

Report of Director of Environment and Housing

Report to Scrutiny Board (Housing and Regeneration)

Date: 28th October 2014

Subject: Update report on maximising re-use

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. At the Scrutiny Board meeting on 25 March 2014, officers were asked to look at measures to increase the supply of electrical appliances to re-use organisations as the Board felt that provision of fridges and cookers would have a direct and positive impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable households.
2. The Leeds Furniture Re-use Group (LFRG) is a network of seven furniture re-use organisations. These organisations work together and in partnership with Waste Management Services (WMS) in Environment and Housing to collect unwanted furniture and household items and provide these to people in need either free of charge following a referral from partner agencies or at low cost.
3. Given that tackling debt and poverty and minimising waste / maximising re-use and recycling are key council priorities, Scrutiny Board was keen to explore opportunities to support the growth of re-use organisations. Officers across Housing Leeds, Waste Management Services and Welfare and Benefits Service have been working closely with LFRG to increase the supply of re-use, raise awareness and explore opportunities to add value.

Recommendations

4. Scrutiny Board is requested to:
 - note the content of this report;

- acknowledge the improvements in performance in relation to re-use from council house voids;
- recognise the work that has taken place and is planned to raise awareness of re-use; and
- feedback on opportunities to add value through additional support or funding to the LFRG.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny Board with a progress update on activity over the last six months in relation to three key areas:
- Maximising re-use through council house voids;
 - Raising awareness of re-use and the LFRG; and
 - Exploring opportunities to add value either through additional support or funding to LFRG.

2 Background information

- 2.1 At the Scrutiny Board Meeting of 25th March 2014, the Board felt that provision of fridges and cookers would have a direct and positive impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable households.
- 2.2 The Council is keen to develop new solutions and integrated approaches in order to mitigate the challenges of deprivation and poverty. As outlined in previous reports, the work of the LFRG can contribute to this corporate priority and at the same time, reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.
- 2.3 LFRG is a network of seven furniture re-use organisations. These organisations work together and in partnership with Waste Management Services in Environment and Housing to collect unwanted furniture and household items and provide these to people in need either free of charge following a referral from partner agencies or at low cost. Collectively the LFRG:
- employs 41 full time and 35 part time employees across 18 retail outlets; and
 - provides volunteering and work experience opportunities to over 181 people per week to help them to improve their lives and future prospects.
- 2.4 Waste Management Services (WMS) pays the LFRG organisations a re-cycling credit for household goods and furniture that is diverted from landfill and re-used in the Leeds district. The recycling credit paid is equivalent to the avoided cost (landfill tax and the gate fee £/tonne) of disposing of the waste to landfill. In 2013-14, the eligible LFRG organisations re-used 775 tonnes of furniture and household items equating to over £60,259 in recycling credits at £77.80 per tonne.
- 2.5 In 2012, WMS started the cross-departmental Bulky Waste Project Group with the aim to intercept re-usable furniture and electrical items produced across all

council activities. This included working with the voids teams of the three ALMOs and BITMO to identify items for re-use and divert them to the LFRG network.

- 2.6 In October 2013, the management of council homes was transferred to Leeds City Council from the three ALMOs. Council housing is now delivered by Housing Leeds through three strands; Strategic Housing, Property and Contracts and Housing Management. The Belle Isle TMO (BITMO) is not affected by this change.
- 2.7 With the Housing Leeds restructure near completion, an extensive training programme for all staff is imminent. In addition, officers are undertaking full service reviews in key areas to harmonise policies and procedures to ensure that tenants receive a consistent and customer focused service across the city.

3 Main issues

3.1 Maximising re-use through council house voids

- 3.2 At its March meeting the Board was keen to explore the opportunities for maximising the supply of re-usable furniture and household goods from council house voids. It was acknowledged by officers and scrutiny board members that there was a need to identify best practice across the geographical wedges and to standardise and harmonise procedures around the voids and lettings process.
- 3.3 Since the last meeting, the voids and lettings procedure has been reviewed and refined and a single process has been agreed across the city. The main features of the process are summarised below:
- When a tenant gives notice to terminate their tenancy an officer conducts a pre termination visit. As part of this visit outgoing tenants are provided with the 'too good to throw away' leaflet advising that they can donate any unwanted items of furniture, household goods or bric-a-brac to re-use organisations who will collect free of charge.
 - When the property becomes empty, it is inspected and any items that a tenant has left in situ that are in good condition and can be re-used will be identified and stored at agreed locations for members of the LFRG to collect. All items donated and re-used through this process are logged and statistics are provided to Waste Management Services so that performance can be monitored and reported.
 - As part of the tenancy sign up process, officers identify whether tenants have access to household items including white goods. Where a need is established, tenants are signposted to the LFRG or referred to the Local Welfare Support Scheme as appropriate. New tenants are also provided with a handbook which includes information on refuse, re-use and recycling as well as the 'too good to throw away' leaflet.
 - For all tenants under the age of 18, Housing Leeds provides enhanced support and advice to help ensure tenancy sustainability. This includes looking at provision of white goods and furniture and providing assistance with referrals to re-use.

- 3.4 In addition to the above, the annual tenancy visit (ATV) process has been harmonised across the city. Through these visits, officers will identify any support needs including financial hardship and take appropriate action to help sustain tenancies.
- 3.5 Due to the smaller scale of activity, Belle Isle TMO has a local arrangement in place whereby estate caretakers clear voids and any re-usable furniture is delivered directly to St Vincent's Charity shop on Town Street in Belle Isle. Currently, there is no mechanism in place to record the amount or type of goods which are delivered there but officers at BITMO are looking at how best to record and monitor this activity.
- 3.6 Waste Management Services (WMS) in Environment and Housing collects data on re-use from council house voids. It also co-ordinates the quarterly Bulky Waste Project Group which is attended by officers from WMS, Housing Leeds and representatives from the repairs and maintenance contractors and LFRG. The purpose of this group is to maximise re-use across all council activities.
- 3.7 The recent performance data shows that there has been a significant increase in re-use through council house voids since the start of this financial year. In quarters 1 and 2 of this year a total of 948 items were retrieved from council house voids, this compares to 398 for quarters 3 and 4 of 2013-14. The table below indicates the number of items retrieved from council house voids including the number of electrical items over the last year. The data is broken down by quarter.

	2013 - 14		2014-15	
	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 1	Quarter 2
No. non electrical items	335	45	281	452
No. electrical items	14	4	45	170
Total	349	49	326	622
Equivalent in kilos	4783.5	1023	4947.6	9926.1

- 3.8 It is apparent that there was a marked drop in performance in quarter 4 of 2013-14 and performance recovered in quarter 1 of this year. There was a significant improvement in performance in quarter 2 with a 91% increase in the number of items retrieved and re-used from council house voids compared to quarter 1 (from 326 to 622). Of particular interest is the 278% increase in the number of electrical items collected for re-use, from 45 in quarter 1 to 170 in quarter 2. The table below illustrates the breakdown of electrical items intercepted for re-use so far this financial year.

2014-15

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2
Cooker	6	9
Fridge	1	9
Fridge Freezer	1	8
Freezer	1	2
Microwave	1	6
Washer	1	10
Dryer	0	3
Dishwasher	0	1
Vacuum	3	8
Small Appliances	31	114
Total	45	170

- 3.9 The Board was particularly interested in seeing an increase in the interception of cookers and fridge freezers. Based on the performance data so far this year, there has been a notable increase in these items through council house voids; from 9 in quarter 1 to 28 in quarter 2.
- 3.10 The Board was also keen to see that any future repairs and maintenance contracts include a requirement on the contractor to support broader council priorities. An opportunity will shortly arise within the existing contracts for this to take place. As part of the redesign of housing services, a specialist team has been developed and is responsible for procuring and contract managing repairs and maintenance contracts. This team will ensure that any future contractual arrangements include a requirement to support corporate priorities around waste reduction, re-use and recycling.
- 3.11 Officers in Housing Leeds are liaising with the LFRG to deliver mandatory training for all staff and contractors involved in the voids process. This training will include a site visit and will ensure that all staff involved in the voids process understand the full range of items capable of being re-used and set these aside for LFRG. BITMO staff will also be undertaking this training.
- 3.12 Raising awareness of re-use and the work of the Leeds Furniture Re-use Group
- 3.13 At the last meeting, it was clear that demand for re-use items outstripped supply particularly in relation to electrical goods. As a result, Scrutiny Board members were really keen to raise awareness across the city of re-use and the work of the LFRG in the hope that this would increase donations. Suggestions included a site visit for scrutiny board members, awareness training for all elected members on re-use and increased publicity through newsletters and the website.
- 3.14 Since the Board's March meeting a number of actions have been undertaken by Environment and Housing officers to raise awareness of the LFRG. Firstly, during Recycle Week in June, the Yorkshire Evening Post ran an article each day of the week on waste, recycling and re-use. One of the articles focussed on Revive, a

re-use shop at the Seacroft household waste recycling centre highlighting its dual function of fighting poverty and helping the environment.

3.15 Secondly The Board decided to use its scheduled July meeting for site visits so that board members could get a broader understanding of the work of LFRG. All seven groups were represented and the visit gave the groups an opportunity to share the range of work they do and the people they support:

- Emmaus Leeds - supports 26 homeless people by giving them a home and employment in a social enterprise. It operates a coffee shop as well as three retail outlets selling second-hand furniture, clothes, books, electrical items and bric-a-brac and has a wood workshop that repairs and upcycles items that would otherwise go to landfill.
- Leeds and Moortown Furniture Store - founded in 1986, its main aim is to facilitate the distribution of donated furniture to economically and socially disadvantaged people of Leeds. Working closely with support agencies and council staff across the city, they accept referrals to provide up to 5 items of household furniture at no cost to the recipient other than a £10.00 delivery charge. In 2013-14, they received 1290 referrals from partner agencies and made 918 deliveries providing on average over five items per delivery. This work is supported by their trading arm which has previously supplied new furniture and electrical items to the Leeds Welfare Support Scheme.
- Safe Haven - Founded in 2010, Safe Haven is a Leeds-based outreach charity that works primarily with people coming away from domestic violence and various forms of mental abuse. They run a furniture recycling facility, food bank, counselling service and a home renovation service and are looking into setting up a cafeteria.
- SLATE – comprises of The Feel Good Café in Beeston and The Feel Good Furniture Shop based in Hunslet which supplies affordable used furniture and electrical items to people in need. In addition, it provides work and volunteer opportunities for adults with learning and physical disabilities and mental health issues.
- St Judes Furniture Store (a project of the St Vincent de Paul (SVP) charity) – has operated in Leeds for over 30 years comprising of a furniture store, a white goods refurbishment operation, a support and advice centre & eight charity shops selling low cost quality clothing & goods. It aims to alleviate poverty in the local communities it serves by providing free or low cost household goods and electrical equipment to households in need. In 2013-14, St Judes received 1323 referrals from partner agencies and provided on average six items per referral.
- Sydney Bridge - Sydney Bridge is a not-for-profit organisation that collects, cleans, repairs and sells furniture and electrical appliances at affordable prices to households on low income.
- Revive Leeds - Revive Leeds is a community interest company set up by three Leeds based charities; Emmaus Leeds, SLATE and SVP Leeds. It is Leeds' first shop on a household waste recycling site and is open 362 days a year employing 6 staff (including 1 former apprentice) and volunteers contributing over 10,000 hours a year. Revive Leeds has been recognised regionally and nationally winning Best Environmental Start Up at the Yorkshire Post

Environment Awards, Best Start up at the Social Enterprise Yorkshire and Humber Awards and Rising Star at the Furniture Re-use Network conference.

- 3.16 Members attending the site visit were very impressed with the contributions LFRG made to tackling poverty and deprivation as well as promoting re-use and recycling.
- 3.17 Thirdly, In September, representatives of the LFRG attended an event in the Civic antechamber prior to full council meeting to raise awareness of re-use. This event gave elected members the opportunity to see the quality of re-used household items and to speak to members of LFRG about their work.
- 3.18 Fourthly, the following activity has also taken place or is scheduled:
- Tenant newsletter - the recent tenant newsletter distributed to all Leeds City Council tenants included an article on re-use.
 - Community action day – throughout the year, housing management arranges community action days and provides skips to encourage responsible disposal of unwanted items. LFRG organisations have been invited to attend these events so they can intercept any items that can be re-used or recycled and raise awareness of their work in local communities.
 - WRAP video – Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) is a national organisation commissioned by the Government to promote waste minimisation, re-use and recycling. WRAP, impressed by the work of the Bulky Waste Project Group and partnership work in Leeds, commissioned and funded a video filmed in Leeds highlighting the benefits of partnership working between local authorities, housing providers and re-use organisations. This video will be available to view on the Council's website.
 - Essentials email – colleagues in the communications team are planning to include a piece in the weekly 'essentials' email that goes to all staff with IT access on LFRG.
 - 'Too Good to Throw Away' – WMS and LFRG are reviewing and updating the leaflet promoting the re-use organisations.
 - Communications Plan –WMS and Corporate Communications has developed a communications plan which includes the provision of training to the LFRG organisations on developing and reviewing their websites and the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.
- 3.19 Exploring opportunities to add value either through additional support or funding to LFRG
- 3.20 The Council operates a Local Welfare Support Scheme (LWSS) which provides support for families and vulnerable people faced with unforeseen difficulties and emergency situations. This includes the provision of kitchen appliances where the applicant fulfils the eligibility criteria.
- 3.21 Government funding for a LWSS ceases at the end of this financial year. Officers are currently considering options for a future scheme and are scheduled to take a report to Executive Board later in the year.

3.22 The table below shows the number of awards and spend during 2013-14.

Type of award	No. of awards	% of overall awards	Value of spend	% of overall spend
Store cards	1579	14	£64,033.00	5
Food	2458	22	£146,280.00	10
Fuel	2590	23	£51,351.00	4
White Goods	2976	26	£725,046.00	52
Brown Goods	1001	8	£118,149.00	8
Carpets	746	6	£271,901.00	20
Travel	8	0	£335.00	0
Removals	55	1	£14,623.00	1
Totals	11,413	100	£1,391,718.00	100

3.23 Based on these statistics, 40% of awards relate to household goods (white and brown goods and carpets) and these represented 80% of the budget. In light of the high level of spend on household items, colleagues in Welfare and Benefits Service started to consider using the LFRG as a first port of call to provide all these items except for carpets.

3.24 From April 2014, for all LWSS scheme awards, the LFRG is given the opportunity to supply household goods including beds, tables and chairs, sofas and second hand electrical items. If LFRG does not have the stock to fulfil the request, WBS passes it to their approved provider. In quarter 1, only requests for beds and mattresses were forwarded to LFRG and in quarter 2, it extended to all furniture and electrical items. The table below illustrates the number of items LFRG have been able to provide so far this year as well as the number of items they were unable to supply due to lack of stock at the time of the request.

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	
	Supplied by LFRG	Supplied by LFRG	LFRG unable to supply
Furniture	18	89	3
Cookers	0	37	15
Fridges / Freezers	0	49	29
Dryer	0	1	0
Washing Machine	0	46	0
Total	18	222	47

3.25 With the significant increase in household items and electrical appliances being retrieved from council house voids, the LFRG have been able to fulfil a large number of awards under the LWSS with re-use. It is anticipated that with the

planned further work on raising awareness, supply can be further boosted particularly in relation to electrical items.

3.26 In addition to involving LFRG in supplying household goods under the LWSS, other work is being undertaken to provide additional support and explore funding opportunities. These are summarised below:

- Funding – LFRG has recently applied for funding under the LCC Transition Fund to undertake a feasibility study on mattress recycling which would look to divert mattresses from landfill so they can be de-constructed and materials recycled or used to re-construct. In addition to this, officers in WMS are exploring whether the European Structural Investment Fund will support re-use activities within the Leeds City Region.
- Bulk purchasing of returned electrical items - St Judes has been awarded a contract allowing them to access returned goods generated by large electrical retailers as well as old unwanted appliances they collect. They can purchase these items at a cost of £12-£16 each and test and repair these and offer for resale or through the LWSS. Currently, they purchase items as and when they need them but they do have available storage space at their Bradford site so could look at bulk purchasing. Additional funding by way of a loan would help to finance larger scale bulk purchasing and officers will explore options.
- Storage – as a result of the increase in re-use through the council house voids, LFRG would benefit from additional storage facilities. Furthermore, if organisations are to pursue bulk purchasing of electrical goods and are successful in securing funding to explore mattress recycling, warehouse space will be necessary. Officers in Housing Leeds approached contractual partners about storage or warehouse space but they do not have surplus space available. Officers will liaise with colleagues in Asset Management and Facilities Management to explore other options.
- Gas cookers – Since the last meeting, Housing Leeds has considered options with its contractors to re-use gas cookers. Under gas regulations, to install and test a gas appliance the contractor needs to have a copy of the installation manual. These manuals are rarely available and therefore gas appliances are, in the main, removed from council voids. Housing Leeds would be happy to set these aside with other household items collected from council voids for LFRG collection.
- Bulky waste collections - WMS has worked with the LFRG to introduce a stock control system to better monitor donations and sales. A booking calendar is being developed that can be used to intercept reusable items via bulky waste collections. This should help to avoid bulky waste items being left outside and getting damaged by adverse weather as it is hoped that the booking calendar will allow LFRG to be booked to collect reusable items.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.1 The existing Local Welfare Support Scheme was developed in consultation with frontline services and advice agencies and has been revised in response to feedback from service users and elected members.

- 4.1.2 New and existing tenants in need will be signposted to appropriate schemes through the voids process, tenancy sign-up procedures and annual tenancy visits.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 An equality impact assessment is not relevant at this stage as the report is primarily an information report.
- 4.2.2 Existing schemes focus on people in need irrespective of ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender or disability.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The report deals with the issues of tackling debt, poverty and deprivation in the city which are key priorities for the City and contributes to a number of the city priorities and the identified poverty-related actions – i.e. the Sustainable Economy and Culture Plan, the Health and Well Being Plan and the Children and Young People Plan (through the Child Poverty Strategy).
- 4.3.2 The Local Welfare Support Scheme and furniture re-use organisations contribute to the Council's City Priorities, particularly the anti-poverty agenda. They offer an alternative to high interest providers and help to tackle high cost lending, child poverty and debt.
- 4.3.3 Furniture re-use organisations also contribute to the best council objective of dealing effectively with the city's waste by increasing re-use and recycling and reducing landfill tax costs.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 There are no identified resource implications associated with the issues under consideration.
- 4.4.2 Maximising re-use opportunities will reduce landfill tax costs.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.
- 4.5.2 This report is not eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 There are no identified risks associated with the issues under consideration.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The recent performance data shows that there has been a significant increase in re-use through council house voids since the start of this financial year. In particular, there has been a 278% increase in the number of electrical items collected and re-used, from 45 in quarter 1 to 170 in quarter 2.

5.2 A number of new initiatives and improvements to existing procedures have been and will be implemented. This will ensure that there is a coherent approach to re-use and further improve the ability to recycle white goods.

5.3 Officers across Housing Leeds and Waste Management Services will continue to work closely with LFRG to monitor progress and performance through the Bulky Waste Project Group.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Scrutiny Board is requested to:

- note the content of this report;
- acknowledge the improvements in performance in relation to re-use from council house voids; and
- recognise the work that has taken place and is planned to raise awareness of re-use; and
- feedback on opportunities to add value through additional support or funding to the LFRG.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 Reports to Scrutiny Board on 24 September 2013 (Council Policy on the Provision of Cookers to Tenants), 7 January 2014 (Schemes providing kitchen appliances to tenants) and 25 March 2014 (Update report on schemes providing kitchen appliances to tenants) from the Director of Environment and Housing.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.