

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	20 JULY 2020		
TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD WASTE - IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOOD WASTE AND 140L BINS PROJECT TIMETABLE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR BARNETT	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES
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#### 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide an update on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current project timetable for the delivery of the food waste/140 litre bin project and to present a revised timetable for consideration and approval.
- 1.2 The pandemic has impacted on the resources available to the team and the team's ability to deliver an effective early adopters' phase. This initial phase is considered vital to the success of the project, with learning outcomes being fed into the main roll out. Originally planned for July 2020, the early adopters' phase is now proposed to commence in October with a full roll out planned for February 2021.
- 1.3 The main roll out in February 2021 is dependent on the success of the initial phases of work with some risks associated with the on-going implications of the pandemic on resources and the community's capacity to embrace a change to the current collection process.

Appendix 1: Early Adopters areas

Appendix 2: Citizens Panel results and responses.

#### 2 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the introduction of a food waste collection service and the introduction of 140 litre bins project is commenced from 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020 (Early Adopters) and 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 (Main Roll Out).

#### 3 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Policy Committee (26<sup>th</sup> September 2019) received a report setting out a way forward for the Household Waste service to achieve the ambition set out in the waste strategy to increase recycling and reduce the cost of waste. The report detailed the full policy background including the targets set out in the EU Waste Framework Directive and the priorities set out in the re3 Strategy. The Committee resolved to introduce a combined

new waste service of alternate weekly collections with 140l residual bins and weekly food waste collection. The original timetable, agreed by Policy Committee, set out a go live date for a full roll out in October 2020 following an early adopter phase in June 2020.

- 3.2 The predicted 11.5% increase in recycling from the current 32% to 43% secures an estimated annual saving of £342k originally profiled £171k in 2020/21 and the remainder in 2021/22. This was based on a successful early adopters' pilot commencing in June 2020 and the full roll out of the service from October 2020. This saving includes the revenue implications of the up-front capital costs of £1.5m to purchase new smaller 140 litre bins and the additional revenue costs of the new drivers and loading staff required to support the programme.
- 3.3 Early in the COVID 19 outbreak, DEFRA issued guidance on waste collection prioritisation: [Guidance on prioritising waste collection services during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic - GOV.UK](#) . The guidance set out the importance of maintaining residual waste and food waste services however it does not address the matter of introducing new collection methodologies.

#### 4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic in March and the subsequent lockdown meant the food waste project team were unable to progress many of the project work strands at a critical time for the project, due to re-deployment of staff to alternative Covid 19 related duties including the clinically extremely vulnerable food delivery service and the need to redesign the waste collection service to respond to the health and safety requirements presented by Covid 19. The project team has now returned to their normal work duties and the waste operations department is operating a full service, but the interruption to the planned programme meant that the original timetable could not be achieved, and a delay was inevitable.
- 4.2 The original high-level project timetable was as follows:
- Early adopter areas service (3,000 properties) to begin 1st July 2020.
  - Phase 1 service to 59,000 properties to begin 5th October 2020.
  - Phase 2 service to 14,000 high level flats to begin in 2021 - once Phase 1 has been successfully implemented.

#### Early Adopters Process

- 4.3 The Early Adopters project is critical to the success of the full roll out. 3,000 properties in five areas around the Borough will be early adopters, who will start the new service ahead of the rest of the Borough so residents can give their feedback and experience of both the operation of the service and the way it is communicated to the remaining 70,000 properties. These early adopters will have at least 3 months of the new service before the main roll out, giving the service an opportunity to make changes and if necessary, delay the main roll out until a successful implementation is able to be rolled out. The lessons learnt throughout this first phase will be used to help shape and adapt our approach for the main project roll out by collecting from challenging areas including, low rise flats, student accommodation, Houses of Multiple Occupancy and operationally difficult areas. The suspension of project work meant insufficient time was available to meet the original early adopters July 1<sup>st</sup> start date. The cross-party Food Waste Task & Finish group will meet on a monthly basis to consider progress and feedback received. Appendix 1 details the 3,000 properties included in the Early Adopters areas.

#### Communications

- 4.4 The pandemic outbreak resulted in all work on the communication element of the project being suspended for five weeks. Once more normal service was resumed the communications plan was reviewed as it quickly became apparent that some elements of the initial plan which required face to face interaction, for example providing information stands at events this Summer, would no longer be deliverable. As a result, a more compact communications plan has been developed whilst still ensuring that all sectors of the community are still able to be reached.
- 4.5 To help inform and improve the communication strategy to promote the project in light of the virus related disruption, officers carried out a citizens panel survey w/c 25<sup>th</sup> May. A summary of the responses and the subsequent actions is included in Appendix 2.
- 4.6 The community's capacity and willingness to change and embrace the new waste collection service is vital to the success of the project. It is recognised that residents have had to manage considerable change since the pandemic started with more people working from home and domestic waste collection services seeing an increase in volume. Understanding this capacity and listening to residents involved in the early adopters' phase will influence the main roll out which is currently planned for February 2020.

#### **Supply on time of the number of caddies, bins and/or liners**

- 4.6 In the early stages of the pandemic there was significant uncertainty amongst the suppliers as to whether they could meet the delivery timescales for the planned roll-out. All critical suppliers have now confirmed that they can meet the revised project timetable set out later in this report.

#### **Anaerobic Digestion**

- 4.7 The re3 contracted Anaerobic Digestion plant is currently accepting food waste from re3 and will be able to accept food waste collected by service in accordance with the revised timetable.

### **5.0 WAY FORWARD:**

#### **Alternative Timetable and Options**

##### **Revised Proposed Project timetable**

- 5.1 Taking into account staff resources and the matters presented above, the proposed timetable for the introduction of the Early Adopters is as follows:
  1. 1<sup>st</sup> August Landlords and managing agents' liaison starts.
  2. Information leaflets delivered to Early Adopters from 24<sup>th</sup> August.
  3. Implementation feedback form made available on line from 1<sup>st</sup> September.
  4. Food waste caddies/bins/liners/cards delivery begins on the 21<sup>st</sup> September.
  5. Bin stickers and signage installed in flats from 22<sup>nd</sup> September.
  6. 240l grey waste bins swapped for new 140l bins from 28<sup>th</sup> September.
  7. Food waste collection starts 1<sup>st</sup> October.
  8. Post Implementation Feedback Form available from 1<sup>st</sup> November.
- 5.2 The proposed timetable for the main roll-out is as follows:
  1. Delivery of food caddies, bins, caddy liners and scheme information for 4 weeks from 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021.
  2. Weekly food waste collections start 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021
  3. 240l grey bins swapped out for new 140l bins from 1<sup>st</sup> February, target completion date 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021.

## 6.0 Options Considered

6.1 The options considered following the 5-week suspension of work on the project caused by the Covid -19 outbreak were:

- Option 1 - cancel the proposed early adopters' phase and roll out the introduction of both food waste and smaller bins in October 2020. This Option has significantly increased delivery risks.
- Option 2 - cancel the proposed early adopters' phase, roll out the food waste collection service from October 2020 but suspend the removal of the current residual bins and introduction of the smaller 140 litre bins until March 2020. This option is not recommended and will present significant risks both to the success of the overall project but also to the participation in the food waste service.
- Option 3 - Introduce early adopters phase 5th October 2020 and introduce main rollout 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021. Phase 2 in 2022 date tbc. **This is considered to present the best option and is the recommendation included in the report.**
- Option 4 - Delay the project by 12 months. The current delivery timetable would be delayed until 2021, with early adopters starting in July 2021, main roll-out in October 2021 and Phase 2 in 2022. While this may increase the successful engagement with the public as the pandemic continues, it would result in further delaying the financial and environmental benefits of the project.

## 7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The proposal agreed at Policy Committee in September 2019 introduces a new food waste collection service, at the same time as replacing the current 240l residual wheeled bins with smaller 140l ones. It will achieve an increase in recycling estimated from the current 32% to 43%. In addition, it will reduce the amount of waste to landfill, and achieve a revenue saving estimated at £233k p.a. (this takes into account the cost of borrowing - excluding cost of borrowing savings are £171k first part year and then £342k full year)

7.2 As part of the Council's capital programme for 2020/21 which was agreed by Full council at the end of February, £1.489m of capital expenditure budget was agreed for this project. Despite the delaying of the project, the majority of the planned capital expenditure will still be incurred in financial year 2020/21 as orders have already been placed with the suppliers and production has started.

7.3 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy had £171k of savings expected in 2020/21 and a further £171k in 2021/22. As set out above, the preferred option, option 3, would not achieve the 20/21 saving due to the later than anticipated full roll out of the service. It is anticipated that in 2021/22 the full saving of £342k will be fully delivered.

7.4 The net savings arising from this project is dependent on a reduction of waste to landfill, planned to be circa 1,300 tonnes per annum. The overall savings from the diversion of waste from landfill is circa £981k pa. Should a reduction in the scale of waste to land fill not be fully achieved there would be a consequence on the forecast savings budget. There is a risk that the fixed costs of the new service may not be fully covered by the savings achieved by diverting waste away from landfill if the take up isn't as predicted; for example, if only half of the predicted food waste tonnage was achieved the net cost of the service would move from a saving of £342k per annum to a potential cost of £148k.

7.5 The vehicles required to deliver the new service have been ordered and are due to arrive in July. There would be a revenue cost related to the vehicles even if they are 'standing costs' with the vehicles not being used. These costs will need to be confirmed.

7.6 The Council has negotiated no gate fees for the anaerobic digester a time limited period (up to the end of March 2022) and if we do not roll out as early as planned the window to take advantage of this is reduced. Gate fees are however considered to be circa £7k per annum.

## **8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

8.1 The proposals support the priorities set out in Reading Borough Council Corporate Plan:

- Keeping the town clean, safe, green and active.
- Providing infrastructure to support the economy.
- Ensuring the Council remains financially sustainable

8.2 The Council has also agreed its strategic priorities for the recovery phase of the pandemic. The overall vision is to ensure Reading can be a thriving, virus-resilient community:

- To ensure the Council itself is resilient and fit for the future.
- To help people be safe and communities thrive
- To secure the economic future of Reading

8.3 The proposals contribute to delivering a net zero carbon Reading by 2030 through increasing the amount of recycling.

8.4 Strategic Priority of the Reading Climate Change Strategy is a commitment to increase recycling rates. The introduction of food waste collection and processing would help to increase recycling rates. In addition, the processing of food waste, via the anaerobic digestion treatment procured for the re3 partnership, would also facilitate the capture of methane from the waste. The captured methane will be utilised in energy production, displacing energy which might have been generated by Carbon based sources, further contributing to the aims of the Climate Change Strategy.

## **9.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

9.1 A full communications plan has been developed. Consultation advice has been sought from the appropriate teams including liaison with the University, residents' groups, community groups, landlords and local community champions.

## **10.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

10.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

10.2 The Council has reviewed the scope of the proposals as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 The Council has duties under various UK and EU legislation to deliver waste collection and disposal services, principally the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the revised EU waste framework directive 2008.

Consultation advice has also been sought from the Corporate Legal team, and they have advised that there is no Statutory Duty to consult regarding the revised timetable.

- 11.2 Detailed work has commenced regarding enforcement powers and legislation to ensure that where needed, the Council is enforcing and taking action when regulations are not adhered to.

## **12. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 The separate collection of food waste at the kerbside and its treatment by anaerobic digestion will benefit the climate by reducing the amount of methane gas (a powerful greenhouse gas) emitted from landfill sites.
- 12.2 Food waste is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the and globally. Significant investment in sustainable collection and disposal is therefore vital in order to respond to the Climate Crisis declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030.

## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None