

**JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SOMERSET
WASTE PARTNERSHIP**

2008

FINAL REPORT



Joint Scrutiny Review of Somerset Waste Partnership

Chairman's Foreword

It is my belief that Waste is an apolitical matter. We start creating it before we are born and are still creating it after we are dead. It is therefore a universal responsibility and duty to mitigate it's effects and impacts and to use it when ever possible not as waste but a resource.

It not the intention that this Joint Waste Scrutiny Committee is formed to be destructive or obstructive to the Somerset Waste Partnership or the Somerset Waste Board, but rather to assist generally and smooth the path when difficulties arise.

However where there are shortcomings or problems they will be carefully scrutinized. I don't believe in meetings for meetings' sake, and they will only be held when one of the Partners considers that there is a valid point that needs questioning or an aspect which merits joint consideration. Other than that I feel that a general progress meeting should be held once every 6 months to bring Members up to date so that any latent or emerging difficulties or concerns can be identified. I envisage the Commission being a vital tool in the eventual solution to the ever present and growing Waste problem.



Councillor Derek Yeomans, Chair of Joint Scrutiny Review of Somerset Waste Partnership

Joint Scrutiny Panel – Review of Somerset Waste Partnership

Final Report

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to outline the process undertaken by the Joint Scrutiny Panel established to review the progress and performance of the Somerset Waste Partnership (**SWP**) during its first year of operation. The Joint Scrutiny Panel met twice in October and November 2008.

In order to ensure that the Scrutiny Committees and indeed wider membership of each of the 6 authorities involved, are kept informed of the outcome of such joint Scrutiny activity, members of the Joint Scrutiny panel are asked to submit this report to their respective Scrutiny committees through the usual processes.

Why?

In the summer of 2008, the Chairs of all Somerset District councils and the County Council (**Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset County Council**) met to consider the issue of Joint Scrutiny.

These discussions were in no small way prompted by the Pioneer Somerset project – an innovative project being undertaken by all the Somerset authorities to achieve enhanced two tier working in the post unitary debate era. It was felt by the Scrutiny Chairs that pursuing joint scrutiny arrangements offered a number of benefits including maximising limited scrutiny resources in all authorities and facilitating a more effective approach to scrutinising common issues effecting all authorities across Somerset.

Once the Scrutiny Chairs had agreed in principle to joint scrutiny activities, there was discussion about topics that would be suitable for such an exercise. The recently formed Somerset Waste Partnership (**SWP**) was identified early on as a potential candidate as all 6 authorities are members of the Partnership and the services delivered by SWP impact on the lives of residents across the County. It was therefore agreed that one of the first joint scrutiny reviews involving the 6 local authorities would focus on the work of the Waste Partnership during its first fully operational year and also look at issues potentially effecting the future development of the partnership.

Practicalities

There was no desire from the Chairs of the various Scrutiny Committees to establish a formally constituted Joint Scrutiny Committee, not least because of the constitutional difficulties this would represent. It was instead agreed to create a time limited informal Scrutiny Panel which would in essence act as a 'Scrutiny Commission' or 'Task and Finish Group' on behalf of each local authority. Any recommendations resulting from the joint scrutiny review would therefore need to be reported to and ratified by the individual scrutiny committees of each authority. The commissioning Chairs expressed a wish that both Executive members and senior officers from all authorities would participate in the work of the joint Scrutiny panel as they would any scrutiny activity within their own authorities.

As with many aspects of local government, there is limited capacity within the 6 authorities to support any additional scrutiny activities. It was agreed from the outset that officers from Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council would support the initial two joint Scrutiny reviews – Pioneer Somerset and this review of the Waste Partnership – respectively.

The initial scope of the review is attached at Appendix A to this report.

In terms of membership of the Joint Scrutiny Panel, it was agreed that the Scrutiny Committee of each authority would appoint two members to sit on the joint panel. The Membership was therefore as follows:

Authority	Members
Mendip District Council	1. Cllr Philip Whitmarsh 2. Cllr Dick Skidmore
Sedgmoor District Council	1. Cllr Julian Taylor 2. Cllr Jeff Savage
Somerset County Council	1. Cllr Derek Yeomans 2. Cllr Ray Tully
South Somerset District Council	1. Cllr Sue Steele 2. Cllr Tony Lock
Taunton Deane Borough Council	1. Cllr Tony McMahon 2. Cllr Nigel Stuart-Thorn
West Somerset Council	1. Cllr David Sanders 2. Cllr David Westcott

The first meeting

The first meeting was held on 24th October 2008, the minutes of which are attached at Appendix B to this report.

Members of the Joint Panel appointed Councillor Derek Yeomans as Chairman for the duration of the review. It was felt that Councillor Yeomans' knowledge and understanding of the issues covered by the review made him an obvious choice. Councillor Yeomans is a member of the Chartered Institute of Waste Management, has a diploma in Pollution Control and has extensive experience of the Waste Partnership.

To provide a context for the review, members of the Joint Panel were provided with copies of the following documents:

- Somerset Waste Partnership Annual Governance Report – September 2008
- Somerset Waste Partnership Business Plan 2008-13
- Value for Money Assessment of the Somerset Waste Partnership – prepared by eunomia for Mendip District Council
- A report outlining Governance and Risk Management
- Somerset Waste Partnership Inter-authority agreement and Constitution

Members were asked to consider these documents and identify any issues they felt should be included in the Scrutiny review. Members discussed analysing the initial objectives that had led to the creation of the Somerset Waste Partnership and

assessing to what extent those had been met, both in terms of achieving service improvement and securing financial savings.

It was agreed that a further meeting of the Joint Panel would be arranged for the following month and that senior representatives from the Somerset Waste Partnership along with senior officers and executive members from the partner authorities would be asked to attend.

In line with good Scrutiny practice and to ensure the most effective use of time, members of the Joint Panel agreed that the following questions should be sent to the above in advance of the meeting. This would allow officers and Executive members to prepare full and factual answers whilst still allowing debate and supplementary questions as appropriate.

Questions:

1. What anticipated additional costs would entail should we be required to collect and dispose of waste from schools, universities, hospitals, care homes and charitable organisations should an unfavourable decision on section 2 be taken by DEFRA? Would this require additional vehicles?
2. What is the anticipated operational start date for the first anaerobic digestion plant?
3. Does the Sort It! Plus trial indicate that if implemented across the district, it would be to our advantage?
4. Given the increases in tender price by May Gurney, Is this price hike affordable and reasonable?
5. What representations is the SWB making to the Government and WRAP in respect of reducing the levels of packaging used in our communities?
6. When will a revised waste minimisation strategy be published/implemented?
7. Regarding the impact of tourism and subsequent generation of waste, particularly along the coastal belt, what plans exist to consider the relationship with the commercial sector for the collection and disposal etc
8. What plans are in place to deal with the segregation of waste for recycling emanating from houses of multiple occupation?
9. What input and liaison does the SWB have with the planning departments in the County and District Councils with regards to ensuring easy access and collection of recycle and household waste rising from present and future major developments?
10. Given the contract process for the rounds in our districts, is it intended to mitigate the cost for Somerset authorities by undertaking an extension of the partnership to include neighbouring authorities, bearing in mind that importing waste may be very unpopular and nugatory?

11. Vehicles -are the cost and maintenance figures in the contract robust? What are the timescales for the replacement of existing vehicles and are they able to perform to the highest parameters?
12. The Annual Governance report states that 'no formal budget monitoring information has been reported to members. Arrangements have, however, been made for the Board to receive financial information on a quarterly basis, beginning with the outturn report for 2007/08 – has this happened and to what effect?

The Second meeting

The second meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel took place on 14th November 2008. At this meeting, members appointed Councillor Julian Taylor as the vice-chair of the Joint Scrutiny Panel.

The minutes of this meeting are attached at Appendix C to this report. The meeting was attended by senior officers and executive members from all partner authorities as well as the following representatives of the Somerset Waste Board:

- Nigel Woollcombe-Adams,
- Peter Downing
- Stuart Kingham,
- Hazel Prior-Sankey
- John Sharpe,
- Paull Robathan,
- Steve Brooks,
- Jon Freeman.

The following responses were provided to the list of questions agreed by the Scrutiny members at their October meeting:

Responses to Questions

Question 1

The panel heard that if a future legal ruling stated that collection services must be provided from such premises it might be necessary to make arrangements for appropriate collection services from May Gurney or other waste carriers. It had been estimated that the cost could be in the region of £100-£200k however there remained uncertainty about the volume and type of waste from the wide variety of premises that could have to be managed in such a situation.

Question 2

It was noted that Viridor had indicated that a plant could be fully operational 21 months after a decision was confirmed to proceed with such a development. Some food waste could be taken in for the commissioning period which would start 15 months from a decision to proceed, and it was noted that a decision to 'go-ahead' could be made before Christmas in 2008.

Question 3

Members were reminded that the Sort It! Plus trials had added both plastic bottles and cardboard to kerbside recycling collections and a report on the trials would be

considered by the SWB at its meeting on 21 November. Initial findings indicated that the 'SP5' service package could improve recycling rates by 9-28%, enabling up to 58% of household waste to be recycled. Sort It! Plus would incur additional costs of £8-£12 per household however this could be offset by the avoidance of increased landfill costs and allowances, whilst also helping to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Question 4

It was explained that increases in prices were allowed in the contract and arose due to inflation and increased costs of purchasing vehicles and baling equipment since the tender prices had been submitted in 2007. The panel heard that as a consequence of the global economic downturn there had been a fall in the market prices of some materials for recycling, and the SWB would have to take a view on whether the increase was reasonable and affordable and make recommendations accordingly.

Question 5

Members were told that the SWB had helped DEFRA to develop its packaging strategy for England, and it was expected that the strategy would contain a case study on the SWB and its approach to joint working and recycling. The SWB had represented local government at events and workshops organised by DEFRA and the packaging industry so that different parts of the process chain could understand each others position. The SWB had argued that the existing Producer Responsibility Packaging Recovery Note (PRN) did not adequately support recycling and the continued fall in prices for materials would highlight this further.

Question 6

SWB maintain an active and varied campaign to promote waste prevention and reuse through a variety of media. A new updated waste prevention and reuse strategy for Somerset was currently being drafted for consideration by the SWB in December 2008.

Question 7

Councils are required to offer a service to commercial waste producers in their area on request and to recharge their reasonable costs for the service. Although there were no specific recycling targets for businesses and recycling would only take place where it made economic sense, the SWB was exploring ways for increasing commercial waste recycling. The County Council had provided funding to enable the SWB to employ, on a fixed term basis, an Officer to develop, co-ordinate and promote recycling collection services to the commercial sector. Also discussions were ongoing with Viridor about the possibility of providing sites on or next to HWRC's for commercial waste.

Question 8

The operations team were actively working to increase the number of recycling facilities for such residents. This included communal refuse containers and appropriately sized bring site containers to serve specific communities, and information leaflets on how to use recycling facilities had been translated in to Portuguese and Polish.

Question 9

All operational teams liaise regularly with the planning departments in each of the partner authorities and they were frequently consulted on plans for new developments by planning officers and developers. There was also the possibility of charging developers for the provision of waste and recycling storage containers either directly or through Section 106 agreements. It was suggested that the SWB should become a consultee on the Local Development Framework.

Question 10

SWB are interested in expanding its range of partners and this could happen through client management or in sharing facilities, such as the proposed anaerobic digestion plant at Walpole. However it was emphasised that it was unlikely that further Councils would join the contract until the first contract break point in October 2014. The SWB was aiming for Somerset to be self-sufficient in terms of processing waste and it was reported that at present 90% of disposal and some processing was accommodated within the County but that most recyclables and a major proportion of food waste was processed outside of Somerset.

Question 11

Contractual arrangements for the provision and maintenance of the vehicles were robust. All the vehicles had proved to be fit for purpose and the maintenance arrangements had been operating well. The working life of the vehicles was approximately 7 years and the next vehicles due for replacement were the South Somerset fleet and May Gurney had already begun to research options for replacing those vehicles.

Question 12

The Annual Governance report that had been completed on the SWB covered the financial year 2007/08, and as the SWB commenced in October 2007, budget monitoring information could only have been received at the 18 January 2008 meeting of the SWB. It was noted that a full report would have been of limited content and value in the absence of meaningful financial information so a verbal report had been presented to the 18 January 2008. An outturn position report that included a draft set of formal accounts had been considered by the 26 June meeting of the SWB. The overall position for the six months to 31 March 2008 had shown an underspend of some £294,990, so against a budget of £13.9 million that had represented a 97.88% spend.

Outcomes

Based on the information gathered as part of this review, members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel did not feel there were any specific recommendations to be made. However, at the conclusion of the process, all the members involved felt that they were better informed about the work of the Somerset Waste Partnership and better able to answer questions from residents.

The original brief for this review was for members from all 6 authorities to review the progress and performance of the Somerset Waste Partnership over its' first full year in operation and to look at priorities for the future and this brief was fully met by the members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel.

Members are however aware that the area of waste collection and disposal is an ever landscape and there will be numerous, significant challenges to met in future. Members agreed that using the Joint Scrutiny Model represents the most appropriate and effective means to engage scrutiny in meeting any such future challenges. They therefore recommend that a similar, time limited joint panel is formed on annual basis, following the same principles as used in this review, to ensure effective scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Partnership from the perspective of all 6 local authorities.

Recommendation

That a time-limited, Joint Scrutiny Panel be appointed on an annual basis to ensure effective Scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Partnership. Any members of future joint scrutiny panels will be appointed on the same basis as those appointed to this review and all reviews will be time-limited and will focus on specific objectives.

Joint Scrutiny Panel – Waste Partnership

1. Purpose

The formation of a joint Scrutiny panel will allow effective multi-authority Scrutiny of the Somerset Waste Partnership. It is also hoped that the joint panel approach will ensure the best use of resources for all the authorities involved.

2. Formation

The Joint Scrutiny Panel will comprise of two members from each participating authority. They will be appointed by the Scrutiny Committee (or equivalent) of each authority as determined locally, except that they should not be Executive members of any authority.

The following members have been appointed to the joint Scrutiny Panel:

Authority	Members
Mendip District Council	3. Cllr Philip Whitmarsh (cldr.Whitmarsh@mendip.gov.uk) 4. Cllr Dick Skidmore (Cllr.skidmore@mendip.gov.uk)
Sedgemoor District Council	1. Cllr Julian Taylor (julian.taylor@sedgemoor.gov.uk) 2. Cllr Jeff Savage (jeff.savage@sedgemoor.gov.uk)
Somerset County Council	1. Cllr Derek Yeomans 2. Cllr Ray Tully
South Somerset District Council	3. Cllr Sue Steele 4. Cllr Tony Lock
Taunton Deane Borough Council	1. 2.
West Somerset Council	3. Cllr David Sanders 4. Cllr David Westcott

3. Powers

The panel will not be constituted as a formal joint committee and would be limited to the agreed remit for the specific scrutiny review as set out a paragraph 6. It would act as a “scrutiny commission” or “task group” on behalf of every authority. It is expected the executive members and officers will attend and co-operate with the joint scrutiny arrangements in the same manner as they would to their “home” scrutiny committee.

4. Report and Recommendations

The recommendations of the joint scrutiny exercise will be reported back to the relevant Scrutiny Committee at each authority. If necessary, each Scrutiny Committee can make recommendations to its own Executive and receive a response.

5. Support Arrangements

Sedgemoor & West Somerset scrutiny chairs have already expressed concerns they would not have officer support capacity to assist in any joint scrutiny arrangements. It seems likely that SCC and South Somerset DC would need to provide scrutiny officer and committee administrator support to enable effective joint scrutiny. The frequency of meetings, their location and the level of support scrutiny members would require, would all impact on the officer resource needed.

It is anticipated that the joint scrutiny panel will meet for the first time in September with the date and venue to be confirmed.

6. Remit of Review

It was initially proposed that a joint Scrutiny panel would consider the results of the kerbside recycling pilot. However, as implementing the outcomes of the pilot will have different financial implications for each authority, this issue will now be scrutinised on an individual authority basis.

The joint Scrutiny panel will instead focus on the performance of the Somerset Waste Partnership over its' first year in operation. Members of the joint Scrutiny panel will be looking at the initial objectives behind creating the partnership and assessing to what extent these have been met, both in terms of achieving service improvement and securing financial savings.

It is anticipated that the review will involve two meetings with the second meeting providing an opportunity for issues raised at the first meeting to be addressed.

Appendix B

Joint Scrutiny Panel - Somerset Waste Board

Minutes of a meeting of a Joint Scrutiny Panel meeting held on Friday 24 October 2008 from 14:00 in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

Present

(All Members were present for the duration of the meeting unless otherwise specified)

Cllr D Yeomans (in the Chair)

Cllr T Lock (South Somerset DC)	Cllr S Steele (South Somerset DC)
Cllr D Sanders (West Somerset DC)	Cllr J Taylor (Sedgemoor DC)
Cllr J Savage (Sedgemoor DC)	Cllr R Tully (Somerset CC)
Cllr D Skidmore (Mendip DC)	Cllr P Whitmarsh (Mendip DC)

Somerset Waste Board Members Present: None

Other Members Present: None

Apologies: Cllr D Westcott (West Somerset DC)

1 Welcome and introductions – agenda item 1

- 1.0 The meeting was opened by Emily McGuinness Scrutiny and Democratic Services Manager – South Somerset DC and those Members present introduced themselves. There was a question about the lack of any representation from Taunton Deane DC and it was reported that an invitation had been sent to Taunton Deane asking if they wished to participate in the Scrutiny process of the Somerset Waste Board (SWB) and they had declined.
- 1.1 It was explained that the inaugural meeting had been called to consider the options for scrutinising the SWB that had now been in operation for twelve months. This first meeting provided scrutiny Members an opportunity, in the absence of SWB Members and Officers, to discuss how they wished to proceed at the next meeting.

Members heard that the formation of an informal joint scrutiny panel would allow effective multi-council scrutiny of the SWB, and it was also hoped that the joint panel approach would ensure the best use of resources for all the Councils involved and avoid duplication.
- 1.2

2 Appointment of Chairman – agenda item 2

- 1.0 Nominations were sought for the position of Chairman. Cllr Lock proposed Cllr Yeomans and Cllr Steele seconded the nomination and those present agreed to elect Cllr Yeomans as Chairman. Cllr Yeomans provided a summary of his background and informed the Panel that he was a Member of the Chartered Institute of Waste Management, he held a Diploma in Pollution Control and had experience of Waste

issues in a variety of different areas, and that he had sat on the Somerset Waste Partnership for five years and had served as Vice Chairman for three years.

3 Discussion of potential areas for Scrutiny – agenda item 3

- 1.0 The Panel considered the reports that had been sent to them prior to the meeting and these were the Value for Money Assessment of the Somerset Waste Partnership, the Audit Commission's Annual Governance report 2007/2008, a Governance and Risk Management Report by South West Audit Partnership, a copy of the Inter Authority Agreement, and the Somerset Waste Partnership Business Plan 2008-13.
- 1.1 There was a discussion about how the Panel would function and it was noted that the Panel would be made up of two Members from each participating Council, to be nominated by the Scrutiny Committee (or equivalent) of each Council as determined locally, provided that they were not Executive Board/Cabinet Members of any Council.
- 1.2 The Panel also heard that the Panel had not been constituted as a formal joint committee and it would be limited to an agreed and specific remit, designed to act as a "scrutiny commission" or "task group" on behalf of every authority. In response to a question it was confirmed that the SWB Members and Officers would attend future meetings of the Panel and co-operate/participate with the joint scrutiny arrangements in the same manner as they would to their "home" scrutiny process.
- 1.3 There was a brief discussion about how the Panel would report its findings and it was explained that any recommendations from the joint scrutiny panel would be reported back to the relevant Scrutiny Committee at each Council. If necessary, each Scrutiny Committee could then make recommendations to its own Executive Board/Cabinet and receive a response.
- 1.4 Attention turned to the areas that could be scrutinised and the Panel heard that initially it had been suggested that joint scrutiny could be undertaken into the kerbside recycling pilot schemes. Initial research had highlighted that implementation of the outcomes of the pilot schemes would have different financial implications for each Council and it had been agreed that this issue would now be scrutinised on an individual Council basis.
- 1.5 There was a general discussion about the issues the joint Scrutiny panel would focus on and a recurring theme emerged regarding the performance of the SWB following its first year in operation. Members discussed analysing the initial objectives that had led to the creation the SWB and assessing to what extent those had been met, both in terms of achieving service improvement and securing financial savings.

The Chairman invited Panel members to suggest items they wished to raise at the next meeting when SWB Members and Officers would be present and the following areas were raised in the discussion:

Financial Issues – following the recent judgement by both Defra and the Audit Commission regarding the free collection and disposal of waste from schools, universities, hospitals, care homes and charitable organisations, what impact would this have on service delivery/cost?

Financial Issues – noting the Audit Commission and SWAP reports what plans did the SWB have to improve cost effectiveness and value for money?

Future intentions/use of emerging technologies – how adaptable was the SWB to new technologies particularly regarding energy from waste plants?

Were there plans to standardise the collection of cardboard, plastics and glass throughout Somerset?

Recalling the 3 R's campaign and noting the success in 'reuse' and 'recycling' why did waste reduction/minimisation appear to be such a low priority?

When will a revised waste minimisation strategy be published/implemented?

Regarding the impact of tourism and subsequent generation of waste, particularly along the coastal belt, what plans existed to consider the relationship with the commercial sector?

Were there plans to extend Household Waste Recycling Centre's (HWRC's), particularly in areas of multiple home occupation?

What plans existed to address waste management when planning applications were considered, was the SWB content with the existing arrangements?

What plans existed between the SWB and adjoining Council's, were there plans to import waste to Somerset?

Vehicles – were the cost and maintenance figures in the contract robust, how are the vehicles performing are there plans to reduce collections?

4 Time and date of next meeting – agenda item 4

- 1.0 It was agreed that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on Friday 14 November 2008 at 14:00 in the Luttrell Room at County Hall in Taunton.

Appendix C

Joint Scrutiny Panel - Somerset Waste Board

Minutes of a meeting of a Joint Scrutiny Panel meeting held on Friday 14 November 2008 from 14:00 in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

Present

(All Members were present for the duration of the meeting unless otherwise specified)

Cllr D Yeomans (in the Chair)

Cllr T Lock (South Somerset DC)	Cllr S Steele (South Somerset DC)
Cllr D Sanders (West Somerset DC)	Cllr J Taylor (Sedgemoor DC)
Cllr J Savage (Sedgemoor DC)	Cllr R Tully (Somerset CC)
Cllr D Skidmore (Mendip DC)	Cllr P Whitmarsh (Mendip DC)

Somerset Waste Board Members Present: Nigel Woolcombe-Adams, Peter Downing, Stuart Kingham, Hazel Prior-Sankey, John Sharpe, Paull Robathan, Steve Brooks, Jon Freeman.

Other Members Present: Nigel Stuart-Thorne – Taunton Deane Borough Council.

Apologies: Cllr D Westcott, Cllr D Ross, Cllr A Glanville, Cllr D Nelson, Cllr J Roundell-Greene, Cllr M Mullins.

6 Minutes of 24 October meeting – agenda item 1

1.0 The Panel agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2008 were accurate.

7 Welcome and introductions – agenda item 2

1.0 The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and noted that the Somerset Waste Board (SWB) Members and Officers and other Officers from the participating Councils that had been invited had attended in good numbers. Those who were unable to attend due to other commitments had sent their apologies. All those present were invited to introduce themselves.

8 Consideration of the questions selected by Members of the joint scrutiny panel – agenda item 3

1.0 The panel noted the questions it had agreed at its last meeting and the Chairman advised the panel that a copy of the 12 questions had been circulated to the SWB Members and Officers. The Panel agreed to consider each question in turn and this may lead to further discussion on associated topics.

1.1 Question 1 asked about the anticipated cost should the SWB be required to collect and dispose of waste from schools, universities, hospitals and if this would necessitate additional vehicles. The panel heard that if a future legal ruling stated that collection services must be provided from such premises it might be necessary to make arrangements for appropriate collection services from May Gurney or other waste carriers. It had been estimated that the cost could be in the region of £100-£200k however there remained uncertainty about the volume and type of waste from the wide variety of premises that could have to be managed in such a situation.

1.2 Question 2 asked about any plans for an anaerobic digestion plant and it was noted that Viridor had indicated that a plant could be fully operational 21 months after a decision was confirmed to proceed with such a development. Some food waste could be taken in for the commissioning period which would start 15 months from a decision to proceed, and it was noted that a decision to 'go-ahead' could be made before Christmas in 2008.

1.3 Question 3 concerned the Sort It! Plus trial, and it was asked if implementing it across the district would be advantageous. Members were reminded that the Sort It! Plus trials had added both plastic bottles and cardboard to kerbside recycling collections and a report on the trials would be considered by the SWB at its meeting on 21 November. Initial findings indicated that the 'SP5' service package could improve recycling rates by 9-28%, enabling up to 58% of household waste to be recycled. Sort It! Plus would incur additional costs of £8-£12 per household however this could be offset by the avoidance of increased landfill costs and allowances, whilst also helping to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

1.4 Question 4 looked at the increased tender price by May Gurney and asked if it was affordable and regarded as reasonable. In response it was explained that increase in prices were allowed in the contract and arose due to inflation and increased costs of purchasing vehicles and baling equipment since the tender prices had been submitted in 2007. The panel heard that as a consequence of the global economic downturn there had been a fall in the market prices of some materials for recycling, and the SWB would have to take a view on whether the increase was reasonable and affordable and make recommendations accordingly.

1.5 Question 5 asked about the representations the SWB had made/intended to make regarding the aim of reducing the levels of packaging generally. It was reported that the SWB had helped DEFRA to develop its packaging strategy for England, and it was expected that the strategy would contain a case study on the SWB and its approach to joint working and recycling. The SWB had represented local government at events and workshops organised by DEFRA and the packaging industry so that different parts of the process chain could understand each others position. The SWB had argued that the existing Producer Responsibility Packaging Recovery Note (PRN) did not adequately support recycling and the continued fall in prices for materials would highlight this further.

1.6 Question 6 asked when a revised waste minimisation strategy would be published/implemented and it was stated in reply that the SWB maintained an active and varied campaign to promote waste prevention and reuse through a variety of media. A new updated waste prevention and reuse strategy for Somerset was currently being drafted for consideration by the SWB in December 2008.

- 1.7 Question 7 looked at commercial waste generated by the tourist industry and in particular the 'coastal belt' area in Somerset. It was explained that the Council was required to offer a service to commercial waste producers in their area on request and to recharge their reasonable costs for the service. Although there were no specific recycling targets for businesses and recycling would only take place where it made economic sense, the SWB was exploring ways for increasing commercial waste recycling. The County Council had provided funding to enable the SWB to employ, on a fixed term basis, an Officer to develop, co-ordinate and promote recycling collection services to the commercial sector. Also discussions were ongoing with Viridor about the possibility of providing sites on or next to HWRC's for commercial waste.
- 1.8 Question 8 asked about the plans that existed to sort waste from houses of multiple occupation, so that it might be recycled. The panel heard that the operations team were actively working to increase the number of recycling facilities for such residents. This included communal refuse containers and appropriately sized bring site containers to serve specific communities, and information leaflets on how to use recycling facilities had been translated into Portuguese and Polish.
- 1.9 Question 9 concerned the work undertaken with planning departments regarding new housing developments to ensure easy access and collection of recyclables. It was reported that all operational teams liaise regularly with the planning departments in each of the partner authorities and they were frequently consulted on plans for new developments by planning officers and developers. There was also the possibility of charging developers for the provision of waste and recycling storage containers either directly or through Section 106 agreements. It was suggested that the SWB should become a consultee on the Local Development Framework.
- 2.0 Question 10 asked if there were any plans to extend the SWB to include neighbouring Councils and if this would lower costs. It was stated that the SWB was interested in expanding its range of partners and this could happen through client management or in sharing facilities, such as the proposed anaerobic digestion plant at Walpole. However it was emphasised that it was unlikely that further Councils would join the contract until the first contract break point in October 2014. The SWB was aiming for Somerset to be self-sufficient in terms of processing waste and it was reported that at present 90% of disposal and some processing was accommodated within the County but that most recyclables and a major proportion of food waste was processed outside of Somerset.
- 2.1 Question 11 asked about the vehicles used to collect waste and it was reported that the contractual arrangements for the provision and maintenance of the vehicles were robust. All the vehicles had proved to be fit for purpose and the maintenance arrangements had been operating well. The working life of the vehicles was approximately 7 years and the next vehicles due for replacement were the South Somerset fleet and May Gurney had already begun to research options for replacing those vehicles.
- 2.2 Question 12 was concerned with the formal budget monitoring arrangements and how this was being dealt with. It was explained that the Annual Governance report that had been completed on the SWB covered the financial year 2007/08, and as the SWB commenced in October 2007, budget monitoring information could only have been received at the 18 January 2008 meeting of the SWB. It was noted that a full report would have been of limited content and value in the absence of meaningful financial

information so a verbal report had been presented to the 18 January 2008. An outturn position report that included a draft set of formal accounts had been considered by the 26 June meeting of the SWB. The overall position for the six months to 31 March 2008 had shown an underspend of some £294,990, so against a budget of £13.9 million that had represented a 97.88% spend.

9 Date of next meeting – agenda item 4

- 1.0 It was agreed that no further meetings of the Panel would be held until or unless a Member raised a specific concern that they would like to be considered by the joint scrutiny panel, at which time a meeting would be arranged.

The Chairman suggested it would be a good idea to elect a Vice Chairman to assist at future meetings, particularly if the Chairman himself was unable to attend. Nominations were sought and Cllr Julian Taylor was elected as Vice Chairman of the joint scrutiny panel.

10 Any other business of urgency – agenda item 5