

## **Working group; Residual Waste Collection Frequency Report for Joint Waste Management Board; July 2016**

### **Background**

It was decided at the last meeting of the Joint Waste Management Board, in May, that, following discussion on council priorities and areas for consideration, there was interest by many councils in pursuing an investigation into the potential of reducing the frequency of residual waste collections as a method of increasing efficiencies in waste collection and disposal. After the meeting of the Board, the Partnership Manager set up a meeting for councils to opt into according to their own priorities (8 of the 10 councils in SWP opted to take part in the working group).

### **Group meeting**

The working group focusing on residual waste collection frequency met on Wednesday 15th June. The group was attended by Officers from the following councils; Staffordshire County Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Lichfield and Tamworth Joint Waste Service, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, South Staffordshire District Council, and Stoke on Trent City Council, with apologies from Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, who wanted to attend but were unavailable on the day.

The aim of the meeting was to openly discuss the potential for authorities to reduce the frequency of the residual waste collection services. The intention of reducing the collection frequency is to actively discourage people from using this waste stream, instead encouraging the use of the recycling services (i.e. any materials that are recyclable which are currently being thrown away in the residual bin would instead be recycled in the correct bin). Ideally, this would reduce the amount of residual waste being produced and therefore collected, as well as increasing the amount of recycling, thus improving recycling rates. For example, in South Staffordshire, if all residents recycled all possible materials in the blue bin, then the District Council's recycling rate would be approximately 70%. This indicates the potential performance improvements available and highlights the capacity that is available in the residual bin if residents correctly use the recycling services currently available. In theory, the service alteration would reduce collection costs (as operations reduce the number of truck and crews required to carry out the service) and disposal costs (as there is less tonnage), although this is not always the case and savings cannot always be realised, depending on the level of the cost starting point and financial implications of contractual issues.

Colleagues around the table noted that the recent examples of other local authorities in England / Scotland who have undertaken a reduction in service frequency offer a variety of lessons learnt from their processes – these include;

- The need for a weekly separate food waste collection service, to ensure all biodegradable food waste is collected within a suitable time frame, as it is unfeasible to leave food waste uncollected for 3 or 4 weeks. Research from WRAP and other local authorities shows that a separate food waste collection service can be more conducive to high yields compared to a combined food and garden waste service.
- A reduction of service to a collection every 3 weeks have proven the starting point for most authorities undertaking the alteration, however this has led to issues with calendar reading as round scheduling with odd numbers offers a variety of

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inconsistencies for residents. Many councils who undertook 3 weekly residual collections are now moving towards 4 weekly collections due to the simpler approach even numbers offer for communication and consistency (indeed some councils are reducing collection frequency by going straight to 4 weekly collections to avoid the two step process seen with the initial uptake of councils).

- Nappies remains a concern for officers as no specific information on how to tackle biological waste has come from the lessons of councils reducing residual collection frequency. The concern is that nappies will be disposed of into other bins that are collected more frequently.
- Case studies commonly show the need for additional support when undertaking this service alteration, which in many councils has been additional staff for communication / contact centre and door-to-door enforcement / bin checking duties, to ensure a smooth transition and to limit public concerns and therefore any knock on affects to the service has a whole, such as contamination.
- As contamination in the recycling waste streams is a big concern, there is potential here to investigate the option to utilise the enforcement powers of section 46 notices, which have not yet been decriminalised.
- Most council case studies also moved recycling collection frequency to weekly, to further encourage recycling – this would cancel out any collection costs savings as operationally no alteration is taking place (the trucks are still being used, they are simply collecting recycling rather than residual).
- Case studies all indicated disposal savings however all councils which have altered their services currently have very high disposal rates (e.g. £308 per tonne), therefore offering huge savings – it should be noted that SWP has the lowest disposal rate in the country (c.£65 per tonne) and therefore huge savings are unlikely to occur, as those were obtained when new contracts came into force for incineration and landfill was no longer the chosen disposal method (very expensive).

### Key issues to be noted

The group noted a key observation of the current residual waste collection services operating within the Partnership; Authorities have a variety of bin sizes, as some authorities have chosen to replace the standard 240l bins with smaller sizes (140l or 180l) to reduce capacity. Should authorities choose to reduce the frequency of the collection service for residual waste, it is unlikely that these smaller bin sizes would be sufficient, and therefore pose a problem.

When discussing the potential alterations to service, the following knock on affects were noted;

- Overfilling of the residual bin and side waste,
- Additional tonnage taken to HWRCs and any knock on affect to the contract (i.e. Maximum tonnage limits being breached resulting in cost changes etc),
- Increase in fly tipping and any knock on affect to street cleansing services,
- Increase in recycling and garden waste tonnages – either correctly or wrongly, i.e. elevation in contamination and rejected loads, affects to the minimum / maximum

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thresholds as agreed in the contracts, with a knock on affect to costs of disposal and basket of goods value (financial return),

- Changes in recycling rates, and any knock on changes in recycling credits payments,
- Reduction in residual tonnage collected at the kerbside and any knock on affects this will have on the disposal contracts regarding minimum / maximum tonnage thresholds, percentage shares with external partners, and therefore prices.
- Impact on those councils that have contracted out their service as such service alterations constitutes a major contract variation and will require extensive negotiation, depending on the scope and procurement legislation restrictions.
- The efficiencies of round routes will be affected, requiring round modifications, with any significant changes requiring substantial route planning, engagement and communication - many councils have recently re-routed vehicles in recognition of changes to principal disposal points (i.e. Four Ashes incinerator).

From these discussions, it is clear that a reduction in the frequency of the collection of residual waste is not a simple method to cultivate holistic savings whilst increasing the recycling rate, as the validity of such service alteration will depend heavily on the financial viability of knock on affects to other services / contracts resulting in potential financial losses and whether such losses can be recuperated by savings in operational reduction.

### **Plan of action**

The group agreed that the work by WRAP to model the potential for the Partnership to undertake separate food waste collections, along with the work by DEFRA to assess the disposal contract with Veolia for the Four Ashes incinerator, form an integral part of any modelling to assess the viability and cost of reducing residual waste collection frequency. As such, the results of both these pieces of work will be required before a full scoping of residual collection frequency can be done sufficiently. The reports from WRAP and DEFRA are expected to be tabled at the October JWMB meeting, meaning this working group can continue the work thereafter.

Conversations with WRAP also note the potential for basic modelling of a reduction in residual waste collection frequency will be undertaken as part of their work. This will act as a starting point for the councils to undertake more detailed assessment thereafter.

However it is also noted that in the meantime, alongside the WRAP and DEFRA work, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City Council, as the disposal authorities, will work on assessing the limitations of the contracts to allow for any reduction in tonnage as a result of the reduction in collection frequency. The County Council are already underway to develop a model to showcase how any alterations in tonnage being received at the Four Ashes incinerator would affect the contract in terms of percentage shares with the external partners and therefore costs to us. The City Council are undertaking works as part of the procurement of the Hanford incinerator and working with the County Council to develop a more symbiotic relationship for waste flow between the two plants, to offset any alterations in tonnage and ensure maximum benefit to the Staffordshire tax payer.