

**Report of Director of Environment and Housing**

**Report to Environment & Housing Scrutiny Board**

**Date: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

**Subject: Waste Strategy Theme**

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**

This report provides Scrutiny Board Members with an overview of key issues and challenges in the following areas:

- The City's Waste Strategy;
- Recycling (including addressing low participation rates in existing AWC areas and viable options for non-AWC areas across the city);
- Managing waste in high rise properties.

**Recommendations**

Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board is requested to note the content of this report and, further to discussion, to identify any specific areas for further scrutiny.

## **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1. The report provides a brief overview of the Council's Waste Strategy, focusing on a number of specific areas identified for further discussion following work on a Scrutiny Inquiry into the Waste Strategy conducted in late 2014 and early 2015. The report invites comments from Members on areas for further scrutiny by the Board.

## **2. Main Issues**

- 2.1. The appendices to this report provide summaries of the key issues and challenges in the following main areas:
  - The City's Waste Strategy;
  - Recycling (including participation (including addressing low participation rates in existing AWC areas and viable options for non-AWC areas across the city);
  - Managing waste in high rise properties.

## **3. Corporate Considerations**

### **3.1. Consultation and Engagement**

- 3.1.1. The Waste Strategy and waste collection policies referred to in this report have been consulted on previously and have previously been approved by Executive Board.

### **3.2. Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 3.2.1. An equality impact assessment is not required at this stage as this report is primarily for information.

### **3.3. Council policies and Best Council Plan**

- 3.3.1. The waste and recycling strategy supports the Best Council Plan 2015–20 in terms of contributing to:
  - Dealing effectively with the City's waste, by proposing a long term solution to disposing of waste and encouraging recycling;
  - Becoming a more efficient and enterprising council, through a reduction in landfill costs.

### **3.4. Resources and value for money**

- 3.4.1. The proposed medium-term strategy clearly takes account of the current financial pressures, and focuses on maximising the value from existing capacity and infrastructure.
- 3.4.2. It should be noted that the Waste Strategy overall, primarily through the PFI contract with Veolia, will deliver savings of around £4m per annum from next year

compared to previously budgeted levels, and around £6.8m in total compared to the projected costs of a continued reliance on landfill.

- 3.4.3. It is proposed that investment be made in a programme of communications, engagement and enforcement as detailed above, which will be more than offset by waste disposal cost savings resulting from an increase in the recycling rate.

### **3.5. Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 3.5.1. This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.

### **3.6. Risk Management**

- 3.6.1. Failure to achieve EU and national recycling targets could potentially have implications for the Council should Central Government decide to impose some form of sanction.

## **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1. The report highlights main issues and challenges in a number of key areas identified by Scrutiny Board. The report sets out the proposed medium-term strategy for recycling, including the approach to be taken to increasing recycling participation city-wide and to identifying the most appropriate collection solutions for non-AWC areas. Members are requested to comment on the information provided and to identify any specific areas for further scrutiny.

## **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1. Environment and Housing Scrutiny Board is requested to note the content of this report and, further to discussion, to identify any specific areas for further scrutiny.

## **6. Background documents <sup>1</sup>**

- 6.1. None

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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.

## **The City's Waste Strategy**

The Council's Waste Strategy, consistent with EU and national policy and strategy, is based around the principle of seeking to move the management of waste up the hierarchy of the following (in descending order of environmental benefit):

- Reduce;
- Re-use;
- Recycle;
- Energy recovery;
- Disposal.

The formal strategy document has not been fully reviewed for some years, although it has developed during this time through a range of key Executive Board reports. The strategy sets out a range of objectives and measures aimed at progressively moving the management of waste up the hierarchy above, and work continues at each of these tiers. However, the most notable developments relate to the recycling strategy and the residual waste treatment solution for the City.

### Recycling Strategy

Recycling in Leeds has been a major success over recent years, with the household waste recycling rate climbing from 22.3% in 2006/7 to almost 43% in 2014/15. This has seen Leeds become the highest recycling Core City.

In December 2011, the Executive Board approved household waste recycling targets of 55% by 2016, and a longer-term target to exceed 60%. This strategy was based on an envisaged investment in the city-wide roll-out of new kerbside services and the capture of new recycling streams, in particular food waste and glass.

However, the ability to deliver on the expansion of recycling services has been inhibited by the current financial pressures and central government funding cuts, with other services across the Council currently needing to be prioritised.

To introduce an additional food waste collection route similar to that currently provided to around 12,500 properties in the Rothwell area of the City would cost an estimated £165k per annum, even taking account of avoided disposal costs.

As regards glass collections, the inclusion of glass within the green bins has been discounted as a method of collection due to changes in legislation, specifically in terms of its impact on the quality of the other dry recyclable materials. A four weekly separate kerbside glass collection route covering around 24,000 properties would cost an estimated £140k per annum.

To roll both of these services out to suitable properties city-wide would cost an estimated additional £5m per annum.

The performance of the Council's recycling services generally continues to improve, with green bin recycling (following the introduction of alternate weekly collections) and recycling at the household waste recycling sites still increasing.

However, these performance increases are being countered primarily due to the Council's waste disposal contractors being able to recover less and less material from black bin waste for recycling due to market requirements for increasingly high quality recyclables. These current arrangements will be superseded by the transition to the new PFI contract with Veolia, which will arrest this decline and safeguard recycling from black bin waste at an appropriate level. However, the Council's recycling strategy needs to focus more on the higher quality materials captured through separation at source by householders.

The net effect of these factors has been a slowing down in the historical increases in the recycling rate, to the point where a small decrease is now being observed.

Whilst it remains the Council's intention to resume the expansion of recycling collection services across the City once resources become available, immediate plans are to focus on maximising existing recycling capacity and infrastructure, and the Council intends to support this with an effective programme of communications, community engagement, policy enforcement and service improvement. These proposals are covered more fully in the section on recycling participation below.

### Veolia Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility (RERF)

The Veolia RERF is now in the commissioning phase, with the Council starting to deliver waste to the facility in late October 2015. The waste deliveries will increase during November, beyond which time it is expected that 100% of black bin waste city-wide will be processed at the RERF. Full service commencement is anticipated to be in March 2016 following full sign-off of the plant by the Independent Certifier.

The facility and PFI contract will bring an environmental step change in the management of black bin waste, enabling the Council to move almost wholly away from its historical reliance on landfill. The RERF will capture through pre-treatment a minimum of 10% of the materials processed, and will generate around 11MW electricity, equivalent to the power consumption of around 20,000 homes. The process will provide an estimated carbon saving of around 62,000 tonnes per annum, equating to the removal of approximately 29,000 cars off the road. The Council is also working to develop a district heating network linked to the RERF, which will further improve its environmental performance and provide the opportunity to provide reduced cost, sustainable heating to social housing.

The PFI contract with Veolia will deliver savings of around £4m per annum from next year compared to previously budgeted levels, and around £6.8m in total per annum compared to the projected costs of a continued reliance on landfill.

### Key Challenges

- Develop and implement a strategy to ensure continued recycling increases in spite of current financial constraints (see following section)
- Continue to assess recycling collection options in order to identify more affordable solutions for expanding recycling services such as food waste and glass collections;
- Work in partnership with Veolia to ensure that full service commencement is achieved for the RERF;
- Develop and launch an educational programme through the RERF Visitor Centre.

## **Recycling (including addressing low participation rates in existing AWC areas and viable options for non-AWC areas across the city);**

The proposed strategy for achieving the revised 50% target referred to in the previous section is based on maximising existing recycling capacity and infrastructure, and the Council intends to support this with an effective programme of communications, community engagement, policy enforcement and service improvement. There are significant differences in tonnages collected for recycling across different areas of the City, and analysis shows that as much as an additional 7% on the recycling rate could theoretically be achieved from the green bins alone if all residents were participating at the level of those on the highest performing collection routes across the City. However, this target can only be achieved through the engagement of residents with the recycling agenda and through a significant behavioural change in this area.

### Communication, Engagement and Enforcement

It is anticipated that the programme of communication, education and enforcement will include the following:

- Distribution of recycling stickers on green bins: refuse collection crews are currently working through a programme of placing clear pictorial stickers on recycling bins to explain 'yes please' and 'no thanks' to what goes in the green bin;
- 'Invest to Save' marketing campaign: a targeted campaign run in themed phases during 2016 aimed at raising awareness of what materials can be recycled and why it is important, encouraging people to change their behaviours/ routines at home and on promoting the wider recycling opportunities available at recycling sites across the City;
- Digital media: this will focus on enabling citizens to engage with the service in the ways they want to, via digital channels such as the 'Leeds Bins App' (to be piloted in late 2015), the website, direct messaging and social media, thus also reducing our reliance on costly mass mail-outs where this is not required;
- Maximising the impact of Council officers: building on initial work with Housing and Localities, staff who have regular contact with residents have been trained in promoting recycling participation messages as part of their daily role on the Leeds' streets and within their communities. Work will continue to maximise the impact of this staffing resource;
- Social contract: developing relationships with community, tenant and third sector groups and Community Committees with the intention of securing support with recycling messages through their established networks, and to explore the potential for establishing 'contracts' with targeted groups. The Service will also continue to increase waste re-use through its range of partnerships with the third sector;
- Incentive schemes: whilst the evidence is not conclusive in terms of the benefits of incentive schemes employed by other councils, it is still felt that there could be merit in this approach. A potential pilot scheme aimed at specific targeted areas or groups of properties is therefore being considered based on, for example,

offering reward points, short-term competitions alongside the 'invest to save' marketing campaign or a monthly prize draw. Citizens would be required to opt in by making a recycling pledge, and the incentive can be either be a community or individual reward. The outcome is to instil competitive recycling social norm behaviour in citizens and establish green bin routines;

- Education programmes: reinforcing positive recycling behaviours in both our current and future citizens is a key to ensuring a continual rise in environmental performance. The Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility (RERF) Visitor Centre will open in March 2016 and will have a modern education space in which school groups and the general public can be welcomed. This facility was made a requirement of the PFI contract with the intention of it providing an environment in which people can hear key messages about the Council's wider waste and recycling strategy, as well as just relating to the RERF itself. The popular schools recycling champions programme was launched over the summer and is being offered to all schools in Leeds. This work ensures that learning in the classroom is transferred to the home. A learning package outlining the benefits of recycling has been developed with the Council's training partner QA, and will be rolled out to Council staff and made available for the public.
- Retailer partnerships: the Service will explore closer working with the commercial sector and major retailers to help increase the impact of waste minimisations and recycling messages through our initial work on projects like 'Love Food, Hate Waste' and via businesses associated with Academy schools;
- Enforcement of waste collection policies: In January 2014, Executive Board formally adopted a range of waste collection policies aimed at clearly communicating the role and responsibilities of the Council and residents in managing household waste and increasing recycling. Since this time, the Service has been focused primarily on the implementation of alternate weekly collections (AWC), and in particular the policy of not collecting side waste (i.e. additional bags of non-recyclable waste not contained within the wheeled bin) in AWC areas. However, the wider policies also cover the issues of contaminated recycling bins and the number of bins to which residents are entitled, and the Service plans to enforce these policies more robustly through a combination of working with the Contact Centre, communications, potential removal of excess or contaminated bins and ultimately more formal enforcement action.

### Collection Service Design in Non-AWC Areas

The new alternate weekly collection (AWC) service, which is now provided to over 75% of properties in Leeds, has been very successful, resulting in an increase in recycling at the kerbside.

However, the remaining 25% of properties not deemed suitable for AWC generally either have physical constraints due to property types, are within areas of high transient population, or have other social or cultural factors affecting recycling participation. This results in low recycling rates, high green bin contamination levels and regular side waste.

It is within these areas that different, tailored collection arrangements need to be considered. This may involve alternative or communal collection arrangements for

particular clusters of properties or high-rise flats where the current system is not working effectively.

Alternatively, there are areas where recycling participation is persistently so poor, due to the nature of the community, that the existing service is proving fruitless. The Ash Road pilot in Headingley, where the green bins were actually withdrawn and an 'opt-in' service offered, has been successful, and there are other areas of the City where this model will be appropriate. As well as addressing the issue of non-participation in recycling or wholesale contamination of green bins, this strategy has also addressed the broader 'street-scene' issues associated with the number of bins left out on these streets.

### Key Challenges

- To deliver the above strategy for communications, engagement and enforcement set out above, using an evidence-based approach to target activities;
- To develop a costed and prioritised plan, in consultation with Members, to deliver alternative collection solutions in priority areas.



## **Managing waste in high-rise properties**

High-rise properties form a substantial element of council housing in Leeds, with over 7,500 households in 121 blocks across the City. Housing Leeds are currently undertaking a programme of work to address the challenges linked to high-rise flats, which includes refuse collection and recycling related issues.

One of the main issues for the Refuse Collection service at high-rise properties is access. Problems are regularly encountered due to resident parking restricting collection vehicle access to empty bins. Alternatively, there may be issues with accessing bin stores due to locks or access codes having been changed.

There are also issues in terms of resident participation in the correct usage of the waste disposal and recycling facilities provided. This can result in waste accumulating on landings in high-rise properties and creating environmental issues and fire risks.

In order to address these issues, the Waste Management and Environmental Action Services are working with Housing Leeds on a specific High-Rise Project being led by Housing Leeds. A trial is being carried out in relation to the 16 Lincoln Green high-rise blocks to cover the following:

- Working with Parking Enforcement and the police to increase enforcement of the parking restrictions already in place, and looking at additional restrictions where deemed necessary;
- Reviewing current recycling facilities at properties to assess usage and contamination levels in order to identify whether current provision is adequate or beneficial;
- Improving information provided to tenants to clarify how waste disposal and recycling facilities should be used, including a review of signage, enhanced information in tenant sign-up packs, targeted door-knocking, etc.;
- Improving communications and co-ordination of activities between key service areas such as Housing Leeds, Waste Management, Environmental Action, CEL, etc. in relation to waste related issues in high-rise properties;
- Reviewing how we manage and remove bulky waste arising from tenants in high-rise properties.

### Key Challenges

Based on the outcome of this trial, the main challenge for Environment and Housing will be to extend these measures to further Council high-rise properties on a targeted basis.