

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO CABINET**

18th MARCH 2025

Report Title: Expansion of Recycling Materials Collected to Include Flexible Plastics & Cartons

Submitted by: Service Director Sustainable Environment

Portfolios: Sustainable Environment

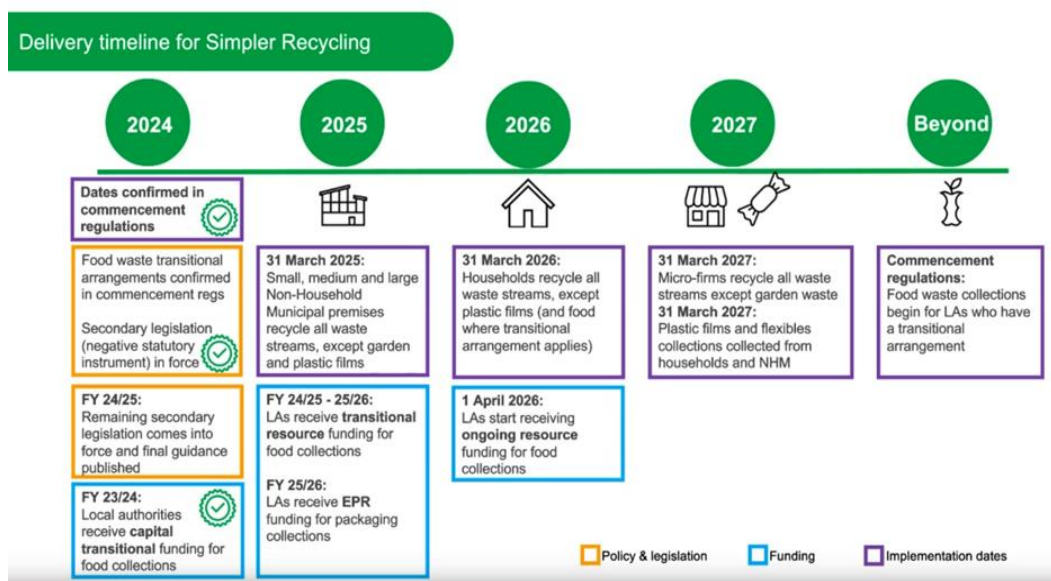
Ward(s) affected: All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes x	No
To gain Cabinet approval to include the collection of flexible plastics (film, wrappers, bags) and cartons to the Councils existing kerbside recycling collection scheme from April 2025, two years ahead of the government's mandatory requirement under 'Simpler Recycling' for collection of these materials in April 2027.			
<u>Recommendation</u>			
That Cabinet: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agrees to the inclusion of collecting flexible plastics (film wrappers, bags) and cartons into the Councils existing kerbside recycling collection service.• Approves that the Council works in partnership with Stafford Borough Council (subject to its Cabinet approval) and Veolia to communicate to residents on the inclusion of these additional materials with the existing dry recycling collection service.			
<u>Reasons</u>			
All local Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) in England are required to comply with the governments 'Simpler Recycling' policy announced in 2023, which aims to ensure a consistent approach across the country in the materials collected for recycling and enhancing Circular Economy principles.			

1. Background

- 1.1** Simpler Recycling is a government policy designed to ensure a consistent set of materials is collected through kerbside recycling schemes across councils in England, avoiding the current variation and aiming to increase recycling rates and quality of material captured.
- 1.2** This policy developed from Consistent Collections, first proposed in 2018. This became Simpler Recycling in 2023 to move away from the costly and impractical implementation of complete source separation of materials at the kerbside, as was proposed initially.

- 1.3** Simpler Recycling will also introduce the widespread collection of food waste, flexible plastic (films), and cartons for recycling from households, and require businesses to have their waste separated and collected for recycling.
- 1.4** These changes are to be introduced starting from April 2025, staggered so that all changes are in place by April 2027.
- 1.5** This long-awaited guidance clarifies several positions and detail on the Simpler Recycling legislation due to begin from April 2025.
- 4 bins as standard and separate paper/card collections
- 1.6** DEFRA has announced that the new default requirement for most households will be to have 4 containers. These will be for:
- Residual (non-recyclable) waste
 - Food waste (weekly / separate)
 - Paper and Card
 - All other dry recyclable materials (plastic, metal, and glass)
- 1.7** **Dry Recycling Collections** - The Councils twin stream recycling collection service introduced in 2020 is fully compliant with the Simpler Recycling regulations. This legal default position on service provision is that authorities separate paper and card collections from glass cans and plastic is a positive decision, particularly in efforts to ensure higher quality of material, helping achieve successful circular economy principles within the material supply chain.
- 1.8** **Separate Food Waste Collections** - The Council has collected food waste separately weekly since 2010 and was one of the first authorities in England to do so. Again, the Council is compliant as it already provides this service, the only requirement being the service needs to be accessible to all households, and up to now the Council has not provided separate food waste collections to flats within the borough. This is being actioned currently, with the rollout of bins to all flat locations which will be completed during 2025.
- 1.9** **Timeline** – In December 2024 secondary legislation implementing the policy updates was laid before government and approved.
- 31 March 2025: Businesses and relevant non-domestic premises in England will need to arrange for the collection of the core recyclable waste streams (glass, metal, plastic, paper and card, and food waste), except for garden waste.
 - 31 March 2026: Local authorities will be required to collect the core recyclable waste streams from all households in England. This includes introducing weekly food waste collections for households unless transitional arrangement has been agreed.
 - 31 March 2027: Kerbside flexible plastics & film collections from households, businesses, and relevant non-domestic premises, will be introduced.
 - 31 March 2027: Micro-firms (businesses with fewer than 10 FTE employees) will become in scope of the requirements for businesses, set out for 31 March 2025.



2. Issues & Proposal

- 2.1** Collecting additional plastics and cartons does not necessarily pose a problem operationally. The Councils twin stream service introduced in 2020 allows flexibility in accommodating additional materials as and when government legislation requires Councils to collect them, and or markets become available for those materials to be effectively recycled. However, the precise effect on vehicle capacity is difficult to calculate at this stage, as the material is quite bulky, but squashes down relatively easily, and is light in terms of tonnage. It is possible vehicles could fill up more quickly, however the service is about to commence a new round of route optimisation work, which this additional material can be built into. Furthermore, the Council will be training staff in use of the route optimisation system, allowing ongoing changes to be made to reflect changing circumstances.
- 2.2** The issue traditionally with flexible plastics and film as well as cartons, is that there are no reliable end markets for the material, and processing plants capable of recycling these materials are limited. Currently there is one in the UK for cartons, and a small number dealing with flexibles. It is for this reason that material recovery facilities (MRF) who we use for initial processing of the dry mixed recycling (DMR) glass cans and plastic, do not currently universally accept these materials.
- 2.3** The Council currently has a contract with Veolia for MRF provision using its facility in Four Ashes in the south of the County. Paper and card is sold directly by the Council into paper and card mills.
- 2.4** The contract for MRF provision was procured as part of a Staffordshire Waste Partnership (SWP) initiative for all waste collection authorities in Staffordshire, (except Stoke and Staffordshire Moorlands) as we all now operate the same twin stream collection service. The contract was awarded to three providers dependent on location. Of all the WCA's in Staffordshire, the Council and Stafford Borough Council use the Veolia MRF. Our contract with Veolia runs to August 2027, but has a potential one-year extension.

- 2.5** Veolia approached both Councils about our plans to collect flexible plastic film and cartons, which was timely, as we as a Council needed to understand what they as a company were proposing to do in having to handle these materials through their MRFs when collections become mandatory in 2027. Their existing MRF at Four Ashes requires investment in its processing infrastructure to be able to separate flexible plastics and films as well as cartons in an effective way which provides clean uncontaminated material which then is capable of being reprocessed back into the supply chain.
- 2.6** To ensure any redesign of their processing arrangements at Four Ashes is effective, Veolia need to understand the quantities and volumes these additional materials will produce in their operation. To facilitate this, discussion has taken place with the Council and Stafford Borough Council as to whether we would be prepared to implement collections of flexible plastic and film as well as cartons ahead of the 2027 mandatory date. Veolia will then use both Councils inputs to design the most effective way to separate flexibles and cartons. Veolia operates a number of its own plastic reprocessing plants in the UK and is actively looking to develop reliable end markets for flexible plastics and film.
- 2.7** The approach has been partly made due to the fact the quality and lack of contamination of the DMR we collect is good, which is a credit to our residents, and the communications the Council continually puts out around its recycling service.
- 2.8** The Council have said, subject to Cabinet approval, that it is willing to collect these additional materials as soon as possible, on the understanding Veolia will accept them on a permanent basis ahead of the 2027 deadline. Veolia have agreed to this. Stafford Borough Council are also proposing the change to include flexible plastics and cartons into their dry recycling collection service, subject to their Cabinet approval.
- 2.9** It is proposed that from April 2025 both Councils add collections of flexible plastics and film, together with cartons to their DMR collections in the blue bins. The Council will work with Stafford Borough council and Veolia in producing joint and consistent communications to residents, which fully fits in with the governments Simpler Recycling ethos and demonstrates effective cross authority and private sector partnership working in building circular economy principles in looking at the materials we collect as a valuable resource and not as waste.
- 2.10** As part of the communication plan for residents, bin stickers will be put onto the lids of the blue bins, advertising the fact that the Council now collects flexible plastic and film as well as cartons, in addition to the existing range of materials. Thought has also been given to putting stickers on to the residual (grey) bins advising residents not to put food waste or recyclable waste into those bins.
- 2.11** It is worth noting that the Council will also be introducing its business waste recycling service to businesses in the borough. This service mirrors the household recycling service and will include flexible plastics and films.
- 2.12** Residents are keen to recycle and have engaged positively with the twin stream system introduced in 2020. With addition of these materials into a

comprehensive recycling collection stream, there will be very little waste requiring residual disposal, therefore further shifting the emphasis on collections away from residual (grey bin) waste to more sustainable recycling and organic processing of material back into valuable commodities. The Council needs to ensure it minimises residual (grey bin waste) by following its agreed policies in the provision of 180ltr bins, which must be presented by residents with the bin lid closed, and no additional side waste.

3. **Recommendation**

- 3.1 That Cabinet agrees to the inclusion of collecting flexible plastics (film wrappers, bags) and cartons into the Councils existing kerbside recycling collection service.
- 3.2 That the Council works in partnership with Stafford Borough Council (subject to their Cabinet approval) and Veolia to produce effective and consistent communications to residents for the inclusion of these additional materials with the existing dry recycling collection service.

4. **Reasons**

- 4.1 Mandatory collection of flexible plastics, films and cartons comes into force in 2027 for English local authorities under the governments Simpler Recycling legislation. The Council has been ahead of most English authorities in collecting separate food waste since 2010, well ahead of this being a mandatory requirement. The opportunity to collect flexible plastics, films, and cartons some two years ahead of the mandatory requirement further strengthens the council's commitment in being a leading authority in sustainability and circular economy principles.

5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 The Council could wait until it is required to collect flexible plastic, film, and cartons in 2027, however given the opportunity and small cost for implementation two years early, it is recommended that this initiative goes ahead without delay.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 Under the governments Resource and Waste Strategy, and the subsequent conditions under the Environment Act 2021, the Council is required to carry out mandatory collections of a number of materials for recycling as well as separate food waste and garden waste.
- 6.2 The default service for recycling collections is a twin stream system with paper and card separate from the other materials, separate weekly food waste, and garden waste which a collection charge can be made. The Council already satisfies these requirements, and with the addition of flexible plastic, film, and cartons will be fully compliant two years ahead of the mandatory requirement.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1** A full and detailed equality impact assessment was undertaken as part of the new twin stream recycling collection service when it became operational in 2020. The addition of flexible plastics, film and cartons has no negative implications on the existing assessment.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1** There are no additional resource requirements in terms of vehicles and crews to accommodate the addition of flexible plastic, film, and cartons into the collections. There will be additional activity within the Councils Transfer Station at Knutton Lane in dealing with the additional material, but this can be handled within the existing resources.
- 8.2** Veolia have confirmed there will be no additional cost to the gate fee for them taking the additional material for processing.
- 8.3** Funding will be required for the communication to residents in the form of bin stickers for all the blue recycling bins within the borough. The cost of this is estimated at £4,500 Stickers will be placed on bins by the collection crews, assisted by some additional resource in the form of casual employees. The cost of this is estimated as £8,000.
- 8.4** Flexible plastics film and cartons will be classified as packaging, and therefore fall under Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) payments and not recycling credits. The Council will therefore not receive any additional funding under EPR at this time but will seek assurances from DEFRA that it is included at the appropriate time.

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

- 9.1** Not complying with government legislation would bring the Council into serious disrepute.
- 9.2** Under EPR the Council is obligated to provide effective and efficient collections of packaging waste. If it does not, then up to 20% of its EPR payment can be withheld in any year.
- 9.3** Collecting flexible plastic, film and cartons early will boost the Councils recycling performance for packaging recovery and show commitment in wanting to support the principles of a circular economy, and helping packaging producers meet their statutory obligations.

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)



11. One Council

Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

One Commercial Council

One Digital Council

- The Sustainable Environments service operational and development teams will make full use of the digital resources available and forthcoming to provide effective communications and up to date information to residents.

One Green Council

- Increasing the range of materials collected as part of the recycling collection service, therefore removing them from the residual (grey bin) waste stream puts the focus of the collection service further up the waste hierarchy.
- Recycling waste has a positive impact in lowering carbon emissions for the Council and the wider borough. It also promotes and contributes to the development of circular economy principles.

12. Key Decision Information

12.1 This is a key decision as it affects all wards in the Councils jurisdiction.

13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

13.1 September 2019 cabinet approval for new twin stream recycling collection service

13.2 June 2021 Cabinet approval for award of contract for processing dry mixed recycling to Veolia

14. **List of Appendices**

14.1 Appendix 1 - Sample bin sticker

15. **Background Papers**

15.1 None



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Cartons, loose plastic bags, films and wrappers

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