

SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Friday 13 July 2001

Time: 9.30am to 12.30pm

Venue: Barry Memorial Hall, Barry

Attendance:

Members:

Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff Central
Rosemary Butler	Newport West
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Sue Essex	Cardiff North
Michael German	South Wales East
Janice Gregory	Ogmore
Jane Hutt	Vale of Glamorgan
Pauline Jarman	South Wales Central
Peter Law	Blaenau Gwent
David Melding	South Wales Central

Jonathan Morgan	South Wales Central
Rhodri Morgan	Cardiff West
Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central
Phil Williams	South Wales East

In attendance:

Bob Macey	Environmental Protection Division, National Assembly for Wales
Andy Rees	Environmental Protection Division, National Assembly for Wales
Robert Little	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Julian Rosser	Friends of the Earth, Cymru
Dr. Jane Gilbert	The Composting Association
Mal Williams	Wales Community Recycling Network
Marian Webber	Keep Wales Tidy
Alun James	Environment Agency wales
Dr. Mark Temple	Bro Taf Health Authority

Secretariat

Roger Chaffey	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

Opening remarks

The Chair extended a welcome to all those present including members of the public and presenters. The theme of the meeting was waste management, and the Chair said that it was important for the Regional Committees to input into the current consultation on 'Managing Waste Sustainably' which would result in the adoption of a waste management strategy for Wales.

Item 1: Apologies for absence

1. Apologies for absence were received from Alun Cairns, Christine Chapman, Jane Davidson, David Davies, Geraint Davies, Ron Davies, William Graham, John Griffiths, Brian Hancock, Carwyn Jones, Huw Lewis, Dai Lloyd, Lynne Neagle and Jenny Randerson.

Item 2: Minutes of the meeting held on 18 May meeting: SEWR-03-01 (min)

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 18 May were approved.

Item 3: Open Mike session

3. In response to an invitation from the Chair, members of the public raised the following issues:

- the need for local authorities to engage with communities in the development of a waste strategy.
- the ability of local authorities to deliver the objectives and achieve the suggested targets for managing waste by reducing the amount of waste going to landfill and increasing recycling and composting. It was felt that adequate funding would be a key factor in the success of the proposed strategy.
- incineration as a method of waste disposal. It was felt that incineration should be considered as a last resort and that adequate risk assessments were required to reassure communities that there were no significant health risks involved.
- the collection and publication of data on materials suitable for recycling.
- the assistance available to farmers and the tourist industry to combat the effects of the foot and mouth disease. It was noted that the task and finish group had been established to assess the impact of the disease on the rural economy and to advise on measures to assist recovery. This group would draw together a draft recovery plan which would be considered by the Rural Partnership on 24 July.

Item 4: Waste Management Strategy: SEWR-04-01 (p.1)

4.1 The Chair welcomed Bob Macey (Environmental Protection Division), Andy Rees (Environmental Protection Division) and Robert Little (Vale of Glamorgan Council) to the meeting and invited them to give their presentations to the Committee.

4.2 Bob Macey from the Environmental protection Division said that the draft waste strategy launched on 4 July was produced in response to the need for a separate strategy for waste management within Wales. He said that the Assembly had worked closely with local authorities, business and industry, the voluntary sector and with specialists, professional and academic bodies through the Wales Waste Forum to produce the consultation document. The National Assembly would debate the final strategy in the autumn before being issued early next year.

4.3 Wales currently had a poor performance regarding waste management, and the strategy proposed targets and policies which would reduce the amount of waste going to landfill to help Wales to meet its obligations under the Landfill Directive. This would be achieved mostly by increasing the amount of municipal waste being composted or recycled. The National Assembly announced additional funding of £3 million in 2001-02 of which £1.5 million would be available to local authorities. Indicative figures for 2002-03 and 2003-04 are £13 million and £24 million, of which £11 million and £22 million respectively has been allocated (subject to final decision by the Assembly) to local authorities. This would assist in the development of new or additional work to increase the rates of recycling and composting and to encourage local authorities to work collectively and with voluntary and community bodies. It was felt that recycling would be very cost effective once all costs, including environmental and social were taken into account. However, it was accepted that initially recycling might not be the cheapest measure of waste disposal in cash terms.

4.4 Rob Little from the Vale of Glamorgan Council said that waste management in the UK was primarily cost driven. The collection of waste and disposal via landfill was cheap and enabled local government to deliver an efficient and cost effective service. He said that the key aim of local government was to dispose of waste through a robust mechanism at a cost that was affordable.

4.5 The requirement to comply with the Landfill Directive and the development of a waste strategy for Wales marked the movement away from the cost-effective approach. The targets for reducing landfill and increasing the amount of municipal waste being composted or recycled would be stretching for local authorities. To achieve these targets it would be necessary to increase kerbside collection; place greater emphasis on education to increase public understanding and gain commitment; increase investment in waste management infrastructure and work in partnership with local communities, and the business and voluntary sector.

4.6 Rob Little emphasised the need for a co-ordinated approach in the delivery of the waste management strategy which included a national waste awareness campaign. He said that the National Assembly must provide the vision for the future of waste management which would be taken forward by local government in an innovative way.

4.7 The following points were raised in discussion:

- It was noted that, although local authorities would be responsible for much of the waste management strategy, they would be encouraged to discuss a full range of options and solutions with their local communities. Local communities would therefore be expected to have a central role in the development of a waste strategy and achieving sustainable waste. Furthermore, it was felt that sharing best practice could assist local authorities in achieving their targets. The Committee agreed that a partnership approach including local government, the voluntary sector, business and communities was vital in order to deliver the waste strategy successfully.
- Members agreed that waste management was a crosscutting theme, which impacted upon health and wider social issues, and that this had been reflected in the consultation document. The National Assembly was committed to the development of health impact assessments to identify potential risks from waste management operations, including incineration and waste to energy schemes.
- The Committee expressed concern that waste production in Wales was increasing at a significant rate. There was strong support for the proposals in the waste strategy to curb future growth in waste and to give priority to waste minimisation.
- The Committee felt that the recycling targets for local authorities were challenging but achievable. There was concern that there was currently insufficient demand for recycled goods and that the market would need to be strengthened in order to aid recycling and gain economic benefits from the recycling process. It was noted that the National Assembly was co-funding the UK Waste and Resources Action Programme to help remove barriers to recycling and create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products.
- The Committee felt that a cultural change would be required to achieve sustainable waste management. It was agreed that an effective education programme was vital in order to facilitate changes in attitude and behaviour towards waste. Members felt that young people had a greater awareness and understanding of the environmental issues concerning waste disposal. Any education initiatives should also include householders, those who litter and illegally dispose of waste, business and industry.
- There was some discussion about the Nantygwyddon landfill site. The Committee noted the concerns raised regarding scientific errors, lack of random inspections and information available to residents. The final report of the Nantygwyddon Landfill Inquiry would be available in October. It was noted that David Purchon, the investigator involved in the inquiry was a member of the Wales Waste Forum responsible for the production of the waste strategy.

4.8 The Chair thanked the speakers for giving their presentations and for answering questions from Members.

Item 5: Waste Management Strategy

5.1 The Chair invited Julian Rosser (Friends of the Earth, Cymru), Dr. Jane Gilbert (the Composting Association), Mal Williams (Wales Recycling Network), Marian Webber (Keep Wales Tidy), Alun James (Environment Agency Wales) and Dr. Mark Temple (Bro Taf Health Authority) to give their presentations.

5.2 Julian Rosser from Friends of the Earth, Cymru welcomed the consultation document and said that it was a significant step towards increasing the level of recycling in Wales. He said that the strategy should include an aspiration to 'zero-waste' in the long-term and targets of 50 per cent by 2010 and 60 per cent by 2015 for recycling and composting. A recycling rate of over 50 per cent had been achieved in Switzerland and Germany.

5.3 He said that recycling would have economic and social, as well as environmental benefits. It was vital for the waste strategy to be taken seriously by decision makers at a local level and for the National Assembly to introduce statutory targets as soon as practicable.

5.4 Dr. Jane Gilbert from the Composting Association welcomed the promotion of composting within the waste strategy. She said that the composting of waste would assist Wales in meeting its obligations under the Landfill Directive and help to achieve the targets outlined in the waste strategy. There was a growing need for composting in order to enhance current agricultural practices and to reduce the use of peat, which had a potential detrimental effect on biodiversity.

5.5 Dr. Gilbert said that the ease with which waste was composted differed significantly. She said that composting could be achieved by using both complex and simple systems and that it was a flexible form of waste disposal. She emphasised the need for adequate regulation to ensure that materials produced were of a specified standard and good quality.

5.6 Mal Williams emphasised the role of the community in the waste strategy. Local people demonstrated a willingness to tackle waste reduction and were committed to recycling, however adequate resources and facilities were required.

5.7 He welcomed the commitment made by the National Assembly to waste management and reiterated the need to further clarify its vision by introducing a 'zero-waste' target. It was important to take responsibility for the production of materials and, if necessary cease producing those that could not be recycled.

5.8 Marian Webber said that Keep Wales Tidy strongly supported the development of a waste

strategy for Wales, in particular the inclusion of litter and litter plans. She outlined the importance of tackling the problem of litter in order to preserve the aesthetic appearance of the environment and the quality of local life, to attract inward investment and tourism.

5.9 Keep Wales Tidy welcomed the emphasis of the waste strategy in addressing illegal waste activities including flytipping and dumping of abandoned vehicles. Local authorities could tackle these issues through a combination of high quality service delivery, awareness raising through the school curriculum and enforcement, which would require adequate funding.

5.10 It was important to share good practice and develop mechanisms to allow the exchange of information throughout the UK. In addition, it was necessary to develop benchmarks and monitor the performance of Wales against other countries.

5.11 Alun James said that Wales currently produced 7.5 million tonnes of household, commercial and industrial waste per year of which 4 million tonnes was produced in South East Wales. He said that the Environment Agency Wales strongly supported the creation of Local Authority Regional Waste Strategy Groups to take forward the delivery of the waste strategy for their region.

5.12 He outlined the need to reuse and recycle waste more intensively and make more efficient use of raw materials and energy. The Environment Agency Wales felt that sustainable waste management decisions should be based on the best practicable environmental option using the waste hierarchy outlined in the waste strategy as a guide. It strongly supported waste minimisation as a priority and suggested the use of fiscal incentives to encourage waste reduction initiatives.

5.13 Alun James highlighted the need to identify health risks in waste disposal. The Environment Agency Wales was working with organisations on the assessment of the health impacts of landfill, composting and incineration facilities. He reiterated the need to consult communities and provide unbiased information regarding risks associated with waste management activity.

5.14 The Environment Agency Wales felt that, to achieve the targets outlined in the strategy, new waste handling facilities needed to be developed in conjunction with a robust planning system.

5.15 Alun James said that the Environment Agency Wales operated a transparent assessment and regulatory process, which was mindful of public concerns. Decisions were based on sound science and the protection of local people and the environment was paramount.

5.16 Dr Mark Temple welcomed the inclusion of public health as a key strategic issue within the consultation document. He emphasised the need to ensure predictive reliability of Health

Impact Assessments (HIA) and highlighted the need to resource an evaluation of the predictive accuracy of HIA.

5.17 He said that prior to permitting a new, potentially polluting development, local authorities were required to consult with the Health Authority to ensure there would be no harm to the local population. He expressed concern that no alternative practice had been agreed in light of the abolition of Health Authorities in 2003.

5.18 The importance of good, accurate and timely data to inform health advice was emphasised. It was vital that national data collection was adequately funded to allow the health impact of the waste strategy to be properly evaluated.

5.19 The following points were raised in discussion:

- There was some discussion on the feasibility of a 'zero-waste' target and the ability to recycle all products and material. Members generally agreed that absolute recycling would be impractical and costly. It was felt that the targets outlined in the waste strategy were a crucial first step in what needed to be a long-term strategy. It was noted that a 'zero-waste' target would be a long-term aspiration and that additional benefits could be gained from sharing best practices with countries that had achieved high levels of recycling.
- Members expressed concern about excessive packaging of products and the impact this had on waste production. The Committee agreed that an effective way to address this was to raise awareness and understanding of waste issues in both manufacturers and consumers. In addition, it was felt that an innovative approach involving local produce might be used to partly tackle excessive packaging and that consideration should be given to the introduction of container legislation. Members agreed that any measures introduced to minimise packaging must not compromise public health.
- The Committee agreed that it was imperative to engage individuals in community based initiatives in order to assist in effective waste management. These initiatives should contain an element of fun and be pleasurable for participants. Members felt that the community recycling sector would make a valuable contribution to achieving the targets outlined in the waste strategy. It welcomed the contribution of local initiatives including the recycling of disposable nappies.
- There was some discussion on the amount of household waste suitable for composting and the market for compost. The Committee noted that there was currently a lack on concise information on waste composition. The suitability of waste for composting was largely dependent on socio-economic factors, however mandatory separation of waste at source, as practised in the Netherlands could facilitate the composting process. It was noted that there was growing demand for compost and the Composting Association intended to develop a marketing strategy within the next year.
- Members agreed that effective regulation and enforcement were a fundamental part of the waste management. It was suggested that the adoption of the waste strategy could

potentially increase illegal dumping activity including littering and flytipping. The Environment Agency Wales had been given additional funding for dedicated enforcement activity in targeted areas prone to flytipping. The Committee felt that illegal dumping activity should carry appropriate penalties and that prosecution of offenders might act as a deterrent.

5.20 The Chair thanked the speakers for giving their presentations and for answering questions from Members.

Item 6: Committee's Annual Report to Plenary: SEWR-04-01 (p.2)

6. The Committee's Annual Report to Plenary was agreed. The report would be laid and debated in Plenary in October.

Item 7: Election of Committee Chair for 2001-02

7.1 Peter Black invited nominations. Jonathan Morgan was the only nomination, and as such was duly elected.

7.2 Jonathan Morgan thanked the Committee for electing him and, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Peter Black for his hard work and commitment as Chair during the last year.

Item 8: Date of next meeting

8. Peter Black said that the next meeting would be held on 2 November.