

Report of the Director of Environment and Housing

Report to Executive Board

Date: 18th November 2015

Subject: Recycling Strategy review

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input 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. 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 recent years.
2. The Council's kerbside recycling collection services continue to improve, with green bin recycling (following the introduction of alternate weekly collections) and recycling at the household waste recycling sites still increasing.
3. Partnership working with third sector organisations to increase the re-use of items that would otherwise have entered the waste stream continues to expand. The re-use shop at the East Leeds household waste recycling site has been a major success, and a second shop is now to be developed as part of the wider redevelopment of the Kirkstall recycling site approved by Executive Board in September 2015, with construction expected to start in early January 2016.
4. However, these performance increases are being countered primarily due to the Council's waste disposal contractors being able to recover less and less material for recycling from black bin waste due to market requirements for increasingly high quality recyclables. These current arrangements will shortly be superseded by the transition to the new PFI contract with Veolia, which will arrest this decline and safeguard recycling from black bin waste at an appropriate level.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.
5. 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.

6. 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.
7. However, the ability to deliver on this 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.
8. Whilst it remains the Council's intention to resume the expansion of recycling collection services across the City once resources become available, a new approach is required in the medium-term which takes account of the current realities, but also enables continued increases in recycling performance to be achieved. It is important that targets are set at a level that remains challenging, but yet achievable.
9. Executive Board is therefore recommended to agree to a revised household waste recycling target that is in line with the EU and national target of 50% by 2020, but retaining the previous longer-term target to exceed 60%, when resources become available.
10. The strategy for achieving the 50% target will be based on maximising existing recycling capacity and infrastructure, and the Council will support this with an effective programme of communications, community engagement, policy enforcement and service improvement. Capturing more materials for recycling through existing services will also reduce waste disposal costs, with a percentage point increase in the overall recycling rate achieved through diverting recyclables from the black bin to the green bin resulting in a disposal saving of around £250k per annum. However, this target can only be achieved through the engagement of all stakeholders with the recycling agenda and through a significant behavioural change in this area.

Recommendations

11. Executive Board is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of this report and the current context in relation to recycling performance;
- b) Approve a revised target to recycle 50% of household waste by 2020, with the longer-term target to exceed 60% remaining unchanged;
- c) Approve the medium-term strategy (outlined in section 3.2) to focus on maximising existing capacity and infrastructure, supported by an effective programme of communications, engagement, enforcement and service improvement, but acknowledging the requirement for residents to participate fully if the revised target is to be achieved;
- d) Agree to the expansion of the provision of recycling collections on an 'opt in' basis (in accordance with the Ash Road, Headingley pilot outlined at 3.2.21) in areas of the City where there is persistently poor recycling participation;
- e) Agree to the removal of excess bins from the kerbside where households have more than the number for which they are eligible as set out within the policy agreed by Executive Board in January 2014.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's recycling strategy and to seek approval from Executive Board to revise the Council's household waste recycling targets in the light of current financial pressures and market related factors, and to bring them in line with current EU and national targets. The report also sets out a strategy for ensuring a continued improvement in recycling performance through maximising existing services and infrastructure and increasing resident participation.

2 Background information

- 2.1 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 recent years.
- 2.2 The Council's kerbside recycling collection services continue to improve, with green bin recycling (following the introduction of alternate weekly collections) and recycling at the household waste recycling sites still increasing.
- 2.3 Partnership working with third sector organisations to increase the re-use of items that would otherwise have entered the waste stream continues to expand. The re-use shop at the East Leeds household waste recycling site has been a major success, and a second shop is now to be developed as part of the wider redevelopment of the Kirkstall recycling site approved by Executive Board in September 2015, with construction expected to start in early January 2016.
- 2.4 In December 2011, the Executive Board approved a new phase of the Council's recycling strategy and introduced stretched household waste recycling targets of 55% by 2016, together with a longer-term target to exceed 60%. The current EU and national target for household waste recycling is 50% by 2020.
- 2.5 Since this time, the Service has introduced alternate weekly collections (AWC) of black and green bins to approximately 265,000 properties across Leeds. This significant change to the Council's kerbside waste collection service has had a beneficial impact on the overall recycling performance, with a 7% increase in the level of dry recyclables collected at the kerbside since 2013/14, and a 2% overall increase in the recycling rate based on the projected full year effect of the completed AWC roll-out city-wide.
- 2.6 However, consistent with the picture nationally and in the context of the current budgetary constraints, the historical increases in recycling performance that have been achieved year-on-year have slowed, to the point where a small decrease is now being observed in Leeds.

3 Main issues

3.1 Recycling Performance

- 3.1.1 In spite of this overall picture, it is important to note that the performance of the Council's kerbside recycling collection services continue to improve, with green bin recycling (following the introduction of alternate weekly collections) and recycling at the household waste recycling sites still increasing.

- 3.1.2 Partnership working with third sector organisations to increase the re-use of items that would otherwise have entered the waste stream continues to expand. The re-use shop at the East Leeds household waste recycling site has been a major success, and a second shop is now to be developed as part of the wider redevelopment of the Kirkstall recycling site approved by Executive Board in September 2015, with construction expected to start in early January 2016.
- 3.1.3 However, these performance increases are being countered primarily due to a reduction in the level of recycling being achieved from the processing of the City's residual or black bin waste by our disposal contractors. This is primarily due to economic factors and reprocessing market requirements for higher quality recyclables, also reflected in recent waste legislation. This is resulting in the Council's current waste treatment and disposal contractors sending a greater fraction of the residual waste for incineration with energy recovery rather than recycling.
- 3.1.4 These current arrangements will be superseded through 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 through the mechanical pre-treatment element of the process once the Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility commences full operations. However, the emphasis of the Council's recycling strategy needs to be increasingly on securing higher quality and less contaminated recyclable materials separated at source by residents.
- 3.1.5 Garden waste is another significant factor affecting recycling performance, with the material collected at the kerbside constituting over a quarter of household waste recycling. The levels of garden waste produced each year can be significantly affected by the weather conditions, with a substantial decrease in tonnages observed between this year and last. It may be prudent in future to forecast garden waste tonnages based on a rolling average in order to minimise the impact this can appear to have year-on-year on the recycling rate.
- 3.1.6 In addition to this, the ability to deliver on the main service developments previously identified as necessary to achieve our high recycling targets, in particular food waste and glass collections, has been hampered by the current financial pressures.
- 3.1.7 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.
- 3.1.8 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.
- 3.1.9 To roll both of these services out to suitable properties city-wide would cost an estimated additional £5m per annum.
- 3.1.10 Therefore, whilst it remains the Council's long term ambition to roll out these additional collections across the City, a new approach is required in the medium-term which takes account of the current realities, but also enables continued increases in recycling performance to be achieved. With the recycling rate for 2014/15 at 42.8%, the Council's recycling targets now need to be reviewed and set at a level that remains challenging but yet achievable. It is therefore proposed

that the medium-term target be brought in line with the EU and national target of 50% by 2020, but that the previous longer-term target to exceed 60% remains, with the intention of rolling out new services as and when resources become available or the net cost of collections improves.

3.2 Maximising existing capacity and infrastructure

- 3.2.1 The introduction of alternate weekly collections, consistent with research findings in this area, is having the desired effect of reducing waste and increasing recycling through reducing black bin capacity and balancing this with an increase in green bin capacity.
- 3.2.2 However, it is clear that this available recycling capacity is not being fully utilised. 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 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. There are also significant savings to be realised here through the avoided waste disposal costs, whether through getting recyclables out of the black bins and into the green, or through reducing contamination in the green bins.
- 3.2.3 Clearly, to close this gap altogether will require a wholesale behavioural change across the City and will not be achieved fully in the short-term. However, it does show the level of scope for improvement through increasing resident engagement, and how essential a part of our recycling strategy addressing this issue needs to be.
- 3.2.4 The Council clearly has an important role in providing the information, tools and services to support high recycling in becoming more of a social norm. A programme of co-ordinated communications, marketing, engagement and enforcement is therefore required which is informed both by local performance data and by research on the most effective means of engaging with the different demographic groups across Leeds.

Communications and marketing

- 3.2.5 In recent years, targeted communications in relation to bins and recycling has accompanied major service changes, most notably the phases of introduction of alternate weekly collections. With these new services now in place, a more intelligent approach to communications is now required which is informed by people's barriers to participation and the media through which communications will be most effective.
- 3.2.6 One of the clear messages arising from consultation with residents is that there is a lack of clarity about the materials that should go into green bins. This is challenging to communicate since the acceptable materials are driven by reprocessing markets, and, especially in the case of plastics, may be specific plastic 'types' (e.g. PET, HDPE, etc.) rather than simply particular products (e.g. plastic bottles). However, this clearly represents a barrier for many people, and clarifying and simplifying these messages is essential to improving participation.
- 3.2.7 It is proposed that our key recycling messages include the following:

- Put the right thing in the right bin to provide good quality recycling;
- Remember your bin days and what can be recycled and where;
- Recycle for Leeds so your waste can be made useful again;
- Saving money on waste disposal can safeguard vital local services.

3.2.8 Some of the main areas of action proposed are as follows:

- 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.

Community Engagement

3.2.9 In addition to direct communications with residents, there are significant opportunities to secure the desired behavioural change through harnessing the capacity within other Council service areas, other sectors and local community groups and organisations.

- 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 policies

- 3.2.10 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.
- 3.2.11 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.
- 3.2.12 The wider policies also cover the issues of contaminated recycling bins and the number of bins to which residents are entitled.
- 3.2.13 Regarding numbers of bins to which households are entitled, whilst there are some instances in which additional bins are permitted (for example, larger families), evidence suggests that there is a fairly significant number of properties with multiple black bins for which they are not eligible. Clearly this does nothing to encourage the residents to minimise waste and recycle more, and the Council will undoubtedly also be collecting and having to pay for the disposal of some level of commercial waste as a result of this excessive residual waste capacity being available. There is also a significant cost to the Council of providing new bins to residents (approximately £250k per annum).
- 3.2.14 The Service is working with the Contact Centre to try to filter out requests where residents are ineligible, though it is difficult to prove eligibility. Many other authorities now charge residents for new bins. Whilst the Administration does not support a policy of charging due to the impact on those making legitimate

requests, a stronger line on enforcement needs to be taken. The Service therefore intends, where operationally practicable, to remove additional bins at the kerbside where they are clearly in excess of the entitlement so as to bring the City in line with the Council's agreed policies.

- 3.2.15 As regards contaminated bins, when collection crews become aware of a contaminated bin, a sticker or tag will be used to explain why the bin was not emptied and to request that the householder remove and make arrangements for the safe and appropriate disposal of any contaminating material prior to the next scheduled collection.
- 3.2.16 However, if a recycling bin at a particular property is found to be persistently contaminated such that it becomes a cause of nuisance, this may result in the removal of the bin.
- 3.2.17 Where residents are persistently not abiding by the Council's policies, formal enforcement action may also be pursued. The Council's Localities service is currently reviewing its policies further to the Deregulation Act 2015 legislative change relating to Environmental Protection Act Section 46 fixed penalty notices (FPNs) to determine a robust approach to issuing these notices where bins have not been used or placed for collection according to policy. Where contamination (or side waste) is regularly present and other courses of action to address the issues have been exhausted, it is anticipated that an FPN may then be issued.

Collection Service Design

- 3.2.18 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, there are still parts of the City in receipt of AWC where resident participation and the presentation of bins is low, resulting in some level of spare capacity within the Service which could potentially be released through further re-design of collection routes. Further analysis will therefore be carried out to assess the scope for releasing this capacity through alternative models of city-wide route design, which could then potentially be redeployed into expanding recycling services.
- 3.2.19 Non-AWC areas: 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.
- 3.2.20 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.
- 3.2.21 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.

- 3.2.22 It is therefore proposed to develop a costed and prioritised plan, in consultation with Members, to deliver alternative collection solutions in priority areas, including an expansion of the Ash Road model where appropriate.

Recycling Sites

- 3.2.23 The eight household waste recycling sites across the City also provide a major contribution to the recycling rate, accounting for almost a quarter. The Service also operates an extensive network of around 380 recycling bank sites located across Leeds. Enhancing the level of waste re-use and recycling at the HWRSS (notably through the imminent redevelopment of the Kirkstall Road site and a second 're-use shop') and seeking to expand the network of recycling banks city-wide will also form an important part of the strategy to maximise existing capacity and infrastructure.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 The waste collection policies referred to in this report have been consulted on previously and were approved by Executive Board in January 2014.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 A screening report has been completed and submitted to the Equalities Team, and is appended to this report.

4.3 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The proposed strategy is consistent with 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.

- 4.3.2 Although the proposed reduction in the recycling target may be perceived as a lessening of the Council's ambition in this area, it is essential that targets, whilst remaining stretching, are realistic and supported by a deliverable strategy. Setting a revised target takes account of the realities of the current financial pressures, whilst seeking to ensure that continued improvements in recycling performance are achieved.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The proposed strategy clearly takes account of the current financial pressures, and focuses on maximising the value from existing capacity and infrastructure.
- 4.4.2 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 this year's budgeted levels, and around £6.8m in total compared to the projected costs of a continued reliance on landfill.
- 4.4.3 It is proposed that around £250k be invested in the programme of communications, engagement and enforcement detailed within 3.2 above, and that a resulting increase in the recycling rate of 2% be targeted for 2016/17.
- 4.4.4 A single percentage point increase in the overall recycling rate achieved through diverting recyclables from the black bin to the green bin would result in a disposal saving of around £250k per annum.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 The recommendations in this report have been developed with regard to the Council's ongoing statutory duties as Waste Collection Authority under the Environmental Protection Act and other relevant legislation.
- 4.5.2 The Service has taken advice from Legal Services on the potential risk of challenge in relation to a withdrawal of kerbside recycling collections in specific areas of the City given the requirements of waste legislation. The risk and potential impact of a challenge is considered to be very small, especially in light of the proposal to offer the ability to 'opt in' to those wanting to continue to receive recycling collections.
- 4.5.3 The legal issues relating to enforcement action are covered in 3.2.17 above.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 A failure to achieve the 50% EU and national target could potentially have implications for the Council should Central Government decide to impose some form of sanction.
- 4.6.2 The PFI business case for the residual waste treatment solution is also predicated on achieving this level of recycling performance, and DEFRA could seek to link this to the payment of Waste Infrastructure Credits, although this has not been explicitly stated.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 The Council's kerbside recycling collection services continue to improve, with green bin recycling (following the introduction of alternate weekly collections) and recycling at the household waste recycling sites still increasing. Partnership working with third sector organisations to increase the re-use of items that would otherwise have entered the waste stream also continues to expand.

- 5.2 However, whilst it remains the Council's ambition to roll out further recycling collection services across the City, the current budgetary pressures mean that this is unachievable at this time. A new approach is required in the medium-term which takes account of the current realities, but also enables continued increases in recycling performance to be achieved. It is therefore proposed that the medium-term target be brought in line with the EU and national target of 50% by 2020, but that the previous longer-term target to exceed 60% remains, with the intention of rolling out new services as and when resources become available or the net cost of collections improves.
- 5.3 The strategy for achieving the 50% target will be based on maximising existing recycling capacity and infrastructure, and the Council will support this with an effective programme of communications, community engagement, enforcement against agreed policies and service improvements. This target will only be achieved through effective partnership working between all stakeholders in the City to ensure engagement with the recycling agenda and a significant behavioural change in this area.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Executive Board is recommended to:
- a) Note the contents of this report and the current context in relation to recycling performance;
 - b) Approve a revised target to recycle 50% of household waste by 2020, with the longer-term target to exceed 60% remaining unchanged;
 - c) Approve the medium-term strategy (outlined in section 3.2) to focus on maximising existing capacity and infrastructure, supported by an effective programme of communications, engagement, enforcement and service improvement, but acknowledging the requirement for residents to participate fully if the revised target is to be achieved;
 - d) Agree to the expansion of the provision of recycling collections on an 'opt in' basis (in accordance with the Ash Road, Headingley pilot outlined at 3.2.21) in areas of the City where there is persistently poor recycling participation;
 - e) Agree to the removal of excess bins from the kerbside where households have more than the number for which they are eligible as set out within the policy agreed by Executive Board in January 2014.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.1 None.

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.