

1 October 2020		ITEM: 5
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Cross Party Waste Working Group and Municipal Waste Strategy for Thurrock 2021-2031		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Mike Fletcher, Chair of the Cross Party Waste Working Group		
Accountable Assistant Director: Daren Spring, Assistant Director Street Scene and Leisure		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers, Director Environment Highways and Counter Fraud		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

A Cross Party Waste Working Group was formed in August 2019 with the key objective of reviewing the requirements of the Government's waste strategy paper and how the Borough will be able to meet those requirements. The recycle rate referred to is the level of household waste that is re-used, recycled and composted.

Central Government published its Waste, our resources: A Strategy for England in December 2018. It identified a number of proposals designed to drive up recycling performance that has plateaued in England since 2013 at around 45%. The Group considered the statutory implications for the Council which impacts on the way we collect and dispose of our waste. This report provides an overview of the activities of the Working Group.

The key output of the group is the refreshed Waste Strategy and Communication Plan, which have been included as Appendix 1 and 2.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 To note the activities and research undertaken by the Cross Party Working Group.**
 - 1.2 To comment on the refreshed Waste Strategy and Communications Plan, recommending it to Cabinet.**

1.3 To propose that the Cross Party Working Group continue to have a role in reviewing the progress of the implementation of the Waste Strategy.

1.4 To consider as part of the new Waste Strategy how the council can lead by example and act to reduce, and where possible, eliminate single use plastics.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Central Government published its Waste, our Resources: A strategy for England in December 2018. It identified a number of proposals designed to drive up recycling performance. The proposals include: -

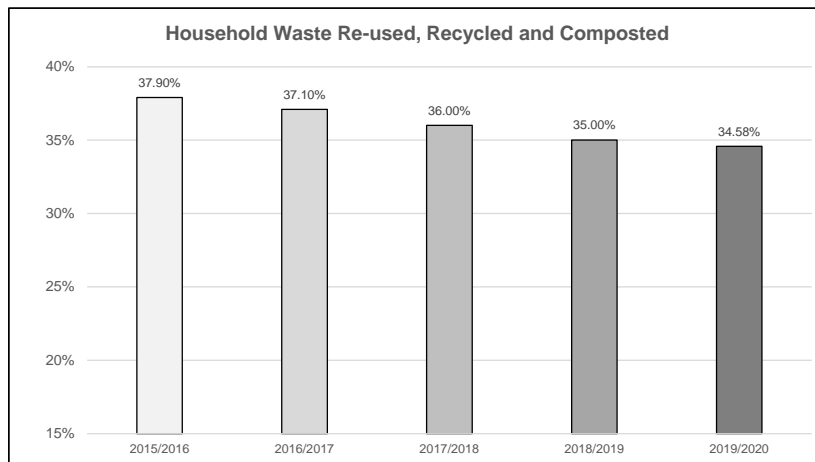
- Improve recycling rates by ensuring a consistent set of dry recyclable materials is collected from all households and businesses;
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from landfill by ensuring that every householder and appropriate businesses have a weekly separate food waste collection, subject to consultation;
- Improve urban recycling rates, working with business and local authorities;
- Improve working arrangements and performance between local authorities.

The National Strategy has a number of statutory implications for the Council that means implementing some changes to the way that we collect and dispose of our waste. These include;

- Provide our residents with separate food waste collections by 2023 (subject to consultation),
- Vastly improve our recycling rate to work towards the 2035 National Recycling Target of 65%,
- Reduce the amount of municipal waste to landfill by 10%,
- Ensure that our dry recycling collections are consistent with Governments requirements and ensure that we are running a cost effective collections system.

2.2 Thurrock has a recycling rate of 34.76% for 2019/20. The National Target for recycling for 2020 is 50%. The national average is 43.2%, with top performing councils reaching 64.5% (East Riding of Yorkshire in 2017/18). In terms of performance rating in comparison to all English authorities, (as published by DEFRA in 2018/19) Thurrock recycled 35% and ranked 265th.

2.3 Despite a number of communication campaigns and strategies being initiated by the Service to increase recycling levels, Thurrock's recycling rate has remained largely static. This is not unique to Thurrock, WRAP, DEFRA and other industry experts advise that the highest recycling improvements are seen where there is a complete service delivery change.



- 2.4 Communication activities have been wide ranging and include; social media campaigns, recycling workshops to all primary schools in the Borough, competitions to name refuse collection vehicles, posters and communication on the side of refuse collection vehicles and the distribution of recycling material to all households through Council tax billing. Efforts have also been made to reduce levels of contamination within the recycling stream through “Oops” bin hangers and follow-up information to households.
- 2.5 A Cross Party Group was established to investigate what further actions and options could be considered by the service that would have a significant impact on recycling levels. The Group has been chaired by Cllr Fletcher with membership including: Cllr Byrne, Cllr Ralph, and Cllr Van Day. Cllr Akinbohun and Cllr Collins attended the first 5 meetings and were then replaced by Cllr Muldowney and Cllr Smith from February 2020.
- 2.6 A number of key areas were investigated by the Working Group including:
- Waste Disposal – understanding what currently happens with household waste collected in Thurrock, including a visit to Bywaters, the current dry recycling disposal point
 - Waste Collections – a review of current service levels and vehicles with a visit to the Depot to better understand working practices.
 - Communications and Education – an overview of all activity that has taken place in the past two years
 - A training event with WRAP, which provided insight into messaging and communication regarding recycling and re-use as well as an overview of the work WRAP are undertaking with Councils across the country looking for standardised recycling collection regimes
 - Household Waste and Recycling Centre redevelopment – an overview of the planned improvements for the site including a visit to the site to better understand the changes and scope for services such as a re-use centre and commercial waste facility
 - Flats recycling project – understanding and supporting the work that is currently underway to ensure that all flatted properties within the Borough have access to dry recycling service collections

- Benchmarking – details were provided regarding the collection regimes maintained by other Councils and their recycling performance.
- A review of the National Waste Strategy with a view to understanding implications for waste services in Thurrock

All of these activities were supported by research and data provided both by officers and recognised Waste Service experts.

- 2.7 In order to ensure that residents' views and opinions were considered, a comprehensive consultation of all residents was undertaken between January and March 2020. Residents were notified of the call for responses through a postcard delivered to each household. This was followed with a further posting to all residents that included stickers for recycling bins details of materials that could be recycled, a recycling information leaflet and details of the consultation. The response rate to the consultation was in line with similar consultations carried out in other Boroughs, although a statistically sound consultation will have a response rate of 10%. In total Thurrock received 684 completed surveys, equating to 1% of residents which may not reflect a wider community approach. Referenced as Appendix 3.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The service residents are accustomed to in Thurrock is a weekly collection of refuse, recycling and combined food and garden waste. The service cost just over £13.8m (£6m for collection and £7.8m for disposal) per annum.
- 3.2 The waste consultation outlined that residents would prefer to retain weekly collections, however also demonstrated that bin capacity would allow for less frequent collections. Residents were also accepting of less frequent collections for garden waste, especially in the winter months.
- 3.3 The working group reviewed the highest performing recycling authorities, their collection frequency and waste stream collections. This demonstrated that the higher performing authorities have moved away from weekly collections to a range of alternate collection frequencies. Of the 345 (2017/18 figures) local authorities in England, currently 75% of them collect household waste using some form of fortnightly residual waste or alternate weekly collection-regime for residual, dry-recycling and garden waste and have recycling rates of over 40%.
- 3.4 A number of Council's are now operating three and four weekly collections, have moved to less frequent food waste collections and are carrying out source separated collections for dry recycle.
- 3.5 The Working Group, taking into account resident feedback, discounted source separation collections to minimise the number of waste receptacles required at each residents home. They also discounted less frequent collections than two weekly, as the change was considered to have to great an impact on residents. The following options were considered by the group, in more detail,

in view of the national strategy, incorporating a separate food collection weekly, the need to ensure every property has the opportunity to recycle and the desire to improve Thurrock's recycling performance overall: -

Baseline	Current Collection	Option 1	Option 2		Option 3	
	Weekly collection of Refuse, Recycling, Free Combined Food and Garden Waste	Refuse and Recycling (weekly) Garden Waste - Free (alt weekly)	Food Waste (weekly) Refuse (weekly) Recycling (weekly) Garden Waste - Paid for (alt weekly)	A- Food waste (weekly) Recycling (weekly) Refuse (alt weekly) Garden Waste - Free (alt weekly)	B- Food waste (weekly) Recycling (weekly) Refuse (alt weekly) Garden Waste - Paid for (alt weekly)	A- Food Waste (weekly) Recycling (alt weekly) Refuse (alt weekly) Garden waste - Free (alt weekly)
35.00%	38.20%	38.30%	54.30%	52.00%	50.50%	48.20%

3.6 The majority of Councils have moved to a subscription service for households that require a garden waste service to help offset the growing cost of providing more extensive recycling collections to households. The options marked 'B' are based on a service charge, assuming 50% of existing garden waste households take up the garden waste service option.

3.7 As a consequence of staff availability and distancing measures during the pandemic the weekly food and garden waste service was initially suspended and then reintroduced monthly and now fortnightly with residents asked to put their food waste in their residual bins. 100% of bins were being presented every week with an increased amount of waste due to lockdown, residents homeworking and home schooling which has resulted in increased tonnage being collected and capacity issues with the fleet.

3.8 The Working Group discounted all 'B' options, charged for garden waste service.

4. Conclusion of the Working Group

4.1 Based on the collection options reviewed and results of the consultation, the Working Group has identified two key approaches that they are confident will positively impact the recycling rate.

4.2 The first approach is to ensure that Thurrock have a refreshed Waste Strategy that is compliant and aligned with National Policy. The approach outlined in the Strategy includes changes to domestic collections that will be implemented on a phased approach and which will have implications for disposal contracts and vehicles. In summary key aspects of the Waste Strategy include:

- Replacing residual waste collections with a new weekly food waste collection to all households, with the associated supporting containers, and an alternate weekly residual collection. The benefit of this change, which has been adopted successfully at many Councils, is that it encourages residents to consider more carefully what can be recycled and to ensure that they have capacity in their residual bins for items that can only be disposed of in that way.
- Retaining the weekly collections of co-mingled dry recycling
- Retaining the fortnightly collections of garden waste
- Redevelopment of the Household Waste and Recycling Centre
- Review of Thurrock's waste collection fleet to ensure a reduction in carbon footprint and fuel usage whilst ensuring that we achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness.
- Ensuring that any future waste disposal contract negotiations include the following principles:
 - Reduction in distance travelled to disposal sites
 - Identifying opportunities for additional recycling and re-use
 - Ensuring a reduction in waste sent to landfill
- Reducing the occurrence of single use plastics within the Borough and within Council activities where the use of alternatives should be prioritised. This will require a detailed work programme covering all service areas and operations, with specific focus required from procurement and communications.
- Investigate the feasibility of creating a transfer station within Thurrock to support alternative disposal options
- Investigate the feasibility of building an energy recovery facility in the Borough as both a means of reducing disposal costs for residual waste and generating income.

4.3 The second principle is to ensure that throughout the implementation of the Waste Strategy, the service is consistently looking to Educate and Empower residents to recycle and reuse, with enforcement as a final option to be considered, only where the other two approaches have been applied.

4.4 The group appreciate that the proposed strategy will have an impact on the council's waste collection operating model and that this is being proposed during exceptional times with the ongoing impact of Covid 19 on service delivery still to be understood. We would therefore proposed that before putting the strategy in place, the council considers any potential impact on jobs or service. Careful planning and risk management approaches will need to be in place to ensure that the changes proposed can be implemented with minimal impact to service levels.

4.5 As with any implementation plan and period of transformation, regular consultation and communication will be held with all impacted by the change. As part of the strategy review work a Waste Communication Strategy is being developed and has been included as Appendix 1.

- 4.6 Following on from the success of the Cross Party Working Group, it is proposed that the group continues to work with the Waste service in an advisory capacity with update meetings to be held 4-6 times a year. This will allow the group to follow the progress of the implementation of the strategy as well as providing review of communications and proposed campaigns.
- 4.7 All options presented to the working group did not include financial costs/savings. The option providing the optimal recycling rate is option 2A, the option recommended by the group, with an anticipated recycling rate of 54.3%. The option presenting the greatest efficiencies for the council is option 3B (weekly food waste, alternate weekly refuse and recycling and a charged for garden waste service).
- 4.8 The Cross Party Working Group is very aware that whilst the proposed changes to collection services will have a positive impact on the recycling rate for Thurrock, they will always impact all residents. It is noted that a robust communications campaign will need to be implemented to ensure that residents understand the impact of the changes for their collections as well as the rationale behind the changes.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 The Waste Strategy and focused education and empowerment campaigns will ensure that Thurrock has a waste collection and disposal regime that provide the optimum opportunity to increase recycling and provide an efficient, effective, compliant and forward thinking service.
- 5.2 The cross party working group recommend the Waste Strategy to CGS O&S to achieve the best outcomes for the borough and on the basis the implementation programme mitigates the impact on employees.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**
**Corporate Director of Finance, Governance
and Property**

High level costings of all of the options have been calculated but are still to be confirmed. The indications are that all options will provide financial savings.

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
**Deputy Head of Law and Deputy Monitoring
Officer**

Any procurement activity relating to changes in service identified in the waste strategy will be carried out in accordance with the Council's own internal governance, including its Contract Procedure Rules, and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Any 'refresh' of the Councils' Waste Strategy would need to be consistent with relevant legislation, central Governments' 25 Year Environment Plan (published 11 January 2018, last updated 16 May 2019), its Resources and Waste Strategy (published 18 December 2018) and any subsequent relevant Government policy.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

A community and equalities impact assessment form has been completed, there are no negative impacts identified on any parts of the community. Care will be taken to ensure all communications are accessible with an increased focus on education and empowerment. The assisted bin collection programme, for those unable to present their bins for collection, will be retained.

7. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Waste Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Waste Communications Strategy
- Appendix 3 - Talking Waste with Thurrock Council – Consultation Report

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