

SURREY ENVIRONMENT PARTNERSHIP - SEP2025

Head of Service: Ian Dyer, Head of Operational Services
Wards affected: (All Wards);
Urgent Decision?(yes/no) No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:
Appendices (attached): Appendix 1: SEP2025 as approved by SEP Members Group on 23 November 2022

Summary

The Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP) has generated an approach document for the period 2023 – 2025, which it has called SEP2025. This report requests that the Committee reviews and endorses SEP2025 on behalf of the Council.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Endorse SEP2025 on behalf of the Council.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 From time to time the Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP) generates countywide strategy documents, as is legally required within a two-tier area for waste such as Surrey.
- 1.2 The Committee has always endorsed such strategies on behalf of the Council, including any caveats that the Committee may deem appropriate.
- 1.3 As detailed below, SEP2025 is an approach document only, rather than a fully-fledged strategy document. However, SEP has asked that each Surrey authority reviews and endorses SEP2025 through its usual democratic process.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP) is a cross-Surrey forum that seeks partnership approaches to waste management issues in Surrey. The Council is represented at SEP by the Chair of this Committee.

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- 2.2 SEP is non-binding. Individual authorities remain autonomous within Surrey's two-tier structure (boroughs and districts are Waste Collection Authorities, and Surrey County Council is the Waste Disposal Authority).
- 2.3 It is a legal requirement that two-tier areas must periodically produce a Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS). SEP usually produces a new JMWMS every four to five years. Such strategies are legally required to include public consultation.
- 2.4 However, SEP has not generated a new JMWMS since 2015. This is because we still await announcements from the national waste strategy, first proposed in 2018:
- 2.4.1 Three elements of the national waste strategy will particularly affect councils:
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** aims to reduce how much packaging councils must collect, and transfer more of it from refuse to recycling bin. Some announcements have been made but there remains a great deal of detail yet to be announced. Government has stated that EPR will start on 1/4/24.
 - **Deposit Return Scheme (DRS):** aims to independently recycle cans and plastic bottles (and eventually glass bottles), reducing what councils will collect. Some announcements have been made but, again, there remains a great deal of detail yet to be announced. Government had stated that DRS would start in 2023 but has recently revised this to 2025.
 - **Consistency of Collections ('Consistency'):** aims to tell councils what recyclables we must collect, and how. And it proposes that garden waste subscriptions should be removed, or severely reduced. These proposals could radically alter the nature, cost and performance of kerbside collections across Surrey. No announcements have yet been made despite repeated assurances from government that announcements are imminent. SEP and other industry bodies continue to press government for announcements.
- 2.5 As a result of these significant issues remaining in abeyance, SEP has felt it inappropriate to generate a new JMWMS until outcomes of the national waste strategy are known. However, it is expected that the national waste strategy outcomes will be known (and some starting to impact councils) by 2025. Therefore, SEP has developed SEP2025 as an 'approach document' in the meantime.
- 2.6 It may be noted that, unlike a JMWMS, an approach document such as SEP2025 does not require a public consultation.

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- 2.7 Full JMWMS's have many specific actions that underpin their overarching strategy aims. However, SEP2025 is an approach document only, that contains only high-level partnership aspirations and broad workstream themes:

High-level aspirations:	Broad workstream themes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Considering how the national waste strategy might affect us.• Strategic direction for the next three years, and a longer-term vision for SEP that will follow the waste hierarchy and work towards zero waste.• Work to drive down food waste and plastic waste.• Work to reduce contamination of recycling bins.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing refuse, especially food waste thrown away in refuse bins; reducing fly-tipping; reducing litter; promoting re-use.• Reducing contamination of recycling bins.• Understand greener vehicle options.• Support the development of waste disposal infrastructure (although developments in Epsom & Ewell seem unlikely).• Work together to consider what Consistency of Collections means for Surrey councils (when announcements are made), and how we can/should respond.

- 2.8 As an 'approach document', SEP2025 does not itself propose specific actions:

2.8.1 However, it may be noted that a summary of SEP's current work programmes for 2022/23 is included in the SEP2025 document at [Appendix 1](#), to give an idea of the kind of work undertaken by SEP.

2.8.2 SEP agrees its workstreams each year through the SEP Members Group. Officers have recently been feeding into a review process to consider SEP's work programme for 2023/24.

- 2.9 SEP2025 was approved by the SEP Members Group (which includes the Committee Chair as noted above) at its meeting on 23 November 2022. A full copy of SEP2025 is appended to this report as [Appendix 1](#).

- 2.10 Overall, officers consider SEP2025 a reasonable, appropriate document, with supportable aims.

3 Risk assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1.1 SEP2025 is an approach document only and therefore carries no inherent equalities implications.

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3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 SEP already considers fly-tipping and littering, and SEP2025 proposes that it should continue to do so.

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 SEP2025 has no safeguarding implications.

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 An indirect financial dependency is discussed in section 4, below.

3.5 Other

3.5.1 Overall SEP2025 is a relatively simple, high-level document, with reasonable content that relates to issues facing all Surrey councils. SEP2025 does not seek to change the status of SEP, relative to the Council. In itself, therefore, SEP2025 presents little risk.

3.5.2 As summarised in section 2.4, above, the national waste strategy could significantly change how much waste, and of what type, the Council collects, and how much it is paid to do so. SEP2025 should help mitigate that risk through its proposed partnership approach to understanding and generating solutions for those issues. This approach worked well in 2015/16 when SEP put considerable effort into joint working to navigate the EU Waste Directive. Doing so greatly reduced the burden of legislative response required from each individual council and allowed a clear peer review of responses.

3.5.3 However, SEP2025 does contain targets that have yet to be clearly justified. In particular, this is because we do not yet know what the true effects of the national waste strategy will be (nor, indeed, when they will take full effect). What is clear, however, is that SEP2025's modelling suggests that – even including predicted effects of the national waste strategy – Surrey will not achieve the targets proposed within the national strategy.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 SEP2025 itself carries no specific financial arrangements. However, three indirect implications may be considered, as below.

4.2 The national waste strategy:

4.2.1 The national waste strategy could have significant financial impacts from such things as how much councils get paid by EPR; how material volumes change as a result of EPR and DRS; the costs of being forced to change collection services, or limits on how much we can charge for garden waste collections.

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4.2.2 While SEP2025 cannot directly affect these things, its commitments to work together to understand the national waste strategy outcomes, and to formulate recommended responses, are likely to be very useful. Previous such joint work has been very productive and efficient.

4.2.3 It is crucial that, when national waste strategy announcements are made, the Council is well placed to understand and respond to them in the most cost-effective way possible. Joint work as proposed in SEP2025 will make that possible

4.3 **SEP work programme:**

4.3.1 Some SEP workstreams (see examples within Appendix 1) have limited financial implications for individual boroughs and districts. For example, work to develop recycling infrastructure at flats may involve the purchase of bins and the application of staff resources.

4.3.2 But, in general, most SEP workstreams are either fully or significantly funded by SEP. Thus, SEP2025, in itself, continues to have only limited financial implications, and within existing Council budgets.

4.4 **SCC annual waste payments:**

4.4.1 Each year, Surrey County Council (SCC) makes payments to each borough and district in support of their waste operations. For Epsom & Ewell, this currently amounts to some £120k per annum.

4.4.2 After the development of SEP2025, SCC announced that it would make its annual waste payments to boroughs and districts for the next three years (2023/24 – 2025/26) dependent on our support for SEP2025. SCC proposed that we should generate action plans, which would be scrutinised each year, and payments made according to how much SCC believed each borough or district had supported the aims and objectives of SEP2025 in that year.

4.4.3 It should be noted that this arrangement was proposed unilaterally by SCC. It was never (and still is not) a part of SEP2025 itself, nor was it proposed by SEP.

4.4.4 However, SCC's proposal was significantly objected to by the SEP Member Group. Consequently, SCC changed its proposal to a trial system as follows:

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- **Year 1 (2023/24):** SEP (not SCC) will agree annual action plans with each borough and district. At the end of the year, outcomes will be reviewed by SEP (not SCC) and any recommendations for improvements for the following year will be discussed with the boroughs and districts.
- **Year 2 (2024/25):** Again, SEP (not SCC) will agree annual action plans with each borough and district. At the end of the year, outcomes will be reviewed by SEP (not SCC) and any recommendations for improvements for the following year will be discussed with the boroughs and districts.
- **Year (2025/26):** Again, SEP (not SCC) will agree annual action plans with each borough and district. At the end of the year, outcomes will be reviewed by SEP. SCC may then – and only then – consider any changes to its waste payments for 2025/26. But it has committed to reviewing this with SEP at that time before any decision is taken.
- Thereafter, it seems likely that new payment structures will, anyway, have taken effect as a result of national waste strategy changes.

4.4.5 Past experience has clearly shown that SCC has the legal power to unilaterally reduce annual waste payments if it so wishes. However, after discussion at the SEP Members Group, it seems that SCC is committed to the more reasonable course of action outlined above.

4.4.6 Officers have already liaised with SEP on an annual action plan for Year 1 (2023/24). Officers are confident that the action plan proposed is reasonable, and includes items that the Council would be looking to support in any case.

4.4.7 In any event, it must be stressed that this arrangement is not an outcome or recommendation of SEP2025 itself. Rather it resulted from a separate, unilateral SCC proposal.

4.5 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The SEP2025 does not impact existing council waste budgets for 2023/24 and aims to mitigate the financial impact of the anticipated national waste strategy on districts and boroughs. Finance officers will work with waste colleagues to understand the finance implications of any future government announcements.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 SEP is a legally non-binding group. And, as already noted, SEP2025 is an approach document only, with no legal power.

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- 5.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** Under section 32(1) of Waste and Emissions Act 2003 waste authorities for a two-tier area must, at all times have for the area a joint strategy for the management of (a) waste from households, and (b) other waste that, because of its nature or composition, is similar to waste from households. Section 32(2) of Waste and Emissions Act 2003 requires the waste authorities for a two tier area to keep under review the policies formulated by them for the purposes of subsection (1).
- 5.3 The SEP2025 is not the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy so the local authorities are not required to carry out a public consultation before formulating the policy.
- 5.4 SEP2025 is not legal binding document and does not create legal obligations.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** SEP2025 supports the Council's theme of Green & Vibrant.
- 6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan. This is because the SEP2025 is an approach document only.
- 6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** SEP2025 aims to support the waste hierarchy of Reduce-Reuse-Recycle-Recover. Therefore it supports the Council's climate change ambitions.
- 6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** By supporting the waste hierarchy, SEP2025 supports the Council's sustainability ambitions.
- 6.5 **Partnerships:** SEP is a key partnership in terms of waste management. The Council has played an active role within SEP for two decades.

7 Background papers

- 7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- Previous JMWMS strategies have been presented to this Committee for endorsement in 2006, 2010 and 2015 (with a modified version of the 2015 JMWMS reviewed by the Committee in 2018).

Other papers:

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- National waste strategy:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf