

Benefits of Consistency in Household Collections in Cheshire West & Chester



Summary

Cheshire West and Chester Council is the fourth largest unitary authority in the North West with 154,500 households. Established in 2009, it brought together the three boroughs of Ellesmere Port and Neston, Vale Royal and the City of Chester and assumed the responsibilities of the former Cheshire County Council for those authorities.

Following a competitive dialogue procurement process May Gurney (who subsequently became Keir) were selected to deliver a 14-year contract starting April 2012. A new consistent service was rolled out in three phases, completed by October 2012. The range of dry recyclables collected was extended and collected via kerbside sort (multi-stream). In addition, all households receive a weekly food waste collection, a free fortnightly garden waste collection and fortnightly residual waste collection.

Benefits have included: an increase in recycling to 57.67% in 2015/16, with an expectation to reach 62% through guaranteed levels of recycling performance which Kier are striving to achieve; improvements in material quality; and expected savings of more than £50M over the life of the contract.

In terms of advice for others, an up-to-date database of properties, including what services they should be receiving and any variations or exceptions, is considered crucial. In addition, whether outsourced or in-house, the performance management framework for the service needs to be sound with clear KPIs that leave little or no room for dispute.

Key Facts

- Savings of more than £50M expected over the 14-year life of the contract.
- Improvements in material quality through a comprehensive kerbside sort system.
- Recycling rate of 57.67% in 2015/16.
- Expected that the consistent service will continue to increase recycling levels to 62%.

Background

Cheshire West and Chester Council is the fourth largest unitary authority in the North West serving 154,500 households. It was established in 2009, bringing together the three previous boroughs of Ellesmere Port and Neston, Vale Royal and the City of Chester and assuming the functions and responsibilities of the former Cheshire County Council for those authorities.

Forming a new unitary authority and bringing together three previous collection authorities meant that initially the services provided to residents did vary. Both Ellesmere Port and Neston, and Vale Royal provided a kerbside sort service, supplying residents with 55l boxes and bags (although colour of containers was not the same across the two authorities). Chester City was in the process of changing to a comingled collection; the newly formed unitary supported the continuation of the roll out of 240l wheeled bins for mixed dry recyclables, with a caddy insert for glass.

A garden waste collection service was available to all residents but container styles and colours varied, and for residual waste 240l wheeled bins were standard in two of the three previous boroughs, with Chester City providing 140l wheeled bin as standard.

Frequency of collection of the recycling and garden waste streams was fortnightly for all residents. However, for residual waste, residents in Chester City with the smaller capacity container received a weekly service; all other residents were provided with a fortnightly service.

At the time the unitary was established two of the authorities had outsourced their collections, therefore contract end dates were a significant consideration for any changes proposed.

In the short term the three different collection services were accommodated but as a newly formed unitary, the plan was to transform the three existing collection arrangements over a twelve-month period into a new consistent service for all residents.

Working together

Selecting the standard service

In 2010, Cheshire West and Chester went out to tender for a new waste collection contract. A Competitive Dialogue procurement process was adopted, allowing bidders to develop alternative solutions based on key requirements of the authority. In November 2011, May Gurney (who subsequently became Kier) was selected to deliver a 14-year contract starting in April 2012, with the option to extend for a further seven years.

A weekly kerbside sort system was selected as the standard service, with residents required to separate their recyclable wastes into two 55 litre boxes. The range of recyclable materials collected was expanded and now includes: plastic bottles; household plastic pots, tubs and trays; food and drinks cans and lids; aerosols and foil; paper and envelopes; cardboard; food and drink cartons; phone directories and magazines; glass bottles and jars; clothes and shoes; batteries; cooking and engine oil; small electrical items; spectacles; empty printer cartridges; and, mobile phones.

Residents were also issued with a 23l food waste caddy and a 7l kitchen caddy for a weekly food waste collection. 240l wheeled bins were selected for garden waste, and 180l wheeled bins were chosen for residual waste; both waste streams are collected fortnightly.

Within the contract Kier retain ownership of all the recyclable materials collected. This approach was agreed to help reduce the price of the contract and minimise the risk to the Authority from fluctuations in the materials markets.

Implementing the changes

A significant mobilisation period from the initial award of the contract in November 2011 to full implementation in October 2012 consisted of round modelling, logistics planning, awareness raising, container purchase and delivery, procurement of new vehicles, depot changes, and staff briefings.

Implementing the new consistent collection service posed a number of logistical challenges requiring:

- delivery of almost 550,000 new containers;

- removal of more than 147,000 existing containers; and,
- distribution of over 500,000 pieces of information.

Although around 60% of the residents already had a kerbside sort service prior to the roll out of the new service, for those with a comingled collection effectively managing the changeover was crucial.

All contracts were aligned to finish on 31st March 2012, with the new contract with Kier starting on 1st April 2012. They ran the existing schemes until they were changed over to the new service.

A phased approach was taken to roll out the new service, starting in Vale Royal in April 2012. The second phase was in Ellesmere Port and Neston two months later. Having had a kerbside sort system in place previously, the changes for residents were less significant in these areas and consisted of delivering new smaller 180l residual waste containers, changing the old residual waste container to the garden waste container, removing the old garden waste container, and providing the new containers for the food waste collection. The roll out was completed within 6 weeks and the new service commenced in the Vale Royal area in June, and Ellesmere Port and Neston in August.

The final phase was in Chester City; with a comingled service in place these residents experienced a more fundamental service change. A similar pattern of container exchange and replacement starting with the residual container as in the previous phases took place over a six-week period with the service going live in October 2012.

Challenges to the service change

For Chester City, not only was this a significant change to the service, the fact that residents had already undergone a service change in 2009/10, meant that this was more of a challenge. A comprehensive engagement and communication campaign was utilised to bring residents on board with the changes and ensure they understood what was expected. This ran prior to, alongside, and during the distribution of the new containers.

The new service was also a challenge for collection staff who had previously delivered the contracted services and local authority staff who were TUPED across to Kier, and needed to adapt to a whole new system of collection with different requirements and expectations on them as staff. A programme of proactive engagement was undertaken, with one-to-ones with every member of staff.

Raising awareness of the changes

To ensure that the bin exchange and implementation of the new consistent service went as smoothly as possible, a communications and engagement programme was delivered by the authority in partnership with Kier and Waste Watch which included:

- Community engagement, for example: presentations and stands at 'Community Forums' and other events; delivery of a 'Community Recycling Champions' programme, based on audience segmentation to ensure delivery of appropriate messages; and, introduction of an e-newsletter service update.
- Pre-leaflet to raise awareness of the impending changes delivered to residents prior to implementation.
- Media advertising using local press and different media outlets to promote the changes and engagement activities.
- Information pack for residents, delivered at the same time as the containers.
- Regular Member Briefing Notes and training sessions during each phase to keep Councillors informed.
- Roadshows and drop-in sessions to ensure resident had the opportunity to ask questions and see the containers.
- Receptacle exchange engagement involving the addition of a staff member on each vehicle allowing those residents with remaining questions to have them addressed, without impacting on the delivery crew.
- Targeted door-to-door engagement to explain the service changes to residents, maximising participation and correct service use.

- Schools education, utilising the existing network of 'Junior Environmental Officers', empowering them to spread the message to their fellow students.
- Allocation of an engagement team member to each of the new collection crews during the first week of collections, allowing initial problems with service misuse to be quickly addressed.
- An increased focus on waste reduction specifically food and garden waste prevention through community re-skilling. This included holding sessions in targeted areas and focusing on a key message, such as providing cookery lessons but teaching how to get the most from the food used and prevent wastage.
- Updated website and improvements to the 'self-service' elements of the site.

Benefits

The aims of the new service are to:

- Maximise the amount recycled, beyond the previous 50% target
- Deliver high levels of customer service.
- Reduce annual costs by £1.58M (15%).
- Minimise carbon emissions.
- Provide consistent arrangements across the Council's area.

In terms of what has been achieved since the consistent service was implemented, there have been performance improvements with recycling rates reaching 57.67% in 2015/16. It is expected within the contract that the consistent service will increase recycling levels to 62%. Under the contract responsibility is placed on the contractor to maximise diversion. Kier have committed to a "Minimum Guaranteed Diversion Tonnage" which effectively caps the amount of household waste they are permitted to send to landfill/treatment. If this cap is surpassed a financial deduction based on the costs of sending the material through the waste treatment contract is applied. Therefore, it is in the contractors' best interest to ensure residents fully utilise the recycling service and utilise it correctly, minimising contamination at the kerbside.

For the residents, a more comprehensive service has been put in place and a wider range of materials including all the core materials that make up around 60% of waste (residual and recyclables) collected from households, are now collected from the kerbside.

Satisfaction levels continue to be high as evidenced in an independent customer insight survey carried out in 2015, with 93% of residents surveyed reporting that they are satisfied with the waste and recycling service overall; this is an increase of 5% from 2014.

The consistent service is anticipated to save the authority more than £50M over the 14-year life of the contract. The savings are as a result of maximising the quality of recyclables collected to secure higher income from their sale to offset collection costs. In addition, by coming together and managing the role of both waste collection and disposal authority the new council has greater control over the final waste disposal budget, and the types and quantities of waste which are being sent for disposal. A holistic waste and recycling collection service has been developed taking into account increased recycling, excellent customer service and comprehensive budget management. With the introduction of the new service the number of depots has reduced from three to two, collection rounds have been rationalised to make them more efficient, and technology has been introduced to ensure the service can be responsive to customer enquiries. These changes have all contributed significantly to the savings being realised.

The consistent service has positively impacted upon quality of recyclables. In the Chester City area, the previous comingled collection had a 7% contamination rate. Under the new service, the crew has been trained to ensure that any non-recyclable items put out for collection are left at the kerbside with an information leaflet explaining what can be presented for recycling.

As well as ensuring a consistent service is being provided for all residents the target of minimising carbon emissions is also being realised as a result of residents' use of the service and the high levels of recycling being achieved. A ranking of authorities carried out by independent consultants Eunomia, based on carbon savings from recycling services and

performance, places Cheshire West and Chester as the top authority on the recycling carbon index recording an estimated CO₂ saving of 109kg per capita in 2014/15.

Advice for other authorities

When implementing a new service, it is vital that the authority's database of properties, including what services they should be receiving, and any variations or exceptions, is up to date. This will allow the call centre to respond to individual queries with accuracy and for the crew to deliver the appropriate service and help maintain high levels of customer satisfaction.

In addition, ensure that with any service, whether it is outsourced or delivered in-house, that the performance management framework is sound and KPIs are very clear with little or no room for dispute. Indicators in place should also be comprehensive and cover all aspects of the service if it is to be monitored effectively, and ensure accountable contract management.

Finally, when bringing in any changes expectations of both the public and the staff need to be clear and need to be communicated effectively and repeatedly during implementation and early stages of service delivery.

"By putting recycling first and by treating waste as a valuable resource, our kerbside collection service maximises the quality of materials we collect, getting the best possible price, and keeping costs down to our taxpayers.

Before we commenced the contract, our residents identified the importance of providing a high quality service, that not only maximised recycling, but collected a wide range of recyclable materials.

High levels of customer service are at the heart of the new service and performance measures are constantly and consistently monitored, in collaboration with contractor, to ensure that our customers' expectations are not only meet but exceeded"

Steve Bakewell, Senior Waste Contracts Manager