AGENDA ITEM : 5

Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the Environment of Buckinghamshire

Member Briefing Note: Waste Management in Buckinghamshire

Context

1. The County Council is responsible for disposing of domestic waste that is collected by the four district councils. The County is also the waste planning authority and so prepares the Waste Local Plan and determines planning applications for waste management facilities.
2. Government targets require more waste to be recycled and less waste to be managed by disposal in landfill sites. To encourage this an escalating scale of Landfill Tax is levied on every tonne of waste tipped and in the future authorities that don't meet the targets will be fined. The cost of landfilling waste will therefore make this option unsustainable in the next ten years and fines could be tens of millions pounds per annum for authorities which continue to landfill waste after about 2010. In addition the amount of waste is growing at a rate of about three percent per annum.

The East Sussex Experience

3. East Sussex where faced with this question several years ago because their landfill sites were going to be full by 2005. They had no acceptable sites for new landraise sites in the County and therefore had to look to other waste management options to deal with their waste.
4. In order to achieve economies of scale East Sussex worked with Brighton & Hove to consider more efficient and flexible ways of dealing with the waste. The two authorities together produce a quantity of waste equivalent to the total produced by Buckinghamshire County and Milton Keynes
5. East Sussex members & officers look at the technical & financial options available to them to manage waste over the next 25 years. They decided that they had to maximise the amount of waste recycled but knew that even the best schemes can only achieve a 30 to 40 percent recycling rate. After speaking with waste management companies East Sussex concluded that the only proven technology to deal with the remaining waste in the medium term was incineration – sometimes known as energy from waste.

Procurement & Costs

6. The contract which East Sussex have with the waste incinerator company means that they don't start paying for the £150million plant until it is operational. The costs of paying for the incinerator and other waste management facilities mean that East Sussex have already started putting several million pounds into reserves to be able to pay for the facilities in the next three to five years. To pay for this cuts have been made in the social services, education & highways budgets. East Sussex also has a review clause in the contract, which enables them to decide in ten years time whether new technologies for dealing with waste are more environmentally acceptable and economic. Over the 25year lifetime of the contract the total cost of waste management will be in the order of £1 billion. The procurement team and consultants & legal/ contract advice will cost several million pounds by themselves over the in the short term.

The Way Forward in Buckinghamshire

7. Whilst Buckinghamshire has sufficient landfill capacity for the foreseeable future the financial imperative to divert waste from landfill along with the long lead in & development times for waste facilities means that decisions need to be taken in the next year. Cabinet have recognised that the waste issue is a priority and have funded a two stage Feasibility Study and Financial Assessment into the Options which will report in February 2005. Mark Taylor is on the Project Board and Hugh Wilson as Chairman of the Joint Waste Committee is part of the Project Assurance team. Cabinet will be asked to consider the preferred options in February 2005.

6 October 2004