

WEST LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY

Report of the Managing Director and Chief Technical Advisor

26 June 2020

Coronavirus Update and contingency planning

SUMMARY

This report provides details of the management and contingency planning related to the Covid 19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Authority is asked to:-

- 1) Note the increased cost and activity due to coronavirus and mitigations to date

1. Background – The Authority and Boroughs are operating waste and recycling services within a regularly changing legislative environment due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The primary focus is to keep people safe and to mitigate cost increases by supporting the West London Environment Directors Board objective to become carbon neutral by 2030 and deliver our joint municipal waste strategy outcomes:

- Effective and efficient operations focused on - **WHERE WE WANT TO BE IN THE FUTURE**
- Our climate emergency response is to focus on - **NO MORE WASTE**
- Recognise the only workforce we have is our - **RESIDENTS and COLLEAGUES**
- Tackling clean streets and flytipping – **WASTE IS A CRIME**
- We can't wait for legislation – **BE PROACTIVE**
- Joined up and consistent - **USING HIGH-QUALITY DATA**

2. Keeping people safe – The Health and Safety Update provides more detail on the immediate and ongoing activities undertaken to keep employees, contractors and residents visiting our sites safe. At the start of the Covid 19 pandemic one employee suddenly passed away and five employees identified as needing to shield. Most office based staff were able to work effectively from home. Maintaining operations and ensuring the resilience of operations across all of the West London sites was challenging as home working is not possible and the sites are all operated independently. The Managing Director relocated to the Abbey Road site to support the operational management of all HRRCs and small transfer stations.

3. Employee survey – At the end of May 2020 all employees were surveyed anonymously to understand their perceptions of how WLWA has managed the pandemic and the effect it has had on employees. Employees were also asked for feedback on organisational culture, employee experience, management training needs and employee wellbeing and happiness. The survey received a 94% response rate and overall, employees perceive West London Waste to have handled this crisis well. Employees feel safe, the organisation was deemed to have acted with compassion and understanding in providing flexible working options and communication has been effective. One outstanding achievement was that 100% of employees partaking in the survey felt the organisation had served its customers to the best of

its ability throughout this pandemic so far. Employees also identified the organisation as a great place to work, that it values its people and that it has created a strong team environment.

4. Key Learning points - To improve, employees identified that there is no such thing as too much communication and that greater transparency and involvement in how the covid-19 situation will change the way we work moving forward was needed. Providing consistent employee development opportunities was highlighted as an area we can do more in.. Culturally WLWA has been moving away from a hierarchical structure towards one that supports personal responsibility and accountability to increase productivity but organisational agility needs to keep pace. This culture change has also been faster with office based staff than on site at Abbey Road. Approximately 25% of employees are not as engaged as we would like. Virtual working, although positive in some ways has removed some of the cross-team opportunities which people miss and would like to re-establish.

5. Actions – Daily meetings have been established in the Operations teams. The senior management team, Officers Board and Members have been meeting weekly. The Environment Directors Board and Climate Emergency Group is meeting fortnightly. A series of virtual communications training sessions started at the same time as the survey took place to support personal leadership throughout a physically fractured organisation. The scale of change needed operationally due to Covid 19 helped to speed up culture change at Abbey Road.

6. Next steps - Next steps includes: establishing a new way of managing HRRCs including a booking system and expansion of the bulky waste collections across west London, reviewing the various meetings timetables, structure and approach, investigating the feasibility of temporary offices at Abbey Road to create more space, establishing cross cutting teams to work together on topics eg carbon reduction, communications, data management and HRRC improvements, and exploring methods of offering better organisational agility and clarity on the future.

7. Cost contingency planning – The March cost contingency planning paper demonstrated the cost impact of typical collection contingency measures with growth assumptions as we headed towards an uncertain pandemic situation. The West London Environment Directors commitment to Plan A services has resulted in very strong mitigation of increased costs and increased recycling by being focused on total system not individual budgets. The strength of the Environment Directors group continues with fortnightly meetings reviewing waste flows and focusing on green recovery across West London. The Environment Directors Board has been asked to lead the cross cutting theme of green recovery in the West London economic recovery plan. Food waste projects are restarting and the Borough value stream mapping exercises are being booked in for June and July. In operational activity the cost of running Abbey Road has increased and the revenue from trade waste and recycling is reduced. These costs have been mitigated as much as possible by re-purposing waste minimisation staff and recycling more from the trade waste.

8. Annual accounts – The production of the annual accounts in a pandemic situation with a newly recruited Senior Accountant was very challenging. The whole Finance team is to be commended for completing the work to a high standard in the normal timescale.

9. HRRC development – The Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted the interconnected nature of the sites in West London and the importance of managing sites collectively not individually.

Since re-opening, we are learning how to manage the sites within social / physical distancing guidelines. The number of people able to access sites is constrained, the smaller waste offtakes are less reliable and collection systems may need to adapt to support residents ability to dispose of waste without queuing for hours. Allowing residents to book visits and increasing bulky waste collection capacity is being investigated. Data is being collected from the waste minimisation surveys in Brent, Ealing, Hounslow and Richmond to support decisions on next steps.

10. Financial Implications – The increased costs of Covid are being recorded. Adaptation of the organisation is focused on mitigating cost increases by; maintaining and increasing the use of recycling streams through collections and HRRCs, and focusing on reducing waste with the food waste projects.

11. Legal Implications – The legislation and guidance relating to Covid 19 changes regularly. Officers are keeping up to date by reviewing and discussing updates at a weekly Officers Board and a weekly senior management team meeting cascading to weekly team meetings.

12. Impact on Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy – Included in the report.

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