

Date	-	26 April 2019
Report of the	-	Lead Director, Dr Anthony Leonard
Subject	-	Communications and Engagement Strategy

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**Recommendation:** It be **RESOLVED:** That the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2019 be approved and Waste and Communications Officers be authorised to plan and deliver communication materials to residents in accordance with the Strategy.

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## Introduction

1. At the onset of the Kier contract in Eastbourne, Hastings and Wealden in 2013 and Rother in 2014, there were various messages to relay to residents about the range of materials to be collected, kerbside presentation of containers, new containers, and a change in colour of some containers to achieve consistency across the Joint Waste Partnership area. The Biffa contract for waste and recycling collection in Hastings, Rother and Wealden, and street cleaning in Rother and Wealden commences on 29 June 2019, and there are fewer messages to convey, with two key phases of communications activity:
  - a) **Phase 1 (period leading up to and shortly after 29 June 2019):**  
Use of a separate box for recycling glass will cease and glass products suitable for recycling will be comingled in the 240 litre recycling containers currently used by residents. (In Hastings and Rother only, there will be an additional message for residents that use recycling sacks).
  - b) **Phase 2 (period leading up to and shortly after implementation of new collection rounds):**  
Biffa may introduce round changes for some residents. The earliest such changes can be introduced is 12 weeks after the contract commences i.e. late September 2019. The primary need is for residents to know which days their collections are due.
2. Clear communication will play a crucial role in public understanding and acceptance of the change to the recycling system in the relevant council areas during 2019, and is essential to meet key aims of:
  - minimising confusion;
  - ensuring high levels of awareness;
  - building public confidence;
  - enabling correct public behaviours; and
  - retaining and improving recycling levels.
3. If these aims are not delivered, the Joint Waste Partnership (JWP) can expect to see added pressure on frontline resources as councils deal with significant public confusion to the change in the recycling service.

## **Communications and Engagement Strategy**

4. A Communications and Engagement Strategy has been developed from contributions by all partners and will be consolidated by the partnership office, this is attached at Appendix A for the key messages that affect all residents in the Partnership area. Communications messages that are local to one council area only and affect some or all of its residents will be handled by that council and fall outside of the remit of this Strategy.
5. The Strategy sets out a protocol for the management of communications and planned activities in the lead-up to the commencement of the Biffa contract, the initial period of running services “as is” i.e. in exactly the way that Kier have run rounds and services (Phase 1), and finally the period of service change where Biffa make changes to some rounds to achieve efficiencies and improve performance (Phase 2). This Strategy will be reviewed and refreshed monthly as planned communications develop, and as we move towards Phase 2 activities.
6. The aims of the Strategy are to:
  - meet Government recycling targets;
  - reduce the impact of change to residents and communities;
  - provide key messages for residents in a clear, timely, informative and consistent manner using a variety of mediums, with agreed timings;
  - ensure that relevant council staff are fully briefed and able to impart messages to residents; and
  - ensure co-ordination between Kier and Biffa and consistency of communication to employees.

### **Phase 1 Communications to residents and budget**

7. The focus of this report is communication about the changes that affect all residents in the Partnership area at the start of the Biffa contract. The key messages to those residents during Phase 1 are:
  - changes to the contractor and who does what;
  - changes to the collection method and what materials go in which container;
  - glass box no longer required and how to recycle glass;
  - what to do with glass recycling boxes; and
  - information to improve the volume and quality of recycling.
8. Kier has stated their intention to collect glass separately in boxes until the contract end date. Therefore the timing of messages to residents to mix glass in with other dry recycling will be very carefully managed, with messages going out from 14 June 2019.
9. Requests are still being received from residents for boxes. Kier will stop delivering new boxes to residents from 1 May 2019. A clear message will be prepared for those residents in this situation.
10. A Communications Plan has been developed for Phase 1 as follows:

DATE	COMMUNICATION CHANNEL	KEY MESSAGE
14 June	My Alerts (Rother & Wealden)	Where to put glass (tailored message to provide subscribers with the exact date of their next collection)
14 June	Advertising materials	Where to put glass and what to do with the recycling box  Information on importance of recycling to improve the volume and quality of recycling
17 June	Website banner	Where to put glass
17 June	Website content	Where to put glass and what to do with the recycling box
17 June	Press release	Where to put glass and what to do with the recycling box
17 June	Social media messages	Series of messages on where to put glass and what to do with the recycling box
29 June	Social media messages	Welcome to Biffa and reminder on where to put glass

11. This phase of the Communications Plan is currently being developed, with the content of press releases, website information, advertising materials and social media messages being agreed by all partners to ensure residents receive consistent messages released at the same time. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) are keen to work in partnership with the districts and boroughs to develop key messages relating to increasing the volume and improving the quality of recycling and to explore additional communication channels, and have indicated that they will contribute to the costs of any messages, in particular those that go direct to residents. Further work will be undertaken to understand the scope and costs of direct communications to residents.
12. There is no provision in the contract for Biffa to collect unused glass boxes and this could only be undertaken at the councils' cost. The messages that will be communicated to residents are to keep the box and re-use it, with some suggestions as to what to do with it e.g. garden/household storage. It is anticipated that some residents will wish to dispose of their boxes, and ESCC has expressed concern about boxes appearing in either the waste or recycling streams and the impact that this can have on their processing facilities. Options for the disposal of the boxes are currently being discussed with Veolia and these include advice to take unwanted boxes to local Household Waste and Recycling sites.
13. Once the contract commences, Biffa will affix bin tags to the wheeled recycling containers, to alert any residents who are continuing to put their glass boxes out for collection. If the resident continues to use the glass box, it will not be collected and the relevant council will be notified to make contact with the resident and explain the change in service. The message may need to be clearer for households with recycling collection sacks.
14. Officers recognise that over time the service arrangements for individual households or small groups of households is often enhanced and residents become accustomed to non-standard service options. For example, households with insufficient curtilage to accommodate a wheeled bin so use

pink sacks to present recycling but have become accustomed to also using a glass box. Such situations are being identified by each council as they arise so the impact of service changes can be assessed and information provided for those residents as appropriate.

## **Phase 2 Communications to residents and budget**

15. Biffa will not advise precisely when service/round changes will occur until they have had opportunity to operate the services for a period and ensure that any planned changes can be effectively managed to minimise disruption. As already indicated, the changes will not take place until at least late September 2019.
16. The key issues to communicate to residents are:
  - How many rounds/residents are affected?
  - What are the changes to the residents' services i.e. change of collection day for waste or recycling or garden waste or all three?
17. As part of the procurement for the contract, bidders were asked to allow £200,000 for resident communications for service change. This is only available for Phase 2 communications and not for Phase 1. Biffa's Marketing and Communications Manager will assist each authority in producing a series of press releases to inform residents about the services being provided and the positive changes. The councils are working with Biffa to plan how this resource can best be utilised effectively. The councils and Biffa are planning a hard copy waste/recycling calendar for every resident, which will commence at the point of service change.

## **ESCC Recycling Disposal Contract**

18. Under the present contract Kier is responsible for the collection and disposal of dry recycling material. They collect the materials from households and have arrangements in place to transport and process the material for recycling. Kier retain the value of the recycling materials sold.
19. Under the new waste collection contract there is no requirement for the incoming contractor Biffa to dispose of dry recycling, and their responsibility ends at collection. From 29 June 2019, the responsibility for managing the recycling material collected will fall to ESCC as the disposal authority, through their disposal contractor (Veolia) and a re-processor currently being procured. The specification for this new contract covers the current range of recycling materials presently collected by the JWP, but the final range of items and materials will not be confirmed until contract award (expected 7 May 2019).
20. ESCC and the JWP are already in close liaison on this matter, and if any changes to the recycling materials being collected are required, this will be communicated to residents as part of the Phase 1 communications. The JWP is clear that it does not wish to see a drop in the recycling rates currently being achieved. ESCC will provide a verbal update to Joint Waste and Recycling Committee (JWRC) on the progress to appoint a new contractor.

## **Council specific communications**

21. There will be some local service changes in Hastings, Rother and Wealden that will affect smaller groups of residents. The bespoke messages relevant to each situation are the responsibility of the individual councils to ensure they are targeted to affected residents only. These situations include:
  - a) the introduction of the Direct Services Organisation (DSO) for street cleaning in Hastings;
  - b) how to recycle glass for those residents who currently use pink sacks in Rother and Hastings;
  - c) changes to collection frequencies in Hastings and Rother for some residents; and
  - d) the introduction of charges for garden waste subscriptions in Wealden.
22. A comprehensive understanding of all intended communications activity helps to ensure that residents are not exposed to conflicting messages. Appendix A to this report therefore identifies Council specific communications as well as activities planned for the whole Partnership (or whole county).

## **Kier employees**

23. Kier employees will have a change of employer. This will either be:
  - Biffa.
  - Hastings Borough Council's DSO which will employ the street cleaning staff.
  - Eastbourne Borough Council's (EBC) company South East Environmental Services.
24. The Communications Plan for Kier employees transferring to Biffa is on track, and is the responsibility of Kier and Biffa. Kier and Biffa demobilisation and mobilisation teams have engaged from the earliest opportunity and communication channels are well developed. Kier has enabled full access to Biffa staff and Biffa has a comprehensive engagement plan which includes key dates for meetings with all employees, 1-2-1s, meetings with union representatives and written communications. There is a Biffa notice board in each depot, and Biffa staff are present on a weekly basis with an open door policy. Employees are being encouraged to ask questions, and FAQs are being collated. Both Kier and Biffa are producing newsletters for staff, and Biffa has commissioned a staff survey which will be forward looking and consider suggestions from staff to improve the service.
25. Communications to the Kier employees transferring to Hastings Borough Council (HBC) and Eastbourne Borough Council will be dealt with separately by those councils and are not included in this report.

## **Branding**

26. Biffa's vehicles are white and will be corporately branded, with council logos on the main body of the vehicles.
27. Included in the contract sum is a "wrap" for one large or three small vehicles. Vehicle wraps can echo brand and partnership working, and provide a message for service provision, advertising or raising awareness. Biffa are

designing a wrap for this contract with the support of their dedicated marketing team and design consultants.

### **Council websites**

28. Council websites are already key in minimising public use of contact centres, and channelling customers to report missed bins and look up collection days on-line, as well as providing other information, for example requesting a new service such as bulky and garden waste collections. HBC, Rother District Council (RDC) and Wealden District Council (WDC) websites already have a postcode search facility allowing residents to enter their postcode and find out their collection arrangements, including collection days. In addition all councils offer residents the facility to have an on-line account where they can look up collection information, and RDC and WDC send out weekly My Alerts emails to subscribed residents.
29. As part of the mobilisation activity for the Biffa contract, there is a weekly IT integration meeting with representatives from the councils' IT teams, Biffa, their IT provider Whitespace and the Joint Waste Office. Their focus at present is the commencement of the contract and the IT work required to ensure the systems are ready on day one, but they will of course develop a work programme for the round and service changes later this year.

### **Media management**

30. The number of media enquiries is expected to increase throughout the mobilisation period. It is key that each partner shares the common messages agreed by the JWP to avoid confusion and ensure consistency for residents. If communications are undertaken by the contractor, their central press office has been asked to liaise with the appropriate authority in providing the response, copying in the Authorised Officer, and partners if necessary. If local media enquiries are received, the relevant council will deal with them, but make partners aware of the nature of the enquiry and agree an appropriate joint message in response.

### **Customer Contact Centres**

31. A significant increase in the volume of telephone and personal calls to the council's Customer Contact Centres at the time of the round changes is inevitable, and HBC, RDC and WDC are already making plans to ensure sufficient resources, working closely with Communications and Waste Officers about when they can expect and plan for significant increases in levels of contact.
32. Increased customer contact is anticipated at both Phase 1 and Phase 2. To assist the councils, Biffa has undertaken to support communications activity with press releases and other relevant information, and Biffa and customer contact staff will be working closely to ensure efficient services for residents.
33. The councils' customer contact staff will have access to WhiteSpace Municipal (Biffa's IT system), and cascade training will be provided.

## **UK Resources and Waste Strategy**

34. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published a policy paper entitled “Our Waste, Our Resources: a Strategy for England” in December 2018. This document considers all of our natural resources and may have significant implications for waste and recycling, as follows:
- review of plastic packaging, in particular single use;
  - improving the quantity, quality and consistency of recyclable materials;
  - tackling waste crime;
  - consultation on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS);
  - consultation on legal powers to introduce food waste targets (which would mean the introduction of food waste collections); and
  - consultation on free garden waste services.
35. As mentioned, certain elements of the Strategy require consultation, and this is currently taking place. Developments will be monitored closely to ensure that any changes affecting the introduction and delivery of the Biffa service from 29 June 2019 onwards are incorporated into the communication activities, and reported as necessary to the JWRC.

### **Summary**

36. The new contract will require a level of behavioural change by all residents and effective communications methods via a range of channels will assist. Communications will be undertaken in two phases.
37. Some messages are generic and will be communicated by all partners in a consistent manner and with agreed timings.
38. Some messages are specific to that local authority and will be communicated solely to affected residents.

Dr Anthony Leonard  
Lead Director

### **Risk Assessment Statement**

Failure to communicate the changes to the waste and recycling service effectively will result in significantly higher workloads for customer contact and waste services.