

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Environmental Services Portfolio Holder 17 January 2012
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BLUE BIN CO-MINGLED DRY RECYCLING PROJECT LESSONS LEARNED

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder of the results of the final stage of the Blue Bin project, namely a review of the lessons learned during the project.
2. This not a key decision as it is for information only. It was first published in the July 2011 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Environmental Services Portfolio Holder notes the contents of this report.

Background

4. The blue bin service, which represented a major service change and reconfiguration of the council's kerbside recycling service, was successfully implemented on time and on budget in October 2010. The service continues to deliver the desired benefits and outcomes, namely:
 - (a) A cost effective and efficient service to residents
 - (b) A high level of customer satisfaction and perception.
 - (c) Future flexibility to respond to external influence.
 - (d) A positive contribution to minimising overall environmental impact.
5. It also continues to deliver increases in the recycling rate; participation rates; customer satisfaction levels; high quality materials for recycling and financial savings over the previous green box scheme. The blue bin service continues to make a significant contribution to the delivery of the council's strategic aims.
6. A review of the 'Lessons Learned' during the project, from inception through to implementation has been carried by the project team. The review represents the final element of the project after which it will be formally closed.

Considerations

7. Throughout the project things that went well and things that didn't go so well, were documented for review at the end of the project. Similar reviews carried out at the end of previous projects delivered by H&ES and the learning derived from them have

undoubtedly contributed to the success of this project. It is hoped that the learning from this project will similarly be taken forward and applied to future projects.

8. Appendix 1 is a 'Lessons Learned' log which pulls together the major items that went well and not so well during the project. The log groups these into a number of constituent parts, namely; Development & Decision Making, Policy Making, Project Management, Procurement and Implementation.
9. Some of the highlights are as follows:
 - a) Decision Making: The Portfolio Holder and Cabinet provided the project team with a clear strategic lead as to the desired benefits, outcomes and objectives required. After that the project team was trusted to get on and deliver the project, having developed a series of SMART objectives by which the project would be evaluated.
 - b) Development: Tenders for Materials Recycling Facilities (MRFs) let by neighbouring councils had sought to minimise the risks posed by market volatility by setting price floors and ceilings for the value of recycled materials i.e. the minimum/maximum prices councils would receive. Modelling using historical market data demonstrated that these would in practice never be triggered, meaning that the councils were fully exposed to the risks of the market. The project team developed an innovative pricing and tender evaluation model, which not only resulted in extremely competitive tenders but also successfully reduced the market volatility risks to the council.
 - c) Development: In an effort to ensure that the minimum number of collection vehicles were being used as efficiently as possible for the new service, a number of assumptions were made based on the density, volume and weight of materials likely to be collected, in particular plastic packaging. As the new service was one of the first of its kind in the country and it was only possible to carry out a very limited trial of collection vehicles, the assumptions made were, with hindsight, overoptimistic. As a result, an additional vehicle had to be applied to the service. It was however funded from within the service budget as a result of the success of the tender exercise.
 - d) Project Management: The project was successfully managed using PRINCE 2 methodology, albeit slimmed down and proportionate to the size of project. As a result the project team was able to keep control of all elements of the project using an easy, light touch, yet effective, approach which was able to respond quickly and flexibly to the unexpected.
 - e) Project Plan: The timescales of some of the elements of the project e.g. drafting the MRF tender documentation, were extremely 'tight'. The project plan was, however, kept under constant review and revised and time made up from other elements. Greater use of time contingencies could have been made, particularly in complex elements of the project such as the MRF procurement.
 - f) Procurement: There were a large number of very detailed and probing questions submitted by tenderers for the MRF contract, some of which were clearly suggesting that the councils tender was anti-competitive. Detailed responses to all tender questions were prepared by the project team mindful of the need to be able to withstand challenge if necessary. As a result, no challenges were made.

- g) Communications: A dedicated communications plan was developed and constantly reviewed and revised. The success of the plan was demonstrated by the minimum number of queries received from residents, the high participation rates and low contamination rates, indicating that residents knew how to use the new service, what was going to happen and when.
- h) Implementation: The project team was made up of a number of key individuals who were able to apply the skills, knowledge, experience and learning gained from previous major service changes e.g. Alternate Weekly Collections 2003/04, Plastic Bottle recycling 2008. This proved invaluable given the scale of change being undertaken and the benefits and outcomes required.

Summary/Conclusions

- 10. The Blue Bin project was an overwhelming success, delivering everything that was expected of it. Although issues inevitably arose, some of which were unexpected, they were responded to quickly and flexibly.
- 11. The project's overall success was due to a number of factors, perhaps the most important of which were clear political direction; an experienced, knowledgeable and dedicated project team and planning, planning and more planning.
- 12. These factors will undoubtedly be key to the success of future projects.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None

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