

## **Response from Councillor Anthony Blagg, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment**

The Cabinet Member notes the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Integrated Waste and thanks them for their work on this issue.

Response: I have responded to the summary of findings and recommendation as numbered in the original report.

### ***4. “The cost of dealing with municipal waste in the two counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire is £57m p.a. and costs are increasing”.***

At face value this is an enormous sum to most Members of the County and District Councils but it does cover every single household in both counties. New house building and an economic upturn regionally can be seen as some reasons behind rising waste tonnages and therefore costs but we are acutely aware of the need to continue our waste minimisation campaigns and to make the waste system as efficient as possible.

### ***5. “At present waste disposal is run by a single company across the two counties. It has organised itself to optimise waste disposal activities, principally at EnviroSort in Norton and at the Energy from Waste plant being constructed in Hartlebury. In addition it has encouraged route optimisation between District Councils, and optimal siting of its transfer stations, taking waste from collection areas to disposal sites”.***

I Chair the Strategic Waste Management Board Members Group between the relevant Cabinet Members from Herefordshire and the Worcestershire districts with their senior waste officers. This has had a successful track record so far in achieving practical courses of action to improve the overall service. Route optimisation is a good example of where money has been saved, householders receive a more efficient service and neighbouring authorities worked together to achieve something beneficial to all concerned.

### ***6. “There is already successful joint working between partners across Herefordshire and Worcestershire and a commitment to deliver the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy”.***

See point 5 above. It is also to be noted that we periodically update the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy to make sure that it continues to be fit for purpose and we plan to look at a refresh in 2015/16.

### ***7. “Options for further integration include the creation of a Joint Waste Authority or the development of joint waste collection contracts”.***

As there is one disposal contract the only scope for more integration is for Districts to join together in separate contracts or for an overall joint authority to be created covering collection and disposal. At present there is nothing preventing these happening in the future and I note the report's information on other joint authorities where savings have been made.

**8. “While a case could be made for District Councils to combine their waste collection operations, this would involve a significant loss of sovereignty over a crucial activity that has a direct bearing on a council’s standing in the eyes of the general public”.**

I am aware that sovereignty has been mentioned in some quarters but also that many residents are more concerned that their bins are emptied efficiently than by what it says on the side of the lorry.

**9. “Creation of a joint waste authority would enable a more unified waste minimisation and recycling campaign and would result in potential savings, but these are likely to vary amongst partners and a robust business case would be needed to assess exactly what those savings might be”.**

Currently joint working on minimisation relies largely on the goodwill of the respective authorities and I feel that a single unified message on minimisation and recycling is necessary. This would come with a joint authority but could come by negotiation with partners and I agree that the business case should be further developed.

**10. “The examples examined in Somerset and Oxfordshire demonstrate that while combining operations can bring financial benefits (£1.7m p.a. in Somerset's case), it is essential that there is a strong desire from at least one of the participating authorities for the project to succeed, in order for it to even be considered”.**

A joint authority would require the consent of the partners.

**11. “In the case of the six District Councils in Worcestershire, there are few if any signs that such desire exists to any realistic extent at present and in consequence it is difficult to see such a move coming about in the near future”.**

The local government world is evolving rapidly and many district councils are already looking to work with others inside and outside the counties. I feel that practical necessity may change this picture.

**12. “Recommendation: Given this situation, it is essential that an audit is conducted to find out what savings might be made from integrating waste in the County. It is recommended that the County Council's Business, Environment and Community Directorate should explore whether government or other funding, e.g. from the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership is available for this purpose. If significant savings could be guaranteed it would be financially beneficial to come together in the fashion found to be successful in Somerset”.**

I would agree that a further cross-authority audit with District Councils is conducted on the principle that external funding could be secured as suggested in the recommendation, as it is well known that our present funding is tight.