

## Waste Management Service – Response to Covid-19

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### What is this report about?

#### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- To provide an update on the Waste Management Service operational response to the challenges presented during the ongoing pandemic and the related financial implications as requested at the October Executive Board meeting.
- Appendix A summarises the Covid-19 impact on operations and performance of the waste management service including:
  - Since reopening in June 2020, the Council's eight Household Waste and Recycling Centres have only been closed Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's day, with over one million visits booked and a customer satisfaction rating in the high 90%. The requirement to book a visit has now been successfully removed from all sites;
  - Over 39 million Leeds bins have been emptied by crews during the pandemic, containing over 400,000 tonnes of household waste. This is 37,000 tonnes more waste than usual and equivalent to crews emptying an extra 3 million bins, as more people continue to work and learn from home;
  - During 2021 our crews have collected over 2,500 tonnes more garden waste from the city's brown bins than usual, and;
  - With around half a million bins collected each week, the official bin collection rate for Leeds in 2021 is around 99.85%, down slightly on the pre-pandemic rate of 99.93%.
- Appendix B summarises the financial cost of dealing with Covid-19 which has included the need for staff to work safely and for workplace outbreaks to be appropriately controlled; the need to deal with the additional waste that is being presented; and managing additional risks such as the national HGV/LGV driver shortages. The projected financial costs of these challenges can be summarised as follows:

- An estimated extra £2.23m to be spent in 2021/22 on the contractual disposal and processing of the additional household waste continuing to be presented as more people work/learn from home than pre-pandemic;
- An estimated extra £1m to be spent in 2021/22 on the hire of extra Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs) by Fleet Services (inc additional fuel costs of £180k) to ensure sufficient extra support/back ups can be sent out each day to manage the extra waste and to replace any RCVs requiring deep cleans following crew Covid cases, and;
- An estimated extra staffing cost of £1.89m to deploy enough cover for staff self-isolating, to collect the extra 20,000 tonnes of waste anticipated to be presented at the kerbside this year, to maintain the successful management of Covid-19 in the workplace/crew cabs and to support staff to take leave accumulated since March 2020. This cover is provided through a mix of extra contracted staff, agency and overtime. The forecast assumes the need for the equivalent of an extra 6 crews, 6 days a week, for the remainder of the financial year, on top of cover for existing crews/routes. Utilising overtime to help cover the extra crews allows flexibility to quickly reduce the additionality as the extra tonnages reduce further, as well as helping cover more routes with more familiar staff as part of a “service bubble”.
- A third appendix provides information on work being done to ensure that the service remains resilient to further pressures and to tackle some of the improvement areas/priorities that were identified pre-pandemic; including:
  - Refuse service/route review – a reminder of the key objectives of the review, what actions were delivered and what was put on hold whilst the response to the pandemic was prioritised. The review will be restarted in December 2021 with the establishment of a Core Project Team and is planned to be completed by the Summer 2022. Key objectives include: the redesign of all black and green bin collection routes citywide to include recent and planned new housing developments to improve the efficiency of collections; more reliable collections on streets that are persistently hard to access; a more bespoke solution to areas with densely populated housing that typically have very little garden space/more on street parking and transient populations; improvements to how high-rise and city centre accommodation is served; and, greater coterminosity with Community Committees to support local initiatives to improve reuse and recycling rates.
  - Continued changes to how people work/learn – the budget setting process for 2022/23 will take into account the anticipated, sustained increase in waste produce at home as people continue to work from home more. The additional waste disposal and staffing costs will be factored into the budget. The collection route review will also take into account the anticipated longer-term change in household behaviours/habits.
  - National HGV/LGV driver shortage – in line with national trends, the service struggled to recruit additional drivers during the pandemic and this summer, including through agencies. However, unlike many waste management services (public and private sector) we did not experience staff leaving to “better offers”. Following a recent successful external recruitment campaign several new Chargehands (drivers) have been appointed, to increase the cover pool and enhance our resilience. Fleet Services are developing an updated HGV/LGV training scheme for existing council staff, such as Refuse Loaders.

- New citywide depot – since the final approval was given by Executive Board in November 2020, the build of the new facility has progressed well, despite the pandemic and national construction material shortages, and is on schedule to be operational in Spring 2022. Situated on Council owned land behind the RERF on Newmarket Approach in Cross Green, the facility is key to the modernisation of refuse services; with all the city’s routes to be designed to operate and managed from the one site, electric charging facilities built in, onsite RCV wash facility and fleet workshops, improved staff wellbeing facilities and the bringing together of back-office and support staff across Environmental Services to one office.

## Recommendations

- a) To note and comment upon:
- a. the performance of Waste Management Services in adapting to the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic, in particular the collection of additional waste produced by households as more people work and learn from home;
  - b. the breakdown of the additional cost of managing the additional household waste produced during the pandemic, together with the extra resources to ensure Government requirements for isolation and safe working environments are being met, and;
  - c. the steps being taken to ensure that services are resilient to a sustained change in the amount of household waste being produced and other pressures such as the national LGV driver shortage, together with the conclusion of the refuse service/route review to address issues effecting the performance of the service pre-pandemic.

## Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 This update is provided in response to the request made by Executive Board at its meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021, as detailed in Minute 70.

## What impact will this proposal have?

### Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

- 2 There are no direct proposals, the report is for discussion and information only.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 3 Elected Members have been kept informed and updated on the relevant issues and service’s response throughout the pandemic through a number of ways, including:
  - the regular Councillor and Leeds MPs COVID-19 Update from the Leader of the Council;
  - the daily End of Day report sent to ward members by Refuse Services which includes information of the latest Covid-19 related pressures and actions;
  - attendance at Community Committee sub-groups by Senior Managers as requested, and;

- o engagement at a ward level with Members on specific issues, including local meetings where requested.

### **What are the resource implications?**

- 4 There are no direct resource implications arising in this report as this is an update report as requested by Members. It does, however, update members on the £5.1m projected overspend for the current financial year. Further detailed information on this projected outturn figure is included above and in Appendix B

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 5 There are no direct legal implications as this is an update report for information. However, Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to collect and dispose of household waste, including any excess waste being generated as a consequence of a change in household behaviours, working and learning arrangements.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 6 Since the pandemic commenced the key risk has been in regard to ensuring the city council can continue to fulfil its statutory duties and responsibilities with regard to waste collection and disposal. To support this the waste management business continuity plan has been enacted, when appropriate, to prioritise the collection of waste. Medi-waste, black and green bins will always be prioritised over and above garden waste collections and whilst during the height of the pandemic there was some limited disruption to garden waste collections, the service has continued to operate across all waste streams, albeit in challenging circumstances, since the pandemic commenced in March 2020.

### **Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth                       Health and Wellbeing                       Climate Emergency

- 7 There are no specific proposals in this paper, however, our environmental services more generally makes a positive contribution to the council's key strategies.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **a) What other options were considered?**

- 8 There are no specific proposals in this paper so no other options have been considered.

#### **b) How will success be measured?**

- 9 Success will be measured through the continuing provision of essential environmental services dealing with the challenges presented by Covid-19 and the ongoing challenges particularly as they relate to excess waste and resourcing.

#### **c) What is the timetable for implementation?**

- 10 This work is ongoing and whilst it is difficult to predict the longer-term implications, we are currently planning for excess waste and ongoing resourcing challenges into the next financial year.

## Appendices

- 11 The updates/information requested by Executive Board at their October meeting are provided in the following three appendices:
- a. the performance of Waste Management Services in adapting to the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic, in particular the collection of additional waste produced by households as people work and learn from home;
  - b. the breakdown of the additional cost of managing the additional household waste produced during the pandemic, together with the extra resources to ensure Government requirements for isolation and safe working environments are being met, and;
  - c. the steps being taken to ensure the services are resilient to a sustained change in the amount of household waste being produced and other pressures such as the national LGV driver shortage, together with the conclusion of the refuse service/route review to address issues effecting the performance of the service pre-pandemic.

## Background papers

12 None

## Appendix A: Summary of Service Performance during the Pandemic

### 1. Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs)

- Leeds City Council operates 8 HWRCs throughout the city.
- Two of these sites (Kirkstall and Seacroft) are also licenced and equipped to be able to take trade/commercial waste.
- All household waste sites were closed at the beginning of the pandemic in accordance with Government advice and guidance at that time.
- Sites were re-opened in June 2020 and all sites have been open since this time during normal operational hours, 7 days a week. They have only been closed for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.
- From June 2020 to September 2021, in order to help manage safe access/use of the sites and avoid queues forming into sites, it was a requirement to book a slot at a site in order to use it. This requirement then changed to weekends only until November 2021 when the requirement was removed altogether. Over 1 million bookings were made online during that period.
- The sites were also modified to ensure customers and staff could use and work within the site safely; in particular so Covid-19 social distancing requirements could be adhered to and in a way that reduced the risk of conflict/contact.
- Customer surveys undertaken during this time consistently fed back a satisfaction rating of 90%, particularly in how safe customers felt.
- The pandemic brought significant staffing challenges, with high levels of existing staff falling into the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) and other higher risk categories. The use of staff from other parts of the council was critical to the successful continued operation of sites, particularly colleagues from Sports/Active Leeds, Leeds Building Services and Civic Enterprise Leeds. As these services/staff have returned more to "normal" operations, more use of agency and overtime has been made, enabling the flexibility of deployment necessary and the successful and safe management of operational bubbles and sites city wide. No sites have had to close due to Covid workplace outbreaks.

### 2. Refuse – household waste kerbside collection service (black, green and brown bins)

- Leeds is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest single council provider of a refuse collection service in the United Kingdom. It is the largest single council provider of garden waste collections.
- During the pandemic, it is estimated that our crews have emptied and taken for processing over **39 million bins** across Leeds.
- The amount of waste collected by crews during the pandemic is estimated to be over 400,000 tonnes.
- When compared to the average amounts collected over the previous 3 years prior to the pandemic, our crews have collected over 37,000 tonnes of extra waste during the pandemic – equivalent to emptying 3 million more bins.
- In terms of managing service disruption during the pandemic, the Business Continuity Plan was clear in that the order of priority to ensure enough crews were deployed each day was Medi-waste, black bins, green bins and then brown bins. This was clearly

communicated to residents and through the corporate covid updates and End of Day reports to Elected Members.

- The only times any kerbside collection services were formally suspended citywide during the pandemic were between April and June 2020 when garden waste collections had to be put on hold, and in March 2021 when the first collections for the year were delayed 2 weeks.
- Other than that, any issues have been localised and related to problems getting the full range of services out on specific days, including the need to collect the extra waste being presented, particularly in the black bins. On these occasions the Business Continuity Plan was followed and some brown bin routes were unable to be made. In the vast majority of these cases, the missed routes were completed within the next 2 days. During July and August 2021 as restrictions relaxed and “freedom day” was experienced, the number of successfully completed garden waste routes reduced by 5% to 95%. It is worth noting however that the total amount of garden waste collected by crews this year is 2,500 tonnes more than the average we collected pre-pandemic.
- Using the methodology used by Government to monitor the performance of refuse collections by Councils, Leeds’ latest figure is a success rate of 99.85%. This compares to pre-pandemic rate of 99.93%.
- Although the focus is understandably on the front line/delivery end of the process to collect Leeds’ bins, recognition should also be given for all the work “behind the scenes” that makes that possible. The challenges, practicalities, logistics and complexities that the ever-changing world of covid requirements/guidance and risk brought applied to those that were in the offices/depots and processing plants throughout the pandemic. That is the “back room” and supervisory staff ensuring PPE was being sourced and allocated, the constantly changing picture of staff availability was being managed to ensure enough vehicles could be crewed up and yet staff bubbles protected, vehicles were being cleaned/sanitised and replacements provided, disposal/recycling contracts were being fulfilled (a big thank you to HW Martins, Veolia and URM in particular) and the huge extra demands through the thousands of tonnes of extra waste being produced was able to be dealt with.

## **Appendix B: Extra cost of managing the challenges and extra waste during the Pandemic**

The projected overspend of £5.1m reported to Executive Board is the forecast extra cost to the Waste Management service for 2021/22, primarily due to the continued effects of Covid19 in order to collect the city's increased household waste and to ensure this is done within Government guidance; for example the continued need for self-isolation and to minimise the risk of workplace outbreaks. This figure includes the Refuse Service and Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). It also includes £250k of additional HWRC trade waste costs that are offset elsewhere in the budget by additional income, and £530k to cover the anticipated pay award that was not in the original budget. Removing these 2 amounts leaves a £4.3m figure for extra costs anticipated this financial year due to Covid-19 factors.

The majority of the anticipated extra cost is simply down to the extra tonnages of waste being presented by households for collection as many people continue to work or learn from home. The revised budget projection for 2021/22 assumes that black bin waste will average around 11% more than usual for the year. Volumes continue to be monitored closely and if they decline, then the cost impact will reduce accordingly. The current £5.1m figure includes:

£2.23m to pay for the processing and disposal of the extra household waste through the existing contracts, mainly the black bin waste that goes to the Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility (RERF) operated by Veolia.

£1.03m is for the hire and running costs, managed through Fleet Services, of additional wagons required to collect the additional household waste and to help manage extra Covid cleaning needs. This includes £180k for additional fuel costs associated with these hire vehicles.

£1.89m is the anticipated cost of providing additional refuse staff to cover for staff self-isolating and the additional crews required to deal with the extra waste. The cover is provided through a mix of extra contracted staff, agency and overtime. The forecast assumes the need for the equivalent of an extra 6 crews, 6 days a week, for the remainder of the financial year. Utilising overtime to help cover the extra crews allows flexibility to quickly reduce the additionality as the additional tonnages reduce further, as well as helping cover more routes with more familiar staff. The Refuse Service is currently recruiting 10 extra, permanent Chargehands (LGV drivers).

As mentioned, in addition, there is £0.53m included to meet the cost of the anticipated national pay award announced by Local Government employers and £174k to pay for Covid related staff cover costs at the HWRCs.

There is some netting down of the overall additional cost due to some extra income expected from the contract with Veolia for the processing of third-party waste at the RERF bringing the overall projection to +£5.1m.



## Appendix C: Additional key actions

### 1. Completion of Refuse Service/Route Review:

The service was part way through a full review of its operations as the pandemic started. The review was necessary to make improvements/progress on a number of issues, the most significant one being the fact the collection routes across the city were designed several years ago and so were becoming unfit for purpose; particularly in terms of the new housing developments that had taken place over the last 10 years or so, as well as changes in demography, customer expectations and things such as an increase in cars parked on the road causing obstructions.

One consequence of these issues was the increase in the number of routes that crews were unable to complete fully – and so leading to less efficient ways of working, recovering misses and dealing with customer complaints etc.

The main review had to be put on hold as the response to the pandemic became the overriding priority. However, progress had been made on some significant elements of the review and were implemented despite the resource pressure during the pandemic. This included the embedding of new Crew Chargehand posts, improvements to the use of in-cab technology and the end of day reports provided to Elected Members with a link to the Council's website established, the redesign and implementation of new garden waste collection routes incorporating new and planned housing developments, a new citywide Traffic Regulation Order to tackle locations where repeat bin misses were being caused by parked vehicles and

There remain however some key objectives that the completion of the review will set out to deliver:

- the redesign of all black and green bin collection routes citywide so they have sufficient capacity to collect from all households on the scheduled day of collection, including future proofing for known housing developments;
- inclusion of more streets for fortnightly green bin collection (Alternate Week Collection);
- wider availability of a free extra/second green bin for those households committed to recycling more;
- creation of more “hard to access” capacity to improve reliability of collections in narrow streets by increasing the number of smaller sized wagons;
- service changes to better meet the unique challenges/needs in our most densely populated areas of housing, where there are access and bin storage/presentation issues caused by the lack of drives/gardens and higher levels of transiency of population making education on issues such as recycling more difficult. This will also include improved solutions for high rise and city centre living.
- further improvements to the local accountability of the service – with collection routes and lines of management/supervisory more coterminous with Community Committees and a focus on working with communities to increase local recycling rates.

In order to restart the review, a dedicated Core Project Team is being established and will begin work in December. Key to the success of the review remains the involvement of staff/crews throughout the process. All front-line crews will be met with to go through the objectives and to get their local knowledge and input into what is needed, further individual crew meetings will take place when the first draft routes are ready to consult on too. As happened with the garden waste route reviews, ward members will also be consulted at the beginning and end of the design process. The involvement and role of Trade Unions in the

review is important too, to ensure their remains a collective agreement and positive industrial relations in such a key front line service.

Providing the review is not further delayed by competing priorities, it is planned to complete the review in full within 6 months and to then implement the required changes. If possible, as has happened already, elements of the review's objectives may be implemented ahead of the completion of the full review.

## **2. Other key updates/actions to note**

### **(a) Assumptions for sustained increase in amount of waste produced by households**

There is no national guidance on this issue. However, the current Leeds trend would indicate that an assumption of around 5-7% sustained increase in back bin waste presented at the kerbside for collection would need building into the budget for 2022/23 and for the service review modelling of new routes citywide.

### **(b) Response to the LGV driver shortage**

Over the last few months it has been very difficult to recruit to or get agency cover for Chargehand (LGV driver) roles. A previous recruitment process earlier on in the pandemic had no suitable candidates

However, the Council is currently recruiting new permanent Chargehand (driver) posts that have been created to help provide a larger pool of staff/capacity in Refuse Services. Following a successful advert and social media drive, over 30 external applications were received and interviews are due to take place shortly. An update will be provided to the meeting. However, indications are, contrary to the national trend/picture, Leeds refuse service is seen in the employment market as a place people want to come at work.

In addition to this recruitment, Fleet Services are developing a training package to be made available to existing staff, such as Refuse Service loaders, that would lead to the required LGV licence and therefore opportunities within the council.

### **(c) New citywide depot and offices for Environmental Services**

In November 2020, Executive Board approved the design and build of a new facility to move staffing and operations from a number of sites to. The new site is on council land adjacent to the Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility (RERF) on Newmarket Approach in Cross Green.

For Refuse Services, this is a key development. It will allow the new routes to be designed to start and finish from the same site, next to the facility that all the black bin waste is taken to, enabling the rationalisation of start-up/duty manager roles to one site and enabling more effective/efficient deployment of resources. The site will be future proofed to enable future fleet replacements to consider electric vehicle options for all size vehicles. There will also be fleet workshops to allow on site repair and maintenance of the largest refuse wagons. The building itself will be the most environmentally friendly the council owns or occupies; with grey-water systems reusing rainwater, solar panels, a living wall and reused furniture and paint.

The building work is on schedule, and it is planned to be operational Spring 2022.