Somerset Waste Partnership

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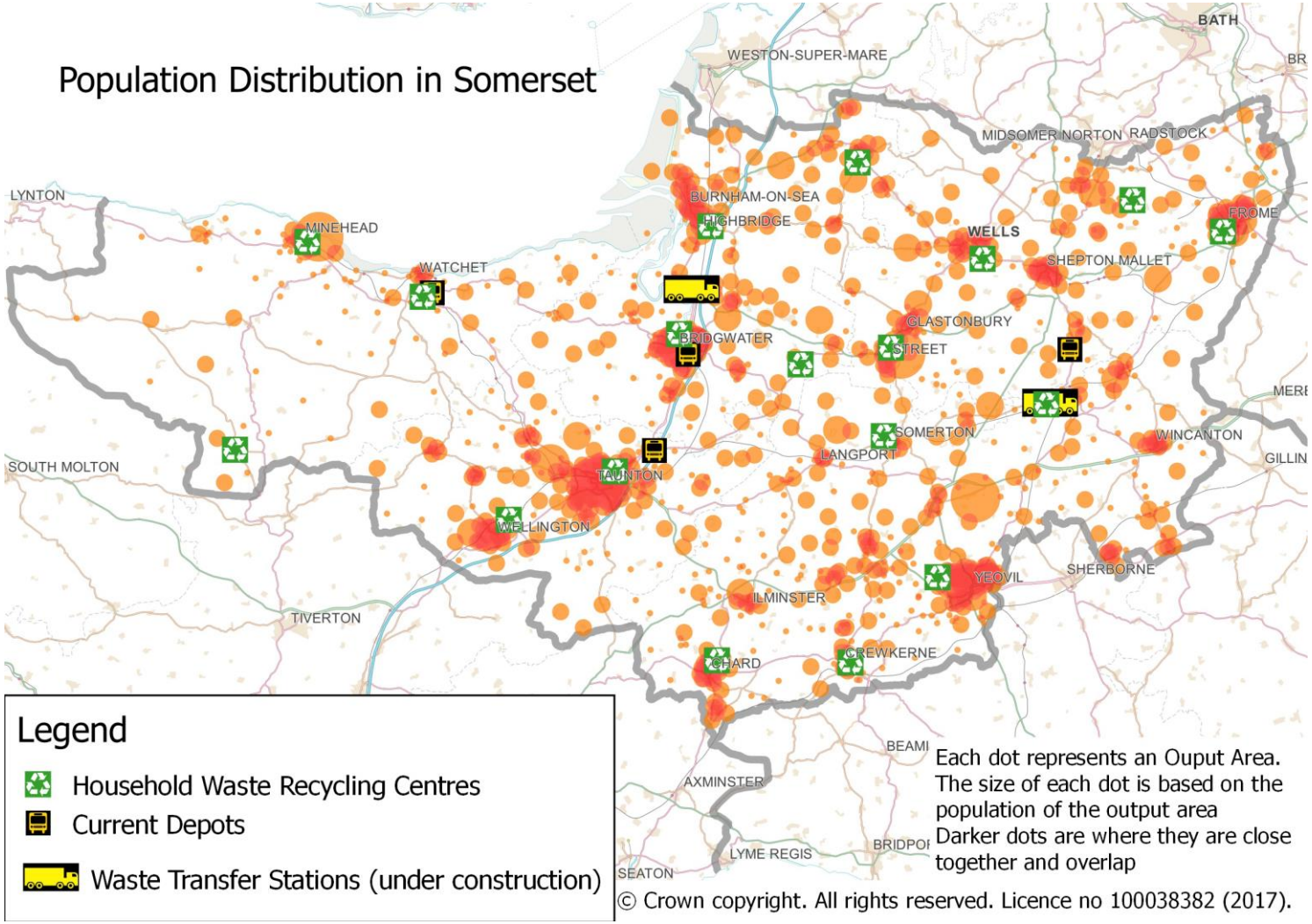
The Recycling Conference 2022

22nd November 2022

Merging household recycling services to deliver cost-effective collection schemes

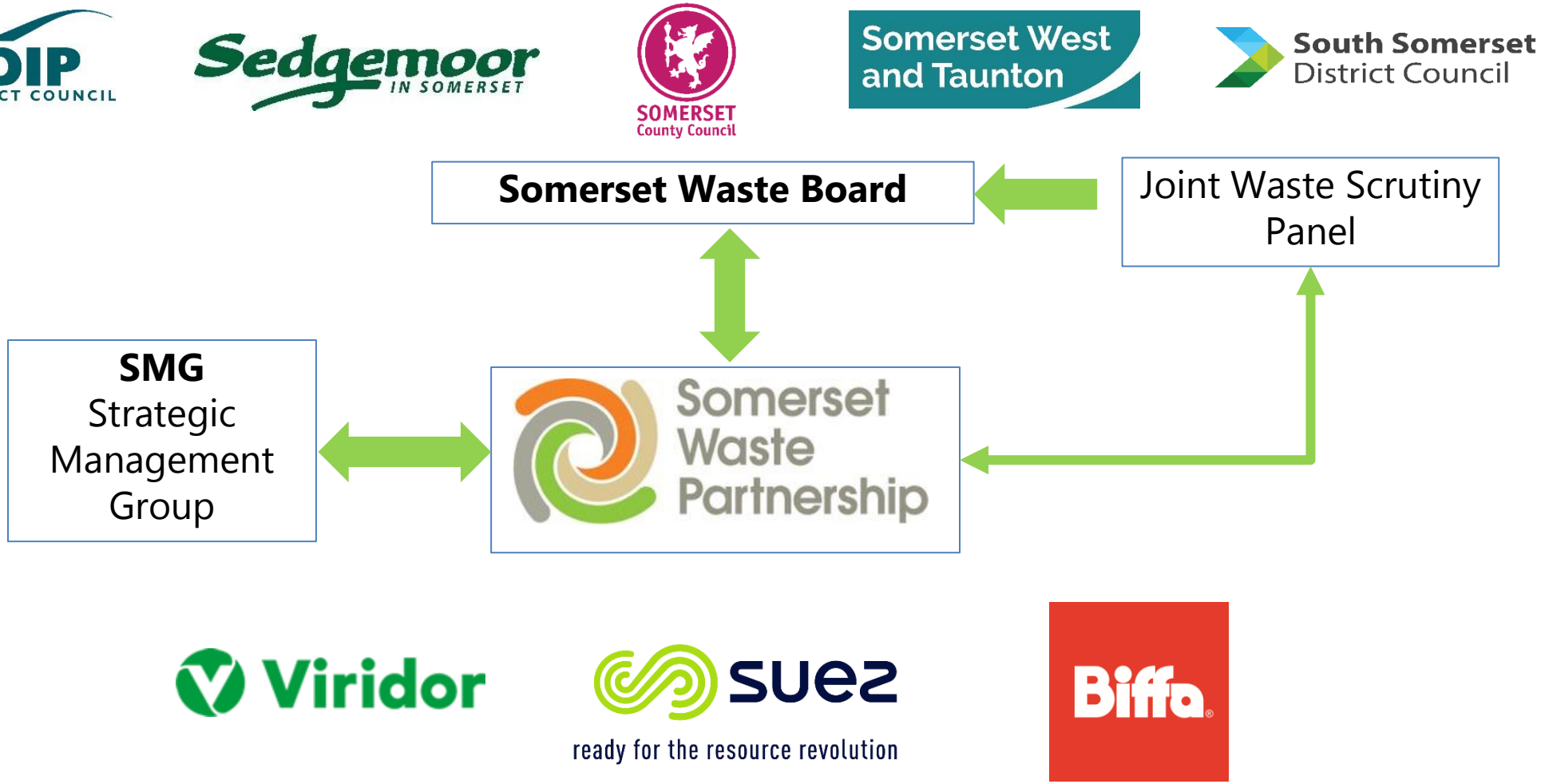
Somerset Waste Partnership

Who we are and what we do



- The first county-wide partnership in the Country
- Accountable to the Somerset Waste Board
- Innovative: kerbside sort, food waste, Recycling Tracker, Fixy (repair/reuse)
- **Budgets:**
  - Approx. £46m per annum
  - c.£23m each collections and treatment/disposal
  - Costs per household - £184.89 (2022/23)
- **Facilities:** 16 Recycling Centres, 2 transfer stations, 3 composting sites, Walpole AD plant, Avonmouth Resource Recovery Facility.

Governance

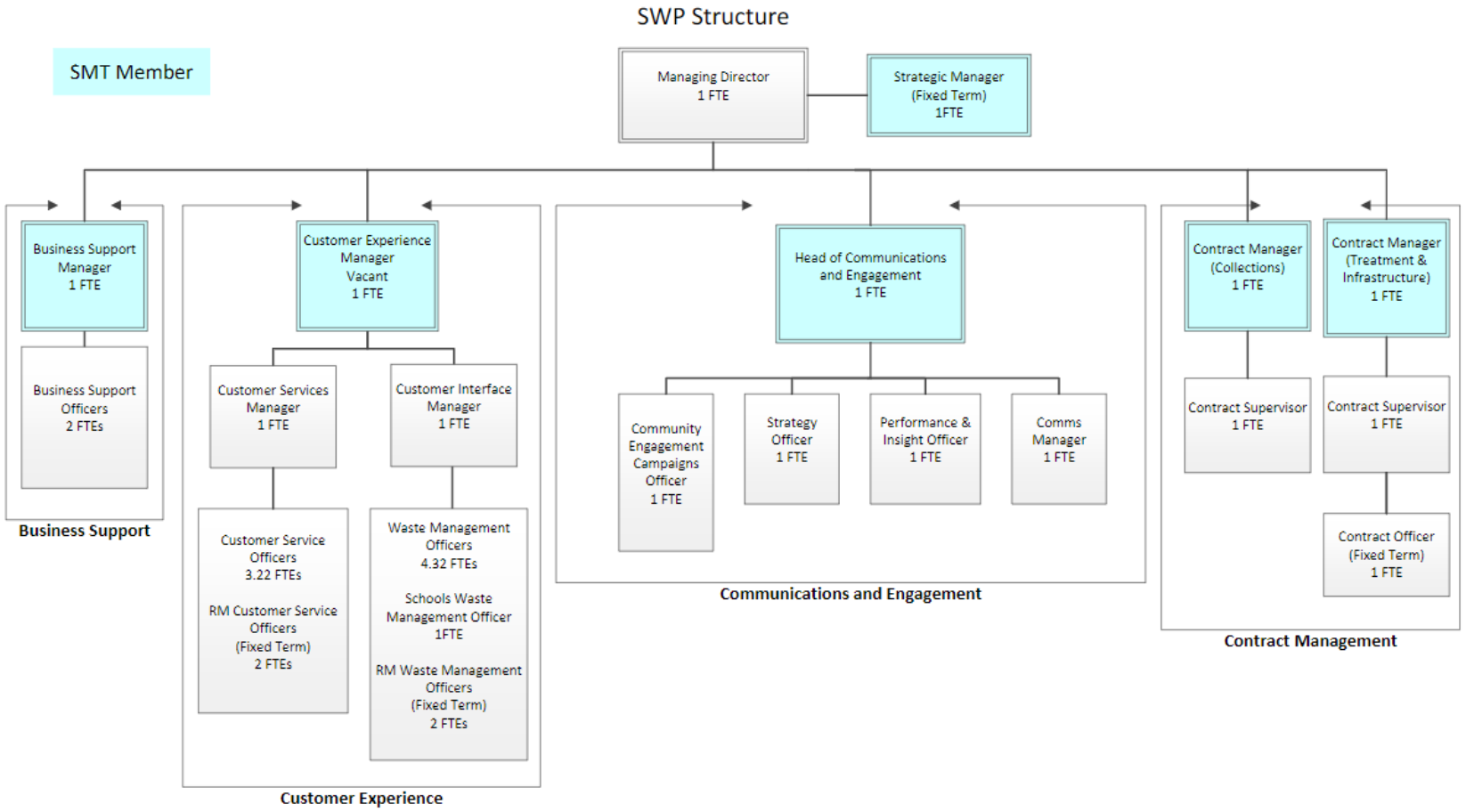

Somerset Waste Board
Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel
SMG
Strategic Management Group
Somerset Waste Partnership

Key facts

- **560k population (over 20m collections per year) and 440k HWRC visits**
- **Recycling rate** of 56.22% (2021/22) – c58% now as all Districts on Recycle More
- **Carbon reduction 'high flyer'** (independently ranked) every year since 2012 (top 10%).
- **Around 97%** of what we collect for recycling stays in the UK (because of kerbside sort), including plastics.

- **Formation of SWP**: Efficiency savings of over £1.5m per annum through rationalising services, £225k single client team creation, £942k avoided future costs.
- **Moved away from landfill** in Spring/Summer 2020.
- **SUEZ:** Contract started on 1 April 2020, c600 staff across 4 depots and 3 transfer facilities. Cultural shift of staff from Kier to Suez, roll-out of Recycle More across to approx. 260k households.
- **Recycle More:** Agreed by all partners: environmental improvement and £2m+ cost saving.

The SWP team now



- Current structure – has been through a few iterations.
- 24.54 FTEs permanent staff
- 6 Fixed term contracts to support Recycle More and LGR
- Embedded comms and engagement team vital to realising benefits from Recycle More: Behaviour change not service change

Establishing a single client team

- Before SWP formed in 2007, 6 separate waste teams – 5 districts and County Council.
- 35 staff originally in scope, 29 transferred in Oct 2007. By 2012, further rationalisation meant 24 staff including 2 seconded to contractor.
- Creation of single client team realised £225,000 savings and avoided an estimate of £942,000 in future costs due to procuring a single contract rather than 5 separate ones.

- Initial customer service contact remains with the individual councils – customers contact their own district or the County Council initially. Reports automated to contractor or SWP.
- SWP has a small customer service team to deal with more involved complaints and queries.
- Single Facebook presence separate from partner authorities (over 18,000 followers)

How did we get here?

Somerset Waste Partnership

1997
6 authorities start working together as SWP

1997
Memorandum of Understanding

2000-2002
Joint Best Value Review

2004
Business case for Somerset-wide collections contract

2004/05
Introduction of Sort It! In 3 districts

2007
SWP formalised

2007
New single collections contract

2007-2011
Roll out of Sort It Plus – standardised service

2013
Walpole AD plant opens

2014
Recycle More trials

2015
Food waste improvement trials

2016
Introduction of permits at HWRCs

2016
Introduction of charges for DIY materials at HWRCs

2020
Move away from landfill to Avonmouth RRC

2020
New collections contract commences

2020-2022
Roll out of Recycle More

Removing district boundaries from collection routes

- Removing district boundaries allows for collection efficiencies and reduced vehicle movements
- Collection rounds planned for efficiency from depots rather than matching district boundaries.
- Consolidate bulky and clinical collections so they are operated from a single depot

- Some round optimisation takes place every time a change is implemented:
  - New collections contract and implementation of Recycle More means we have gone from 170 vehicles in previous contract, down to 144. One third fewer RCVs, round optimisation and increased capacity recycling vehicles.
  - As Recycle More beds in there is opportunity to do further large-scale round optimisation to reduce additional support. Need to ensure service stability and find appropriate timing to do this.

- Key challenges include:
  - data collection – providing accurate data to the district level becomes challenging.
  - In 2017/18 we stopped reporting on WDF as individual authorities and started reporting as Somerset Waste Partnership – essentially unitary. Challenging for accountability.
  - Communications – when providing collection day information, need to ensure the customer is directed to the correct council – again, accurate data is needed.

Procuring a single collections contract that meets the needs of all partners

- Previous partnership working meant SWP had a solid foundation on which to develop the contract. Partners need to be able to compromise and work towards the best overall solution which may not be the preferred option for their authority, particularly in the early days of the partnership. These strong relationships develop over time.
- There were no examples of other successful partnership contracts when we procured, so we had to demonstrate the proven track record of working together along with robust partnership governance arrangements.
- Recognise and accept that financial benefits may not be equitable across all partners. SWP adopted the viewpoint of the Council Tax payer to help put attention on finding the best overall system.
- Planning services across both tiers (WCA and WDA) means that the most efficient and cost effective solutions for the whole waste system are found.
- Benefits far outweigh the challenges – financial savings, improved performance, easier communications (with lower costs), high material quality meaning most recycled in the UK, high customer satisfaction.

Recycle More: Savings and satisfaction

Financial savings:

- Target to deliver at least £1.7m
- Delivering over £3m in 2023/24 (helped by buoyant recycling market and includes contract savings): savings to both District & County tiers
- Reached break even ahead of schedule
- Recycling rate up towards 60%, residual waste reduced by 20%

High customer satisfaction:

- 84% of survey respondents say it is an improvement
- 74% happy with their residual/ rubbish bin capacity
- New service quickly understood by most
- Always some wrinkles/learning…

Winner of: 2022 Local Government Chronicle Award: "Environmental Services" category

Shortlisted for MRW National Recycling Awards and LARAC awards

What's next?

- Formation of Somerset Council – SWP will become part of the new authority

- Another look at round optimisation post-Recycle More

- Achieving the aim of a recycling rate of c.60%, and then even further...
  - Collection and packaging reforms implementation – Recycle More is already consistency aligned.
  - Look to add more materials to kerbside – e.g. plastic films (SW over-represented in the national trial)
  - Additional materials at recycling sites? – e.g. hard plastics, UPVC frames, mattresses
  - Pulling materials out of residual waste (esp. plastic): finding end markets is the challenge

- Waste composition/participation analysis in 2023 – see what's left in residual bin. Use this to target campaigns to increase capture/reduce residual – particularly materials with high carbon impact.

- Focus on reduction (esp. food given cost of living crisis), prevention and **reuse/repair**.

- Development of new MWMS: in light of new administration, financial pressures and national policy?