

Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Inquiry into Recycling

Summary report of the working group meeting held on 1st December 2009.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A working group of the Board met on 1st December 2009 to consider evidence in line with session two of the Board's Inquiry into Recycling.
- 1.2 The purpose of this meeting was to consider the following issues:
- The range of materials currently recyclable at household waste sorting sites and bring sites and whether there is scope to expand the range (including more reusable materials). Also, to consider the potential for more locations across the city for bring sites.
 - Examples of other recycling facilities/methods used outside of Leeds and the potential cost implications for adopting these across the city.
- 1.3 The following Members and officers attended the working group meeting to discuss the evidence submitted:
- Councillor B Anderson (Chair of the Scrutiny Board)
 - Councillor A Blackburn
 - Councillor Joe Marjoram
 - Councillor James Monaghan, Executive Board Member for Environmental Services
 - Angela Brogden, Principal Scrutiny Adviser
 - Susan Upton, Head of Waste Management
- 1.4 In preparation for the meeting, a briefing paper on the current range of recyclable materials collected in Leeds was provided by the Head of Waste Management. This is attached for information.
- 1.5 In consideration of this briefing paper, a number of issues were raised by the working group, which are summarised below.

2.0 Main issues raised

Setting achievable recycling targets

- 2.1 In acknowledging that the Council's current recycling rate is around 34%, with the aim of reaching a target of 50% by 2020, the working group questioned whether there would be a capping point as a result of it not being viable economically to further separate materials from the residual waste collections for recycling. In view of the existing market streams, it was highlighted that the capping point for recyclable collections would be between 50-60%.

- 2.2 It was noted that by increasing the frequency of recyclable collections, particularly as part of an alternative weekly collection system, this could achieve a further 10% to the collection rates. It was noted that the proposed food waste collections could also increase the figures into the 50% bracket. However, beyond this figure it was noted that the Council would need to look at the cost implications of extending the range of materials already reused and recycled.
- 2.3 Whilst the working group acknowledged that the Council already collects a wide range of reusable and recyclable materials, they discussed the potential benefits and opportunities available to extend this range further.

Recycling of textiles

- 2.4 The working group noted that apart from food waste, textiles would make up a large proportion of the residual waste collected. In view of this, Members discussed the opportunities available for separating out textiles to help improve recycling rates.
- 2.5 It was noted that many charities, and other businesses, already provide a collection service within residential areas for reusable textiles which would need to be taken into consideration. Emphasis was therefore placed upon the Council exploring opportunities to work more closely with charities to coordinate services for the collection of textiles.
- 2.6 In acknowledging that the contract for the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) expires next year and will therefore be subject to a competitive tendering process, Members also suggested that potential bidders be asked to give an indication of costs for adding textiles to the contract to enable the Council to evaluate the cost benefits of this approach before making any decisions.

Extending the range of plastics recycled

- 2.7 During its November meeting, the Scrutiny Board had already identified plastics as a material which causes much confusion for the public in terms of the different types used and which ones can be recycled.
- 2.8 The working group learned that the following plastics are not recycled at the local Household Waste Sorting Sites:.

Plastic types 3 (PVC),
5 (polypropylene PP)
6 (polystyrene PS),
7 (others)

- 2.9 It was noted that these include the plastic types used for yogurt pots, food trays and margarine tubs. Whilst these waste streams can be recycled, subject to value for money justification, it was highlighted to the working group that this is likely to need further investment at the Household Waste Sorting Sites. As an example, it was highlighted that recycling of polystyrene may

require the waste stream to be bulked up and then baled to produce sufficient weight to gain income from sale for recycling.

- 2.10 The working group also learned that hard plastics, UPVC windows and glazing glass are also not collected for recycling at the present time.
- 2.11 It was reported to the working group that the range of plastics recycled is largely dictated by market forces and until there is a demand for these materials it is not cost effective to separate them from the residual waste. Members again identified a need to lobby for a national approach towards the use of plastic packaging to restrict the range of plastics used.
- 2.12 Particular reference was made to the collection of Tetrapaks at particular Household Waste Sorting Sites and the working group again questioned whether this material could be included in the new MRF contract. Whilst acknowledging that this would be possible, it was highlighted that the quality of materials collected via the co-mingled method would not be of the same standard as that collected at source. This would therefore need to be taken into account in terms of market demands.

Glass collections

- 2.13 The working group questioned whether the collection of mixed glass was more cost effective than having separate collections. It was noted that there is currently no charge for collecting glass as the distributors would recover their collection costs from the value of the materials collected.
- 2.14 However, it was highlighted that the Council is anticipating a change in the glass industry over the next couple of years with a stronger preference for separate collections. It was noted that mixed glass tends to be directed at aggregated outlets rather than reusable. In view of this, importance was placed upon not only considering the cost implications of having separate glass collections, but also acknowledging the benefits in terms of reducing carbon emissions too.

Working closely with supermarkets

- 2.15 The working group discussed each of the materials currently collected at the Housing Waste Sorting Sites and particular reference was made to the collection of small electrical goods and also batteries. In acknowledging that not all residents have easy access to the local HWSS, the working group initially questioned whether there was any scope of including these within the SORT collections. However, it was highlighted that local supermarkets could prove to be a valuable collection point as customers should be encouraged to exchange their damaged electrical goods and batteries when purchasing new goods. It was noted that a similar approach could also be adopted for low energy bulbs.
- 2.16 Members agreed that such innovative partnership working needed to be explored further by the Council.

Underground waste collection system

- 2.17 Within the briefing paper, particular reference was made to the Envac system, which is a pneumatic waste collection system. Separate recyclable wastes are put into different containers which are connected to a pneumatic collection system. The waste materials are sucked through an underground pipeline system to a central collection point up to 2km away. The waste is compacted prior to transfer to a container that is then loaded onto a vehicle for removal.
- 2.18 It was noted that this system has been installed in the Wembley City residential complex next to the new Wembley Stadium where it is used to collect household waste, although similar systems can be used to collect waste from street collection bins. In acknowledging the benefits of this system in terms of low carbon emissions due to the lack of collection vehicles and being able to address capacity issues within densely populated areas, the working group agreed that there would be merits in exploring this method further for Leeds.
- 2.19 It was noted that individual subterranean systems are also used for the collection of waste from street bins and there are merits in exploring this further.

Promoting a sustainable and green Arena for Leeds

- 2.20 The working group emphasised the importance of ensuring that representatives from waste management had an input into the developments for the new Leeds Arena to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to waste management as part of its infrastructure. This was noted by the Head of Waste Management and the Executive Member.

Introducing local incentives for recycling

- 2.21 The working group questioned whether there would be merits in developing an incentive scheme as a way to engage more people to recycle, such as a points system which could be redeemable within local supermarkets and other retailers. Whilst it was noted that such a scheme would need to be on an individual and temporary basis, it was suggested that this approach could be piloted in order to evaluate its impact.

Frequency -vs- capacity

- 2.22 The working group questioned whether the Council would benefit from allocating more green and brown bins to residents rather than increasing the frequency of collections. It was noted that there would be a preference to increasing frequencies as opposed to increasing the number of bins collected as this would have a greater impact on collection routes and there would also be significant costs in terms of providing additional bins. In relation to increasing the number of brown bins, preference was made to exploring alternative methods such as providing composting bins.