

**REPORT FROM: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES MANAGER**

**TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

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## **TACKLING CONTAMINATION IN RECYCLING BINS**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide Members with an update on plans to tackle the issue of contamination within the recycling materials collected via household and commercial schemes.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That report be noted.
2. That further reports are presented in due course.
3. That the report be adapted for Area Committee and Town Council's viewing.

### **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ensure that Members are aware of the actions we are taking to reduce the contamination of recycling in Pendle.

### **Introduction**

1. Contamination in recycling bins is an ongoing problem for most local authorities. A national survey has identified that 82% of householders add one or more items that shouldn't be in their recycling collection.
2. Contamination is generally unwanted materials, defined generally as either non-recyclable or non-targeted:
  - a. non-recyclable material – it is not recycled at all, e.g. nappies, rubble, dog waste;
  - b. non-targeted material – it is recyclable but is in the wrong container, e.g. paper and card included in glass, cans and plastic collections.
3. Both types of contamination results in:
  - an increase in collection, sorting and reprocessing costs;
  - a reduction in the quality and quantity of materials destined for recycling; and
  - lower revenues and/or higher gate fees for local authorities.

4. Data from Lancashire County Council (LCC) shows that Pendle's contamination rates in the brown bin (commingled glass, cans and plastics) have ranged from 20% up to almost 34% in the last 2 years, averaging out at 25.5% last year. Lancashire County Council suggests the main contaminant within the brown bin is paper, card and plastic film (bags).
5. The material from the brown bins is sorted at LCC's facility in Leyland however in spite of this in 2019/20, over 303t of commingled recycling was rejected.
6. The paper and card collection scheme (blue bin) in comparison experiences around 4% contamination however due to market demands we regularly see that loads are rejected by LCC's contractor, Saica Paper, and the material ends up in landfill. In 2019/20, 323 tonnes of paper/card went to landfill at a cost of around £43,000 in disposal. This does not include the loss of income for the material.
7. In recent months LCC has started diverting our paper to their facilities in Thornton for pre-sorting in an attempt to improve the quality of the collected material and reduce rejection levels.
8. The table below (from LCC) provides some more detail about the brown bin contamination and what is in there. The "actual contamination" rate is net of other recycling materials being removed e.g. paper/card is a non-target material placed in the brown bin but is recyclable. The columns do not all add up to 100% as there are some items less than 1% not listed.

<b>Pendle</b>	<b>Q1 18/19</b>	<b>Q2 18/19</b>	<b>Q3 18/19</b>	<b>Q4 18/19</b>	<b>Q1 19/20</b>	<b>Q2 19/20</b>	<b>Q3 19/20</b>	<b>Q4 19/20</b>
<b>Brown Bin Target Material – glass, cans and plastics</b>	76.56%	70.18%	74.65%	69.98%	73.71%	66.27%	79.99%	77.71%
<b>Brown Bin - actual contamination</b>	8.92%	12.54%	11.03%	12.20%	16.00%	13.08%	10.82%	4.11%
<b>Paper Contamination</b>	3.03%	3.00%	3.12%	2.93%	2.46%	5.23%	3.62%	3.97%
<b>Incidents where the contamination of the brown bin recycling stream exceeded trigger levels</b>								
<i>Dense plastic +5%</i>	6.23%	6.59%	6.32%	7.39%	6.14%	6.69%	-	7.69%
<i>Film +1%</i>	3.38%	3.89%	4.40%	3.16%	-	4.15%	3.62%	3.82%
<i>WEEE +1%</i>	-	1.32%	-	1.10%	1.40%	1.20%	-	-
<i>Sanitary +1%</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Textiles +1%</i>	-	1.98%	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Inert +1%</i>	1.42%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Comments</b>	Paper contamination has regularly been between 3% and 4% in the last two years. A larger contributor to contamination is dense plastic (not the same as food packaging) which is between 6% and 8% of the recyclate. Plastic film is consistently high, between 3% and 4.4% of the recyclate. Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment is a problem in some quarters but not all.							

9. More sorting of recycling and rejected loads all cost Lancashire council taxpayers money. LCC has recognised this and set up a fund for district councils to bid for additional one-off funding to tackle contamination.
10. Pendle council was successfully awarded £17,250 in order to develop better systems of tackling contamination within waste services, including employing a dedicated officer full time for 6 months to work on this project.

11. For a number of years we have had a Contamination Action Plan (CAP) at Pendle but despite implementing the actions, our rates have not improved much. Last year we focussed on getting plastic bags out of the recycling bins, using our new vehicles to promote this message as well as social media, news releases, press articles leaflets and website information.
12. As we currently don't have an in-cab system we struggle to close the loop between crew reporting contamination and getting information out to householders and customers via our existing paper based systems.
13. In order to improve how we deal with contaminated recycling bins, the temporary officer will revise the CAP, and implement the actions which will hopefully result in an improved system for crews reporting contamination increasing the ability for business support to contact the residents hopefully lowering contamination levels.
14. Originally we envisaged the officer working with crews and talking to householders and customers, but we need to adapt this into a more socially distanced way of working in light of Covid-19. This has LCC's approval.
15. As a part of the project the officer will enlist support of the Council's communication team to produce messages and campaigns which are either specific to areas of the Borough or target issues which are found to be generic across all wards.

### **Next steps**

16. The officer started in August 2020, initially looking at the CAP review, establishing how our systems can be improved and working with crews (socially distanced) to reduce contamination of recycling in Pendle.
17. Members will be kept informed of any targeted action being taken within their wards ahead of it happening through briefing notes or email communications.
18. A further report will be presented to Management Team by end of March 2021 detailing outcomes of the project including:
  - a) Number of contaminated bins before/after the project. Officer to go ahead of crews starting with areas which we know anecdotally to be the worst. Records to be kept of how many households visited, contamination noted etc. Looking at both household and commercial bins.
  - b) Types of contamination seen. Officer will log addresses and type of contamination. Photos to be taken on site.
  - c) Number of householders engaged with. Door knocking to not go ahead due to social distancing. We will send a letter with copy of photo showing exact cause of contamination. Officer's direct phone line to be put on letter to facilitate one to one discussion with householder. If a conversation takes place, then this to be logged as part of this report.
  - d) Number of letters sent. As per above, logs to be kept of all addresses inspected and number of contaminated bins.
  - e) Details on the number of enforcement actions which have been completed following exhaustion of explanation and education activities.
  - f) Calculate the true cost of contamination using the Resource London toolkit

## **IMPLICATIONS**

**Policy:** None arising directly from this report – further reports to be presented.

**Financial:** Project costs met by LCC funding.

**Legal:** None arising directly from this report.

**Risk Management:** None arising directly from the report.

**Health and Safety:** All guidelines relating to Covid-19 to be followed.

**Sustainability:** None arising directly from the report

**Community Safety:** None arising directly from the report

**Equality and Diversity:** None arising directly from the report

## **APPENDICES**

None

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS** – Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) waste tracker survey – [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)