

Appendix 4

Subject: Bag Splitting at Household Waste Recycling Centres

Electoral Division: The initiative is intended to cover all electoral divisions

Summary: KCC is undertaking a bag splitting pilot at selected Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), as part of a wider roll-out, with a focus on increasing recycling rates and realising avoidable costs by directing recyclate away from the residual waste stream.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines a bag splitting initiative which has been introduced at selected Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), with the intention of a full roll-out of the scheme across Kent in the coming months.
- 1.2 The scope of the project is to target residents who deposit black bags into the residual waste stream which may contain recyclate materials of value, where they have historically been assigned for incineration at the Energy from Waste facility.
- 1.3 A pilot commenced on the 29th November 2022, at HWRCs in North Farm, Tunbridge Wells and Tovil, Maidstone.
- 1.4 The objectives for the initiative are:
 - i. To initiate a pilot to understand the feasibility of the project; this has now taken place at a small number of sites, with the intention of full-roll out of a bag splitting scheme at all 19 HWRCs;
 - ii. To implement a scheme which takes recyclate out of bin bags and reassigns the waste to appropriate waste streams;
 - iii. To have no impact on the public's experience of using the waste sites, except where an enquiry is made as to what they have in the bag and whether there is recyclables within it.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 Kent County Council is the Waste Disposal Authority and as such is responsible for the disposal of controlled Local Authority Collected Waste deposited by the Waste Collection Authorities (District Councils), and for providing a network of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) for residents to deposit their household waste.
- 2.2 Government targets to improve recycling rates mean that KCC must find new ways of increasing recycling at HWRCs, as well as via waste collected at kerbside. In addition, budgetary pressures on the service have expedited this project as avoidable costs can be realised through the introduction of this initiative.

- 2.3 The project being introduced at HWRCs seeks to address waste brought to the facilities in bin bags and usually disposed in the residual bay/container assigned for incineration at the Energy from Waste facility; this project will involve splitting the bag and sorting in situ as a way to increase recycling rates.
- 2.4 The scope of the project is to target approximately 75%+ of all bin bags in the residual and bulky waste streams which are deemed to be in a condition that can be safely handled, i.e., circa 25% are deemed to have obvious malodorous, hazardous, or dangerous waste within the bag and would not be opened or once opened could not be fully examined.
- 2.5 Planning for the pilot and full roll-out of the project was a combined effort from KCC, Commercial Services and FCC Environment Ltd being the site operators. It was imperative that site staff understood how best to engage with the public to educate and encourage customers to sort their waste before they visit the site.
- 2.6 In order to develop the operational practices of undertaking bag splitting, guidance was sought from HSE and WRAP about how splitting operations should be carried out ensuring site operative safety.
- 2.7 To accompany the bag splitting pilot, a communications campaign is being run alongside. This is to encourage customers to 'pre-sort' their waste before attending the HWRCs. Customers are informed that up to 50% of waste in bags destined for the residential waste containers could have been recycled and to ensure recyclable materials are separated. This campaign includes an overarching information film, as well as individual material specific films, which are being shared on social media and the KCC website, including at time of booking. Site signage and postcards are also provided to explain to customers the importance of separating as many items as possible when visiting the HWRCs.
- 2.8 The pilot commenced on the 29th November 2022 at North Farm and Tovil HWRCs under Commercial Services management. The findings across the first week were extremely successful in terms of positive staff and customer attitude to the initiative, and the recovery rate of recyclate. Nearly all the bags that were intervened, were able to be split, with very few going directly into the container showing that customers were open to the initiative.
- 2.9 Typically, as part of the pilot over 50% of the sorted waste deposited at the centres in bin bags was found to be recyclable. Most of the recovered material was paper and card, textiles, metal, glass, ceramics, and plastics, as well as electrical appliances and green waste, all of which were placed into separate bays at the centres to ensure that they are recycled properly and avoid the cost of incineration or disposal.
- 2.10 Another unexpected benefit was the recovery of a significant amount of household batteries and other hazardous items, such as a small fire extinguisher, gas bottles, aerosols and mobile phones which are major causes of fires at waste sites.
- 2.11 All waste remains anonymous, and all legitimate household waste brought to the recycling centres in bin bags will continue to be accepted for processing.

2.12 The sites being rolled out following the pilot will be, New Romney, Herne Bay and Allington, with the remaining sites to commence bag splitting and sorting in the new year.

3. Financial Implications

3.1 It is estimated that the cost avoidance and revenue linked with diversion from residual and increased recycling commodities is valued circa £110,000 p/a. There is a small set up cost per site, totalling c.£10,000 for the 19 HWRCs for sorting equipment, tables, additional PPE including full-face masks and puncture resistant gloves.

4. Legal implications

4.1 HWRCs are provided for the deposit of household waste by householders in the administrative area under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

4.2 In recognition of the intention of local authorities to undertake processing of mixed municipal waste (“black bag waste”) to act as an educational exercise (to change public behaviour and improve recycling), the Environment Agency will support, and has approved, a “low scale” proposal for use at HWRC facility types only, under existing permits.

5. Equalities implications

5.1 This internal and operational process will not impact on specific groups with protected characteristics, as it is not a policy change.

6. Conclusions

6.1 KCC is proposing a full-roll out at all Kent’s HWRCs, following a successful pilot of bag splitting and sorting. The focus of the project is to educate the public in sorting their black bag waste before they visit the HWRC and in doing so increase recycling rates and improve revenues by cost avoidance and acceptance of more valuable recycling materials.

7. Contact details

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