

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	6 JULY 2021	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD WASTE - UPDATE ON THE INTRODUCTION OF THE KERBSIDE FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE AND THE CHANGE TO 140L RESIDUAL WASTE BINS.		
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide an update on the main roll out of the kerbside food waste collection service and the change to 140 litre residual waste bins.
- 1.2 To report that the recycling rate for April in Reading was 52% compared to 32% in April 2020.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the progress to date of Phase 1 of the project is noted.
- 2.2 That the proposed Phase 2 roll out timetable is noted.
- 2.3 That a further update, including the results of the Phase 2 roll out is brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The EU Waste Framework Directive sets a recycling and re-use target of 50% for waste materials from households to be achieved by 2020. This target has become UK law and it is anticipated that it will remain in place post-Brexit. The Government has committed to achieving 65% recycling and re-use of municipal waste by 2035.
- 3.2 Policy Committee (26th September 2019) received a report setting out a way forward for the Household Waste service to achieve the ambition to increase recycling and reduce the cost of waste. The Committee resolved to introduce a combined new waste service of alternate weekly collections with 140l residual bins and a weekly food waste collection. The original timetable, agreed by Policy Committee, (as shown in Section 4.1) set out a go live date for a full roll out in October 2020 following an early adopter phase in June 2020.
- 3.3 The Covid 19 outbreak in March 2020 and the first lockdown resulted in staff absences of up to 20%, the redeployment of staff to other essential operations such as food parcel delivery and the temporary suspension of some waste services in line with the waste service continuity plan and Government guidance: Guidance on prioritising waste collection services during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic - GOV.UK .
- 3.4 This uncertainty about staffing levels, the availability of waste bin delivery contractors and raw materials resulted in a review of the practicality of delivering the project as originally planned, which concluded that a delay was necessary to make the roll out a success. This review was presented to Policy Committee in July 2020 and it was resolved that the early adopter phase of the project should go ahead from October 1st, 2020 with the main roll out in February 2021 rather than being delayed for up to 12 months.
- 3.5 The 11.5% increase in recycling rate from the then prevailing 34% to 45% was predicted to achieve 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 in June and the full roll out of the service from October 2020. This saving includes 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. The delay to the roll out caused by the Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in the re-profiling of this saving with £142k being achieved in 20/21 and the remainder of £342k in 21/22. This reprofiled saving has been factored into the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy 21/22.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Project Timetable

The original, pre-pandemic and revised project timetables are shown below:

- 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- and low-rise flats to begin in July 2021.

Revised project timetable:

- Early adopter areas service (3,000 properties) began on 1st October 2020. Complete.
- Phase 1 service to 59,000 properties began on 1st February 2021. Complete.
- Phase 2 service to 14,000 high- and low-rise flats to be split into 2 further phases. Phase 2a between July and December 2021. Phase 2b starts in June 2022 until completion. See section 4.7 for further details.

4.2 Governance

A Member Task and Finish cross party working group was established to ensure appropriate engagement throughout the process and to enable clear oversight and input to the early adopters' phase and the subsequent main roll out programme. The Group first met in October 2019 and has met regularly until April 2021 when Phase 1 completed. Meetings with Ward Members will be arranged as necessary during Phase 2 and the Task and Finish Group will reconvene later in 2021 for review purposes.

4.3 Communications

The project has been supported by a comprehensive communications campaign under the banner 'Let's Wise Up to Waste'. Consultation was carried out via a citizen's panel in May 2020 and a survey of early adopters in December 2020 informed the main roll out.

The service changes have been publicised via a broad range of media including the residents' newsletter, Council website, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor and YouTube), direct residents' e-mails, digital media and direct mailing of leaflets and letters, on-bus screens, the new collection calendar as well as 59,000 leaflets in food waste bins, flyers and bin hangers. Content and support have also been provided by the Re3 Communications and Marketing Officer, throughout.

A series of short 'how to' food waste videos were produced as well as a food waste explanatory animation and a short film which featured an early adopter who became an advocate for the scheme.

Further information about the communications campaign can be found in Appendix 1.

Officers will be working on an ongoing communications campaign to promote food waste collection in the coming months, as well as promoting the Love Food Hate Waste campaign.

A communications plan, which is specific to the high-rise flats included in the Phase 2 food waste roll-out, is currently being developed and will use the same type of channels as that used for Phase 1.

4.4 Early Adopters

As part of the preparation for the roll out of the food waste and 140l bin project it was felt prudent to establish the new service in five early adopter areas with the following aims:

- Increase the understanding and aims of the project
- To reduce the levels of contamination that may occur
- Understand any barriers that may prevent participation in the project
- Inform on the most effective communication channels in time for the main roll out

Four of the geographical areas selected for the roll out were chosen as they contained a cross section of the different demographic areas in Reading and included various types of residential properties where waste collection is challenging and recycling contamination levels are higher. The types of properties included:

- Low Level flats
- Student Accommodation
- Houses of Multiple Occupancy
- Homes which had service-related issues i.e. presentation of bins in back alleys or communal car parks, etc.

A comparator area, comprised mainly of residential properties occupied by single households which were regarded as more straight forward to collect from, was also included to act as a control.

The early adopter initiative which encompassed over 3,000 households ran for 17 weeks and provided useful operational and communications insights which helped inform the main roll out of the project in February 2021.

The tonnage of food waste collected from the early adopter properties averaged 2.31 kg/household/week and exceeded the initial target set of 1kg/hh/wk. and average participation rates of 78% were achieved.

4.5 Main Roll Out

4.5.1 Food Waste

As planned, 56,000 food waste bins, caddies, liners and leaflets were delivered between 4th and 29th January and a mop-up service was provided to deliver any bins which had been inadvertently missed. The five new food waste collection rounds began on Monday 1st February as planned and since then the rounds have continued to successfully bed in as crews and residents become familiar with the new service.

Table 1 below shows the tonnages of food waste collected per week during the first 4 months of collections from 59,000 properties (3,000 Early Adopter & 56,000 Main Roll Out).

Month	Food waste collected (tonnes)	Food waste collected per household per week (kg/hh/wk)	Recycling rate
February	554	2.34	46%
March	692	2.93	53%
April	686	2.90	52%
May	620	2.62	TBA
Total	2,552	Average 2.70	

Table 1

Appendix 2 gives more details of the food waste collections.

As shown in Table 1 on average 2.70 kg of food waste was collected per household per week for the first 4 months of the new service compared to the target of 1.4kg/hh/wk. Tonnages are far higher than predicted. Other Authorities have seen a gradual reduction as residents recognise the need to reduce the amount of food they discard. However, the service is confident that the revised food waste collection target of 1.4kg/hh/wk, used to support revised savings targets as part of the agreed Medium-Term Financial Strategy, will be achievable going forward. Covid 19 related lockdowns and disruption to working patterns may have influenced the tonnages but it is an encouraging start to the new service which seems to be valued by residents. Data is still being collated but initial estimates put the current participation rate for food waste at around 80% and a further communications plan will be put in place to engage with those who do not currently use the food waste service as well as how to reduce food waste.

The recycling rate for April was 52% compared to 46% in February. This means that the Council has achieved the 2020 target of 50% recycling in Q1 of 2021 and exceeded the project target of 44% set in the 26th September 2019 Policy Committee report. This compares to a third quarter 2020/21 recycling rate of 33%.

One of the main aims of the new service was to reduce the environmental impact of food waste by removing it from landfill. Rotting food produces the harmful greenhouse gas methane, which is 84 times more polluting than CO₂. In the first 4 months of the new service 2,552 tonnes of food were diverted from landfill to an anaerobic digester which generates electricity and agricultural fertiliser. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to a Carbon Neutral Reading by 2030, the wider climate change agenda and is a direct, tangible response to the Climate Emergency declaration of 2019.

4.5.2 Round changes - Domestic and Recycling Waste

A notable feature of the extended lockdown periods has been an increase in the volumes of recyclable materials, particularly cardboard being presented by residents at the kerbside. This is due to the increase in home working, on-line shopping and home deliveries and is likely to continue until the lockdowns are lifted in June. Waste patterns will continue to change as the likely increase in home working becomes established, and the rounds will be continually monitored and adjustments made whilst avoiding collection day changes for residents.

The swap out of the 240l residual waste bins for the new 140l bins began as scheduled on the 1st February and was completed within the planned 10-week timetable. The Service has received 2474 requests for additional waste capacity since 1st February, of which 1686 were approved and have agreed to issue 1727 additional recycling bins in accordance with the Council's Waste Collection Service Standard policy.

In general, the swap out and replacement of residual bins has gone according to plan however, there have been some minor issues with bins being removed ahead of time before the replacement has been delivered as well as with 240l bins being removed when they should have been left, for example for clinical waste reasons. The waste operations team is monitoring and resolving issues quickly as they arise and some disruption was inevitable in a project of this size and complexity.

The introduction of food waste collections and the change to 140l bins is a fundamental change to the waste collection service and accordingly an increase in the number of complaints and service enquiries was anticipated. The table below shows the number of complaints received from January to May 2021 and Table 3 gives a comparison to numbers received prior to the introduction of the new service.

Whilst the numbers were expected to rise; it is recognised that the number of repeat contacts received was too high and that additional resource was required to deal with this increased volume. This learning will be applied to the Phase 2 roll-out and extra resources will be available to deal with the complaints in a timely manner.

Month	January	February	March	April	May
Themes					
Communications	5	5	9	17	4
Quality of Service	1	1	6	9	5
Staff Conduct	2	8	4	8	10
Reduced bin size	1	1	3	4	3
Missed collection	5	37	38	34	26
Extra Capacity appeal	1	2	7	13	4
Assisted collection	2	1	7	1	1

issue					
FPN issue	1	0	0	1	0
Calendar/pay issue	0	3	0	1	0
Bin delivery issue	0	7	12	10	12
Total Number of complaints	18	65	86	98	65

Table 2

Monthly complaints pre-Early adopters food waste main roll out (the old service).

Month	June 2020	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020
Complaints	3	23	9	22

Table 3

4.6 The Recycling and Enforcement Team

The team's focus shifted for the duration of the main roll out away from their routine enforcement work to dealing with requests for additional waste capacity, additional recycling bins and ensuring residents have food waste bins, caddies and liners. Now the roll out is complete and the service issues resolved the team will continue to:

- Contact and support residents who are struggling to put the right material in the right bin by card, letter and phone and liaising with landlords and managing agents.
- Environmental enforcement including deployment of mobile CCTV cameras
- Monitor the presentation of food waste bins and 140l bins.
- Resume working with the Re3 partnership to help residents reduce contamination in collected recycling.
- Promote the 'Love Food Hate Waste' campaign to reduce the amount of food waste being recycled.

Social distancing advice has meant that the team has not been able to carry out face to face interactions with customers in the normal way and have been using alternative contact methods such as e mail, Teams, Zoom and phone to make contact. However, as the restrictions lift the team will return to more normal working methods whilst still observing government guidance.

4.7 Phase 2 timetable.

The final phase of the project is to roll out the introduction of a food waste collection service to the remaining 14,000 households living in high and low-rise flats in the borough.

Individual internal caddies and caddy liners will still be provided to each household, however, rather than an external caddy per household, the required number of 240 litre communal food waste bins will be provided instead in the bin storage areas. Each of the block of flats will have the

capacity needed for communal residual and recycling waste bins reassessed during this roll out.

The communication plan used in the earlier phase will be adapted to reflect the changes in the roll out to the residents of the high and low-rise flats. The Recycling & Enforcement officers will be utilised to support closely the residents throughout the roll out phase.

Phase 2 will be split into 2 further phases:

Phase 2a between July and December 2021.

Phase 2b starts in June 2022 and will run until completion.

This timetable has been designed after considering the lessons learnt during the early adopter and main roll out phases of the service changes. The new service, whilst running well, is still being consolidated by the waste team and this timetable gives space for this to be completed whilst beginning the Phase 2 roll out. The gap between Phases 2 a and b has been included to allow the team to review the Phase 2a roll out methodology, settle in the Phase 2 a roll out and make changes for Phase 2b if necessary.

The gap between Phase 2a and 2b rollouts also acknowledges the increased challenges posed in collecting food waste from low and high rise flats and this will allow Officers time to focus on providing additional support in these areas and enhanced communications to ensure this phase of the roll out is successful.

- 4.8 There have been a number of learning outcomes from the early adopter and main roll-out which will be applied in phase 2 of the project. They are primarily operational relating to control of bin delivery crews, delivery of additional capacity and access to bin stores. However, there are improvements needed in complaint handling and turn-around times, the management of staff resources, both manual and managerial and the targeting of specific communications for blocks of flats.

4.8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.8.1 The proposal agreed at Policy Committee in September 2019 introduced a new food waste collection service, at the same time as replacing the current 240l residual wheeled bins with smaller 140l ones. It was predicted to achieve an increase in recycling estimated from the current 34% to 45%. In addition, it would reduce the amount of waste to landfill, and achieve a net revenue saving estimated at £233k per annum (taking into account the cost of borrowing. Excluding the cost of borrowing, the savings are £171k pa in the first part year and then £342k in a full year.).
- 4.8.2 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 to fund the new caddies and replacement residual waste bins. 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 being placed with the suppliers and production has started.

- 4.8.3 The Medium-term Financial Strategy had £171k of savings expected in 2020/21 and a further £342k in 2021/22. In 20/21 a saving of £138k was achieved against a target of £142k, due to the delay caused by the Covid 19 pandemic and that in 2021/22 the full saving of £342k will be fully delivered.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The proposals contained in this report are in line with the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe
- Promoting health, education, wellbeing and culture
- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future

- 5.2 In addition, the Council has adopted a Strategic Framework (March 2020) which sets out the Council's key priorities including:

- To keep social care services running for the children and adults who need them;
- To support vulnerable and isolated people during the crisis;
- To support business and the economy, which will secure the long-term recovery of Reading.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 A full communications plan accompanied the project roll out. Customer surveys were carried out in May 2020 with the Citizens Panel and with the early adopter customers in November 2020. Consultation advice has been sought from the appropriate teams.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 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.

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

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 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 proposals.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Please see section 5 above.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 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.

- 10.2 Food waste is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions globally. Significant investment in sustainable collection and disposal is therefore vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Household Waste The Way Forward: Policy 21 April 2021

Household Waste -The Way Forward - Policy Committee report (September 2019)

Household Waste - The Way Forward (Covid 19) - Policy Committee report (July 2020)