

RECYCLING AND REFUSE POLICIES

<u>Report of the:</u>	Transport & Waste Services Manager
<u>Contact:</u>	Jon Sharpe
<u>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</u>	No
<u>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</u>	N/A
<u>Annexes/Appendices (attached):</u>	None
<u>Other available papers (not attached):</u>	Report to the Environment Committee dated 7 June 2016

REPORT SUMMARY

The Council will be launching its new, weekly recycling and refuse collections, known as 'Simply Weekly Recycling' in Spring 2017. This report proposes the introduction of policies coincident with the launch of the new collections, designed to maximise recycling and minimising refuse.

RECOMMENDATION (S)

- 1) That recycling bins contaminated with unsuitable waste should not be collected until the contamination has been removed by the resident.
- 2) That refuse bins containing large amounts of recyclable waste, or where significant recyclable waste is found on a regular basis, should not be collected on the scheduled collection day, but should instead be collected the following week.
- 3) That residents should be requested not to wrap recycling in black refuse sacks (or other opaque bags) prior to recycling.

Notes

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 Recycling and refuse collections are a flagship service that the Council provides to every household.
- 1.2 Recycling supports the Council's key priorities of Sustainability and Managing Resources.

- 1.3 Recycling saves residents money. Refuse disposal is very expensive, so recycling more reduces refuse costs.

2 Background

- 2.1 'Simply Weekly Recycling' will be launched from spring 2017:



- 2.2 A key aspect of this change is the need to reduce or avoid costs wherever possible. The policies proposed in this report are designed to support that effort in two areas:

2.2.1 Reducing the amount of non-recyclable waste in **recycling bins**

2.2.2 Reducing the amount of recyclable waste in **refuse bins**

2.3 Recycling bins:

2.3.1 Mixed recycling bins – like our current black recycling bin – can tend to see some other waste thrown in as well. This is known as 'contamination'.

2.3.2 Contamination is costly. It must be separated from the general load (at a mechanical sorting plant) and a disposal route found and paid for. This increases the cost of sending the recycling for sorting. The Committee may have seen a BBC article on this subject in August.

2.3.3 Contaminated recycling is not currently a problem within Epsom & Ewell. Our current black bins bring in only a third of our recycling, and the contamination rate is low when compared with other Surrey councils.

2.3.4 But Simply Weekly Recycling brings greater levels of mixed recycling, with paper, cans, card, cartons and plastics all together in the large, green recycling bin. So contamination could become more significant and costly. We must take steps to police it and keep it as low as possible.

2.3.5 This message is already part of our overall communications effort for the new collections, in particular at our twenty-three recent Big Switch roadshows. “Put the right thing in”.

2.4 Refuse bins:

2.4.1 The cost of refuse disposal is borne by Surrey County Council (SCC), and so affects Borough residents through the SCC element of Council Tax.

2.4.2 SCC has made great strides in recent years to reduce its reliance on landfill. Now, only around 6% of Surrey’s total household waste goes to landfill, compared with over 90% a decade or so ago.

2.4.3 But the cost of refuse disposal remains high because the treatment technologies that have replaced landfill, such as energy-from-waste, are expensive.

2.4.4 To illustrate this:

- In 2002/3 92% of our waste was refuse. It was all sent to landfill, and cost around £300,000.
- By 2015/16 only 54% of our waste was refuse. It was sent to energy-from-waste and cost some £1.7 million. Energy-from-waste is certainly cheaper than current landfill costs, but not by much (about £30,000).
- So it can be seen that refuse disposal has become very expensive indeed.

2.4.5 From time to time the contents of refuse bins across Surrey are analysed to show what recyclable waste is being thrown away in them. Officers are currently awaiting the completion of the latest analysis, which takes place every three years or so. The last such analysis in 2013 showed the following recyclable wastes in Epsom & Ewell refuse bins:

- Over 3,000 tonnes a year of recyclable food waste
- Around 600 tonnes a year of recyclable paper
- Over 250 tonnes a year of recyclable clothing, textiles, shoes and accessories
- Around 100 tonnes a year of recyclable glass bottles and jars, and around 80 tonnes of recyclable tins and cans

2.4.6 These tonnages represent a ‘double-whammy’ to residents. The opportunity for recycling income is lost, and refuse disposal costs have to be paid instead. Combined, that amounts to some £570,000 a year at current prices for the above materials.

2.4.7 Clearly, it is in residents' financial interest to recycle more, and to avoid throwing valuable, recyclable waste into their refuse bins. Again, this forms part of our communications programme for the new collections, but it is also sensible to have policies to control this where it continues.

2.5 As a result of these considerations, and the clear imperative to control waste management costs on behalf of residents, the following policies are proposed for adoption coincident with the launch of Simply Weekly Recycling from spring 2017.

3 Proposals

3.1 **Proposal 1:** That recycling bins contaminated with unsuitable waste should not be collected until it has been removed by the resident:

3.1.1 For example, it is financially vital that glass bottles and jars should be recycled separately, in the green box, and not in the mixed recycling bin. This is because glass in the mixed recycling bin would smash and contaminate the other materials around it.

3.1.2 It is also important that non-recyclable waste (or food waste, which cannot be mechanically separated after collection) does not enter the mixed recycling bin. These will simply increase sorting costs, and again reduce the value of our recycling.

3.1.3 The Council provides appropriate containers for household recycling and refuse. Simply Weekly Recycling will make them even simpler than ever to use. Therefore, residents should have little difficulty in ascertaining the correct container for each waste type.

3.2 **Proposal 2:** That refuse bins containing large amounts of recyclable waste, or where significant recyclable waste is found on a regular basis, should not be collected on the scheduled collection day, but should instead be collected the following week:

3.2.1 This creates a tool to address those who consistently or significantly fail to recycle without good reason, who will now find that they are forced to revert to a fortnightly collection. As we have seen, disposing of recycling in refuse bins is very costly. Therefore, this proposal supports the efforts of the majority, who recycle diligently.

3.2.2 A label would be left on the bin, explaining why it has not been collected and that collection will instead take place the following week. In the meantime, officers will attempt to engage with the resident, to discuss the issue. They will seek to understand and overcome barriers to recycling.

- 3.2.3 For those who choose not to recycle without good reason, this effectively means a return to fortnightly collections, with just one refuse bin allowed. Therefore the policy may well be self-policing in most cases.
- 3.2.4 But we must respect that for some people recycling can be genuinely difficult, perhaps through disablement. Where such genuine difficulties are encountered, the policy must be relaxed and the resident restored to weekly collections.
- 3.2.5 In any event, officers propose that this policy should be used only for heavy or regular contamination events. It should be used only when we are forced to do so by deliberate significant, or consistent, contamination. The policy must not be used as a blunt instrument that might appear to punish mistakes, or inconvenience those for whom recycling is genuinely difficult.
- 3.2.6 Residents must clearly understand how this policy supports their efforts; that it will be enforced pragmatically, and that it will be invoked only when we are forced to do so. Diligent recyclers must know how this supports them, and those with genuine difficulties must know that their needs will be understood. But those who deliberately contaminate must know that we now have a policy to use if we are forced to do so.
- 3.2.7 Therefore, the policy's introduction must be accompanied by a clear communications campaign. This should be part of our ongoing communications such as Christmas bin hookies and service leaflets etc., as well as through usual means such as press/Borough Insight.
- 3.3 **Proposal 3:** That residents should be requested not to wrap recycling in black refuse sacks (or other opaque bags) prior to recycling:
 - 3.3.1 This policy already operates in Reigate & Banstead. It allows operatives to more easily check for contamination. Contamination could be expensive to residents, so we must guard against it where possible, and encourage residents to help us.
- 3.4 These proposals support existing policies designed to control and reduce the amount of refuse collected, such as the non-collection of refuse side waste and restrictions on additional refuse capacity.
- 3.5 Officer time may be needed initially to explain the reasons behind these policies, and conduct home visits where appropriate. But the financial benefits to residents are clear. Refuse disposal is very expensive, and will continue to cost more if we do not recycle more. Contamination – of either refuse or recycling bins – inhibits recycling and adds cost.

- 3.6 Residents regularly tell us that they want to recycle more. It seems likely that the majority will indeed do so through Simply Weekly Recycling. For the minority who differ, these policies offer a way to enforce, and to turn negative behaviours into positives.
- 3.7 Clearly, there may be times when officers may need to exercise judgement such as where a resident may be ill, disabled or have communication difficulties. As above, it is acknowledged that officer time may be needed, and individual decisions can be made where it is appropriate.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 Recycling contamination is not currently a significant matter within Epsom & Ewell. But the greater level of mixed recyclables in Simply Weekly Recycling means that recycling contamination has the potential to grow. Therefore, it should be monitored and controlled in order to avoid cost increases.
- 4.2 However, refuse contamination is significant. As seen in section 2.4.4 above, recyclable materials in our refuse bins could represent a cost of some £570,000 (the combination of lost recycling income for the Council and extra refuse disposal costs for SCC).
- 4.3 While it is highly unlikely that 100% of those lost materials could be 'rescued' for recycling, it is clear that there remains significant potential for financial benefit.

Chief Finance Officer's comments: None for the purposes of this report

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990 Section 46(4)(d) allows councils to direct residents as to what types of waste should be placed in which container.

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 Recycling supports the Council's Sustainability Policy. The proposed new service structure is forecast to lift the Council's recycling rate from its current level of 46% to 53% or higher. It is clearly in the interests of the Council, SCC and residents that levels of recycling should be maximised, and refuse minimised wherever possible.

7 Partnerships

- 7.1 The Council works within the Surrey Waste Partnership to consider best practice in areas such as policy, communications and operations. The Partnership's overarching strategy promotes actions to maximise recycling and minimise refuse. Control of contamination of recycling bins and the minimisation of refuse are key parts of that strategy.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Residents have always strongly supported recycling initiatives. While we have reached the limits of performance that might be expected from our current service type, the change to Simply Weekly Recycling should see the Borough to break through the 'glass ceiling' beyond 50% recycling. But to achieve best value from Simply Weekly Recycling, and provide residents with sustainability in the future, we need to maximise recycling and minimise refuse.
- 8.2 As we have seen from analyses of our collected refuse, a small number of residents do not recycle, and some recycle only partially. Clearly, those residents to whom we may need to apply these policies may disagree with us doing so. However, officers would welcome the opportunity to have the conversation with those residents, for the benefit of the Borough as a whole. Without these policies, such conversations have no teeth.
- 8.3 As stated above, there may be individual cases where it is inappropriate to apply these policies due to illness, disability or other issues, as determined on a case-by-case basis. Officers wish to continue to be able to offer a considerate response in such cases, and only invoke these policies when forced to do so

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 The proposals within this report are recommended as being in the overall interests of the Council, SCC and residents. They are designed to support and complement the efforts of the majority of residents who work hard to make our recycling services a success. They retain the flexibility to recognise special needs and limitations, however.

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All