

Scrutiny Committee – 9th October 2008

8. Sort It Plus Trials – Early Findings

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Purpose of the Report

It has been agreed that the attached report be submitted to all SWP partner authorities using the Somerset Waste Partnership report format.

Action Required

That the Scrutiny Committee considers the attached report and indicates which SORT IT PLUS service package(s), if any, it recommends should be introduced in South Somerset. This could be service package 3, 2 or 5 or more than one of these options, dependant, for example, on further clarification being provided on costs.

Report

Attached.

Background Papers: *SORT IT PLUS Briefing – Collection Trials for Cardboard and Plastic Bottles, April 2008*
SORT IT PLUS trials report to the Somerset Waste Board on 18th January 2008

**Scrutiny Committee
South Somerset District Council
9 October 2008**



SORT IT PLUS Trials – Early Findings

Report of David Mansell, Strategy and communications Team Leader

1. Introduction

- 1.1** This report provides early findings on the Sort IT PLUS trials, which cover 8,500 households in Mendip, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane.
- 1.2** SORT IT PLUS builds on Somerset's award-winning SORT IT collections and is an integrated package of waste services involving weekly food waste collections, fortnightly refuse collections, optional charged garden waste collections and which adds cardboard and plastic bottles to recycling collections.
- 1.3** The trials are testing innovative new collection vehicles and different recycling collection frequencies. These service options or packages and the locations of the trial rounds are shown in Appendix A.
- 1.4** The differences between service packages are in the frequencies of recycling collections for current standard recyclables (paper, glass, cans etc) and the additional plastic bottles and cardboard, as shown in the following table.

Recycling Collection Frequencies	Service Package 3	Service Package 2	Service Package 5
Standard Dry Recyclables	Fortnightly	Weekly	Weekly
Plastic Bottles & Cardboard	Fortnightly	Fortnightly	Weekly
Food Waste	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly

- 1.5** The trials have been designed to show the variation in performance between service packages and not other factors, such as socio-economic variations. Therefore, the trial rounds were carefully selected to broadly contain households with similar socio-economic characteristics and to represent the main groups found in Somerset, using the ACORN classification system.
- 1.6** A presentation will be made at the board meeting with slides showing the trial vehicles and charts of the early monitoring results.

2. Trials launch and early collections

- 2.1** The SORT IT PLUS trials were launched on 19th May 2008.
- 2.2** Most residents on the trials successfully switched to the new collection systems, but a few early issues were observed:

- a) It would have assisted collection crews and residents if different colour boxes had been used for plastic bottles and cardboard and for other recyclables.
- b) Non-bottle plastic packaging was also put out for recycling. This had to be rejected and left in boxes with an explanatory label, which soon greatly reduced the amount of incorrect plastic put out.
- c) Some residents were confused by new fortnightly collection cycles initially, which was noticed on SWP round inspections and further information notes were delivered to these households, which helped to address this situation.

3. Monitoring and newsletter

- 3.1 The trials rounds are being closely monitored, especially for the weights collected for recycling and as refuse. Participation monitoring has also been undertaken as well as collection weight sampling at the household level to complement round level data.
- 3.2 A newsletter and postal questionnaire (appendix B), with reply-paid envelope, were delivered to all trials households in July apart from one round, where these were delivered in late August. Over 3,000 questionnaires have been returned, giving a response rate of 36%, which is high for this type of survey.
- 3.3 Monitoring and survey data collected so far has not yet been fully analysed, but some early findings are available.

4. Early results

- 4.1 Early round weights for the trials in June show the following collection yields and projected overall recycling rates that would be achieved with these yields applied to South Somerset:

Collection Yields Kg/Household/Fortnight	Service Package 3	Service Package 2	Service Package 5
Standard Dry Recyclables	5.5	8.8	7.4
Plastic Bottles & Cardboard	1.6	1.4	2.0
Food Waste	3.7	4.1	3.9
Total Recycling Rate	51-52%	56-64%	55-61%

It is very important to be aware that the yields and rates above are based on the results from the trial rounds in all three districts, especially because the Taunton Deane trial rounds are performing slightly better than in the other districts, which is affecting the overall balance of the results. With this factor taken into account, it is likely that service package 5 is actually performing best, which is masked in the data above due to only one of these trial rounds being in Taunton Deane and four being in other districts; whereas half of the service packages 2 and 3 rounds are in Taunton Deane.

- 4.2 Taking into account variation in performance between districts, the early findings from the trials show that performance and collection yields are closely related to collection frequency. Service packages 2 and 5, with weekly collections for standard recyclables, appear to achieve similar yields, whereas service package 3, with fortnightly collections, achieves roughly 35-40% less for these materials. Service packages 2 and 3, with fortnightly collections for plastic bottles and cardboard, appear to achieve similar yields, whereas service package 5, with weekly collections, achieves roughly 75% more for these materials.
- 4.3 Food waste yields across the service packages are broadly similar.
- 4.4 Overall, the highest recycling performances are achieved on service package 5 rounds, which may be roughly 5% higher than service package 2, giving a total recycling rate about 2% higher. Service package 3 achieves roughly 25% less, giving a total recycling rate about 8% lower than the others.
- 4.5 More data is still to be collected from the trials and further analysis work will be undertaken to compare the change in recycling performance resulting from each service package, but from data collected, so far, the trends appear to be fairly clear and consistent.
- 4.6 Early results from the questionnaire survey are summarised in the following table, which shows the most notable findings so far. Please note these results do not include responses from all returns as this analysis is still in the process of being completed. Overall, all service packages have been given positive ratings with service package 5 receiving the highest scores and then service package 2.

Questions and Responses %	Service Package 3	Service Package 2	Service Package 5
Q1. SORT IT PLUS collections for recycling and refuse are much better or better than the previous waste collection arrangements?	68%	76%	87%
Q2. It is easy or fairly easy to separate your waste into the different categories?	78%	81%	89%
Q3. Recycling a lot more or more.	71%	75%	83%
Q5A. Refuse bin has been full with extra sacks.	5%	6%	2%
Q10. How recycling collections for cardboard and plastic bottles could be improved:			
- No need	26%	22%	42%
- Lid for box	23%	22%	22%
- Different colour box	17%	22%	4% (17%)

- More frequent collections	10%	14%	1%
Q11. If it was not affordable to collect all recyclables and food waste weekly and your local Council had to choose, which would you prefer?			
- Weekly collection of food, paper, glass and cans but not collect plastic bottles and cardboard	17%	25%	22%
- Weekly food waste collections and fortnightly collections for all recyclables (including plastic bottles and cardboard)	83%	75%	78%

5. Costs

- 5.1 The costs of each service package will be affected by the results of the trials, especially by the collection yields achieved and by the operational effectiveness of the trial vehicles.
- 5.2 The SWP’s contract with ECT shows total additional costs for each service package in South Somerset as follows:

	Service Package 3	Service Package 2	Service Package 5
Cost per Household	£1.50-3.75	£6.10	£9.00
Total Revenue Costs (£,000s)	£105-266	£432	£637

These costs take into account additional income for Recycling Credits from Somerset County Council.

- 5.3 It should be noted that the above contract costs for SORT IT PLUS are based on two-pass recycling collections using two collection vehicles for different materials. The trials are also testing a one-pass collection vehicle for all recyclables and food waste, which may allow the costs of Service Package 5 to be considerably reduced and possibly become comparable to those for Service Package 2.
- 5.4 In addition to the above revenue costs, there will be capital costs for the provision of additional collection containers (total of approx. £285,000 for South Somerset). Somerset County Council has indicated it is minded to make a substantial contribution of up to a maximum of 75% towards this capital cost from a DEFRA Waste Infrastructure Grant, leaving a total capital cost to South Somerset District Council of about £71,200.
- 5.5 The final costs for each service package will be prepared with ECT at the end of the trials and are likely to be different from those shown above, but these are the current best guide.

6. Future reporting and decision making

- 6.1** An interim report on the results of the trials will be presented to the Somerset Waste Board on 17th October 2008 and a final report will be presented to the Somerset Waste Board on 21st November 2008.
- 6.2** The key decision to be taken for South Somerset will be whether to adopt a SORT IT PLUS service option in 2009/10 and, if so, which service package to implement.
- 6.3** Other SWP partner authorities face the same decision and there would be benefits if all could adopt the same service package, not least because some efficiencies may be lost if all do not adopt the same service package, which is likely to increase costs. However, all partners may not be able to afford to adopt a SORT IT PLUS service package in 2009/10. In which case, it would be best to minimise the number of service package variations between partner authorities.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1** That the Scrutiny Committee considers this report and indicates which SORT IT PLUS service package(s), if any, it recommends should be introduced in South Somerset. This could be service package 3, 2 or 5 or more than one of these options, dependant, for example, on further clarification being provided on costs.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1** SORT IT PLUS Briefing – Collection Trials for Cardboard and Plastic Bottles, April 2008
- 8.2** SORT IT PLUS trials report to the Somerset Waste Board on 18th January 2008

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