

Future of Waste Services: Working Group Summary

ATTENDEES

Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Cllr B Anderson | Cllr R Finnigan | Cllr M Midgley |
| Cllr A Blackburn | Cllr A Gabriel | Cllr D Ragan |
| Cllr K Brooks | Cllr P Grahame | Cllr K Ritchie |
| Cllr M Dobson | Cllr C Howley | |

Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board Representatives

| | | |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| Cllr A Scopes | Cllr S Firth | Cllr D Chapman |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|

Officers

| | | |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| John Woolmer (CO, Environmental Services) | Sarah King (Service Manager) | Hayley Thackwray (Head of Service) |
| Matthew Birkett (Service Manager) | Rebecca Atherton (PSA) | Rob Clayton (PSA) |

Apologies: Cllrs Akhtar, Collins, Charlwood, Rafique, Smith

AGREED ACTIONS

| ACTION | OFFICER | TIMESCALE |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board | | |
| To share information about the carbon impact of various waste streams. | Polly Cook / John Woolmer | Next meeting |
| Circulate December Executive Board report regarding additional expenditure to members once published. | Becky | December |
| To provide a breakdown of recycling figures by ward – applying the city-wide recycling rates to tonnages collected to illustrate trends. | John Woolmer | Next meeting |
| To share the draft updated green bin policy with scrutiny once available. | John Woolmer | Next meeting (if available) |
| To seek further information about the materials collected for recycling by neighbouring authorities, the ways in which those collections take place and the amount of waste being sent to landfill | John Woolmer | Next meeting |
| To explore further action where advance notification from a utilities company does not accurately reflect access restrictions experienced on a given day. | John Woolmer | Next meeting |
| To schedule a future update on the service review for the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board in 2022. | Becky | New municipal year |
| To schedule a further working group meeting in 2022. | Becky | As agreed with Chair |
| Additional Context – for email circulation | | |
| To provide further detail about covid restrictions put in place over the last 18 months to protect frontline staff. | John Woolmer via Becky | To circulate via email as available |
| To share core appraisal objectives for operational staff with board members. | | |
| For Consideration by the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board | | |
| An estimate of costs linked to the delay of the service review to be provided to the Strategy and Resources Board in line with their schedule of discussion. | John Woolmer | To be determined by S&R Board |

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

1. It was noted that the inquiry into the Future of Waste Services is being conducted jointly with the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board. Cllrs Scopes, Chapman and Firth were in attendance as representatives of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board.
2. Cllr Anderson set out the proposed format for the session and noted the Terms of Reference at Appendix 1 of the agenda pack (as agreed by both Scrutiny Boards in previous public meetings):
3. The Chair invited John Woolmer (Chief Officer, Environmental Services) to provide an initial overview of the main challenges for the current service.
4. John Woolmer outlined the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the waste service, in terms of current logistical challenges, legacy of the last 19 months for staff and the difficulty of progressing wider development projects while dealing with the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic period.
5. Members were informed that increased volumes of waste (5-7%) are still being presented, particularly in black bins. Additional crews are being sent out each day to assist in dealing with that additional volume.
6. Staffing levels are still being disrupted by self-isolation resulting from confirmed or suspected cases of covid-19, although this has significantly reduced in frequency over recent months. Staff are also taking leave following the intensive period of activity over the last 18 months.
7. To maximise the number of crews available to deal with the additional presentation of waste the service has been using additional agency staff. The service is also seeking to recruit an additional 10 charge hands. Officers welcomed the number of applications received for these posts, particularly given the context of the national shortage of HGV drivers.
8. It was noted that the service is considering the potential implications of the National Resource and Waste Strategy. However, the service has also been tasked with identifying additional savings that can help contribute to closing the financial gap the Council is anticipating over the next three years – so it is difficult to bring forward proposals for the service that incur a cost.
9. Despite the challenging context the service is currently modelling the cost and impact of potentially collecting new waste streams – particularly in relation to food and glass given the indications from Government.
10. There has been significant uncertainty around the National Resources and Waste Strategy. However, in October's Budget Chancellor Rishi Sunak

referred to £300m for Councils to set up food waste collections in England from 2025. Officers are awaiting further information.

11. It was agreed that it is important to move beyond measuring performance on the traditional basis of tonnage and to instead move to a system of measuring performance based on carbon impact.
12. Polly Cook is working with the service to identify the carbon impact of different materials so that future decisions can be made based on carbon impact. It was agreed that the information about carbon impact will be shared with Board members ahead of their next meeting.
13. John reflected on the objectives of the Refuse Service Review, which was suspended in March 2020 due to the pandemic. The Board was informed that from November 2021 work on the review will restart, with an ambition to redesign routes around 10 operational areas based on community committee boundaries. He noted that this would assist the service in addressing legacy issues around increased presentation on some “out of date” routes, better incorporating new builds into routes and addressing ‘hard to access’ streets.
14. New timescales for the service review were discussed, with members noting the challenging context for the work. It is anticipated the service review will take around six months with implementation dates determined after that point.
15. John confirmed a small project team will be established to take the service review forward, along with the work linked to the National Resource and Waste strategy.
16. The importance of involving frontline staff in the route review was discussed. Members were informed that to bring crews into the office to share their knowledge of their routes and to discuss future changes, there needs to be a degree of capacity within the service. There has not been additional capacity over the last 18 months but it is anticipated that there will be extra capacity released through the cessation of the garden waste services for the year.
17. As work on the route review progresses the team will also schedule discussions with ward members.
18. Implementation of new routes will be a significant undertaking as most residents will need to be contacted and advised of changing collection days for black and green bins. It was agreed that the exercise needs to be carried out at a point when other predictable seasonal challenges are minimal.
19. The Board discussed core appraisal objectives for operational staff. It was agreed the relevant objectives would be shared with members.

20. Members queried the cost to the Council of having had to delay the route review. The complexity of separating costs attributable to covid-19 over the last 18 months and those specifically attributable to delays in the route review makes it very difficult to provide precise figures. However, it was agreed that an estimate of some of those costs could be provided to the Strategy and Resources Board at the appropriate point in their inquiry discussions.
21. Members requested a breakdown of those costs for individual wards where there are repeated missed collections on legacy routes. It was suggested this may be considered by the Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board.
22. The working group discussed the recording of missed collections and the detail of the 'end of day' report. Members discussed ways in which communication with the public and members might be improved.
23. Members suggested greater automation of responses might provide a useful starting point in managing expectations around recovery collections – for example, using automation to advise that recovery collections will be within a maximum timescale. Officers cautioned that that exact numbers of crews are only confirmed on the morning of collection, so setting any precise automated timescale for recovery would have to be carefully thought through.
24. It was noted that the end of day reporting has improved since the previous Scrutiny inquiry – the format has improved and information is more reliable. Achieving the objectives of the service review will enable further improvement.
25. Members were advised that the service has considered publishing daily information on the website about where the service has had problems with collections on a particular day to improve public communication. This is an approach adopted by some other authorities. It was agreed that the service review needed to be completed before anything similar could be explored further in Leeds.
26. Members requested that the Scrutiny Board is kept updated on the progress of the Service Review through its work schedule.
27. Elected members thanked the service for their work during the pandemic and their ongoing efforts to improve the service.
28. Members suggested it would be helpful to have a clear contact with responsibility for member liaison. Members were advised that following the service review it is envisaged that the duty manager will have greater responsibility for co-ordinating responses to queries sent to the member inbox. In addition, Team Leaders will have greater responsibility for member liaison within individual community committee boundaries, with escalation routes still available via heads of services.

29. Members requested that as part of ongoing staff development, crews are asked to consider accessibility issues when putting bins back. The Board was reassured that appraisal objectives are helping to set clear expectations for staff and encourage culture change around some behaviours.
30. Members discussed the potential use of a greater number of smaller vehicles for collections along 'hard to access' routes. Members were informed that one vehicle was already in service but city-wide coverage may require 3-4 vehicles. The consultation about the service review would consider which communities may benefit from using these vehicles.
31. It was noted that collection rates could increase by using smaller vehicles in some areas, reducing the need to send out additional crews for recovery collections. However, there is an additional cost associated with using smaller vehicles. Members were advised that broader efficiencies achieved through the service review would be needed to assist with that cost.
32. Members raised concern about the impact of roadworks on bin collections and the repetition of problems in certain localities. Board members discussed advanced notification from utilities companies with permission to carry out work on the highways. It was suggested a more robust approach may be required where access for refuse vehicles has been agreed but collections cannot be carried out on the day. Members queried whether additional escalation routes need to be explored – potentially with penalties included as part of conditions of road closure. Officers agreed to explore this further.
33. Members were updated on the first phase of the introduction of TROs in some communities. It was noted that consideration is being given as to which streets should be included in the second phase of that process.
34. The Board discussed the challenges of poor parking impacting on access to narrow streets and explored links with parking services and the police.
35. Members requested further information about changing restrictions to protect staff from Covid-19 over the last 18 months.
36. As a result of a recent discussion at Executive Board about additional expenditure in the service, a further report is scheduled to go back to Executive Board in December. It was agreed this would also be shared with both Scrutiny Boards for additional information.
37. The working group discussed the stricter implementation of the 2014 policy of providing one brown bin per household. It was acknowledged that when capacity allowed crews used their discretion to collect any additional brown

bins presented. However, the expansion of the service has resulted in there being no additional capacity to facilitate extra collections.

38. It was confirmed that the amount charged to residents for a brown bin only covers administration costs, with the Council covering the cost of the bin itself. Additional bins are only provided as replacements.
39. The service carried out a scoping exercise at the request of scrutiny some years ago to look at where additional bins are presented but do not hold precise information.
40. Members explored differences across the city in terms of tonnages of recycling presented and contamination levels. John agreed to provide information about rough trends in tonnages with the city-wide recycling rates applied to those volumes. This would not provide an illustration of contamination levels but would identify where recycling rates are lower.
41. Challenges to delivering recycling services in some areas of the city were discussed, including areas with high density housing, no drives resulting in higher levels of on street parking and limited space for storing bins, high occupancy rates, and high transiency.
42. The complexity of addressing these issues was acknowledged. Options to increase the frequency of green bin collections in areas of high occupancy were discussed to reduce the potential for contamination.
43. Members requested further information about the different ways in which neighbouring authorities carry out collections and the materials they collect.
44. It was noted that Leeds has focused on the expansion and maintenance of a free garden waste collection. Leeds' garden waste collection is the biggest in the UK with twice the tonnage collected as compared to Birmingham. Members explored the advantages and disadvantages of charging for an enhanced brown bin service.
45. Attendees highlighted the importance of focusing on the amount of waste that goes to landfill, rather than just the recycling rate defined by government. Leeds has an official recycling rate of 38% in government defined terms but only around 1.5% of waste is currently going to landfill. This figure has risen during the pandemic but was previously less than 1%. Members requested information about the waste going to landfill in neighbouring authorities.
46. Attendees discussed ways in which the public understanding about recycling can be improved where contamination levels are high – options discussed included the use of social media, waste doctors, third sector partners, education stickers, and the provision of additional green bins. It was

suggested that the provision of an additional green bin may be accompanied with a request that residents become community champions for recycling.

47. Members explored anticipated timescales for the implementation of measures set out in the National Resources and Waste Strategy.
48. Members welcomed the opportunity to understand the carbon impact of glass collection, as part of the information to be provided by Polly Cook. The working group discussed the potential conflicts of introducing a deposit return scheme for glass at the same time as kerbside collection of glass. Further information is awaited from Government.
49. Attendees noted that reducing waste would be the most impactful way of reducing our carbon impact.
50. The benefits of food waste collection were explored and members welcomed the opportunity to receive further information about the carbon impact of collecting food waste, as opposed to burning such waste at the RERF.
51. Attendees expressed an interest in understanding more about the advantages and disadvantages of co-mingling garden and food waste collections if that is permissible under future government regulations. It was noted that any redesign of the route to accommodate comingled waste would present the opportunity to reconsider the potential for an enhanced fee-based garden waste service.
52. Cllr Brooks expressed an interest in having further discussions about the challenges of recycling in areas with transient populations. It was agreed this would be discussed with members as part of the service review.
53. Recycling rates at the RERF were discussed with members informed that such rates had a minimal impact on the overall city recycling rate. It was noted that it is mainly metals that are extracted at the site.