

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors A Maloney, A Hannan,
A McCluskey, S Ali, L Cunningham,
L Farley, K Haigh, Z Hussain, C Anderson,
R Jones and S Seary

34 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection documents.

35 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

36 Late Items

There were no late items.

37 Declaration of Interests

No members made any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests.

However, two members requested that non-pecuniary interests be noted in relation to item 8 Food Strategy Progress Update:

- Cllr Cunningham is a Director of Armley Action Team – a hub that set up a community fridge and food pantry, alongside Climate Action Armley.
- Cllr Golton is Vice President of Leeds Allotment Federation.

38 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from the following Scrutiny Board members:

- Cllr Barry Anderson (Cllr Caroline Anderson attended as a substitute)
- Cllr Norma Harrington (Cllr Simon Seary attended as a substitute)
- Cllr Mohammed Iqbal (Cllr Raymond Jones attended as a substitute)

39 Minutes - 18 July 2024 and 31 July 2024

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meetings that took place on 18 July and 31 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Wednesday, 23rd October, 2024

40 Waste Strategy Update

Individuals in attendance for this item were:

- **Cllr Mohammed Rafique** (Executive Board Member for Climate, Energy, Environment & Green Space)
- **James Rogers** (Director, Communities, Housing & Environment)
- **John Woolmer** (Chief Officer Environmental Services)
- **Phil Turpin** (Senior Business Officer)
- **Matt Birkett** (Service Manager)

The Chair welcomed the early engagement with the Scrutiny Board on proposals relating to the introduction of food waste collections and an associated '3 bin solution' for Leeds.

John Woolmer was invited to introduce the paper. He provided an overview of progress in the development of national policy and legislation, including information relating to extended producer responsibility, deposit return schemes and separate collections of household waste.

He went on to set out proposals for managing household waste in Leeds in a way that seeks to meet recently introduced national Simpler Recycling requirements and helps Leeds residents to reduce the amount of waste they produce that is not re-used or recycled.

An update was provided in relation to the recent introduction of glass into green bins. It was confirmed that, measured by weight, the amount of waste being collected in the first few weeks is up by 30%, with around 700 tonnes of glass being separated for remelt and recycling in August. This is anticipated to increase as awareness improves. Further analysis will be required to determine the proportion of glass being diverted from black bins or bottle banks. John explained that the greater environmental and financial benefits would be achieved through diverting glass from the black to the green bin, as incineration would have no recycling or energy recovery benefit. He outlined plans to focus on changing customer habits in the areas of the city where glass is predominantly placed into black bins and said the service would welcome help from ward members in sharing this message.

Concern was raised about the spillage of glass on the road in some areas of the city. Members were asked to highlight examples of this with the team to help identify the cause of the problem – for example, this may be related to specific collection vehicles.

John specifically sought the views of the Scrutiny Board in relation to a proposed '3 bin' approach to enable residents to recycle more at home while minimising the need for more bins.

John confirmed that no further information has been received about annual, revenue funding for a new food collection service. However, Leeds has been

allocated £7.1m capital monies via DEFRA to support the purchase of infrastructure such as new vehicles, bins and caddies.

John informed members that the expectation from DEFRA has moved towards comingling of food and garden collections where that makes most sense locally and supports the Simpler Recycling aims. However, weekly collections still currently remain a future national requirement for food waste. It was noted that this is despite mixed garden and food waste collections being successfully delivered on a fortnightly basis in other places such as Hull and the East Riding. John confirmed that initial proposals for Leeds would therefore represent an interim step towards those requirements.

Referring to proposals for the introduction of separate food waste collections, John noted that affordability and infrastructure factors would determine what options were possible and reiterated that no details or confirmation of the Government funding for food waste collections has been provided. He explained that as the largest provider of a garden waste collection service in the UK, Leeds was in a strong position to utilise existing infrastructure to introduce food waste collections by adding food as a waste item within the brown bin. The high-level modelling undertaken by the service indicates that this could be delivered within existing revenue resources, utilising the capital grant to pay for new wagons, caddies and bins.

The preferred proposal would see households with a brown bin collection increased from 220k to 291k, representing 80% of properties. Those households with a brown bin would receive a year-round fortnightly collection. It would be the choice of the household if they used the brown bin for food waste as well as garden waste. The report explained that this could increase the city's recycling rate to over 50%.

A future solution for food waste collections would then be explored for the remaining 20% of properties, which includes areas of high-density housing and places where the number of bins is already a problem. Residual waste would be collected on a minimum fortnightly basis, with weekly collections continuing in areas of high housing density.

Members sought reassurances about the level of staff required to support the introduction of enhanced brown bin collections. In response officers provided assurance that additional staff were part of current modelling which is indicating that somewhere in the region of 3-4 additional crews will be required. That will potentially include a 'spare' crew to enable more rapid collection of any missed bins and additional resources in peak periods of demand.

Officers also responded to concerns about new collections in areas of high-density housing noting that any national learning would be incorporated into subsequent phases of food collection roll outs and local members will be consulted on possible solutions.

Other matters raised by members included:

- Anticipated take up rates for the new service.
- Infrastructure requirements including whether the use of inserts for food waste within brown bins would be beneficial, the provision of liners to residents and the capacity to move to smaller vehicles to enable dedicated food waste collections should that be required.
- Concerns about smells and pests if food waste is left out for collection in areas of high-density housing and where communal bins are used.
- The availability of local contractors to process the increased yields of waste.
- Clarification about the anticipated outcome of recycling food waste.
- Potential spillage of food waste.
- The impact on levels of residual waste at the RERF and any contractual implications.
- Provision of brown bins to new housing developments.

John noted that more detail will be included in the proposals as they are developed. However, the aim will be to encourage rather than compel residents to engage with the new comingled collection. He also noted that officers are seeking to learn from colleagues in East Riding and Hull, as well as Manchester and Cheshire, where comingled food collections are already in place and working successfully.

Phil confirmed that projected yields of food waste are based on WRAP guidance. The WRAP data has been developed using information from local authorities who have operated a food waste collection and is based on kilograms per household.

Members were informed that there are different practices with regards to the provision of caddy liners. The expectation in Leeds is that liners will be provided to residents using new burden revenue funding.

Members were informed that it is anticipated that the mixed garden and food waste will be composted. However, a procurement process will be undertaken shortly to determine the options available.

The Chair sought clarity about whether a formal evaluation of learning from the extended pilot of food waste collections in Rothwell was available. It was also noted that the Rothwell pilot involved dedicated collections of food waste caddies.

A formal evaluation of the Rothwell pilot was not available. However, John confirmed that affordability would prevent the introduction of dedicated food waste collections in 2025, as was the model for the Rothwell pilot scheme.

To deliver a model on that basis would mean delaying the introduction of a food waste collection until sufficient additional funding was available to cover the collection and infrastructure costs. Officers set out how the way in which comingling could make best use of current infrastructure to deliver an interim solution at an earlier stage. Officers highlighted that comingling would expand

the garden waste collection to an additional 70k households, and provide the added bonus of expanding garden waste to an all-year-round collection.

John reminded members that food is already collected in black bins so issues linked to spillages should not be significantly different if that is collected in the brown bin. However, he noted learning from other areas - such as turning off the drain on wagons to avoid waste spilling from the vehicle.

Officers confirmed that projected yields for food waste do not suggest there would be concerns about going below the contracted minimum volumes for the RERF. Had projections suggested there would be an adverse economic impact due to the contractual relationship with the RERF, an exemption to food waste collection requirements would have been sought from the Government.

It is anticipated that in future brown bins will be provided as standard to new homes alongside black and green bins as kerbside food and garden waste collections become a statutory requirement from 2026. John also explained that the proposal would require the design of new collection routes citywide before implementation and that would take into account known housing developments.

Members sought and received reassurance about the education and information programme that will support the introduction of new comingled collections, particularly in new communities where English is not the first language of many residents.

The Chair noted that without more detail the Scrutiny Board was not able to fully endorse the proposed approach, but members welcomed the early engagement and look forward to further information as the proposal is developed.

RESOLVED:

The Scrutiny Board noted and provided comment upon:

- a) the updated national position in relation to implementing the national Resource and Waste Strategy, revised/new recycling collection requirements set out in the Environment Act (2021) and the associated Simpler Recycling policy.
- b) progress made so far in Leeds in meeting the Simpler Recycling requirements; including the recent introduction of glass bottles and jars as items now accepted in the green, household recycling bins;
- c) the option presented for a “3 bin” approach for inclusion within the Leeds Household Waste Strategy, including adding food waste to the list of items allowed in the brown bin.

41 Food Strategy Progress Update

Individuals in attendance for this item were:

- **Cllr Mohammed Rafique** (Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment and Green Space)
- **Polly Cook** (Chief officer Climate, Energy & Green Spaces)
- **Andrew White** (Senior Project Manager)
- **Claire Dalton-Nobbs** (Senior Project Officer)

The Chair introduced the item, noting that the full Food Strategy Progress Update had been considered by the Executive Board on 18 September, and has previously been considered by the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee.

Andrew White was invited to provide an overview of the report highlights, noting that the Food Strategy was introduced in 2023 in collaboration with partners and stakeholders. He highlighted that the Scrutiny Board was being asked to consider the report so far as it related to the remit of the Scrutiny Board including matters linked to food poverty, sustainability and resilience in the context of the Council's Climate Action Plan.

Andrew set out the aims of the strategy, key areas of progress over the first twelve months and anticipated next steps, noting the key performance indicators designed to measure delivery and outcomes. He highlighted the cross-council approach to the food strategy and the extensive collaborative with partners across the city.

Members sought clarification about the data that underpins the concerns raised in the report about lower income households struggling to access healthy food.

In response, the Scrutiny Board considered the impact of limited access to supermarkets in some communities, particularly where car ownership is low.

Members noted that it would be helpful to understand whether a reduction in the number of adults meeting the '5 a day' fruit and vegetable target represents an ongoing trajectory or a short term event.

Cllr Rafique emphasised the importance of collaboration and influence as many of the levers for achieving the overall ambitions for the city are outside of the Council's control.

Concern was raised about access to unhealthy foods including take aways for children and members sought advice about whether any national legislation is anticipated to regulate access to these products.

Andrew White informed Board members that there is an appetite to regulate where possible. The Government recently announced a ban on junk food advertisements before 9pm and online adverts for products high in fat, salt and sugar will be banned altogether.

In response to member concerns, Andrew outlined work between planning services and public health colleagues to review the Council's Supplementary Planning Document on Hot Food Takeaways.

Members endorsed the cross-council approach to the Food Strategy given the way in which priorities are connected to the ambitions of different service areas.

Members sought clarification about support to reduce food waste, citing the Real Junk Food Project as an example of that approach.

In the context of food inequalities members highlighted concerns about access to fresh foods via food banks and challenges with access to white goods.

The Chair sought further information about how the principles of Asset Based Community Development are informing the approach to the Food Strategy. Members recommended exploring relationships with community committees with a view to them helping to empower communities to provide a response to the challenges they identify locally.

Andrew noted that discussions with community committees to date have focused on issues such as community growing and composting. However, officers would be happy to expand that work to include food education. It was agreed that it would be important to share best practice across different areas.

Officers outlined the work of the third sector to secure access to food from retail and hospitality venues, which would otherwise be thrown away.

Members explored the challenge of food poverty and support for private sector initiatives to reduce food waste.

Andrew set out how colleagues are working together to incorporate the food strategy into wider work across the city – for example, incorporating the strategy into the city's submission as part of the Global Destination Sustainability Index.

Members noted that they would welcome access to the mapping of food deserts in the city to inform their work in those localities.

The Chair provided an update on regional work within West Yorkshire Combined Authority in relation to food security, including areas identified as for collaboration.

Members requested further information about demand for allotments in different areas of the city.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

42 Work Schedule

Members were asked to note and provide comment on the draft work schedule at page 119.

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor highlighted the additional working groups taking place in the Autumn:

- 09/10/24: Sim Spec Walk
- 17/10/24: Social Progress Index update
- 23/09/24: Budget working group (all scrutiny members), providing context ahead of individual board consultation process.
- 12/12/24: budget consultation working group, focusing on proposals that fall within the remit of this Scrutiny Board.

It was noted that a further working group is due to be confirmed in relation to a post consultation update on Housing Allocation Policy.

RESOLVED: Members noted the work schedule.

43 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) will take place at **10.30am on 23 October 2024**. There will be a pre-meeting for Scrutiny Board members at **10.00am**.