Council was keen to improve its recycling rate, reduce the amount of residual waste to landfill and improve the recycling service with as a minimum enhancement - the addition of mixed plastics and heavy cardboard being collected from the kerbside. A project board was formed including key staff from CBC, Joint Waste Team (JWT) and Ubico. The Cabinet Lead was kept up-to-date of the project through monthly update meetings.

The JWT supported the Council in identifying potential recycling collection service options and Ubico was then tasked with undertaking modelling of these options to determine the likely cost and associated performance.

This modelling work was then independently reviewed by the Somerset Waste Partnership which has extensive related experience in service modelling. The assumptions made were supported and the final modelled recycling collection options were presented to CBC.

The Council carried out two consultations with residents to test the appetite for each of the recycling collection options. The consultation results together with the modelling were then presented to Cabinet and Full Council in separate reports with a recommendation by the Project Board to retain a kerbside sort method of recycling collection and add the collection of Mixed Plastics (pots, tubs & trays), OCC (brown coloured) cardboard, textiles & shoes, small waste electricals and household batteries.

The chosen option suggested a recycling, reuse and composting performance increase of 2% (46% rising to 48%), once the service had bedded in and the estimated best case additional cost of £146k per annum as detailed in Appendix A – Council Report on Waste & Recycling Service Redesign. The report also presented the anticipated worst case scenario of £305k and potential mitigations if the costs rose from the best case scenario. It should be noted that the worst case scenario was predicated on receiving less income in respect of recycle material value. The cost of collection was assumed to be the same in both cases presented to Council.

Service Launch

New recycling collection vehicles were procured along with new reusable blue coloured sacks for cardboard being provided to residents to help them sort their recycling materials.

Ubico used round scheduling software to create new collection rounds and information on day changes and the new service was then provided to residents.

The new service was launched on 16th October 2017.

Initial Performance

With such a service change it is common for there to be an initial spike in participation which results in a high level of recycling, this is largely due to the promotional campaign in preparation of the service launch and residents enthusiasm in using the new service. However, commonly this spike then begins to decrease over time as some people lose their enthusiasm and the participation and associated amount of material captured will decrease before plateauing, but this new level of performance will be higher than the starting position.

The spike in performance can last up to 6 months so at this point in time it is difficult to anticipate what the plateau level might be and therefore take meaningful decisions to permanently amend any part of the service.

The model anticipated residents sorting materials in 2 x recycling boxes (glass and paper in one, mixed plastics and tins/cans in the other) and cardboard being contained in a blue bag. Take up in requesting boxes for recycling was much higher than anticipated, resulting in 10,000 being delivered prior to commencement of the new service.

Currently, substantial amounts of recycle are being presented at the kerbside. Levels of pre-sorting and separating materials by residents prior to collection in the boxes varies significantly. Ubico have timed the sorting process with the new Romaquip vehicles. It is taking between 50-60 seconds longer to complete a collection when materials are unsorted (50-60 seconds when sorted compared with 1min 40 seconds - 2 mins when unsorted).

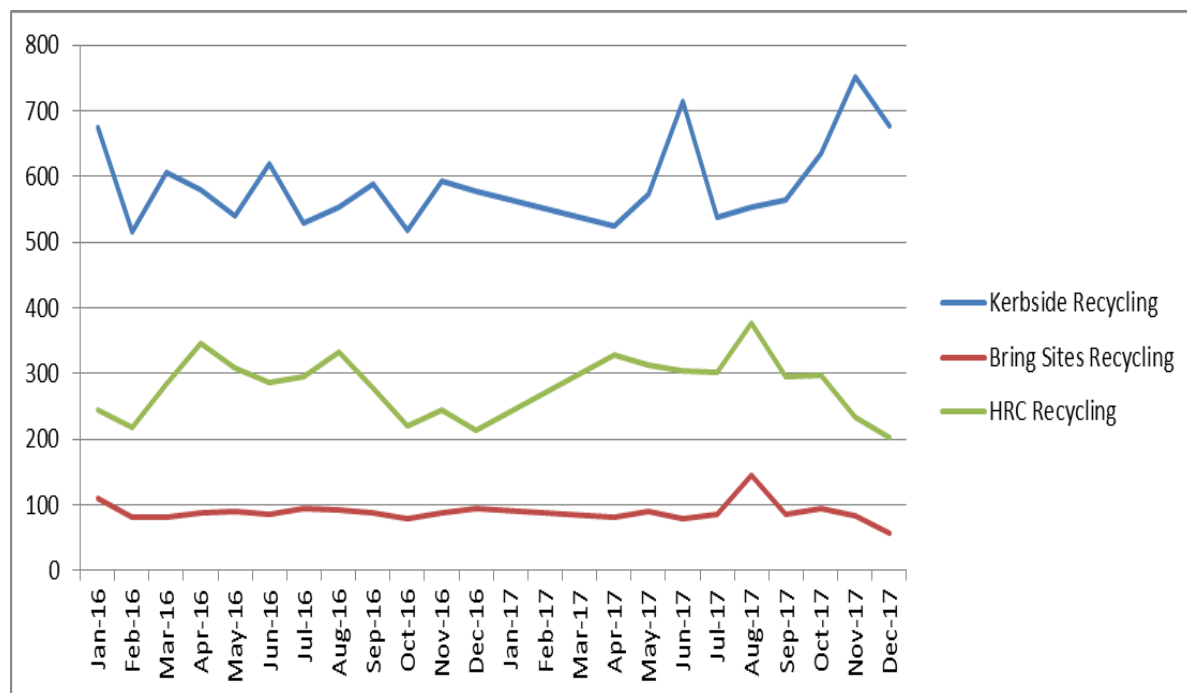
In addition, many residents are currently presenting excess cardboard over and above what will fit in the bag provided.

Ultimately, this is requiring additional resources to collect the material being presented at the kerbside and to consistently complete recycling rounds within the allowable time and stop any outstanding collections rolling over to the next collection day. Some days have been found to be challenging in relation to completing round which has affected resident's collections. A communications plan is also being developed aimed at thanking residents for the high level of recycling, but also highlighting and emphasising the need to sort materials. In addition the environmental services policy is programmed to be updated for Councillors consideration, ensuring that the community are advised of industry best practice in recycling activities and the council is obtaining best value from the service.

Overall, the new Romaquip vehicles have been found to be effective and fit for purpose for the job that they are designed for. However, as with any kerbside sort vehicle, once any bay has been filled, the vehicle has to return to the tip. At this stage it is too early to draw any conclusions on whether specific bays e.g. food, glass, paper, are filling more quickly than others but crews have reported variances on materials collected across different geographic areas of Cheltenham borough. In addition, some roads in Cheltenham have not been accessible with the collection vehicle assigned on their round which has resulted in some residents experiencing delays in collection. These issues are being reviewed and alternative collection arrangements are being implemented.

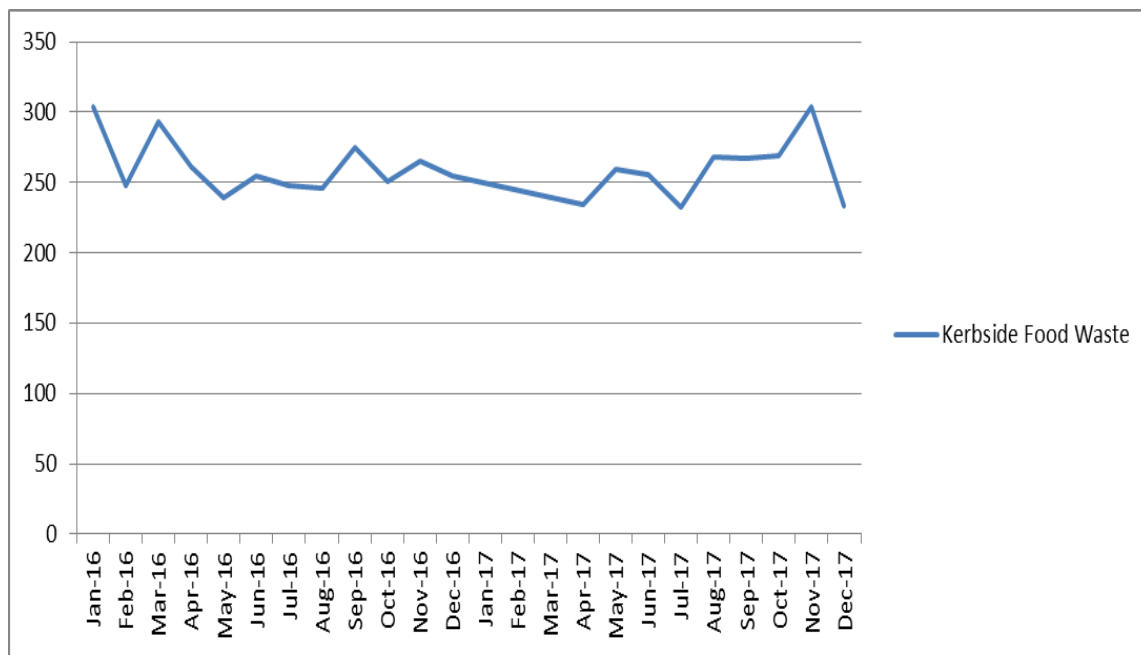
It's also common for there to be issues needing to be resolved in such a large service redesign affecting so many households, and Ubico together with officers from CBC and the JWT are working through these collection issues, and implementing measures to ensure that residents receive the services as planned.

Shown below is the tonnage of recycling material which was collected from the kerbside in the year running up to the new service launch and the increase in performance which was seen in the second half of October and November 2017. The graph also shows the performance achieved at the Bring Sites and Household Recycling Centre;

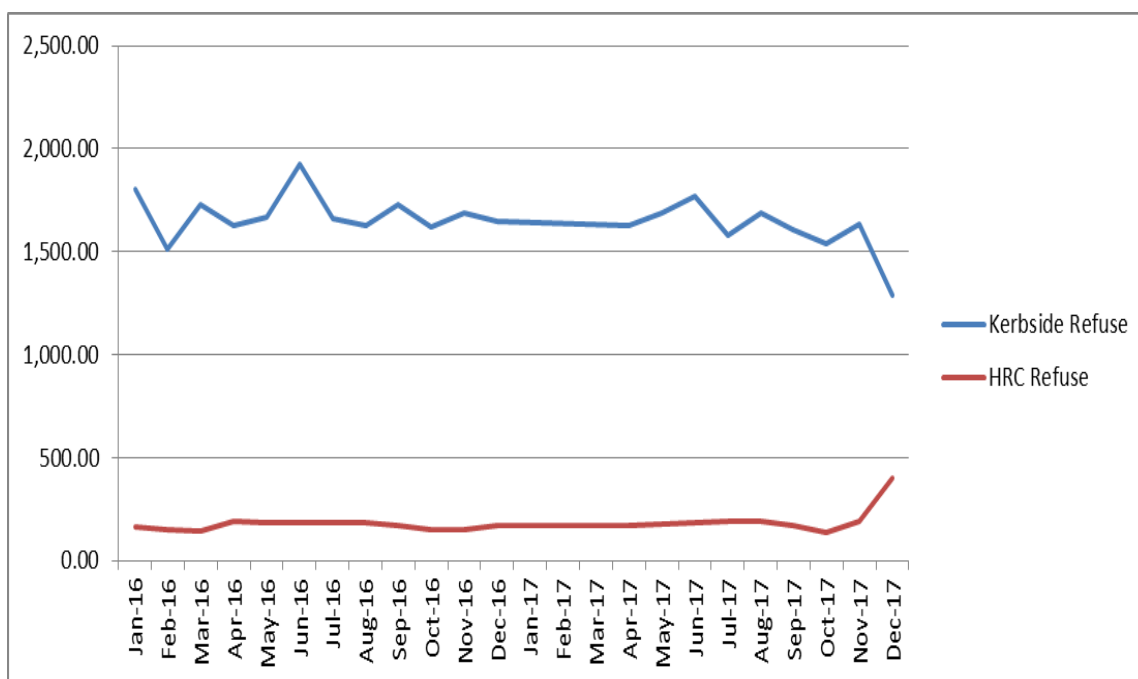


Recycling performance in October was higher at the kerbside and consistent from the bring sites and HRC, and November saw a significant increase at the kerbside together with a decrease at HRC but this was largely due to a fall in the amounts of wood and scrap metal taken to the facility and no clear transfer of materials to the kerbside.

Kerbside performance decreased in December 2017 but this was due to the disruption caused as a result of the two periods of inclement weather which affected the number of collections made and therefore the quantity of material captured.



By comparison the amount of food waste collected in the second half of October and November 2017 also increased Food waste also significantly decreased in December which could be due to the Xmas and New Year waste & recycling retrieval period



Refuse collected at the kerbside in November was lower than the same time last year however, the HRC saw an increase, but it is not possible to determine what this is made up of and whether or not the two are linked.

December saw a decrease in refuse from the kerbside which is likely to be as a result of the fewer numbers of collections due to the inclement weather and an increase in the amount refuse taken to the HRC. This would have been partially as a result of the inclement weather missed collections and residents disposing of waste themselves.

However, the combined refuse tonnage from the kerbside and HRC for December is lower than the same time last year across both services. This could be caused in part by residents having a greater range of materials recycled at their property.

The refuse collected in January is likely to be higher as a result of the Christmas period catch-up and the spill over from the inclement weather disruptions in the Christmas week and this is likely to have a negative effect on performance.

Shown below is the combined recycling, reuse and composting performance achieved for the 2016/17 financial year compared with the performance achieved so far this financial year (2017/18);

Category	Apr-16	May-16	Jun-16	Jul-16	Aug-16	Sep-16	Oct-16	Nov-16	Dec-16	Jan-17	Feb-17	Mar-17	Total
Residents' Recycling, reuse and compost rate	50.41%	53.12%	53.58%	53.82%	52.85%	52.51%	50.22%	47.52%	44.18%	44.62%	44.87%	49.09%	46.32%
	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Total
Residents' Recycling, reuse and compost rate	51.72%	51.73%	54.11%	51.42%	54.60%	52.65%	54.18%	49.22%	45.89%				50.13%

The period shown in yellow is the point when the waste and recycling service redesign was implemented and there is a clear increase in the October, November and December's performance.

The amount of garden waste significantly reduces during the winter which negatively affects the combined recycling and composting performance in January and February however, even with this decrease, it's still likely that the Council will beat the modelled 2% increase in performance for this year. Taking account of the fact that the increase is only based on 6 months of the new kerbside service, it's likely that next year will be even better than 2%.

Conclusions

- 1) Current information from Ubico suggests that the recycling material being collected at the kerbside has increased by around 25% by quantity compared with the previous service. With the modelling anticipating a 2% increase in the combined recycling, reuse and composting rate this is resulting in increased resources having to be used to collect it. Although this is a fantastic take up by residents, this is resulting in additional costs being incurred by Ubico. The new service model anticipated resident's sorting their recycling materials into 2 x recycling boxes and a cardboard bag prior to presentation, as this directly impacts on the time taken to load materials into the vehicle. Ubico reports that in a number of areas this is not being seen and is placing additional pressure on the collection crews and extending the time taken for staff to tip the materials into the vehicle.
- 2) As with any new service introduction there are several operational problems to deal with. Shortly into the new service there was the Christmas and New Year period, with the usual catch-up collections taking place. The new service had not settled in and to compound the problem during this period there were large amounts of snowfall on two separate occasions. This again increased costs due to staff having to work increased amounts of overtime.
- 3) In order to control some of the additional costs mitigation measures have already been undertaken. This includes revising some waste and recycling rounds to ensure that there is a more even spread of work throughout the week. Ultimately the service needs time to settle down having benefitted from operational changes before the true financial implications are known and any level of additional resource requirements going forwards. Since mobilisation, both adverse weather and the Christmas period have meant that the new service has not enjoyed a sustained period of business as usual in order to bed in. Nevertheless, additional recycling collection resources are in place and officers at CBC are working closely with Ubico to resolve remaining collection issues and to specifically focus on returning to a

reliable and consistent service to any residents who have been acutely affected by delayed or missed collections.

4) There have been some repeated missed collections and in some instances specific roads have experienced missed collections. Missed collections to complete roads have largely been due to the inability of the new vehicles gaining access. These have now been identified and alternative collection arrangements are being implemented. 7 The costs currently being incurred are likely to change taking account of further mitigation measures and increased income from the additional materials. It is anticipated that it will take 3 months to review the service and then a recommendation will be made on changes required to further mitigate the additional costs. Clearly there will be reduced waste taken to landfill, resulting in some landfill diversion incentive payments and a higher level of recycling will result in a greater level of recycling credit income. That said it is too early to be able to predict the financial outcome of this until the service is operating as 'business as usual'

5) The launch of the recycling service redesign has clearly been successful in meeting the objective of encouraging greater recycling and increased waste diverted from landfill. As with any service redesign the service provider - Ubico has had to tackle a number of operational issues. Over the next few months a clearer picture will emerge of performance, the amount of waste going to landfill and what the level of recycling is likely to be in 2018/19.

Inclement Weather – December 2017

During December 2017 Cheltenham experienced two instances of significant snowfall which hampered the refuse and recycling collection services operated by Ubico Ltd and for a number of days the crews were unable to make any collections safely.

CBC has an Emergency Waste Collection Policy which sets out the process for managing during times of inclement weather and other issues which might affect the collection services. During an emergency the policy process is completed several times to take account of any changing weather conditions and decisions are taken based on the best information available at that time.

Ubico as the service provider has primary duty of care to its employees and so the decision to suspend any collections is made by them in consultation with CBC officers and JWT

The JWT supports CBC by scrutinising any decisions made to suspend by Ubico and coordinating the relevant information to the key stakeholders including Customer Services, Customer Relations and the Communications Team who then feed the information out to the wider audience. The JWT then works with both Ubico and the Council in planning the mitigation measures and agreeing the catch-up process.

The inclement weather, increase in demand as a result of the recycling service redesign and the Christmas Bank Holiday catch-up arrangement's meant that there was very little capacity available to assist with the catch-up during the period directly after the snowfall during Christmas week and as a result the decision was taken to suspend collections for some areas of the borough, and collect double on the next scheduled collection day.

Following concerns being raised regarding the amount of waste amounting in specific areas in Cheltenham, a further decision was taken by the Council to pay for a skeletal Ubico team to target accessible areas of the borough on New Year's Day and a number of collections were made which was positive and aided the catch-up.

Review & Conclusion

The key stakeholders reviewed the series of events and the policy and concluded that the processes contained within were sound and the policy is robust, but greater clarity was needed over the key decision makers able to take timely decisions.

It was recognised that the second bout of snowfall during Christmas week came at the very worst time and in effect created the perfect storm because there was very little additional capacity available to assist with the catch-up and a number of key members of staff were on annual leave.

Had Ubico not have already been programmed in to work on the three Saturday's following Christmas Day then the catch-up could have been made far quicker.

With these lessons in mind work is underway to identify a larger pool of officers to be included in the process and provide greater cover for any absence or leave.

Background document: Waste & Recycling Service Redesign and Routes Optimisation report (Council / 12 December 2016)