

Somerset Waste Partnership reference - 2018-19 – 146

Enquiries relating to plastic waste recycling

Date of response: 21.05.2018

Dear XXX

Plastic Waste Recycling

I am writing regarding your recent request for information from Somerset Waste Partnership, which has been dealt with under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Somerset Waste Partnership is a partnership of Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset and West Somerset District Councils, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council. This response covers all those partner authorities.

I confirm we hold the information you request. In response to your questions: -

Two Questions:-

I was interested to see your workforce taking plastic cartons out of the recycling bins that were put out by homeowners this morning, when I asked why this was one of your workers said that if any plastic waste (mixed) gets found in their vehicle on return to the depot that shouldn't be in with the 'correct' plastic this gets taken out put into a box with their round number on it and publicly displayed by the managers so they feel humiliated by the rest of the workforce. I was astounded to hear this, are you aware of this? In the 21st century you cannot treat your workforce in this way this treatment you would find maybe in China or in 19th century Britain, if true and I hope not, it surely must be unlawful to treat your workforce like this.

Also, under a freedom of information request, what is your policy and procedures on plastic waste and mixed plastic waste collection? How it is dealt with, who sorts it and where it eventually end up and the costs involved?

I look forward to your response

Thank you for your letter to South Somerset District Council raising your concerns regarding the treatment of collection crews and queries relating to plastic and mixed plastic waste collections. This has been passed onto Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) to answer.

In relation to the materials SWP accept for recycling. We do not accept cartons or mixed plastic materials, other than plastic bottles, for recycling on our kerbside service.

Cartons are made up of a mix of materials (cardboard, plastics and aluminium foil) and therefore are not wanted at the paper mills which accept our cardboard for recycling (though, we currently provide facilities at a number of our recycling centres,

which are serviced by the carton manufacturers' body). In our communication material, we do ask the public not to present cartons at the kerbside.

Some people do present plastic pots, tubs and trays and also consider drink cartons as cardboard and so put these materials into their boxes for recycling. Therefore, we ask crews to leave these behind, along with a tag on the collection box explaining that we do not collect these.

Following your reporting of your concerns regarding the alleged of treatment of the crew. Our Collections Contract Manager contacted the Evercreech depot to investigate.

Our contractor employs a number of temporary agency staff working on the collection service. Therefore, the depots managers regularly undertake training sessions and use materials which crews have collected incorrectly to educate their staff. On speaking to the depot supervisors, my colleague is satisfied that training is managed professionally and respectfully, However wellbeing of crews is of concern to us and we will continue to monitor.

Your second query relates to the topic of plastic waste and mixed plastics.

Plastic bottles have been in demand by reprocessors for many years, as they are generally clean, made from identifiable polymers, easily sorted and are generally of good quality. When we tendered for our collection contract in 2007, there were limited secure markets for lower quality plastics such as food and toiletry packaging, which are often contaminated by food and toiletry waste and these were subsequently difficult to sort and reprocess.

Like many others, Somerset Waste Partnership is concerned that this potentially useful resource (mixed plastics) is going to waste and we want to do more. In recent years technology to identify and separate plastic by type has made great leaps forward and now the potential market for mixed plastics is starting to open up, so we have made the commitment to find a way to collect more.

Our proposed enhanced kerbside collection service entitled 'Recycle More' is the result of that commitment and will be phased in from the beginning in 2020, when mixed plastics will be added to kerbside collections. It requires a new fleet of recycling vehicles, with more capacity for plastic, along with new depot infrastructure, so will take some time to organise. Not only will Recycle More add a wider range of plastics to your collections but it will bring kerbside carton recycling, small electricals and possibly more.

In relation with who deals with the materials we collect, we produce an End Use Register (latest version enclosed), which outlets the tonnages collected and where they are taken too for reprocessing via our kerbside and recycling centre contractors (Kier and Viridor). Recycle More will bring more plastic to kerbside collections and, when that happens, you can be sure that will get recycled too.

Costs are best considered in terms of avoided expense. Refuse is taxed at £88.95 per tonne, with transport and disposal costs on top of that. Recycling plastic has limited intrinsic value but avoids these costs, and therefore makes an important financial contribution.

On a positive note, I can also confirm that we have been working with our contractor Viridor, which manages our network of recycling sites. From early May, all plastic bottle recycling banks will be able to accept an extended range of clean plastic food packaging, such as yoghurt pots, fruit punnets and ice cream tubs for recycling. This service will assist in the demand for local plastic packaging facilities until such time that we can introduce the new Recycle More kerbside service.

If you have access to the internet you may be interested in visiting our website, the address of which is www.somersetwaste.gov.uk as it contains full details on our service. Finally, for information, I enclose a copy of our current service guide.

If you feel your request has not been answered in sufficient detail or if you wish to clarify the information given please contact me and I will be happy to address the issues you raise.

If you are not satisfied with the way in which your request has been dealt with, or the information you have received, you can ask for an internal review of our decision.

Please send your request to:

Peter Grogan
Information Governance Team
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton
TA1 4DY or email informationgovernance@Somerset.gov.uk

An internal review will then be carried out and we will write to you with the results of our investigation. If you are not content with the outcome of our review, you may then apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk>) for an appeal: The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF Tel: 0303 123 1113

Please quote the reference numbers at the top of this e-mail in any future correspondence with Somerset Waste Partnership.

Yours sincerely