

Member Forum
1.00 pm 15 January 2018
Statements from councillors



Procedural note:

STATEMENTS FROM COUNCILLORS:

- A maximum of 1 minute shall be allowed for the presentation of each statement (subject to overall time constraints).
- There shall be no debate on the statements and the Lord Mayor shall refer them to the Mayor for information/consideration.
- Statements will be dealt with in the order of receipt (subject to time).



The following statement has been submitted – full details are attached:

CS 01 - Cllr Martin Fodor – Bristol's waste and recycling services



STATEMENT CS 01

Green Councillor Martin Fodor - Full Council Members Forum Statement

Bristol's waste and recycling services

I'd like to comment on recent reports about the closure of Chinese markets to mixed plastic waste and what they have called 'rubbish.'

Imports no longer taken

Since 2012 China and Hong Kong have taken 2/3 of Britain's plastic waste so UK recycling companies are highly dependent on it. The response from Michael Gove to the recent import ban that's been in the news suggests Central Govt has no clue yet how to deal with the impending problem of this market closing. While this is little surprise it is nevertheless likely to lead to at least a short-term waste crisis for many UK Councils.

(See <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jan/02/rubbish-already-building-up-at-uk-recycling-plants-due-to-china-import-ban>)

This crisis is not unexpected. Last year the Chinese government gave notice it would stop importing many mixed plastic and unsorted waste consignments, quite rightly. These imports have sometimes been used for illegal transfrontier shipments of unsorted waste and mean richer countries have been dumping unsorted materials on the less developed economy, at the expense of communities there who get pollution, rubbish, and very low grade materials. Companies sending the materials have done little to assist recycling if contaminated material is dumped abroad, under the guise of feeding industry there.

Markets for our recycling

I was therefore delighted, though not surprised, to see the BWC statement (ref <http://www.bristolwastecompany.co.uk/whats-happening/bristol-plastics/>) that confirms our recycling collections are not at risk currently and were not going directly to China. To me this shows how valuable our current kerbside, 'sorted at source,' methodology. We have some of the highest quality recyclables collected and available for use again and it all has a market.

The local recycling tradition

To me this is a testament to decades of practical action from the 80s by bodies like Avon Friends of the Earth, and their spin off social enterprise Resourcesaver, who provided kerbside collections for many years, latterly as a BCC contractor once the council was required to take recycling seriously in the 90s. The current recycling collections are a natural progression from the tradition of sorted collections at the kerbside, which are well established as providing the highest quality segregated materials for market. Without this tradition and the emphasis on recycling we could even now be locked into a decades long, inflexible, incineration contract that was hungry for waste to burn, as proposed by Avon County Council in the mid 90s and others less convinced by resource reuse and recycling. Only the last few years has the European Circular Economy Directive been in place to inform our resource management strategy.

We're assured all the materials collected have markets, which is vital for the viability of our service. The value of our reclaimed materials will still be at risk, as even high grade sorted materials are now liable to drop in value, due to the very limited domestic industrial demand for such resources. If we had a mixed recyclable system compacted in a waste lorry this quality would be at risk. The positive news is that if we keep the quality high, and improve uptake to collect more presorted materials, then some of the shrinking income can be made up and the landfill tax penalties can be avoided. Well sorted recycle should always have a reasonable market.

Set an example and tell the story

There's still more we need to do, however. An effective response has to ensure we also discourage wasteful packaging waste; do more as a council to set a proper example and eliminate single use, disposable plastic; educate about the need for better sorted materials to protect markets for useful types of polymers; tell the story of what happens to the recycled products; and promote better industrial infrastructure to use secondary plastics as part of a diversified, inclusive economy that's fit for the future.

Myths were still coming up on the doorstep recently, that collected materials get land filled, so I'd still like to see the positive news told by the council about our services and the work of our collectors, too.

Martin Fodor

Redland Ward, Green Party Cllr