

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO CABINET**

01 September 2020

Report Title: Delivery of the Councils new Recycling Service, and future developments.

Submitted by: Head of Recycling & Fleet Services - Andrew Bird

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To update Cabinet on the introduction of the new recycling service, subscribed garden waste collection service, and to agree future developments.

Recommendation

That the report be noted, and further steps in development of the recycling service for flats, schools and businesses be approved. Additionally approval is sought to enter into a joint procurement for a contract to commence from April 2022 for the processing of dry recycling materials collected with the Staffordshire Waste Partnership (SWP).

Reasons

To update Cabinet on the introduction of the new recycling collection service during the lockdown period, and update on the performance of the subscription only garden waste collection service.

1. Background

- 1.1** In September 2018 Cabinet approved a cross-party working group recommendation to replace the source separated recycling collection service with a twin stream, paper and card separate collection system utilising a wheeled bin and bag to replace the boxes. In addition approval was given to introduce a paid subscription service for garden waste collections following the County Councils decision to cease paying recycling credits.
- 1.2** The subscription garden waste service commenced in January 2019, with collection operations commencing in February 2019. A target was set for 20% participation in the first year rising to 40 % by the fourth year. Now in only its second year of operation, over 50% of domestic households have subscribed.
- 1.3** Planning and project development has taken place over the last eighteen months to develop the new recycling collection service, which has included procurement of wheeled bins, woven bags for paper and card, vehicles, recycling material processing contract to deal with the materials collected for recycling. Additionally change management and development and implementation of digital solutions across the service have been undertaken.
- 1.4** A project management group was formed from within the recycling and waste service team, supported by a dedicated project manager seconded from the Councils ICT department, as digital delivery processes were necessary to improve operational delivery, and underpin many of the changes being made, and to provide additional project management and direction as this

otherwise would have exceeded the capacity of the Recycling and Waste team to deliver on the additional work required.

- 1.5 Additionally a Recycling and Waste Steering Group was formed with members from across the Councils corporate departments, all of which have a role to play in the successful delivery of this key Council service. The group included the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling. Regular reports on the progress of the project, including key work streams, were received by Informal Cabinet as the work progressed.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Plans for the new recycling collection service were at an advanced stage, with a projected implementation date of September 2020, when the Covid Pandemic hit the Country and had a significant impact on recycling and waste collection services locally and throughout the Country. Faced early on with a 25% reduction in operational staff, from mid-March, through Covid related sickness, self-isolation, and shielding, EMT and Informal Cabinet agreed a range of contingency options which could be deployed if staff shortages continued to grow, in order to protect service delivery.
- 2.2 At the same time waste arising's increased by over 25%, a result of people being at home, clearing things out, gardening, and buying more food and drink. This put substantial added pressure onto the collection service, however the aim was to maintain all collection services as far as reasonably practical.
- 2.3 The source separated recycling service as it stood was very labour intensive, and posed the greatest risk to maintaining operations if staff shortages continued to grow. Therefore, a decision was taken to temporarily collect recycling materials comingled, which would drastically reduce the number of vehicles and staff needed to carry out collection of this material.
- 2.4 Implementing this worked, and with recycling volumes increasing, was the right decision to make, although it meant the separate collection of food waste collections had to be suspended. However collections remained very reliable, and it was easier for the crews to operate. Additionally, these changes allowed all collection services with the exception of separate food waste to continue, garden waste service being particularly important as it is now a subscription collection service. This was well received by residents as many authorities, over half in Staffordshire had suspended garden waste collections.
- 2.5 The one consequence of the revised recycling collection process was that the material collected for recycling had to go to a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to be processed for recycling, which incurs a high cost gate fee per tonne of material processed. This additional cost, although offset in part by the reduction in the number of staff required to collect material, and those needed in the transfer station to process it, could not be sustained given the Councils loss of income in other services as a result of covid19.
- 2.6 As a result, a decision was taken to bring forward the rollout and implementation of the new recycling collection service. It would maintain the lower cost of vehicle usage, but reduce drastically the processing costs for the materials processed; as paper and card (fibre) were being collected separately, and had a positive sale value, and the cost of sorting the remaining comingled items, glass cans and plastics, is much cheaper (by around £40 per tonne) without the fibre mixed with it.

3. Solution

- 3.1 With a strong project plan already in place for the original planned roll out in September, and with all the necessary procurement work completed, the team were able to adapt the plan to bring in the service early through a phased approach.

- 3.2 Deliveries of over 53,000 new bins and bags commenced to households at the end of May and was completed on schedule by the middle of July.
- 3.3 Collections of recycling from the bins and bags commenced one to two weeks after delivery of the new containers to households.
- 3.4 Effective communication was key to the success of the roll out, as although it had been carefully planned not to have any day changes for collection, the service was swapping from a weekly collection service to fortnightly.
- 3.5 Comprehensive training and briefing sessions were undertaken with the Councils Customer Service staff, and the operational workforce from the recycling and waste team which included what the new service looked like, the reasons for change, what was expected from collecting materials, how containers were to be left after collection, and how to look for and manage any contamination which may be present. In terms of crew engagement and buy-in to the changes, and to equip them with the information they needed when engaging with residents during collections, these sessions were an important part of the implementation plan. Similar sessions will be a regular feature of the management of the service moving forward.

4. Implementation.

- 4.1 The first twin stream collection took place on Monday 8th June from the Knutton and Silverdale areas, with the first full week on the twin stream system commencing from the 27th July, effectively two months ahead of the original plan.
- 4.2 From the outset, the new, simplified service was received very positively by residents and participation and presentation was very good from the start.
- 4.3 The separate food waste service was recommenced in mid-August.
- 4.4 This milestone now means the Council has a full range of recycling and waste collection service operational again, but is now more efficient and effective in its day to day delivery, and better able to cope with shifting demands moving forward.

5. Resident Feedback and Performance & Future Development.

5.1 Resident feedback

Feedback from residents has been very positive, with the Council receiving a high number of compliments made officially through the Councils corporate complaints and compliments system. Compliments included several for the sterling job done over lockdown, happy to be recycling more plastic, new recycling system is easier, leaflet is great, really like the new bins and bags. Additionally, feedback from collection crews is that they have been told by numerous of residents just how much they prefer the new recycling system as it's easy to use, and looks tidier on the streets both before and after collections.

As well as compliments received during the roll out and implementation of the new service, out of over 53,000 deliveries, the Council received 40 complaints, mainly around the changeover of collections, and 143 comments, which were mainly about what to do with the old recycling boxes

5.2 Recycling performance

Recycling performance has increased both in terms of participation and tonnage. The addition of pots tubs and trays (PTT) to the mix of plastic has also had a positive benefit. Comparing July and Augusts collection tonnage when compared to the same period on an average for the last

three years shows an increase of 22.02% in tonnage terms. There has also been a corresponding drop in residual waste tonnage over the same period which is really encouraging.

Feedback from our processing contractor, Biffa, is that the material we are supplying to them is of a high quality with less than 1% contamination, or none target materials. This is excellent feedback and demonstrates the effectiveness of the Councils communications in explaining to residents how to use this much simplified collection service. Close monitoring and control of contamination is vital, as it can lead to rejection of loads from the MRF, which incurs high costs, as the material has to be disposed of to landfill or incineration.

5.3 Garden Waste service performance

Garden Waste performance, is very positive. In 2019 we achieved a subscription rate of 50% of those who were eligible for garden waste collections, this has increased to 52% during 2020. The tonnage of garden waste collected is very good achieving 75% of the tonnage collected from an average of the previous three years, when the free garden waste service was in place. The quality of the material sent for composting is also very high, and has improved from 2019 onwards.

5.4 Future Development – Flats, schools and commercial waste recycling

With the rollout of the new recycling and food waste collections to houses now complete, attention has turned to future development of the service to residents and businesses. These developments include: -

- Refreshing and enhancing recycling provision and collections for flats,
- Refreshing and enhancing recycling provision, and initiating separate food collections to schools,
- Developing an options appraisal and financial model for the introduction of commercial waste recycling and separate food waste collection services to businesses within the borough.

5.5 Future development – Material processing contract

A procurement exercise is now proposed to replace the existing contract after the end of March 2022. The procurement exercise will be completed by March 2021, which will allow the Council to look and consider its options for the processing of materials it collects. The new contract is suggested for a period of five years, with options for extension, to allow a further longer term County wide solution to be developed and evaluated. Approval is therefore sought for the Council to be part of the SWP procurement process.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1** The Council has a legal duty, to provide collection services for none recyclable waste, and to collect separately four streams of recycling, namely, paper/card (fibre), metal, plastic, and glass all free of charge. The Council has no statutory responsibility to provide garden waste collection services, and can make a charge for doing so if it so wishes.
- 6.2** Currently the Council does not have any statutory recycling targets imposed by Central Government; however there is a service level agreement with the County Council to deliver recycling levels above 50% as part of their PFI arrangements for their Energy from Waste Plant in the South of the County.
- 6.3** The new Recycling and food waste collection service will meet the forthcoming government legislation and guidance, in achieving consistency in recycling collections across England, and mandatory separate food waste collections.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1** An equality impact assessment has been completed for the new recycling and food waste collection service.
- 7.2** The nature of the new recycling service designs out many of the manual handling issues raised by residents with the previous box-based service, and resident accessibility for service use was a key part of the planning process. Issues raised included those around residents without English as a first language (which we address through clear, simple language and image-based messages), disability (we raised this on the leaflet delivered with the new containers to reassure existing assisted collection customers and raise the availability of help for other residents who may find the help useful – and noted a rise in applications for help during the container roll-outs), and rurality (properties accessed down un-adopted tracks receive visits to identify collection points which work for residents and the collection operation, especially where an assisted collection is subsequently requested)

8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1** There are no new financial and resource issues resulting from this report. The budget for the new recycling and food waste collection service has been built up from base between officers from the recycling and waste service and financial services departments. The new waste budget was approved as part of the 2020/21 Revenue Budget.

9. Major Risks

- 9.1** A comprehensive Risk Register was developed, and remains live, for the development and introduction of the new recycling and separate food waste collection service. The Covid pandemic, and its effects became an integral part of the risk register during this year and was used to help shape the control measures to ensure an effective and reliable service was maintained, and to take account of the new service rollout.
- 9.2** High level risks remaining are those to do with managing the Covid pandemic and implications of any further waves or local lockdowns, particularly with regard to staffing levels, safe service operation, and maintaining full service provision. Additionally contamination needs to be continually monitored and managed to ensure the Council minimises the risk of rejected loads from the MRF, and the associated financial consequences.

10. Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

- 10.1** The new recycling and separate food waste collection service uses less vehicles than the previous collection service. The processing contract looks towards focused re-processing of materials in the UK and this will be further enhanced as part of the SWP procurement process which will also advocate closed loop recycling achieved within the UK.
- 10.2** This direction of travel will support national government targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and will help deliver the UK's circular economy strategy, and ensuring 65% of packaging waste is recycled.

11. Key Decision Information

N/A

12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

12.1 Cross-party task and finish group recommendations to Cabinet for a new recycling and separate food waste collection service – July 2018

12.2 Cabinet approval of cross-party task and finish group recommendations to Cabinet for a new recycling and separate food waste collection service – September 2018

13. List of Appendices

None

14. Background Papers

None