

Special Scrutiny Committee – 24th March 2011

4. Recycling Centres – Future Operation to Meet Savings Requirements

Purpose of Report

This meeting of the Scrutiny Committee has been convened to allow South Somerset Members the opportunity to consider reports being submitted to the March 25th meeting of the Somerset Waste Board. The reports relate to future operating arrangements for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's) across the County.

Action Required

Members of the Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider and comment on the three papers attached:

1. Recycling Centres – Future Operation to meet savings requirements
2. Impact Assessment Form and Action Table (Amended for budget cuts)
3. Somerset Waste Board minutes – 11th February 2011

The Somerset Waste Board is due to meet on the 25th March to consider these proposals. Any comments made by the SSSC Scrutiny Committee will be taken into consideration by our representatives on the Somerset Waste Board.

Background

Members from three partner authorities called-in a decision taken by the Somerset Waste Board at their meeting on the 11th February 2011. The decision related to the future service provided at various Household recycling Centres (HWRC's) across the county. In recognition of the fact that there had not previously been a call-in of this nature and that the SWB Constitution states that in order to ensure the best use of Partnership Officer time, where possible, a joint approach to Scrutiny should be adopted, an **informal** briefing session was held on 7th March.

The meeting was not formally constituted and was intended to provide the officers of the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) an opportunity to explain the rationale for the decisions taken on the 11 February and to update members on any work done since that meeting. This approach meant that the officers could provide this information to officers and members from all partner authorities at one meeting and that this information could then be formally disseminated and discussed by the individual authorities as they saw fit. The briefing session on 7th March was well attended by Scrutiny representatives from all 6 partner authorities as well as senior officers from both the partner councils and the SWP. At the start of the meeting, each authority which had called-in the decisions taken by the SWB in February was given the opportunity to outline their grounds for call-in. It became apparent that there were two main issues. Firstly, there were concerns over the decision making process used by the SWB and the Scrutiny process which followed.

Secondly, those members present at the briefing session felt that more time should have been allowed to explore possible alternatives to the closure and reduction in hours of the various HWRC's across the County.

Due to the time constraints in needing to set budgets by the end of March, it was agreed that the briefing session and any subsequent Scrutiny meetings at the individual partner authorities would focus on the proposals for the future of the HWRC's. A note was taken

of the concerns raised relating to process and it was agreed that a more formal Joint Scrutiny meeting would be held after May where these issues can be explored in more detail.

Richard Hogg, Solicitor Somerset County Council updated those present on the legal advice recently received by the Partnership which supported a view that the potential for charging for services at those HWRC's identified for closure or reduced opening hours could be explored.

There was a general consensus amongst members present that their constituents had expressed a willingness to pay to use the HWRC's rather than lose the service. The Managing Director of SWP stated that since receiving this legal advice, he and his team had been working up proposals that would be presented to SWB members for a final decision at their next Board meeting on 25th March. He stated that he would make every effort to ensure that these proposals were circulated to all partner authorities in time for individual Scrutiny Committees to consider and comment on prior to the 25th March.

The papers attached to this agenda contain the technical detail discussed at the meeting. In terms of next steps, members from each partner authority stated that it was their intention to discuss the matter once the papers had been published via their individual Scrutiny functions, with of course, the agreement of the respective Scrutiny Chairs. The comments from these individual Scrutiny considerations would then be available for the SWB on 25th March.

It was agreed that officers from each authority would arrange a more formal joint Scrutiny meeting to be held after May to discuss the issues raised over the decision making process and future joint Scrutiny arrangements.

Background Papers: *Recycling Centres – Future Operation to meet savings requirements*
Impact Assessment Form and Action Table (Amended for budget cuts)
Somerset Waste Board minutes – 11th February 2011
