

# SOUTH HAMS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



## **Minutes** of a meeting of the **South Hams Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday, 10th June, 2021 at 2.00 pm** at the **Chamber - Kilworthy Park**

Present: **Councillors:**

**Chairman** Cllr Birch  
**Vice Chairman** Cllr Smerdon

Cllr Austen  
Cllr McKay  
Cllr Spencer  
Cllr Jones

Cllr Jackson  
Cllr O'Callaghan  
Cllr Thomas

### **In attendance:**

Councillors:

Cllr Long  
Cllr Hodgson  
Cllr Pearce  
Cllr Holway  
Cllr Hopwood

Cllr Hawkins  
Cllr Abbott  
Cllr Baldry  
Cllr Bastone  
Cllr Brazil

Officers:

Chief Executive  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Monitoring Officer  
Head of Practice – Commissioning & Contracts  
Democratic Services Manager  
Specialist – Democratic Services  
Communications Officer  
IT Support Officer

### 1. **Apologies for Absence**

O&S.01/21

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs M Chown, J T Pennington, J Rose and J Sweett.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

O&S.02/21

Members and officers were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting but there were none made.

3. **Council's Waste and Recycling Service - Performance**

O&S.03/21

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Committee was addressed by the Executive Lead Member with responsibility for waste and recycling. The Member stated that he was very concerned with the level of service provided to some parts of the South Hams District by FCC Environment (the Council's Contractor) and took responsibility for this as residents looked to the Council to provide a satisfactory waste and recycling collection service.

The Member outlined initial explanations and reasons, including a dislike of service change of which there were many, and teething troubles, and said that South Hams District Council (SHDC) did not react quickly enough to the initial problems. The new round changes to collections had been devised by FCC Environment, who had assured SHDC that the new rounds had been tested and worked well, but it was clear that this was not the case as some rounds had been assigned to vehicles which were too big for their allocated route. This, coupled with new vehicle drivers being assigned to routes they did not know and without a pilot to show the way to go, had been a major contributing factor to the problems being experienced.

The Member paid tribute to all who had worked hard to get this service improved, including the staff in waste, local Ward Members who had been dealing with members of the public and to the Executive, who had worked strenuously to get things put right, including regular meetings with the Contractor, at which the Council's dissatisfaction with the service was repeatedly stressed.

The Member said he believed that the new service, when made to work, would be the right approach as its aim was to improve recycling rates within the District and align the service to the rest of Devon and the majority of the West Country and Wales. This approach to waste collection would soon become a Central Government requirement. With the enhanced ability to collect and recycle bottles, food waste, and a greater variety of plastic containers, where the service was operating properly, the recycling rates had increased significantly and the landfill waste much reduced.

The Lead Member concluded by apologising to the public and Members.

The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged that SHDC had not provided good customer service nor delivery to all residents of South Hams. He averred that the team had been working hard to improve the situation, often working 12 hours a day and seven days a week, but that the Council had been fundamentally let down by its Contractor. He apologised to Members for having to deal with these issues and to residents for having to

experience these issues, and thanked the Lead Member of the Executive for his hard work and support. Due to the sheer volume of contact over these issues, unfortunately not all emails had received a response, again negatively impacting on the service provided to both Members and the public. The Deputy Chief Executive firmly held FCC Environment responsible for the situation.

The Officer for Contracts and Commissioning then gave an update on the current situation, by outlining the phases of implementation of the new service. The first three phases had worked as expected. The next three phases to be implemented had been those routes with narrow access roads and had resulted in a significant increase in missed bins. Resources applied to these three phases had resulted in an inability to go back to resolve any missed bins in other areas. It was clarified that the six phases equated to approximately 36,000 households out of 46,000 households in the area, and missed collections were around 1,000 per day.

FCC Environment representatives were then introduced: Mark Barnfield – Head of Municipal Collections and Street Scene, and Brian Ashby – Area Manager for South Hams and West Devon areas. The Chairman outlined that he would be inviting questions from Members on the current state of affairs. Once these were concluded, the Chairman would then ask FCC Environment to outline how they intended to resolve the situation.

#### Questions and Answers – Current State of Affairs

Members asked FCC Environment (FCC) for an explanation of how the present situation had arisen.

During the response, FCC Environment stated the following:

- FCC acknowledged that the service currently received by some residents was not acceptable;
- Following the implementation of the later phases, and the disruption to those services, FCC met with the Executive on 18 May 2021 where FCC outlined their plans to improve the situation. These included increasing resources, including a greater number of smaller 7.5 tonne vehicles, increased supervision – some resource from FCC and some from SHDC, dedicated restricted rounds for the worst hit areas, increased resources in the Ivybridge Recycling Depot to better manage the flow of traffic into and out of the depot, to reduce vehicle waiting times;
- FCC had designed the Ivybridge Depot based on 2018 recycling figures which were significantly lower than that seen on the introduction of the new service;
- FCC acknowledged that there would need to be some minor revisions made to the new routes;
- There had been issues with the IT software; and
- Difficulties hiring new drivers had led to some drivers employed who had never driven refuse vehicles before and this inexperience had impacted on missed collections. It was acknowledged that a shortage of suitably qualified drivers was a national problem.

A Member raised the issue of missed assisted collections for the elderly and vulnerable which showed on the system as being completed but were not. A number of Members felt that supporting such assisted collections had to be an absolute priority. FCC apologised for this and stated that this was an unacceptable situation and would be looked into as a specific action outside of this meeting. FCC confirmed that assisted collections appeared on the in-cab devices and staff received training on how to carry these out.

Following a question from a Member on how the rounds were designed, FCC confirmed that routing software had been used during the re-design but that FCC were further reviewing rounds to ensure they worked better.

FCC were asked about communication between FCC and SHDC and responded that the scale of missed collections had produced a vast amount of complaints which had overwhelmed both FCC and officers of SHDC. FCC said that once the issues were resolved there would be better response times and increased communication between the two parties.

A Member referred to the previous plan submitted by FCC to the Executive, which had resulted in a minimal service improvement and asked how the new plan would prove to be any more effective. FCC responded that the additional resources and supervision put in place had not had the expected impact. FCC were confident that the new way forward would result in a much improved service that worked.

Following a question from a Member regarding intermittent internet signal in some areas of South Hams, FCC confirmed that routes were downloaded and missed collections, etc, could be recorded when the device was not connected to the internet. FCC acknowledged that there had been glitches with the technology at the start of the service but that these had been resolved, however some crews remained wary of using (and trusting) the technology.

A Member raised the issue of some residents not having had a collection for eight weeks despite regular reporting and responses being received to say that they would be collected soon. FCC said that they were trying to identify these properties and had deployed a resource at the beginning of the week to specifically tackle these properties, but the quantity and locations were making this difficult to resolve.

When asked about the impact on staff, FCC conceded that it was difficult for all involved and that a new Contract Manager would be starting from Monday, 14 June, to aid and assist staff. FCC reiterated the lack of available drivers and the increased reliance on agency workers which was far from ideal. However, they were offering staff, both permanent and agency, the opportunity to train as drivers and were looking at pay conditions for drivers to see if this would improve the situation. FCC acknowledged that having consistent crews on rounds was beneficial to round collection quality.

Following a query from a Member on the number of residences, and attendance vehicles, in West Devon Borough, FCC said there were between 26-27,000 residences but could not confirm the resources used in the area.

FCC promised to give a more detailed response outside of the meeting to all Members.

A Member asked to see the Viridor contract with FCC. FCC responded by saying that the contract was short term and had not been finalised, but promised they would get details of what the process would be and what would be recycled to Members.

Further to a question regarding some collection points being changed, FCC said that some of the old collection points were no longer accessible with the new vehicles, hence the change to the collection point.

### FCC Environmental Proposal

It was confirmed that FCC Environment (FCC) had sent a proposal to officers late in the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021. FCC requested they be permitted to outline their proposed remedies to the Committee, which the Chairman allowed.

With regard to their proposal, FCC stated that all residences would get their recycling collected on the allotted day moving forward which would require an increase in resources and increased capacity in the transfer station. The first three phases (1, 2, and 3) would continue as they currently were, with phase 4 remaining on the old system of blue and clear sacks until phases 5, 6, and 7 were resolved. Phases 5, 6, and 7 would have their recycling collected in a different way: although residents would be asked to continue to present their recycling in the appropriate boxes, the recycling would be then put into one vehicle which would then be taken to a site where the sorting for recycling would take place. No recycling would go to landfill nor the incinerator. FCC explained that they required residents to continue to self-sort their recycling as rounds would be returned to the new recycling vehicles without notice.

The interim use of single spaced vehicles would free up other vehicles to help resolve the backlog. FCC stated that the issues would not be resolved until there was increased capacity at the tipping site and infrastructure, therefore there would not be a final resolution for six months.

The Deputy Chief Executive then said that the proposal would require detailed examination and that it was vital the level of resource and detail was sufficient that this had a successful outcome. This new proposal was a different approach to previous plans, with a fundamental change to collections which must result in all collections being made when they were due to be, and any missed collections, much reduced in numbers, would be collected within the required two working days.

FCC confirmed that if the proposal was agreed to, then all properties would get a collection in the first week, with extra resources used to ensure that the backlog rounds were brought up to date.

Officers confirmed that there would be a team going through the data so that there would be confidence that all properties would be captured during

that first week, and that the properties which had been missed for multiple weeks would be cleared.

It was agreed by all that clear communication to residents was vital.

Following a final question from a Member, FCC said that the outstanding collections would be done within two to four weeks. An officer confirmed that additional resources from neighbouring Local Authorities were being used to help with the backlog. FCC stated that additional resources had made an improvement to the situation and that, if the proposal was accepted, then significant improvements would be seen.

The meeting was then adjourned while the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee met with the Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer to review the written proposal received the previous night from FCC.

On resumption of the Committee meeting, the Chairman **PROPOSED** four recommendations which was **SECONDED** by the Vice Chairman.

Following debate, an additional recommendation was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** that requested an update on outstanding collections be given to the Special Council Meeting to be held on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021. When put to the vote, this amendment was declared **CARRIED**.

It was then:

### **RESOLVED**

That the Committee:

- 1) expresses its dissatisfaction with the waste collection and recycling service being provided by FCC throughout the District;
- 2) calls on FCC to provide an assurance that there will be a marked and sustained improvement in the performance of the waste collection and recycling contract between today and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held on 22 July 2021: at the very least the backlog will have been collected by the end of June;
- 3) requests representatives of FCC to attend its meeting on 22 July 2021 to provide an update on its performance and, if a sustained improvement in performance has not occurred, to explain why not.
- 4) requests the lead Executive Member to provide a fortnightly update to all Members on FCC's performance so that Members are informed and can inform their residents.
- 5) notes that the report to Council next week (17 June) will include an update on the backlog of waste not collected for four weeks or more and would expect this collected.

The Meeting concluded at 5.29 pm

**Signed by:**

**Chairman**

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