

5 July 2018		ITEM: 6
Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Recycling - Current position and planned actions		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Report for noting	
Report of: Claire Harvey, Strategic Lead – Waste Services		
Accountable Assistant Director: Daren Spring, Assistant Director		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers, Director Environment and Highways		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Thurrock Council, like many other local authorities in the UK, is experiencing a decline in its levels of recycling. More stringent monitoring, by processors of recycled materials, as the global market prices decline has seen an increase in the levels of contamination being reported.

The recycling rate reported over the last five years has dropped 4% from 40.93% in 2013/14 to 36.97% in 2017/18. In the last 12 months however, the recycling rate has remained at the level in 2016/17 and demonstrates that the interventions being actioned by the council has impacted to mitigate the declines. The key focus of the activity has been an ongoing and dedicated communication programme across a number of channels.

Evidence and experience from other authorities has also confirmed that there are two key service changes which lead to improvements in recycling rates achieved: smaller residual bins for all residents and fortnightly residual waste collections. Thurrock Council remain committed to weekly collections and there are no plans for change.

The key approach for this coming year will focus on increasing recycling rates and improving the quantity and quality of dry recycling material by reducing the levels of contamination and targeting communications to poor performing areas.

- 1. It is recommended that Cleaner Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**
 - 1.1 receive this report for information and comment;**
 - 1.2 and receive a report back on the proposed pilot scheme in due course**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Thurrock Council as a Unitary Authority has a statutory obligation under the Environmental Act 1990 to arrange for the collection and disposal of waste. The Council discharges these obligations by operating a weekly, in-house waste collection service for all streams.
- 2.2 Waste disposal is contracted to separate companies; general waste is sent to FCC Environment for Energy from Waste incineration, kitchen and garden waste is sent to Biffa for composting, wood waste from the HWRC is sent to SUEZ for processing and mixed dry recycling is sent to Bywaters for sorting and onward processing. The combined annual disposal cost to the Council is approximately £7.5million.
- 2.3 The Council has two options in managing the cost of disposal. The first is to reduce the overall volume of waste generated by each household and the second is to increase levels of recycling, re-use and composting. The table below details the current variations in gate fees for the three streams of kerbside collections:

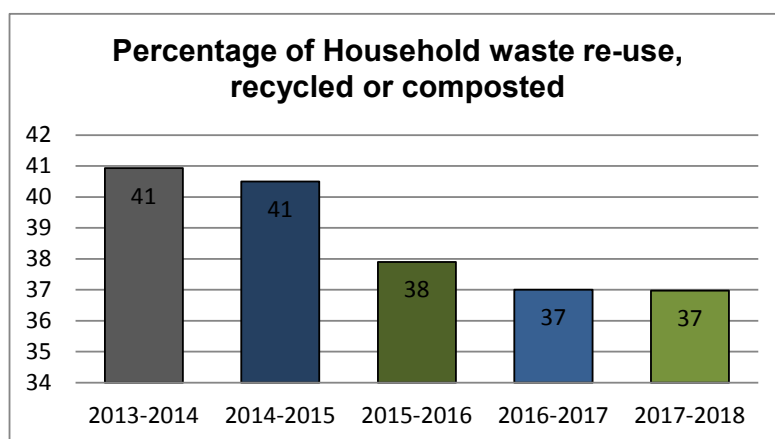
Collection Stream	Cost per tonne*
Residual Waste (grey/green bins)	£100
Dry Recycling (blue bins)	£72
Kitchen and Garden Waste (brown bins)	£60

**Gate fees listed above are indicative only. There are a variety of factors that influence the costs paid for disposal, particularly dry recycling, including commodity value and level of contamination.*

- 2.4 The Revised Waste Framework Directive 2011 set a 50% recycling target for waste from households. The Government Review of waste policy in England 2011 also stated *'To ensure England delivers its share of the UK target, Government must continue to work closely with local authorities.....'we want, and expect, recycling rates to continue to improve across the board it is not the intention to use the UK Waste Framework Directive target to set a 50% recycling benchmark for every local authority'*. There has been no subsequent change to this policy so this is the prevailing expectation.

Thurrock has set a target of 41% of all household waste to be recycled, re-used and composted in 2018-19 which is well below the 50% target and more needs to be done to improve Thurrock's performance.

- 2.5 The table below shows the change in recycling performance over the past 5 years. The decline in recycling rate over the 5 years is 4%, with performance in the last 12 months remaining at the level in 2016/17



3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 There are a number of contributing factors that have influenced the decline in recycling rates nationally. These include the Courtauld agreement which many manufacturers have voluntarily signed up to. This has resulted in significant reductions in the weight of packaging. Likewise, the increased use of technology has seen a massive decline in the purchasing of newspapers and magazines, which have inevitably impacted on one of the heaviest commodities, paper, being presented for recycling. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that suggest householders have become complacent to recycling messages.

3.2 For a number of years the WRAP Recycling Tracker survey has identified confusion amongst householders on what can/can't be recycled. The 2016 survey highlights that:

- Two thirds of households (66%) express uncertainty about how to correctly dispose of one or more items.
- Almost half (49%) of UK households dispose of one or more items in the residual bin that are collected for recycling in their area.
- Just over two-thirds (68%) of UK households add one or more items to their recycling collection that are not accepted locally.
- Only one in eight households (12%) do not put any items in the residual bin that could be recycled, nor do they put any items in the recycling that are not accepted.

Overall the consumer testing undertaken by WRAP revealed a low level of awareness amongst householders of the many items that are currently not recyclable. It also highlighted how detailed and complicated recycling can be to householders. Significantly, householders revealed that Local Authorities provide too much information on what can and cannot be recycled. Their recommendation is that Council's should target their communications, focusing on materials of low capture, materials that are often incorrectly placed in recycling and behaviours that have the most beneficial impact.

3.3 It is important to note that the Council has been and will continue to take further proactive steps to actively encourage and educate residents to recycle more.

3.4 Activities that have been ongoing over the past 12 months that have aimed to increase recycling rates, but in effect have resulted in slowing decline, are:

- Recycling messages have been re-enforced and communicated to all residents with Council Tax information.
- The new fleet of refuse collection vehicles have all been fitted with boards, promoting recycling messages.



- Primary school children in the Borough were given an opportunity to enter the name a vehicle competition, the key theme being recycling, increasing awareness and encouraging family discussion.



- The winning pictures are displayed on the sides of the vehicles with the winning names on the front of each vehicle.

The success of this campaign was captured by Essex Radio and local media covering the story, again broadening the reach and reminding audiences of the importance of recycling.

Further success was observed through a number of the schools requesting that the Waste Service conduct “Recycling Assemblies” to further explore the topics and re-enforce the actions that everyone can take at home. The images below are from some of the winning entries:



- Through the “Next Top Boss” programme, schools participated in presenting promotional and marketing campaigns on the challenge of contamination in communal bin stores.
- On a weekly basis social media messages are published; this is part of an ongoing “Recycle It” campaign.

3.5 Key actions for this coming year will focus on increasing recycling rates and improving the quantity and quality of dry recycling material by reducing the levels of contamination and targeting communications to poor performing areas.

3.6 To minimise the impact of contamination, recycling collection loaders are currently required to undertake a visual inspection of the contents of the bin before it is emptied into the refuse vehicle. If there is found to be non-targeted items present the bin remains unemptied and the back office staff notified. When the customer contacts the Council to report a missed collection the householder is advised why the bin has not been emptied and what needs to be done to ensure a collection is made on the next scheduled visit.

3.7 Initiatives that have been or are in the process of being implemented and piloted are listed below:

- **Bin tagging** – In response to feedback from residents and Councillors, the below programme will be rolled out in phases from August, in line with technology implementation. In advance there will be communication of the scheme to all residents, reminding them of what materials should and should not be in their recycling bins and advising them of the process: -

Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bins identified as contaminated, after a visual inspection, will be marked with “Oops!” stickers alerting residents that materials have not been disposed of in the appropriate bin, the main causes of contamination and links to the website for more detailed information. • This will be preceded by a clear campaign detailing the reasons for the stickers and confirming that bins with stickers will continue to be emptied where contamination is minimal.
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the implementation of back office software and with waste collection crews starting to use in-cab devices to record instances of contamination, there will be an opportunity to increase engagement levels with residents.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once the system is fully functioning, residents whose bins have had stickers attached will receive detailed recycling information via the post, reminding them of the importance of presenting their waste in the appropriate bins.
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data capture will enable us to identify individual properties which are not responding to the “oops” sticker and the follow up advice/information sent. The analysis will then inform whether further more stringent actions are required to influence residents to reduce contamination. Actions that could be considered vary from the non-emptying of recycling bins, while residents remove the contamination, to the potential use of Environmental enforcement powers. Prior to any action being taken proposals will be considered by Cleaner, Greener, Safer Overview and Scrutiny committee

- Action for multi-occupancy / communal buildings** - The following measures will be implemented to offer greater opportunities for residents and increase the likelihood of quality recycling being presented correctly:
 - A review of bin stores and facilities to ensure that recycling bins are clearly identified and accessible for residents. This will include the provision of clear sided recycling bins, as a pilot. Evidence supports that if residents can see that recycling is of good quality, they are less likely to contaminate.
 - Engagement with Managing Agents to ensure that clear recycling information is displayed with the bins. Image signs have been proven to be very effective, particularly where there are non-English speaking residents.
 - Engagement with Resident Associations (RA) to encourage tenants to become recycling champions, promoting the importance of recycling, educating them in the appropriate material for recycling, key contaminants and the reporting of issues and problems that may arise in their block.
- Review of recycling options and actions that can be tailored to Thurrock's demographic and current waste collection arrangements –**
 - External advice is being sought on tailored schemes that are more likely to have the greater impact on Thurrock residents. Procurement is underway and it is anticipated that the review will commence in August 2018 with a report and action plan toward the end of the calendar year.
- The “Recycle It” Communication Plan** – Based on previous work and reviews of recycling in Thurrock, a detailed communications plan has been developed and is being delivered. This has been included as Appendix 1 of this report.

Summary

- 4.1 The opportunities many authorities have taken to fundamentally reduce the amount of residual waste being presented, resulting in increased recycling rates

are not being considered for Thurrock as the Council and its residents continue to be committed to weekly waste collections.

Increasing recycling rates will therefore continue to be a challenge for the authority and it relies heavily on communication, education and most importantly the willingness and participation of our residents to reduce contamination and increase recycling.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 This report is an overview of recycling in Thurrock, including the current position and planned actions No consultation was required or undertaken.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The implications of the recommendations in this report may require a review of local policies and procedures.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Management Accountant (Environment and Highways)

This report is for noting and there are no actions at this time that have an immediate impact for the Council.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Monitoring Officer

There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

There are no implications for equality and diversity arising from this report.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

There are no other implications arising from this report.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- There are no background papers used in preparing this report.

9. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 - 'Recycle It' Communications Plan

Report Author:

Claire Harvey

Strategic Lead – Waste Services

Environment & Highways

‘Recycle it’

‘Recycle it’ is the overarching behaviour change campaign around household waste. It seeks to assist the service in addressing issues including;

- Recycling rates
- Contaminated bins
- Blocked access
- Missed collections

Aims

- Increase recycling rates in the borough
- Reduce the number of contaminated collections
- Reduce the number of failed collections due to blocked access
- Improve the communications around missed bin collections

Initiative	Activity	Progress	Delivery Date
Website refresh	Prominent position on the website. Make it simpler (fewer steps if possible) to find out if something is recyclable	COMPLETE	April 2018
	Campaign page for “Recycle it” in the same way we have a page for ‘Clean It, Cut It, Fill It’, we could have a landing page which features	Findings will be used to create an eye catching web	July 2018

	all the 'Recycle it' key messages and links to service pages with more detail.	page. Ongoing	
WEEE Amnesty	Week-long event for residents to bring old and unwanted electrical items for recycling. Publicity via website, Social Media, libraries and hubs. Donation locations publicised across the borough.	COMPLETE	January 2018
Recycling bags at Christmas	Opportunity for residents to collect and recycle more over the Christmas/ New Year period. Blue recycling bags distributed to libraries and Community Hubs across the borough, for residents to present side recycling waste for excess recyclables during one of our busiest periods.	COMPLETE	December 2017/ January 2018
Bin Stickers	<p>Contaminated bins will be tagged to tell residents their bins are contaminated</p> <p>Three stage process: <u>First Stage</u> "Oops!" sticker explaining nature of contamination and alerting residents that materials have not been disposed of in the appropriate stream, action required to be left on contaminated bins.</p> <p>This will be preceded by a clear campaign detailing the reasons for the stickers and confirming that bins with hangers will continue to be emptied where contamination is minimal. Briefing created for members, customer services team and recycling crews</p> <p><u>Second Stage</u> With the implementation of Bartec in-cab devices to record instances of contamination, there will be an opportunity for residents whose bins have been tagged with a sticker to receive detailed recycling information via post regarding bin contamination, recycling and action.</p>	<p>Draft designs created. Will be refined, approved and printed.</p> <p>The Bartec system implementation is underway. This will automatically generate letters to residents.</p>	<p>Aug 2018</p> <p>September 2018</p>

	<p><u>Third Stage</u> Monitoring of households not responding to additional information and stickers, further action taken through direct communication with residents, e.g. non emptying of bins until contaminants removed etc. yet to be approved.</p>		November 2018
Imagery	<p>The artwork used in this campaign will be striking and in line with the previously designed infographic, rather than the previous 'Love Thurrock' based design.</p> <p>Items to produce include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poster (A2, A3, A4) • Social Images • Carousel 	Work taking place to create campaign materials to be used consistently across all channels.	Aug 2018
Video content	As well as producing videos of the portfolio holder for environment, we will also use online resources to create bright, vibrant and shareable video content to be used online as part of the 'Recycle It' campaign	Resources	June 2018
Poster campaign	<p>Internal sites, libraries, hubs, community forums, schools, colleges, managing agents, bin stores.</p> <p>Mirroring posters already widely seen on waste collection vehicles</p>	<p>Design and printing to take place.</p> <p>Design and messaging to be created.</p>	<p>July 2018</p> <p>July 2018</p>
Blocked access postcard	<p>Postcard produced with message regarding blocked access</p> <p>Produced and provided to crews to place on poorly parked vehicles when on rounds and for the service to hand deliver to homes in known hotspots.</p>	COMPLETE	May 2018

Vehicle livery	<p>28 new Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs) received in March/ April 2018 feature 'Recycle it' messages aimed at increasing dry recycling rates.</p> <p>Four existing RCVs will feature 'Recycle it' messages aimed at increasing compostable recycling rates. Poster design agreed, awaiting manufacture and installation</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>April 2018</p> <p>July 2018</p>
Resident communication	<p>Regular "Recycle it" articles or promotion in the council's e-newsletter which is distributed to around 13,000 residents every month.</p> <p>Social media campaign Repeated and scheduled posts featuring key recycling messages, shared daily as part of the council's social media activity. Linking back to information on the Thurrock.gov.uk website.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>April 2017</p>
Council tax leaflet	A leaflet which accompanied the council tax bills going to every household in Thurrock included 'Recycle it' key messages, as well as other priority campaigns.	COMPLETE	Feb 2018
Internal Communications	Utilise internal channels to raise awareness of key messages, including Inform, Insight, Thurrock Manager, Chief Exec's blog and posters in the Meet and Eat area.	Ongoing	August 2018
School Competition - Naming the RCV	<p><u>First stage</u> The service engaged with local primary schools as an initiative to raise awareness of recycling, by asking schools to get children to colour in a poster of an RCV, as well as suggest a name for the RCV.</p> <p>The competition was a success receiving more than 1,000 entries from Thurrock pupils. 27 designs now appear on the new fleet of bin</p>	COMPLETE	Jan/ February 2018

	<p>lorries. This received widespread coverage in the local media and will feature in follow-up articles when pupils receive their prizes in the near future.</p> <p><u>Second stage</u> New vehicle manufacturer, Dennis Eagle, has provided prizes for the winning children and post promotion visits to schools will be arranged to present winners with prizes and certificate for winning entry, this opportunity will be used to promote recycling messages and raise the positive profile of the waste collection service.</p>		June/ July 2018
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