

Joint working in waste management case study: Suffolk Recycling Consortium

This document sets out how the waste collection authorities in Suffolk came together to develop a successful recycling consortium.

The intention is to use this document as a starting point for further contributions and discussions between councils on how to resolve some of the issues arising from the split between collection and disposal functions in country/district areas (but including unitary authorities where appropriate).

How can someone contribute or find out more?

- You can find out more on the example here by sending an email to innovation.forum@westsussex.gov.uk

The Suffolk Recycling Consortium

Summary

The Suffolk Recycling Consortium is a partnership of six waste collection authorities working with a private sector provider, who, jointly have contributed to a countywide recycling/composting rate of 35 per cent, with two members exceeding 50 per cent.

Prior to 2003, with the exception of one authority (Babergh District Council), the collection of dry recyclate (paper, textiles, cans and glass) was dependant on an extensive network of 'bring sites' only with little or no kerbside collection.

A number of authorities were achieving significant diversion rates with the introduction of garden waste collections for composting, but it was evident that, to achieve the Government's statutory targets, more kerbside collections were necessary.

The councils recognised that, to ensure viable and sustainable processing facilities within the county some form of joint working was essential and this led to the formation in 2002 of a partnership to procure a single joint contract for the reception and sorting of co-mingled dry recyclate.

How the partnership developed.

The partnership arose in response to two significant pressures. The first was the need to meet the first statutory target set by the Government for 2003/04. The second was the potential loss of a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) serving the central Suffolk authorities of Babergh, Mid Suffolk and Ipswich.

This facility, originally designed to sort and recover material from mixed household waste, was unable to achieve the required recycling rates. One authority, Babergh, introduced a segregated sack collection of dry recyclables to

improve the performance of the MRF, but this was not financially sustainable on the quantities recovered from one district authority.

The solution was to improve the quality of material feeding the MRF through separate collections and to ensure the viability of the MRF by ensuring at least 20,000 tonnes of material per year. This could not be achieved by one authority alone.

In September 2002, six of the seven Suffolk waste collection authorities met to consider the options available. From this first meeting the Suffolk Recycling Consortium was born, with a common objective to recover over 20,000 tonnes of paper, plastics and metals by 2003/04.

Achieving the objective

Although with one common intent, the participating authorities had different collection methods, diverse political representation, varying views on collection methods and limited financial scope.

Notwithstanding, a single procurement exercise was embarked upon from November 2002. A project team was formed comprising a mix of officer skills from all participating authorities, including legal, financial, procurement and technical expertise.

Documents were produced and agreed within three months and a contract for 'The Sorting and Recycling of Recovered Materials' tendered in February 2003.

At the same time the partners also developed a 'Consortium Agreement', a document detailing the nature of the partnership and the commitment of each authority to that partnership. This was signed by all the participating authorities in June 2003. It places challenging performance, quality and financial obligations on all members.

Following a robust evaluation process, a 10-year contract was awarded to Viridor Waste Management, which began receipt of material under the terms of the contract in September 2003. The company then began the implementation of a £1.5 million upgrade of the existing MRF. The salient points of the contract include:

- a guaranteed minimum tonnage of material delivered by the consortium
- a sliding scale gate fee providing an incentive to members to maximise recycling through the contract – higher tonnage, lower fee
- same gate fee at all reception points – incorporates transfer stations at two satellite locations
- gate payment negotiated for delivery of source separated material

- incentive for contractor to secure best market prices for material – gate fee offset by income, with market price reviews during contract term
- contract overseen by management board with representation from all consortium members
- joint appointment of full time supervising officer located at MRF

Throughout the procurement and subsequent implementation period five of the six consortium members have rolled out alternate week, co-mingled dry recycle collections through provision of a second wheeled bin. The sixth authority is currently reviewing its kerbside paper collection with a view towards a co-mingled collection.

The joint municipal waste management strategy

Partnership working in waste management has always been a strong feature in Suffolk. Although the county council is not a formal member of the consortium, county officers were in attendance as observers throughout the process and provided technical and procurement support.

Despite it being a challenge to bring together a number of diverse local authorities, this was made much easier because of the developing municipal waste management strategy embarked upon by the county. This was developed from the beginning as a partnership of all the authorities and signed up to at a political level.

This provided the political authority for all the partners to progress with the joint procurement, and the monitoring of the strategy provides governance through a joint elected member/director group to which the consortium management board reports.

As a result of these initiatives, joint working has resulted in harmonised collection methods across the county, further successful the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) partnership funding in excess of £5 million, the achievement of stretched Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and an annual delivery of material to the MRF now well in excess of 34,000 tonnes.