

East Herts Council Non-Key Decision Report

Date: 10 April 2024

Report by: Councillor Tim Hoskin – Executive
Member for Environmental Sustainability

Report title: Collection of Soft Plastics from Kerbside
Collections

Ward(s) affected: Sawbridgeworth

Summary

- To inform the Executive Member of the proposed trial of soft plastics kerbside collections

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION: That:

- (A) That Councillor Tim Hoskin agree to the expansion of the Flex Collect trial and kerbside collections of soft plastics; and**
- (B) That Councillor Tim Hoskin delegates to the Head of Operations any necessary change to the collection demographic and area for the trial.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 This report seeks authority for an expansion trial of kerbside collections of plastic film and wrapping (soft plastics). A small trial has been running under delegated authority in North Hertfordshire, providing approximately 2,000 households with fortnightly soft plastics collections. This has been successful and is providing useful data to Flexible Plastic Funds FlexCollect trial and the Shared Waste Service in advance of introducing collections more widely in 2025. An expansion of the trial area is proposed across East Hertfordshire to 2,500 households.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Flexible Plastic Funds' (FPF) FlexCollect is a national project

to trial the collection of flexible soft plastics from a select demographic of households. This service is not currently offered to households in East Hertfordshire, as a kerbside collection. Knebworth in North Hertfordshire was originally identified as the pilot area due its proximity to the materials handler so collections could be delivered direct, making it efficient and cost neutral. The initial trial properties offered a distinct conurbation of standard housing types, where the trial collections can be undertaken by existing crews on established rounds. The project is fully funded to cover costs and presents negligible to no-risk.

- 2.2 There is a full partnership for the trial – funders (Flexible Plastic Fund, Defra / UKRI's Smart Sustainable Plastic Packaging Challenge (SSPP), our existing collection contractor Urbaser, and MRF contractor Pearce Recycling, with a wider project team which includes WRAP, SUEZ, RECOUP, and Ecosurety working towards the success of the project.
- 2.3 The initial trial in North Hertfordshire has been operating well and the shared waste service in conjunction with the FPF wish to expand the trial to more properties across both East and North Hertfordshire.
- 2.4 Participating properties will receive an information leaflet 2 weeks in advance of the collection bag deliveries explaining the trial and what will be happening. The collection bags with instructions will arrive 2 weeks before first collection. There is current guidance on the website as to how to recycle soft plastics at supermarkets for all other households.
- 2.5 The proposed area for expansion is Sawbridgeworth. The funders are happy with the demographic compatibility and offers approx. 2500 households as good size trial area.
- 2.6 Based on the experience of existing soft trial and other authorities taking part in the FlexCollect trial we anticipate between 20 and 60% participation by residents. NH/EH are one of only 9 authorities selected to participate in this high-profile trial.
- 2.7 Data will be available to inform our future MRF contract procurement or extension.

2.8 Data will also inform appropriate collection methodology for 2025 should processing of soft plastics in the commingled stream remain problematic.

3.0 Reason

3.1 The aim of the project is to give insight into the types and quantities of soft plastics available. Participating in the trial will give the Council an opportunity to test and better understand the operational implications of collections and processing requirements which will inform the new service roll out in 2025. Currently soft plastics are not accepted in the kerbside recycling service.

3.2 The trial does not wholly mimic the 2025 services and will inform appropriate soft plastics collection methodology for 2025.

3.3 The data will inform our future MRF contract procurement or extension needs for 2025 and provide data for the wider industry to better prepare for the anticipated mandated collection of soft plastics.

4.0 Options

4.1 Testing the collections in East Herts as well as North Herts is key to ensuring that future services are fit for purpose for both authorities.

4.2 There are no other reasonable alternative options. The main objective of expansion for the Council is to test options for the 2025 new service collection arrangements and MRF processing capability, which will also inform the future MRF contract at no cost to the council as the project is fully funded.

4.3 Limiting collections to North only with existing delivery and sorting arrangements means limited information to inform the new services and MRF contract information. There is the possibility that our participation in this high-profile project will end if we are unable to build on capacity data, and a loss of valuable information for 2025 new service arrangements, along with the loss of funding to gather this information.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 The trial is designed to provide data and information on participation rates, capture rates and tonnage information. These will provide valuable insights ahead of 2025 service changes.
- 5.2 The risk of not participating means going into 2025 with no soft testing to iron out possible operational issues.
- 5.3 The risk of not expanding the participation numbers means going into 2025 with no soft testing of any nuances in East Herts collection from wheeled bins to iron out possible operational issues or differing material composition impacting on processing.
- 5.4 Not expanding would also be a loss of opportunities to fully test MRF capabilities for handling of the soft plastics materials. Any risk that may arise in unforeseen operational challenges would already exist in existing collection operations (weather, strikes, covid).
- 5.5 There is a small risk associated with increased MRF processing contract costs in 2025 due to processing soft plastics from April 2025 rather than from August 2025 but these risks exist based on the new services and soft plastics tonnages would be from a very small proportion of the households. It is not possible to identify this risk while the market is still determining the processing requirements since the government announcement. There are some potential advantages of being an 'early adopter' of soft plastics, with available composition data, with MRF contract bidders having clarity over our material types, quantities, and composition.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

N/A

Community Safety

N/A

Data Protection

N/A

Equalities

All operational services are available to the trial area participants and will continue to receive standard services as usual. If any resident is designated as an assisted collection (AC) property, the trial materials will be collected under AC requirements, so all services provision remains the same.

Environmental Sustainability

There are no known negative impacts.

The positive impacts of the trial will be increased awareness around plastics recycling, a greater understanding of potential advantages of collection, handling and markets for a difficult but often requested material for recycling. These are single use plastics and the recycling of them will decrease litter and reduce resource use as if recycling this saves materials going for residual waste disposal. All these things prime us and markets for effective soft plastics collection and recycling / recovery ahead of 2025.

All material collected as part of the trial are being diverted from the residual waste stream and therefore reducing material being sent to landfill/Energy from Waste. Material processing is part of the wider trial, and the end destinations may vary whilst processing options are being tested; all material is being process tested in the UK.

Financial

The financial implications of the project are nil. The full cost of the trial is covered, financed by DEFRA UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) SSPP, and the Flexible Plastic Fund (FPF), costs will be managed directly with Future Recycling UK. Internal resource costs are low, as data gathering, sampling and project oversight are conducted by the project sponsor.

Health and Safety

The trial is part of usual operational services, where all expected health and safety practices will be observed.

Human Resources

The project is being managed within existing resources with any additional resources funded by the project. We do not anticipate any impacts on existing resources once the trial project has commenced; the initial set up resource requirements are considered manageable within

the existing team resources.

Human Rights

N/A

Legal

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability has overall responsibility for the discharge of functions pertaining to waste, as set out at paragraph 4.26.2 of the Constitution.

The trial has already been in effect in parts of North Herts and is now expanding across into East Herts as part of the shared waste service.

Specific Wards

Sawbridgeworth

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

The FlexCollect soft plastics collections has been running in Knebworth (North Herts) since November 2023. There has been a good engagement with residents, and collection tonnages are consistent with other trial areas in the national project. These collections have been arranged with direct delivery to the MRF. We now wish to expand the trial area where collected materials will be taken back to the depot as per usual collection arrangements to better mimic the 2025 collection methodology and MRF handling capabilities.

The current small-scale trial in Knebworth is using blue collection bags placed out on top of paper boxes for collection with collected bags direct delivered, where they are handpicked from the paper at our Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) for onward processing.

The proposed expansion is having the collection bags placed in the recycling wheeled bin for collection. The material will be returned to the depot along with all other mixed dry recycling and be collected by our MRF contractor as usual, with the picking/removal of blue bags being done at the MRF. We are keen to test this operating model on a wider scale to consider the practicalities for future collections.

Contact Member

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