

Appendix 5:

Proposed change to recycling containers FAQ September 2020

Q 1. What is the proposed change?

We are proposing to replace the existing black recycling boxes with waterproof recycling bags during winter 2020/21 (roll out date TBC). The new bags are made from a waterproof material and seal at the top. The bags are bigger than the existing boxes, each with the capacity to hold 60 litres. This change is for houses only and will not impact communal properties such as flats.

Q 2. Why do we need to change?

When it rains, card and paper recycling gets wet in our recycling boxes. Previously the moisture level of our recycling was not an issue. However last year the UK and European markets, where most of our recycling is re-processed, started demanding higher quality recycling due to a change in the world market. It means that the quality of paper and cardboard from Wokingham is unable to match the higher quality now. As result all our recycling cannot be recycled when it gets wet. This could cost the Council £600,000 per year and could result in a 6% decrease in our recycling rate every year.

In a 2017 market research survey our residents have informed us that treating their recycling in an ethical way is a top priority. The recycling bags are being proposed as an alternative recycling option to keep paper and card dry and allow it to be recycled.

Q 3. What options have been looked at and why are bags the best option for WBC?

In a market research survey conducted in 2017 by a consultancy, 92% of residents supported the current service of continuing with weekly collections with blue bags and recycling boxes. Due to the emergent issue of wet paper and cardboard we now have to replace the recycling boxes. As we need to act quickly, we considered only short-term options including lids and shower caps for the existing recycling boxes, and waterproof recycling bags. All these options were assessed by an independent consultant and the waterproof recycling bags stood out to be the best option to tackle the issue of wet paper and cardboard, as well as being the better choice environmentally, financially and socially amongst the available options.

Q 4. How do we know the bags are fit for purpose?

Monmouthshire County Council has trialled these bags for a year now, and following satisfactory results from their trial, they are planning to roll these bags out to the entire borough next year. We have tested the bags with our partners Veolia and re3 and both are satisfied with the result of the tests. In addition, we have carried out in-house testing to assess how user friendly they are from a resident's perspective and found them more user friendly than our recycling boxes.

Q 5. How do reusable bags benefit residents?

- Prevent litter and access by animals
- Prevent paper and card getting wet
- Have greater capacity
- Provide savings on ongoing container costs
- Allow for easy collection from Community Hubs
- Are less likely to be broken or damaged
- Provide added convenience due to easy handling

Q 6. What is the useful life of these bags?

The life expectancy of the bags is up to five years. This can be prolonged if these are stored indoors in order to reduce their exposure to UV light. Dragging and overfilling can also degrade the fabric of the bags, which would shorten their lifespan.

Q 7. Are the new waterproof recycling bags secure?

The bags come with a Velcro strip running across the width of the bag and two additional Velcro strips at both ends of the opening to help keep all your recycling secure and dry. The Velcro has been tested and has a lifespan of 10,000 openings. It is best to store these indoors to keep them away from permanent or prolonged exposure to UV light.

Q 8. Will the bags have the same capacity as the black boxes?

The bags have a 60 litre capacity and are bigger than the current black boxes

Q 9. How many bags will I get?

Each house would receive two bags. However, residents can have as many bags as they wish and will be able to collect additional bags from hubs after the borough-wide roll out.

Q 10. What can I recycle in the bags?

There is no change to the items that can be recycled. We will continue to collect the following items:

- Paper
- Cardboard (broken down and folded)
- Plastic bottles including lids
- Plastic pots, tubs and trays (no black plastic)
- Food tins and drinks cans
- Aerosols (empty please)
- Milk, soup and juice cartons

Residents can also benefit from our re3cyclpedia app for further assistance which can be accessed by using our website www.wokingham.gov.uk/rubbish-and-recycling

Q 11. We put metal cans to be recycled, so could sharp edges tear the fabric?

The bags are tested so there is very low risk of the bags being cut with metal edges. Sharp edged items are still not advised to be put in the recycling. These can pose a health and safety risk to the collection operators.

Q 12. If I have a large piece of cardboard and it doesn't fit in the bags, what do I do?

Residents will be able to place cardboard inside the bags if broken down into smaller pieces. Larger cardboard can also be recycled at one of our Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in Smallmead, Reading or Longshot Lane, Bracknell.

Please help us recycle all your paper & cardboard. It constitutes the majority of our recycling and losing it out of the recycling loop means a considerable impact on our recycling rate and on the environment. Card and paper are a finite resource and can only be recycled if it remains dry.

Q 13. Why can I still not recycle glass in the new bags?

The new bags are just replacing the existing recycling boxes to help us manage the issue of wet paper and cardboard. Our current bottle banks are an established system for recycling glass. By sorting glass into colours at our bottle banks, it means it definitely gets recycled into another glass bottle rather than crushed and used for another purpose such as aggregate. You can find your nearest bottle bank site on www.recyclenow.com.

Q 14. Will there be any changes to the collection day?

The vast majority of residents will not have their collection day changed. Residents will be informed by letter where any minor change is necessary.

Q 15. Where to present your recycling on the collection day?

Bags should be presented at your usual collection point, along with your blue bin bags and food waste caddy. We will still collect rubbish, recycling and food waste at the same time in the same vehicle.

Q 16. Won't rubbish tip out of bags during emptying?

Our crew will continue to carry their bins with them and will empty the bags into their bins before tipping them into the truck. This will reduce the risk of recyclates littering the street.

Q 17. What will the Council do to stop bags being blown down the street?

The bags come with a 350g rubber pad at the bottom which will keep them from blowing away. The trial in Monmouthshire has found that the bags do not blow away when empty with only 23 replacement bags being requested by the 6,000 households that have trialled the since September 2019.

Q 18. Bin men will have to put them away properly to stop them being a trip hazard?

As with our current black boxes, the collection crew will leave them where they have collected from. Weight added at the bottom of the bags will keep them from moving.

Q 19. Surely it will take them longer to empty the bags properly?

Yes, we estimate we will need to add an extra vehicle to the existing fleet to accommodate this change. The positive impact on our recycling rate and the cost avoidance from solving the wet paper problem will outweigh the financial impact of the additional vehicle by over £400k per annum.

Q 20. Should we all store the bags inside to keep the paper dry?

If you can keep the bags inside that would be great but we understand not everyone can. If you have to store them outside please keep them sealed all the time to keep your paper and cardboard dry.

Q 21. Will they stand up to being washed?

It is strictly not advised to wash the bags in the washing machine. A light rinse or wipe will help keep them clean. It is also advised to quickly rinse your recycling which will reduce the risk of the bags getting dirty in the first place.

Q 22. How do I get an extra new bag or a replacement bag?

After the initial roll out, bags will be available from all the hubs that currently provide our blue bin bags and garden waste bags. Visit our website www.wokingham.gov.uk for further information.

Q 23. Elderly residents won't be able to use them conveniently especially if they are weighted

The weight of the rubber pad, which is added for this purpose, is only 350g. Together with the weight of the bag these are slightly less than the existing recycling boxes. The weight of an empty recycling box is approximately 1400g. These bags are much easier to handle as there is less bending as compared to the current box.

Q 24. I am on assisted collection will this continue?

Yes, your assisted collection will continue. All your rubbish, recycling and food waste will continue to be collected from your designated collection point.

Q 25. Can I still use recycling boxes along with bags if this proposal goes ahead?

If the proposed recycling bags goes ahead, then once the bags are delivered residents can use the new bags only. However, there will be a transition period of four weeks after delivery, after which the recycling boxes will not be emptied.

Q 26. Why can't we have lids for the black boxes?

We looked at the possibility of lids through the options assessment but determined that they are less effective and more costly both financially and environmentally.

Q 27. What do I do with my old black recycling boxes if the proposal goes ahead?

Wherever possible we encourage residents to repurpose their old recycling boxes. For example, some residents use these as garden planters or for storage. However, we will collect any unwanted black recycling boxes once the reusable bags are delivered. A schedule for the delivery of new bags and collection of old boxes will be provided if the proposal goes forward.

Q 28. Will you send the collection team again if I miss the collection slot for redundant recycling boxes?

If you miss the scheduled collection of the old recycling boxes then we will be unable to arrange a further collection. Residents will be able to dispose of their unwanted recycling boxes at one of our recycling centres at Smallmead, Reading or Longshot Lane, Bracknell.

Q 29. Why can't we have wheelie bins?

Using wheelie bins significantly slows down the operation for the collection vehicles going around the borough. It's estimated that we would need another three vehicles to be able to cover the borough due to the extra time it takes to empty individual wheelie bins compared to the current system (where collection operatives empty multiple recycling boxes in one bin, they carry it with them, which goes on the back of the truck before being tipped in). Wheelie bins are not possible while retaining weekly collections due to the additional cost but are more viable for fortnightly collections.

Q 30. Did you consider metal bins which are weighted, waterproof and 100% recyclable?

Metal bins are considerably more expensive and heavier than the proposed waterproof recycling bags. To provide two bins per home would cost the council £1.3million, which is substantially more expensive than the waterproof recycling bags.

Q 31. Surely the council could spend the £600k on something more important?

£600k is the amount that the Council would lose per year as a result of wet card and paper, made up of lost income from recycling and additional cost to dispose of this material. The cost of the bag solution is £288k (a one-off payment to purchase the bags) and £235k per year for the additional vehicle and crew. Within one year, the council will have recouped the money lost to wet waste and from year two onwards, the bag option will be £365k per year cheaper for the council than the black recycling boxes.

Q 32. Will there be a consultation with residents?

The proposed change would not result in a change to the level of service our residents receive, only a change to the container used. Your waste and recycling will be collected every week in the same way but using a different container - all that would change is that we ask you to put the recycling in the new bags as opposed to the open recycling boxes to enable us to recycle more because paper and card would be kept dry.

Q 33. Is there a cost to delaying this decision?

Any delay in putting in place this initiative will cost the Council £13,000 a week and reduce 1% recycling every month.

Q 34. Bearing that in mind could there be a pilot trial in a certain areas?

Unfortunately, recent experience has demonstrated that we need to implement a solution as soon as possible to offset the environmental and financial impact of wet waste. In addition to undertaking a full options report, we have spoken to Monmouthshire County Council who use this particular type of bag with positive results and tested them with our partners to make sure that they are fit for purpose.

We thank all our residents for their recycling efforts.

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