



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

scrutiny



Environment, Housing
and Communities

Future of Waste Services: Interim Statement of
Progress
March 2022



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Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board

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Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board

Focusing on services affecting the lives of citizens living and working in the council's neighbourhoods to monitor progress as a citizen focused city and prioritising environmental sustainability.

Queries in relation to this report can be directed to the Principal Scrutiny Officer supporting the inquiry:

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Further information about the work of the committee can be found here:

[Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board](#)

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INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROGRESS - INQUIRY INTO THE FUTURE OF WASTE SERVICES

1. Aims of the Inquiry

Best City Ambition – Zero Carbon: In 2030 Leeds will have made rapid progress towards carbon neutrality.

- 1.1 In September 2021 the Environment, Housing & Communities Scrutiny Board agreed to lead an inquiry into the future of waste services in Leeds, with the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board also taking on additional delegated responsibility for specific aspects of that work.
- 1.2 The Environment Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board determined that its focus would be on a forward-looking review of how recycling services could be enhanced and how waste management services could become more sustainable and resilient.
- 1.3 The Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board would in turn primarily focus on the costs of recycling and the contracts related to the delivery of new services.
- 1.4 Key issues identified as of interest for the Environment, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Board are summarised below.

- **Current waste management** – examining current volumes and types of waste, considering how it is collected, processed and funded.
- **Changing trends within the city’s waste profile** – examining the changing trends in the presentation of waste since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **National Resources and Waste Strategy** – exploring the implications, challenges and opportunities for Leeds.
- **Climate Emergency** – examining how future waste management services can contribute to the Council’s ambition to with tackling the declared climate emergency in the city.
- **Local recycling** – considering what more can be done at a local level – and in conjunction with local ward members - to boost recycling rates, particularly in communities which have traditionally had lower than average rates.
- **Improving performance** – The Board will also be looking at the ways in which performance can continue to be improved, including consideration of the initial conclusions of the city’s route review.
- **Policy** – the Board will assess and review existing policies and where appropriate make recommendations to decision makers around future policy



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2. Purpose of the statement

- 2.1 This statement sets out the Scrutiny Board's progress with the joint inquiry into the future of waste services and the recommendation that the successor scrutiny board continues this work in the next municipal year.
- 2.2 It was originally anticipated that the Board would be in a position to publish its interim conclusions and recommendations at the end of the 2021/22 municipal year. However, several pieces of evidence deemed fundamental to the inquiry are not yet available for consideration by the Board.

- **National Resources and Waste Strategy:** Launched in December 2018 the first round of associated consultations took place in early 2019. The second round of consultations was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the related Environment Bill was delayed three times before gaining Royal Assent in November 2021.

The detail of the proposals within the strategy will have a significant impact on the way waste is managed in Leeds including the materials collected, frequency of collections, infrastructure required to deliver new services and the way in which the costs incurred by the council are funded.

The Council is still awaiting further detail regarding the implementation of the proposals set out within the national strategy.

- **Refuse Service Review:** Delayed due to unprecedented demand on the service during the Covid-19 pandemic, this process is now anticipated to conclude in summer 2022.
- **Carbon Impact of Waste:** The Council has commissioned an analysis of the carbon impact of various waste streams to ensure that future decisions about services reflect the organisation's ambitions for carbon reduction.

Given the information outstanding it is recommended that the successor board progresses scrutiny of these matters in the next municipal year.



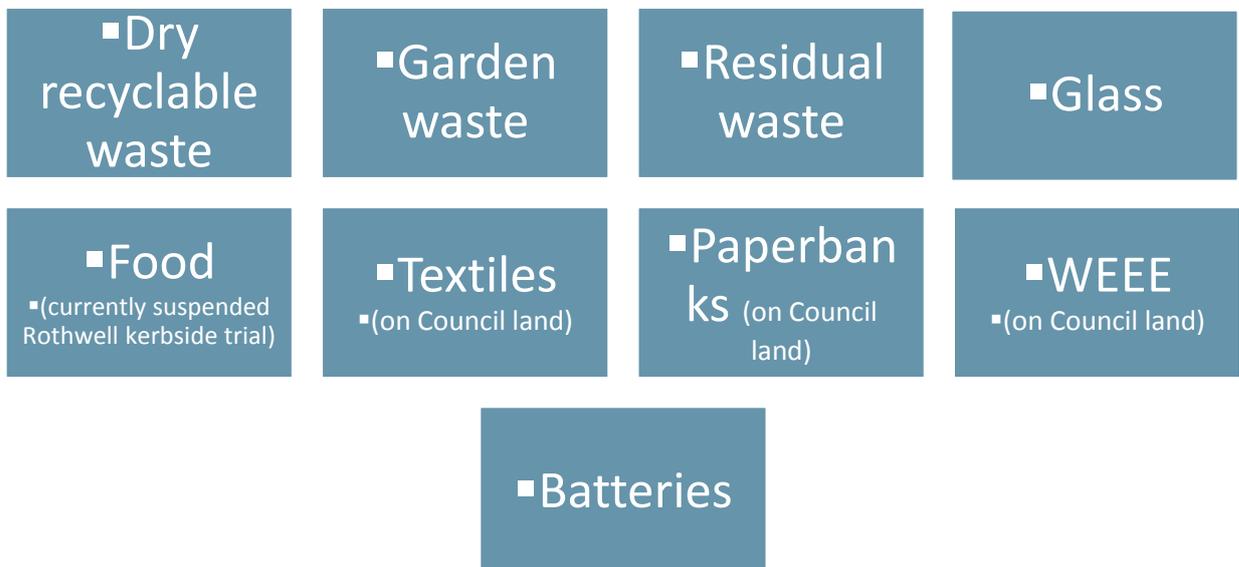
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3. Summary of Inquiry to Date

- 3.1 In November 2021 the Board met to progress the first stage of the inquiry into the future of waste services. A full summary of the discussions and initial recommendations that emerged from that meeting was approved as an accurate record by the Board at its meeting on [20 January 2022](#). A brief overview of some of the key areas of consideration is also provided below.
- 3.2 The second stage of the inquiry, which was intended to consider the carbon impact of various waste streams, was recently deferred until the conclusions of the commissioned carbon impact analysis could be provided to the Scrutiny Board.

Summary of key areas of consideration – Inquiry Stage One

- 3.3 The initial stage of the inquiry examined the current waste services provided to the 357,000 households in Leeds.
- 3.4 This included analysis of volumes and types of waste, recycling rates and methods of processing.
- 3.5 Members considered collection and disposal services, and the associated costs in relation to:





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Current waste management and changing trends within the city's waste profile

Residual Waste and Recycling Rates

- 3.6 Members considered the city's recycling rate and the amount of waste that the city sends to landfill. The city's official recycling rate is 38% in government defined terms. However, only around 1.5% of waste is currently being sent to landfill – it was noted that this has risen over the pandemic period and is expected to return to less than 1% post-pandemic.
- 3.7 Members explored the process for managing residual waste. All residual waste is collected and taken to the Recycling and Energy Recovery Facility (RERF) at Cross Green, operated through a contract by Veolia. As noted above very little, if any, waste goes to landfill.
- 3.8 A small amount of the waste is separated for recycling before incineration (ferrous and non-ferrous metals) and the waste material is then incinerated. The energy created through that process is used to generate electricity that is fed into the national grid. The heat created is used to feed the Leeds Pipes network, which provides heating to households, some public buildings and businesses. The ash that results from the process has further metals extracted for recycling and the remaining material is largely used in construction aggregates, such as for road building.
- 3.9 To avoid duplication, members of the Board noted that the contractual arrangements relating to the RERF – including recycling targets - would be considered in more detail by the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board.
- 3.10 The different ways in which residual waste is collected from households were explored by members of the Board. 76% of households have a fortnightly collection of their residual waste but alternative arrangements are in place in other areas of the city. Some time was spent examining the arrangements for 'hard to access' streets with a number of communities identified as having bespoke arrangements in place to facilitate collections.
- 3.11 Members discussed the composition of residual waste and were advised that if recyclables have been correctly dealt with by householders the main contents of a black bin would be food waste, along with items such as non-recyclable plastic and nappies.
- 3.12 It was agreed that further consideration would be given at a later date to the ways in which contamination of recycling bins can be reduced, and the role of ward members in supporting that work.
- 3.13 Specific consideration was given to garden waste. Leeds currently collects significantly more garden waste from households than any other Council in the UK and is one of a minority of Councils that still offers the discretionary service without additional charge. Garden waste is collected from 216,000 households every fortnight with the exception of the winter period.



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- 3.14 Members explored the experience of other authorities that have introduced charging for this service, noting the consequential reduction in volumes collected. Members also explored how garden waste is disposed of with the two current contractors providing compost for agricultural use and land reclamation projects.
- 3.15 Members of the board were particularly interested in understanding the city's approach to glass collection. While glass is not collected from households in Leeds, the Council does provide a network of over 700 bottle banks.
- 3.16 Members examined the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. It was noted that glass has been highlighted as an area where it is anticipated the authority will have additional responsibilities under the National Resources and Waste Strategy.
- 3.17 A key consideration for members was the fact that separate glass collection in Leeds, currently reduces contamination. The Board was advised that as a result glass can be recycled more times and has higher financial value.
- 3.18 Food collections were discussed with a degree of frustration expressed by some members in relation to the ongoing suspension of kerbside collections in Rothwell. The Board was supportive in principle of expanding food waste collections in the city, particularly in the context of the anticipated new requirements of the National Resources and Waste Strategy.
- 3.19 The Board noted that further consideration would need to be given to infrastructure requirements should mass Anaerobic Digestion be required by all local authorities. Once more detail is available about statutory requirements – including with regard to the potential co-mingling of food and garden collections – members are keen to scrutinise options available to the Council. It was suggested that food collection may be one of the areas where greater integration of local plans and infrastructure across the region is most likely to be required to fulfil the ambitions set out by Government.

Covid-19 Pandemic

- 3.20 The Scrutiny Board considered the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on waste services, in terms of current logistical challenges, the legacy of the last two years for staff and the difficulty of progressing wider development projects while dealing with the unprecedented challenge of the pandemic period.
- 3.21 Members sought to understand how trends in the presentation of waste had changed since the onset of the pandemic and the likelihood of some of those trends becoming permanent features of the city's waste profile.



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National Resources and Waste Strategy

- 3.22 The Scrutiny Board examined the challenges, opportunities and uncertainties associated with the implementation of the National Resources and Waste Strategy. This included reference to the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility, Government ambitions to collect a consistent range of materials to a minimum standard and the introduction of a deposit return scheme.
- 3.23 The proposals within the strategy will have a significant impact on the way in which waste is managed by local authorities including the materials collection, frequency of collections, infrastructure required to deliver new services and the way in which costs are funded. The requirements around consistency also suggest a greater need for locally integrated waste management plans to ensure complementary decisions are taken around infrastructure and contracts.
- 3.24 The Board noted the Government's stated commitment to fund any new burdens brought about by the implementation of the strategy and the provision of £330m in the Autumn Spending Review. However, without further detail it is difficult to assess the potential impact of new requirements on the Council's finances. Members noted the further challenge of planning future service delivery at a time when the service is being required to deliver additional savings as part of the Council's financial strategy.
- 3.25 The consideration of options relating to glass collections highlighted the importance of understanding all aspects of the National Resources and Waste Strategy before re-modelling individual services. The working group discussed the potential conflicts of introducing a deposit return scheme for glass at the same time as kerbside collection of glass.
- 3.26 Equally members highlighted the need to understand the detail of the Government's approach to the co-mingling of garden and food waste, in order to fully assess the advantages and disadvantages of the future processing options available to the Council.
- 3.27 There have been a series of delays to the implementation of the National Resources and Waste Strategy since its launch in December 2018. This has included delays to the second round of consultations and the progress of the Environment Bill in securing Royal Assent, which was finally achieved in November 2021.
- 3.28 The Chairs of both the Environment, Housing and Communities and Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Boards have jointly written to George Eustice MP in his capacity as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to seek assurance that the Government is committed to providing further information about implementation requirements in the near future. A copy of the letter is attached at **Appendix 3A**.



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Climate Emergency

- 3.29 In the context of the Council's declaration of a climate emergency and the ambition to make rapid progress towards carbon neutrality by 2030, members are keen to ensure that decisions taken about future waste services should take into account the carbon impact of the different types of waste.
- 3.30 The Scrutiny Board welcomed the commissioning of analysis seeking to provide data to support such decisions in future.
- 3.31 Having anticipated that information being available in spring 2022, members requested the second stage of the inquiry be scheduled at that point in the municipal year. Unfortunately, that stage of the inquiry has been delayed as the information cannot yet be provided to the Board.
- 3.32 In their letter to the Secretary of State, the Chairs of both scrutiny boards have sought further assurance that the detail provided by Government will reflect the science of reducing the carbon impact of waste.

Refuse Service Review

- 3.33 Members reflected upon the suspension of the Refuse Service Review in March 2020 following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic response. Although a dedicated team began working on the review again this Autumn, the conclusions of that process are not now expected before summer 2022.
- 3.34 It was agreed that the redesign of routes across the city offered the opportunity to address 'legacy issues' around over presentation on some routes, more consistently and appropriately incorporate new builds into routes and address 'hard to access' streets.
- 3.35 It was further agreed that front line staff must be engaged in the review process and members acknowledged that process requires a degree of capacity in the service to enable crews to take part in engagement activities.
- 3.36 The Board requested that it be updated on the outcome of the review as soon as possible.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Given the outstanding information required to inform further scrutiny of the future design of local waste services it is recommended that the successor board progresses scrutiny of these matters in the next municipal year

Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)

Statement of Progress: Future of Waste Services

March 2022

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