

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Proposal to change the number of supplied blue refuse bags to properties in the Borough from February 2023</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on Thursday, 29 September 2022
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Environment and Leisure - Cllr Ian Shenton

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

To set out how the Council will tackle financial pressures and drive forward its waste minimisation, recycling and carbon reduction commitments. This will be achieved either by reducing the number of blue bags provided to properties for refuse from 80 to 54 bags per year or ceasing the supply of blue bags to properties.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That The Executive either:

- i) Option 1: Approve the proposed change of policy from supplying 80 blue bags for refuse to 54 blue bags for refuse per annum to all properties (including larger households) OR
- ii) Option 2: Approve stopping the annual supply of all blue bags to all properties

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In light of the Council's financial situation and commitment to improving environmental performance (including the Climate Emergency), two household waste management proposals have been submitted in order to address these key pressures.

In June 2010, the Council's Executive agreed a policy to supply the Borough's properties a maximum of 80 blue bags for the containment of non-recyclable household refuse. However, there are immediate financial and environmental pressures which need to be addressed in order to meet targets and drive best practice.

A recent blue bag composition review showed that nearly 57% of the refuse thrown away is recyclable either through the kerbside green bag scheme, food waste caddies or via the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's). The approximate cost of disposing of this valuable material is c.£1m which, on average, is 65% more expensive than recycling. Additionally, once this material is disposed of, it will contribute to carbon emissions and ultimately it cannot be used again.

The first proposal is to encourage residents to maximise the use of the existing comprehensive recycling services by reducing the number of supplied blue bags for refuse from 80 to 54 per annum. This adjustment will not only help with the financial pressure but contribute to meeting the climate emergency objectives.

The second option to consider is for no blue bags to be distributed to residents. This would mean residents would purchase their own bags for the containment of their rubbish.

Any delays to the decision will result in the bags not being ordered at the beginning of October 2022. This will mean the opportunity to improve the Councils environmental and financial performance will be missed until February 2024 when this can be reviewed.

## **BACKGROUND**

Wokingham Borough Council has a good track record of waste management with over 54% of rubbish being recycled in 2021/22. New initiatives have helped drive this forward including the food waste service implementation in 2019 which is used, but not to the full extent it could be. Additionally, communications and engagement campaigns have been pivotal to further capture more recyclable material and generally inform residents of climate change impacts.

However, there are now financial and environmental pressures which must be addressed. The cost of plastic has escalated dramatically, so that maintaining an unchanged number of blue bags is not affordable within the budget. Additionally, each year thousands of tonnes of recyclable material are disposed of in the blue bags, costing over £1m a year in excess disposal fees, contributing to carbon emissions and it means that this valuable material can never be used again.

A recent compositional analysis of the blue bags collected in Wokingham Borough showed that nearly 57% of the contained material could be recycled at the kerbside (green bags or food waste) or via the Household Waste Recycling Centre's (HWRC's). Therefore, there is a significant opportunity to capture more recycling and disposing less non-recyclable material through the existing comprehensive recycling services. A reduction in the blue bags for non-recyclable refuse is a natural progression to encourage a more positive recycling behaviour change.

The proposal is to reduce the number of supplied blue bags to properties from 80 to 54. This will stay within budget and encourage residents to maximise the use of the existing comprehensive kerbside recycling scheme and to a lesser extent at the HWRC's.

To further increase savings, which may have an adverse impact on recycling performance, a secondary option is to cease the supply of blue bags to all properties in the borough.

## **BUSINESS CASE**

It is clear that the annually increasing cost of disposal, along with the increased price of plastic to produce the bags as well as the loss of recyclables, is both environmentally and financially unviable.

Option 1: Reducing the number of bags from 80 to 54

In terms of the savings, Table 1 below outlines the reduction of blue bags and associated estimated savings, in the form of cost avoidance.

<b>Number of bags</b>	<b>Total cost per year</b>
80 bags	£463,000
54 bags	£314,000
<b>Saving</b>	<b>£149,000</b>

Table 1: Estimated financial savings as a result of reducing number of bags

Further to the saving as a result of bag reduction, there will be a saving as a result of more recyclable material being diverted from the blue bags as detailed in Table 2 below:

<b>Potential diversion of recyclables from blue bags</b>	<b>Potential saving (recycled rather than disposed of) per annum</b>
10%	£101,471
25%	£253,670
50%	£507,356
100%	£1,014,712

Table 2: Potential saving from diverting recyclables from blue bags to green bags etc

Additional recycling will be captured; however, it is difficult to quantify the amount which could be realised. Capturing all 100% of the recyclable material (57% of current blue bags contents) in the blue bags may not be practical in the shorter term and an estimated amount for the first year is likely to be 10%. It is expected that the amount of recycling captured will rise as residents recycling behaviours change.

In addition to this, there is the opportunity for realising an income for the sale of recyclables. This is to be determined as it is dependent on factors that cannot be predicted including market prices.

To assist with communicating the change, it is proposed a £50k fund is set aside which will be raised through the savings above. This will enable greater targeted reach to low recycling areas and support for residents which will also include home visits if required.

Option 2:

Ceasing the supply of all blue bags in the borough

The saving from not supplying the blue bags for all properties in the borough is around £463,000 per year as outlined in Table 3 below.

Number of bags	Total cost per year
80 bags	£463,000

Table 3: The saving from not supplying the blue bags to all properties in the borough

It is also proposed that a £50k fund is set aside for this option, which will be raised through the savings above. This will enable greater targeted reach to low recycling areas and support for residents which will also include home visits if required.

#### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial 2022/23 (Year 1)	£0		
Next Financial Year 2023/24 (Year 2)	<p>Option 1: Reducing the amount of blue bags from 80 to 54:</p> <p>(£149,000 plus £101,471 plus unknown additional income)</p> <p>£50,000 cost for communications campaign</p> <p>Option 2: Stopping the supply of blue bags for all properties in the borough</p> <p>(£463,000)</p> <p>£50,000 cost for communications campaign</p>	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year 2024/25 (Year 3)	£0		

## **Other Financial Information**

### **Do nothing**

- To do nothing and keep 80 blue bags with the same projected recycling behaviours would cost in the region of £463,000 for 2023. Reducing the number of bags to 54 would save £149,000. If 80 bags were to continue, this would result in an additional budget pressure of around £149,000 each year and many thousands of tonnes of valuable recyclable material being disposed of.

## **Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation**

Stakeholder consultation and consideration has been assessed as part of this report. In 2017, WBC undertook a waste and recycling consultation which set out to gain insight into resident's waste and recycling opinions. 95% of residents stated that it was important to increase recycling and reduce landfill. A further 97% stated that it was important to reduce the impact on our environment.

In 2021 a borough wide waste and recycling consultation was undertaken, and most residents stated that the environmental benefits were their primary concern. Over 95% of residents stated that it was 'very important' or 'important' to reduce the amount of waste produced.

It is clear from these surveys that there is a desire to improve our recycling and minimise waste as much as possible in the borough.

## **Public Sector Equality Duty**

A Full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and this has highlighted further consideration for those residents that have additional rubbish from medical waste which can be disposed of in blue bags rather than specialist clinical collection.

It is proposed that residents which generate additional waste due to medical needs and maybe affected by this proposal to contact the Council for further support.

Currently larger households can receive additional blue bags. However, as nearly 57% of the content of a blue bag is recyclable and if this material is diverted to the green bags, it is likely that there will be sufficient existing space for the containment of general rubbish in one blue bag per week. Extra green recycling bags are available and can be ordered online or via Customer Services. It is therefore proposed as part of the approval that the current policy of additional bags for larger households is stopped and residents can utilise further green bags if required. Additional support will be provided to households which require further waste management information/assistance.

## **Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030**

This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible through leading by example as well as by encouragement. This proposal will help reduce carbon and single use plastic and support the goal of the Borough reaching carbon neutral by 2030.

<b>List of Background Papers</b>
None

<b>Contact</b> Richard Bisset	<b>Service Place</b>
<b>Telephone</b> 0118 974 6000	<b>Email</b> richard.bisset@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank