

HERTFORDSHIRE WASTE PARTNERSHIP

MEMBERS' GROUP
26th January 2009

Item 5ii: Assessment of Strengths & Weaknesses

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1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an initial analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.
- 1.2 **NB** – The comments below are based on the fact that the Development Manager's role is new. As such the recommendations should be regarded as an evolution of the existing set up and in no way a criticism of current practices.

2 Background

- 2.1 An analysis of strength and weaknesses has been carried out as a result of observations and discussions with borough / district and county council officers. The report includes recommendations to address the issues identified.

3 STRENGTHS

3.1 *Decision Making*

- 3.2 Although not universally supported, there is general acceptance that the structure of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, (HWP) decision making process is one of the Partnership's strengths. However, once an Inter Authority Intermediate Agreement has been established, further work to assess possible changes to long term governance arrangements for the Partnership should look to streamline decision making when it comes to the strategic development of integrated waste management services across the County.

3.3 *The HWP Brand & WasteAware*

- 3.4 A good example of partnership working is the HWP brand itself and the WasteAware campaign. A number of officers specifically mentioned the WasteAware group and the productive cross boundary nature of its work. However, some concern was expressed at the disjointed use of the HWP logo balanced by suggestions that through the auspices of the WasteAware group a common protocol could be established.

3.5 The recruitment process for a permanent WasteAware co-ordinator has been initiated which should see applications due before the Christmas / New Year break. As with the Development Manager and Partnership Support Officer, the new co-ordinator will be employed by HCC and based at the County Council in Hertford; but will be mobile as necessary to fulfil the requirements of the post.

3.6 Longer term from a Partnership standpoint there are concerns about control of the WasteAware campaign from a strategic perspective. There needs to be an effective link between gaps in operational performance and the issues tackled by the campaign. In addition the campaign and specifically its information distribution mechanisms will need to accommodate input from the communications strategy launching next year to support the residual waste procurement programme. This could possibly include integration of additional staff resource from the residual waste programme.

3.7 Recommendations

A. **Work is undertaken by the Partnership Development Manager to identify and utilise any synergies that exist between the current WasteAware campaign and the communications strategy to be launched in support of the residual waste programme.**

3.8 *HWP Recycling Performance*

3.9 Figures for Quarter 1 2008/09 indicate a recycling rate of 45.7% with big increases in recycling tonnages being matched by similar reductions in residual household waste. This underlines a strong commitment to achieving agreed targets and offers good practice for weaker performing boroughs / districts to follow.

3.10 In turn, considering that the majority of recycling services have been developed in isolation, a current review of successful waste partnerships elsewhere in the UK indicates significant potential for delivering more cost effective services whilst maintaining and improving recycling results through joint service provision. Any such developments would need to be supported by robust business cases.

3.11 *Knowledge & Experience*

3.12 The Partnership as a whole is considered to have a good range of knowledge and experience. There is a genuine enthusiasm for the Partnership and a desire to see if more can be achieved by working together. The main issue preventing this is a lack of communication coupled with an historic lack of co-ordination at the operational level.

3.13 Opportunities for Joint Procurement & Joint Services

- 3.14 For the most part there is a desire to see the Partnership working closer together when it comes to joint procurement and joint working. A number of the boroughs / districts have and continue to expend genuine effort on 'low-level' joint initiatives.
- 3.15 Recommendation – that formalised procedures be established through the offices of the Partnership Development Manager to facilitate (and streamline) the joint procurement of relevant capital assets and waste related services. This recommendation brings into line current practices with one of the intended areas of responsibility for the Partnership Development Manager.**

4 WEAKNESSES

4.1 HWP Processes and the County Council Waste Management Function

- 4.2 Historically Partnership process have been largely facilitated by the county council with support for the WasteAware campaign, and the provision and support of HWP meetings. A number of different sections within the county council have operational and financial input into this process.
- 4.3 The Partnership Development Manager's role creates an opportunity to evolve current arrangements by reorganising Partnership processes into a single area with budgets realigned to match. At the same time the linkage between the work of the Partnership and the waste management function at County Hall should be revised.
- 4.4 Clearly, one of the roles of the Development Manager is to act as an effective link between the boroughs / districts and the county to ensure that the Partnership is developed on a collaborative basis creating added value. This can be supported by including the Development Manager on a strategic basis in all future work streams linked to residual waste procurement as well as the wider functioning of existing waste management operations controlled by the County's waste management unit. To be clear this is not intended to replace existing elements, rather the intention is to add to them through the provision of additional resource.
- 4.5 The changes below are recommended to ensure that all resources linked to the operation of the Partnership are brought under the control of the Development Manager. This will clarify areas of responsibility and accountability.

4.6 Recommendations

- A. Changes are made to current work streams to integrate the Partnership Development Manager into work to support the residual waste procurement programme.**
- B. All budgets linked to the staffing of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership are transferred to the control of the Partnership Development Manager.**
- C. All ancillary / support budgets linked to the operation of the Partnership are transferred to the control of the Partnership Development Manager and Partnership Support Officer.**
- D. Any HCC budgets linked to communications work that takes place under the auspices of the WasteAware campaign be transferred to the control of the Partnership Development Manager and WasteAware Co-ordinator.**

4.7 Memorandum of Understanding & Commitment to the Partnership :-

- 4.8 The memorandum of understanding (MOU) established a clear commitment by the boroughs / districts and county council to work in a coordinated fashion. To work towards mechanisms for joint decision making and to enable the development of integrated waste management systems. This is underpinned by a commitment not to enter into any new waste related contracts or arrangements without prior consultation with the Partnership.
- 4.9 However, with some exceptions in general terms these requirements appear not to be considered by boroughs / districts in the medium to long term planning of their collection services. This stems from a lack of clarity about the context set by the MOU as well as reporting mechanisms and associated guidelines for consulting on service changes with the HWP. This has led to a number of instances where compliance with the MOU has taken second place to a boroughs / districts own interests which highlights the largely parochial way in which services have been developed to date.
- 4.10 Such decisions have been based on 'local' interpretations of the MOU at officer level. Whilst the empowerment of officers to make decisions is to be supported this can also result in a mismatch between the strategic direction set by the HWP (and associated mechanisms such as the MOU) and work at borough / district level. Recent problems experienced in agreeing the Annex are an example of this.
- 4.11 Consequently it remains unclear how many of the Boroughs are truly committed to moving the Partnership forward to a point where joint decision mechanisms are established leading to joint service provision. Some Boroughs are very keen for this evolution to take place others less so. This could prove problematical in moving forward on the issue of joint working when it comes to the re-specification and letting of contracts for major

collection services as well as the development of effective cross boundary working for direct service organisations.

4.12 Recommendation – As part of longer term work on new governance arrangements for the Partnership, Directors and Members need to reaffirm a commitment to the development of integrated waste management systems based on the strategic alignment and joint procurement of services across the County.

4.13 *Financial Relationship Between Waste Collection & Disposal :-*

4.14 The financial relationship between collection and disposal is complicated due to the use of recycling credits and the alternative financial model. However, it is recognised that the current system is to a large extent based on a framework imposed by Central Government.

4.15 Some boroughs / districts suggest that both systems are necessary to finance recycling without which rate payers would face increased costs. However, the funds used to pay for these incentives are raised via the precept. Therefore the financial burden exists exacerbated by costs associated with calculating, paying and monitoring these systems at both borough / district and county level. In essence the current two-tier structure prevents proper consideration of ‘whole service costs’ to the tax payer.

4.16 That said, given the amount of effort that has been expended on this issue as well as the need to give boroughs / districts (and their budgets) stability at a time when they should be considering service developments to achieve 50% recycling changing the financial model at this stage would do more harm than good.

4.17 Recommendation – that any proposals to change the financial relationship between the boroughs / districts and the county council be considered as part of longer term work relevant to the establishment of joint working arrangements across the two tier structure.

4.18 *Waste Infrastructure Capital Grant – Selection Criteria :-*

4.19 Administration of the Waste Infrastructure Capital Grant (WICG) has been difficult due to a lack of clear guidance from DEFRA. In turn the criteria that have been agreed locally need to emphasise that funding should result in additional tonnages being recycled securing the required increase in performance.

4.20 The Partnership Development Manager has drawn previous discussions and reports on the selection criteria for the WICG into a single document. This together with changes to address the wider ‘municipal’ perspective are presented elsewhere on the agenda.

4.21 *Schedule of Meetings / Attendance at Meetings :-*

- 4.22 Based on attendance at previous meetings concerns exist over the commitment to Partnership processes by some boroughs / districts. However, this is partly explained by the 'bunching' of some dates as well as recognition that in some authorities officers fulfil a diverse range of functions resulting in their attendance being required at a range of meetings.
- 4.23 It should also be recognised that a number of the boroughs / districts are currently undergoing significant service changes which result in less time being available to attend HWP meetings.
- 4.24 The HWP support officer in conjunction with the Partnership Development Manager is already looking at this issue and will implement the necessary changes to the schedule. Dates are being worked back from those already agreed for the Members and Directors which remain unaffected.

4.25 *Decision Making :-*

- 4.26 There is a general concern that the Partnership process can be slow to make decisions. This raises questions, not over the value of the Partnership, but the time spent inside Partnership processes compared to the need to concentrate on managing Borough services.
- 4.27 This creates an impression of complex relationships with unclear lines of responsibility and accountability, leaving some Boroughs unsure what relevance Partnership processes have on service developments which links back to non compliance with the MOU.
- 4.28 One the main reasons cited for this delay was the need for recommendations agreed by the Partnership to be ratified by each individual authority adding significant delay into the process and as result limiting how productive the Partnership can be. The need for individual ratification in essence also gives the power of veto over any Partnership decision by any single individual authority which will not be conducive to effectively meeting future challenges.
- 4.29 **Recommendation – As part of longer term work on governance arrangements for the Partnership progress needs to be made towards establishing joint decision making processes that have strategic and management input into all waste related service developments and contracts both at borough / district and county level with a view to their strategic alignment over time.**

4.30 *Communication Issues :-*

- 4.31 A common complaint has been a lack of clear communication between boroughs / districts and the county. That said some of the examples quoted were determined to be unfounded. However, regardless of this there is a perception that communication lines are unclear.
- 4.32 No specific recommendation is being made. Part of the work of the Partnership Development Manager is to 'free up' the lines of communication by acting as a conduit between the boroughs / districts and the County.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 A draft version of this report was presented to the Heads of Waste Group on the 21st November 2008 and incorporates feedback from this meeting, together with feedback from the report presented to the 15th December 2008 Directors' Group meeting.