

Report

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Report to:	Community and Enterprise Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	21 August 2018
Report by:	Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

Subject:	Contamination in Kerbside Recycling
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- seek approval to adopt and implement a formal service standard designed to improve the quality of the recyclable material collected at the kerbside

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that a formal service standard for contaminated recycling bins is adopted and implemented from 1 October 2018 as set out in Appendix 1.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Scottish Government is committed to moving Scotland towards a more circular economy, where products and materials are kept in high value use for as long as possible. The circular economy model is reliant on manufacturers having access to large quantities of high quality recyclable material; consequently, the Scottish Government introduced a Framework designed to increase the amount of high quality recyclable material collected in Scotland.
- 3.2. The Framework, which in addition to the recycling targets set out in the Zero Waste Plan, includes the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012 which required local authorities to collect certain key material separately to minimise contamination. The Framework also includes the Household Recycling Charter, to which the Council signed up to in principle in May 2016, and the Materials Recovery Facilities (MRF) Code of Practice.
- 3.3. The MRF Code of Practice was introduced as it is recognised that contamination is a significant barrier to high quality recycling. The Code of Practice places a statutory requirement on MRF operators to sample input and output materials at their facilities and report the findings to SEPA. The statutory sampling obligation means local authorities and processors are required to give more consideration to contamination levels in kerbside collected recyclable waste streams.
- 3.4. The Council reviewed its kerbside waste and recycling service during 2014 and approval was given by the Executive Committee on 11 February 2015 to implement a '4 bin system' in order to comply with the statutory requirements of the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012. The new 4 bin system was rolled out to approximately

111,000 households, on a phased basis, between May 2015 and December 2016. A light grey bin was introduced to allow residents to collect glass bottles, cans and plastic food and drink containers (the 'container mix') while the existing blue bin was re-designated to collect paper and card only (the 'fibre mix'). The burgundy bin, which was previously used to collect glass separately, was re-designated to collect food and garden waste. Residents in flatted properties where there are limitations on available space continue to collect 'co-mingled' material (i.e. paper, card, plastic food and drink containers and cans). Residents in flatted properties who wish to recycle glass can request a light grey bin for this purpose.

- 3.5 The Council awarded new contracts for the processing of its kerbside collected recyclable waste (i.e. waste collected in blue or light grey bins) in November 2017. The new contracts make use of a variable pricing mechanism based on the composition of the material delivered as well as the average monthly prices for the relevant recyclable commodities. The variable pricing mechanism was introduced because market testing revealed that contractors were unwilling to accept risks associated with receiving poor quality material in uncertain market conditions.
 - 3.6 It should be noted that contractors can reject loads if they are deemed to contain more than 20% contamination. Rejected loads are inspected and verified by members of the Council's Waste Education Team and then disposed of to landfill by the contractor. The Council is liable for the costs associated with the landfilling of contaminated loads. The new contracts commenced on 1 April 2018.
- 4. Current Position**
- 4.1. During the first month of the new contracts, approximately 978 tonnes of 'container mix' and 801 tonnes of 'fibre mix' was collected and delivered to the new processors under the terms of the contract. All of the loads of container mix were deemed to be of acceptable quality; however, this was not the case for the loads of fibre mix. Of the fibre mix delivered, just over 362 tonnes was accepted with the remainder rejected due to excessive contamination. This equated to a rejection rate of 54.8%.
 - 4.2. Members of the Council's Waste Education Team reported that the most common types of contamination found in the fibre mix loads were black bag residual waste, nappies, food waste, glass and textiles. It was acknowledged that the presence of excessive contamination in the material posed significant environmental, reputational and financial risks to the Council, therefore, a number of operational changes, supported by a campaign to raise awareness of the issues amongst staff and members of the public, needed to be made to mitigate these risks in the short term.
 - 4.3. The Waste Service introduced operational changes from May onwards, with refuse collection crews starting to check the contents of the paper and card recycling bins and initially rejecting those that contained obvious contamination; instead contaminated bins were collected on a second pass (after the crew had delivered the material collected from uncontaminated bins to the processor). The material from the contaminated bins collected on the second pass was sent directly to landfill. This change, along with the implementation of a communication plan prepared in conjunction with the Council's Communications and Strategy Service, resulted in the rejection rate falling to 31% in May and to approximately 17% in June 2018, although it should be noted that this resulted in a higher volume of waste being sent directly to landfill.

- 4.4 Although these operational changes resulted in a significant improvement in rejection rates, it was acknowledged that it was neither environmentally or financially sustainable for vehicles and crews to run the same route twice in one day. Therefore, following on from awareness raising measures that included applying information stickers to blue paper and card bins, social media releases, web site updates and an article in 'The View', the 'yellow tag' procedure was adopted.
- 4.5 The 'yellow tag' procedure involved crews checking the contents of the bin and, again, leaving contaminated bins unemptied. However, contaminated bins were not collected by crews on the same day; instead, residents were asked to re-present their bin on the next scheduled non-recyclable (i.e. residual) waste collection day. As non-recyclable bins are collected the week after a recycling collection, a resident only ever had to wait a week before the contaminated bin was emptied. Again, the contaminated recycling was sent to landfill.
- 4.6 The 'yellow tag' procedure commenced on 16 July in East Kilbride, Rutherglen and Cambuslang areas. Tagging commenced in the Clydesdale and Hamilton areas on 6 August 2018.

5. Proposed Service Standards

- 5.1. Waste Services considers that it has taken a proportionate and phased response to deal with the problem of contamination and the publicity, awareness raising and action to date is designed to improve the position going forward. However the Council is not in a position to sustain the level of costs incurred and, therefore, a robust procedure is required.
- 5.2 The Service acknowledges that, while the yellow tag procedure does improve the quality of the material delivered to the contractor for processing, there are still costs associated with collecting and disposing of the contaminated waste. The procedure could also potentially encourage residents to use recycling bins for additional non-recyclable waste capacity. As the Council empties contaminated recycling bins at the same time as black/green non-recyclable waste bins, there is little incentive for the resident to recycle properly. If the yellow tag procedure remains in place indefinitely, there is likely to be a significant impact on Council budgets and household recycling rates.
- 5.3 Waste Services has consulted with Zero Waste Scotland and other local authorities to develop an alternative to the current yellow tag procedure. Of the local authorities who either responded to our consultation request or had information about how they dealt with contaminated bins on their website, eleven said they tagged contaminated bins but did not empty the bins until the contamination had been removed and the bin was re-presented (at the next scheduled collection for that colour of bin). Local Authorities who do not collect contaminated recycling bins until the contamination has been removed include North Lanarkshire Council, East Renfrewshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council and Edinburgh City Council.
- 5.4 It is proposed that the Council adopts a service standard for dealing with contaminated bins that does not involve the continued emptying of contaminated bins. Any recycling bins (including light grey 'container mix' bins, blue 'co-mingled' bins and burgundy food and garden waste bins) identified by collection crews as containing contamination would be tagged with a red tag which would advise the resident to remove the contaminants and re-present on the next scheduled collection

date (4 weeks later). Alternatively, the resident can dispose of the contents at the nearest Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC). Appendix 1 of this report sets out the proposed service standard. An example of a red tag can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

5.5 It is proposed that the service standard is implemented from 1 October 2018.

6. Employee Implications

6.1 There are no employee implications from this report.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 The service has incurred contamination charges totalling £90,952 for the first 3 months of the new recyclable waste contracts. All costs referred to above relate to contamination within the blue paper and card recycling bins. The charges for April, May and June were £52,860, £24,684 and £13,408 respectively. Whilst it is anticipated that these charges may reduce as residents become more aware of the 'yellow tag' procedure, it is recognised that further action is necessary to ensure the material in the bins is correct so as to avoid the costs associated with landfilling the contents of contaminated recycling bins.

8. Other Implications

8.1. The negative impact on the Council's household recycling rate will be mitigated as a consequence of the introduction of this service standard.

8.2 There may be implications for the Customer Services Centre as residents may contact the Council by telephone regarding tagged bins. The red tag does refer householders to a dedicated webpage for information but discussions have been held with the Customer Services Centre regarding the potential increase in calls.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy, or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment is required.

9.2 The Trade Unions have been consulted and are in agreement with the proposals.

9.3 Zero Waste Scotland has been consulted and is in support of the proposals.

Michael McGlynn
Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)

11 July 2018

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambition/Objective

- ◆ Fair, Open and Sustainable
- ◆ Accountable, Effective and Efficient and Transparent

Previous References

- ◆ Introduction of a New Waste Collection Service, Executive Committee, 11 February 2015

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

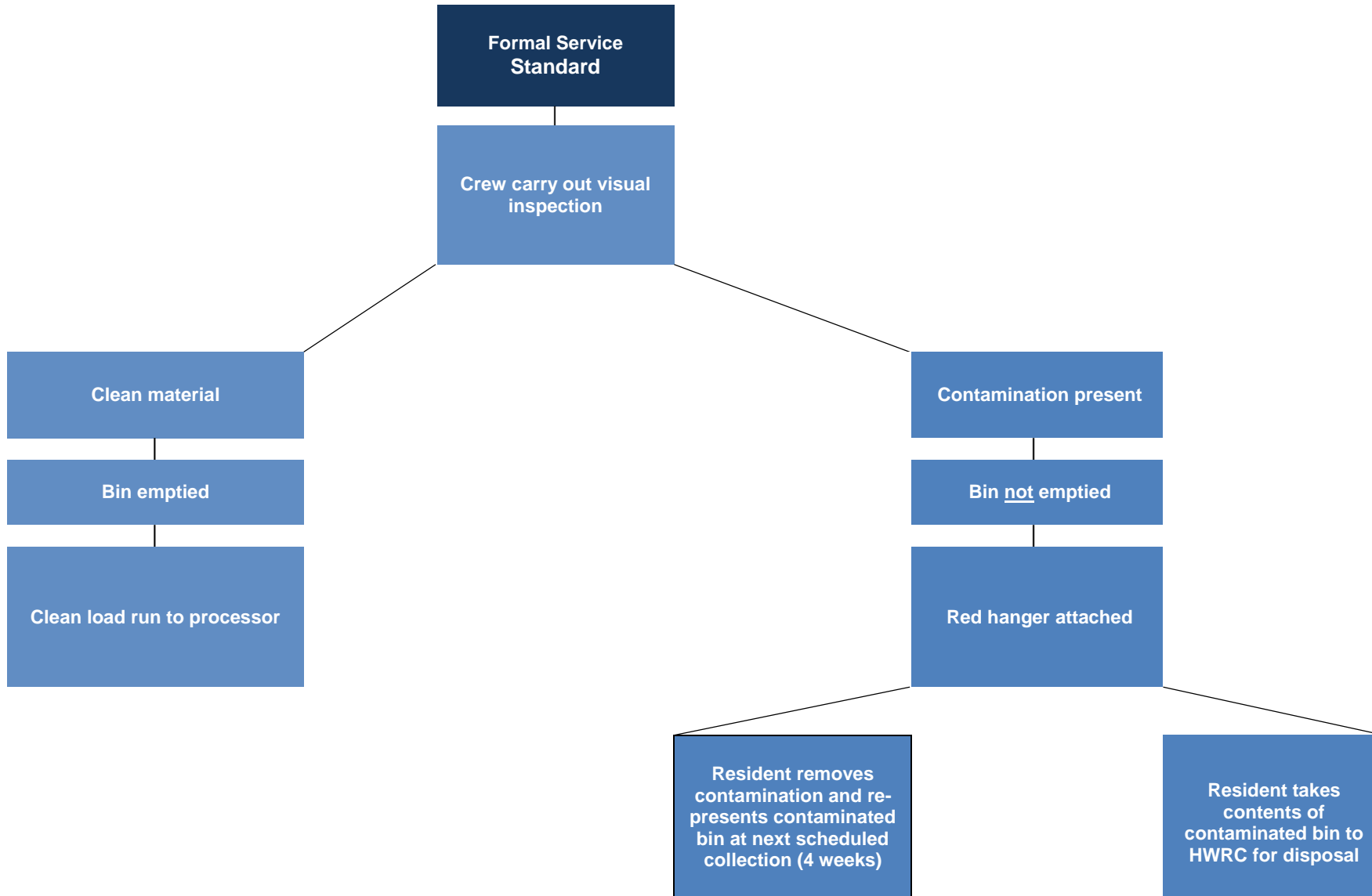
If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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Appendix 1
Process Diagram: Proposed Service Standard



Appendix 2
Example of a Red Tag

