

Briefing note for Cllr Tony Cummings, Bury Council meeting, 3rd April 2013

GMWDA Update

Bury have been represented on the Authority this year by myself and Cllr Alan Quinn. I have served as one of the Authority's three Vice-Chairs for the second year in a row, and was also Chair of the Performance, Policy & Resources Committee for the second year in a row. Cllr Quinn was a member of the Authority's Audit Committee.

The PPR Committee drives performance by monitoring progress against targets in capital and revenue budgets, performance, and delivering on key priorities. This Committee also monitors the Authority's internal, non-Contract costs and seeks to maximise savings in this area. This is in line with the directive from AGMA to reduce controllable costs by 25%, a target that has already been significantly exceeded, and further savings continue to be sought.

A key challenge addressed by the PPR Committee this year was completing the sale of a number of surplus sites, including the Authority's portfolio of closed landfill sites. 18 of the closed landfill sites have been sold (with two retained due to their strategic value, and the others returned to freeholders). This will generate a significant saving in the Authority's costs going forward, which in turn will also help to reduce the Levy for Districts in the future.

Cllr Quinn sits on the Authority's Audit Committee, which actively monitors the Authority's finances and systems of internal governance. This drives savings through efficiencies in the budget, which are also passed back to Districts through savings in the Levy.

The Authority has two further Committees. The first is the Recycling, Waste Management and Operations Committee, which is responsible for monitoring the performance and implementation of the Authority's £3.5bn Recycling and Waste Management Contract, and considering any ways that the Contract can be optimised to deliver the greatest possible landfill diversion and recycling rates.

Increases in these rates will drive savings and hence reduce the Levy, which is passed on to Bury and the other Districts.

The other Committee is the Strategy & Behavioural Change Committee. This Committee seeks to drive increases in the recycling rate and landfill diversion rate (and thus drive savings in the levy) by promoting recycling and changing the behaviour of Greater Manchester residents, mainly through a range of communications campaigns.

Our overall focus as an Authority is to drive up recycling (to 50% by 2015/16), increase diversion from landfill (to at least 75% by 2015/16) and hence to reduce the financial and environmental burdens of dealing with the 1.1 million tonnes of waste the conurbation produces each year.

Bury's recycling performance has improved from 25.8% in 2010/11 to 34% in 2011/12, and was up to 44% from April 2012 to the end of February 2013. Currently this year Bury ranks 3rd out of the 9 GM Authorities, behind only Stockport and Trafford, who are currently leading the way at 61% and 48% recycling respectively from April 2012 to the end of February 2013.

The last couple of years have been strong for the Authority overall, with the conurbation-wide recycling rate now at 39% to February 2013, with landfill diversion at 55% in the same period. For comparison, these figures were 27% and 37% respectively in 2006/07, before the start of the Contract.

Along with a small reduction in total waste collected (due in part to communications work to minimise the amount of waste produced by households), waste to landfill has reduced significantly. It is projected that the Authority will landfill roughly 460,000 tonnes of waste from April 2012 to March 2013, a significant reduction from 514,000 tonnes in 2011/12 and 641,000 tonnes in 2010/11. It costs around £100 per tonne to send waste to landfill, so this reduction clearly represents a significant saving on the Levy charges, which should be welcomed in the current financial climate. Through the actions taken under the campaign of 'our aim is zero waste', the Authority is seeking to reduce the amount of waste landfilled to as low as around 105,000 tonnes (which will be over 90% landfill avoidance) by 2015/16.

The big improvements in performance both overall and for Bury in particular show that not only are the new facilities that have been constructed having a benefit, but also that the changes in collection practices and the communications campaigns that have been run have had a great effect.

Members will have heard in the national press comments from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government regarding the increases in the Levy from the Waste Disposal Authority. Although the Levy increase this year, and in recent years, has been significant, this was required to allow the construction of the sustainable recycling facilities across Greater Manchester. Following the completion of the construction phase of the Contract, Levy increases will be significantly below the rate of inflation for the remaining 20 years of the Contract. These short term increases in the Levy have allowed Greater Manchester to provide a world class waste solution.

Indeed, in January 2013 the Authority hosted a visit from David Newman, the President of the International Solid Waste Association to allow Mr Newman to view Greater Manchester's waste solution first hand. Following his visit, Mr Newman stated that "Greater Manchester should be proud of the results it is achieving ... I am pleased to see Greater Manchester has become a virtuous example in waste management and I really hope the City takes the opportunity to promote its achievements around the world; there is a lot to be learnt here."

As of March 2013, 40 of the total of 42 waste management sites in Greater Manchester that will be delivered have now been completed and are fully operational. The remaining sites are an In-Vessel Composting facility in Bolton, which will turn food and garden waste into compost, and a Mechanical Biological Treatment facility in Bredbury, which keep residual waste (general rubbish) away from landfill by turning it into electricity and fuel for the combined heat and power station being constructed in Runcorn. The Runcorn site is also due for completion later this year. The MBT facilities and combined heat and power station have dual benefits, as they not only avoid landfilling waste, which reduces costs, but they also generate electricity that can be sold for significant levels of income, which again reduces the Levy charges.

Looking forward to the coming months, the main focus for the Authority is continuing this strong performance on two fronts. The first is to continue to build on work with Districts to change the behaviour of residents throughout Greater Manchester, to ideally turn everyone into an accurate and enthusiastic recycler. That makes sound environmental and financial sense.

To help this, the Authority has been successful in bidding for LIFE+ funding from the EU. This is over half a million pounds of funding to develop and run a range of innovative communications campaigns across Greater Manchester over the next 18 months, in partnership with each of the Councils in Greater Manchester. These campaigns will focus on specific areas in Districts where recycling performance isn't as good as it could be. These campaigns will begin shortly, and will run at a wide range of locations across Greater Manchester. They are aimed to be repeatable, so if any of the campaigns that run elsewhere are shown to be particularly effective, you can be sure you will see them in Bury as well.

The other front is to work with the Contractor, Viridor Laing (Greater Manchester) Limited, to complete the construction of the remaining facilities. As facilities are completed, we can extend our work with Viridor Laing to make the most effective use of the whole range of facilities to maximise efficiency, maximise income from the sites, increase recycling, and reduce landfill, hopefully generating further savings for the Authority which can be passed on to Districts through the Levy.

In summary, by using our sustainable waste management facilities to achieve their potential by engaging the public in recycling, it is hoped that Greater Manchester can achieve 50% recycling and 90% landfill diversion by 2015/16, which would be an achievement that everyone in Greater Manchester could be proud of.