

CUMBRIA SCRUTINY NETWORK

WASTE MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

2nd Report on the
Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership

April 2006

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A joint scrutiny working group of Members from each Cumbrian Local Authority was established in 2005 to investigate concerns raised in an Audit Commission report¹ about the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership (CSWP) and to address issues of partnership working with respect to accountability and visibility to both the public and to Members of individual authorities.
- 1.2 A first Scrutiny report² was issued in January 2006, echoing many of the concerns raised by the Audit Commission, and urging action on a number of issues, motivated for the most part by an unanimous concern at the level of potential fines which might be levied on Cumbria for a failure to reduce the amount of residual waste currently going to landfill sites. This concern was subsequently echoed by the majority of relevant scrutiny committees in each individual authority.
- 1.3 Latest estimates would suggest that the fines expected in 2007-08 are in the region of £2.5-3m. Ultimately, it will be the council tax payer who will bear the burden of the fines, either through increases in council tax or reductions in other services.
- 1.4 A second meeting with the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership was held on 22nd March 2006. It was felt that a second report would be helpful to clarify the scrutiny position following that evidence session and to make two further recommendations to the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership.

2. Monitoring

- 2.1 The main roles of Overview and Scrutiny are to review services, challenge ways of working and monitor services with a view to making recommendations for the improvement of services.
- 2.2 In their evidence session of 22nd March, Members were encouraged by a number of assurances from the CSWP that progress, which would help to address some of their concerns, would be delivered by certain dates.

¹ Waste Management Follow-up: Cumbria Local Authorities Audit 2005-06, September 2005

² Cumbria Scrutiny Network: Waste management Working Group – Report on the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership.

Scrutiny Members, therefore, would like to **monitor** the following:

Milestone	Date
The Resource Cumbria web site will go live and public internet access to Partnership Agendas and Minutes will be organised.	By 1 st April 2006.
A policy officer will be appointed to the Partnership to help drive forward the partnership agenda and provide a co-ordinating role between the local authorities.	By end of May 2006.
A 15-page draft summary of the revised waste management strategy will be produced.	By the end of April 2006.
Public consultation on the waste management strategy will take place not just on the web, but with Parish and Town Councils, WIs, Neighbourhood Renewal Forums etc	By August/September 2006 (timescale given for completion of strategy was 5-6 months)
Public consultation on the potential sites for waste treatment/disposal or recycling will take place as part of the consultation exercise for Cumbria County Council's Mineral and Waste Disposal Framework.	By June/July 2006.
A new terms of reference for the partnership will come into effect.	1 st April 2006.
The Communications Strategy will be published in its final form.	1 st April 2006

2.3 It is therefore envisaged to hold a further meeting with the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership in July 2006 to receive updates on all of the above.

Further recommendations

Communications

3.1 Members of the joint scrutiny working group have noted that the Communications strategy is to be published by 1st April 2006. As it is accepted that the Waste Collection Authorities will have the main role in reducing residual waste in order to meet targets and minimise fines (waste treatment plants are not expected on stream until 2010/11) the cooperation of the residents and businesses of the County is of paramount importance and can only be achieved through good communication and education.

- 3.2 Members are concerned that it has taken well over 12 months to draw up and agree the Communications strategy and that, therefore, without dedicated support, the drive, energy and know-how to implement the communications strategy may well be lacking.

With this in mind, Members make the following recommendation:

R8: A communications professional dedicated to the CSWP, with expertise in media and advertising campaigns, and in public consultation, should be engaged by the Partnership to drive forward the communications strategy and provide a point of co-ordination with all the local authorities for campaigns and consultation. This is a need in addition to the policy officer position already mentioned by the CSWP and is identified in the draft communications strategy itself.

Given the number of fast-approaching deadlines with respect to communications, it is suggested that there is a similar urgency to that of the appointment of a policy officer and that the Partnership should consider a secondment from any one of the partner organisations.

Decision-making

- 4.1 A fundamental remit of local authorities, District or County, is to work for the people they serve. The fines looming on the horizon for a failure to divert enough waste from Landfill sites may be less than first predicted, but are still substantial.
- 4.2 While understanding some of the political reservations individual members and officers of the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership might have to more formal structures, the need for speedier, devolved decision-making remains and does not appear to be addressed by the revised terms of reference of the Partnership.
- 4.3 The joint scrutiny working group considers that the short-term political pain of more devolved partnership working is vastly outweighed by the medium-term political gain of avoiding substantial council tax rises or cuts in services for residents and businesses across Cumbria, not least as few distinguish between one local authority and another.
- 4.4 It could be further expected that, as the Audit Commission recommended structures to speed up decision-making, that Authorities who take the step to devolve decision-making will be seen in a positive light.

The joint scrutiny working group has taken advice on how a joint committee might operate, which is attached for information, and make the following recommendation

R9: That the Cumbria Strategic Waste Partnership further considers its remit and terms of reference by considering how the Cumbrian Authorities might devolve decision-making and speed up its work programme. If there is still a political resistance to such a move, it is recommended that the Partnership seek an independent facilitator, such as ACE or the North West Employers Organisation, to help overcome barriers.