

# SCRUTINY REPORT



**MEETING: Overview and Scrutiny**

**DATE: 22 November 2018**

**SUBJECT: Waste Management and Recycling**

**REPORT FROM: Operations - Waste Management**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Glenn Stuart – Head of Waste Management**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

**1.1** This report provides an update on a range of miscellaneous waste management and recycling related topics raised by Overview and Scrutiny.

## **2.0 ISSUES**

### **2.1 What does the Council's recycling rate stand at now?**

The following table shows the weights (in tonnes) of each waste stream collected over the last two complete years and the first half of this year, up to the end of September.

<b>Bin Type</b>	<b>16/17</b>	<b>17/18</b>	<b>18/19</b>
Grey	25,405	25,295	12,335
Blue	9,321	9,231	4,691
Green	8,236	7,819	3,617
Brown	17,677	17,075	10,198
Total Tonnage	60,640	59,422	30,842

## **N.B**

*Grey Bins - non recyclable, residual waste*

*Blue Bins – glass bottles and jars, steel and aluminium food and drinks cans, plastic bottles, aluminium foil and aerosols.*

*Green Bins – paper and cardboard*

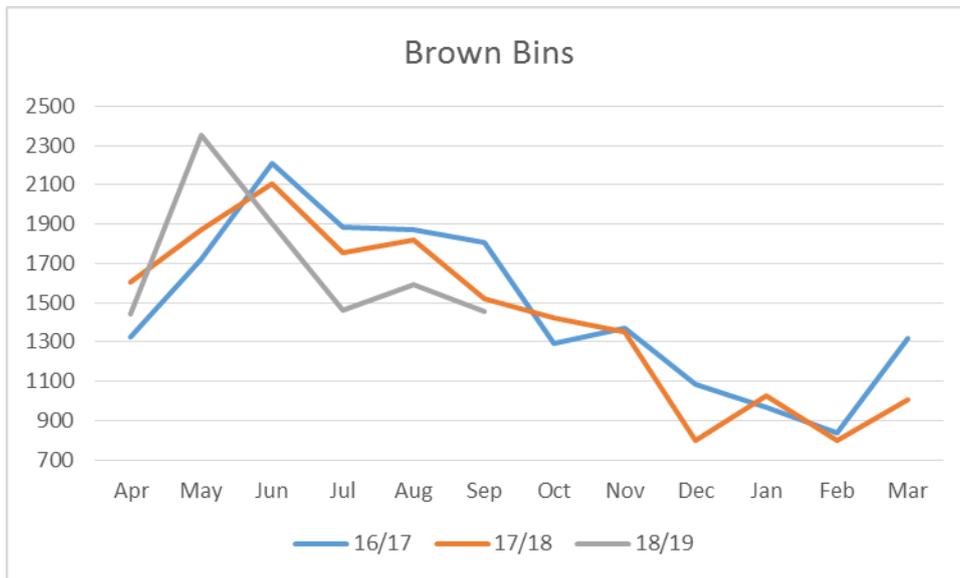
*Brown Bins – food and garden waste*

## **Explanation of Figures**

Annual grey bin tonnages reduced between 16/17 and 17/18 and may show a further small reduction this year, relative to last, though we still have the Christmas/New year period to come when residual weights are at their heaviest.

The reduction in residual waste tonnages is welcomed, particularly given the continual increase in the number of households in the borough over this period, but this scenario is replicated across many of our AGMA neighbours.

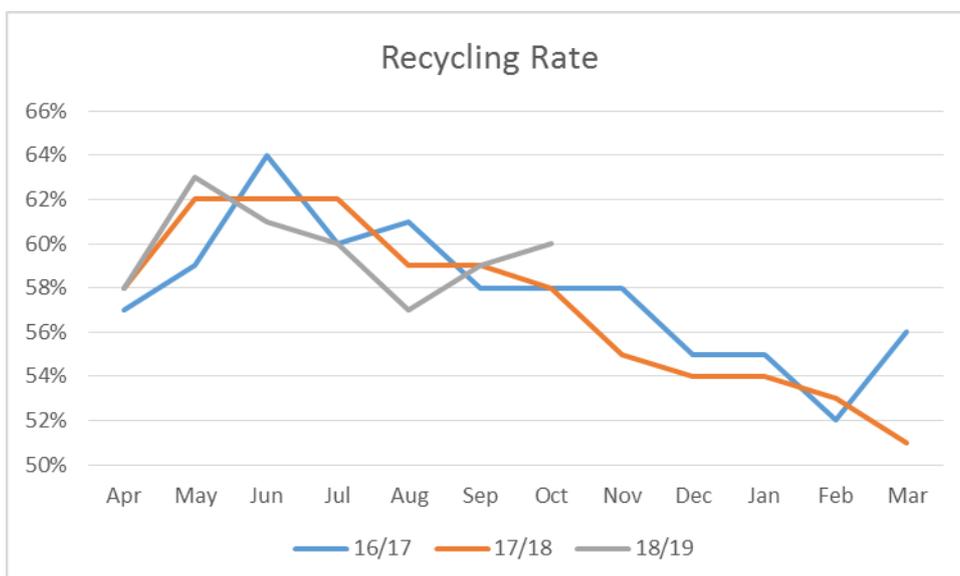
Blue bin tonnages have stabilised, whilst green bin tonnages have shown a reduction, continuing a trend of recent years. The former could be attributed in part at least to the ongoing light weighting of items such as glass bottles and jars and food and drinks cans. The latter is largely due to a continuing reduction in newspapers and magazines bought, only partly offset by an increase in cardboard packaging arising from internet shopping.



As the above graph illustrates, brown bin tonnages fluctuate with the weather and always have done because the largest constituent of this bin is garden waste. A wet, warm Spring and Summer will increase tonnages, whilst the dry, hot spell we had this year saw tonnages drop because lawns stopped growing etc.

**Recycling rate for collected bin waste**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Yearly Average
16/17	57%	59%	64%	60%	61%	58%	58%	58%	55%	55%	52%	56%	<b>58%</b>
17/18	58%	62%	62%	62%	59%	59%	58%	55%	54%	54%	53%	51%	<b>57%</b>
18/19	58%	63%	61%	60%	57%	59%	60%						<b>60%</b>



As can be seen in the graph above, the monthly recycling rate tends to peak in May/June every year, as garden waste tonnages increase, followed by a gradual reduction over the remainder of the year. The single best month for recycling was June 2016 @ 64%.

As tonnages across all 4 waste streams have stabilised following the Council's move to 3 weekly collections in October 2014, so automatically have recycling rates. This replicates the picture across AGMA and across England as a whole where recycling performance has plateaued over the last few years.

## **2.2 How might recycling performance increase from hereon?**

The team of Recycling and Enforcement Officers, though it has reduced in size from 7 to 3 Officers over the past 18 months due to the need to make savings, continues to directly engage with residents promoting the 'Right Stuff, Right Bin' message. Inevitably though with this reduction in capacity they can no longer be as effective as they were previously and in reality their work is more about maintaining the current level of recycling performance rather than improving it.

In March 2017 the resources charity WRAP (Waste and Recycling Action Programme) announced a partnership with the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) – Resource GM – aimed at driving up the recycling rate to 60% across the conurbation by 2025, as well as improving the quality of recycling collected. To this end, the partnership has been responsible for undertaking extensive research, which will inform future promotional campaigns, as well as the delivery of advertising campaigns across GM. The latter includes full page adverts in the Bury Times, on buses and bus stops and across the Metrolink system. Small scale pilot projects have also been delivered across GM and in the coming weeks a campaign targeting contamination on two green bin rounds in Bury will be delivered, in conjunction with Council Officers.

Nationally, a new Resources & Waste Strategy is due to be published by DEFRA before the end of the year. It is anticipated that the strategy will see the introduction of a range of new measures designed to kick-start recycling performance in England. Such measures may include the following:

- **Mandated separate (weekly) collections of food waste** – intended to increase food waste capture. In Bury this would probably mean food waste being collected in caddies and a small tipper vehicle, whilst the brown bins would revert to collecting garden waste only on the existing 2 weekly cycle.
- **A ban on food waste to landfill** – in line with the above.
- **Extended producer responsibility** – designed to ensure that those businesses that manufacture, import and sell products are more responsible for their end of life environmental impact i.e. their disposal and recycling. This helps shift the cost burden associated with waste disposal and treatment from the public to the private sector.
- **A deposit return scheme for containers such as drinks cans and bottles** – whereby consumers pay an up-front deposit when they buy e.g. a drink, which is redeemed on return of the empty drinks container. Possible variants of a deposit return scheme include cash rewards for returning drinks containers without an upfront deposit.

The publication of the strategy is eagerly awaited by the waste management industry and local government to see how it might help improve recycling rates nationally.

## **2.3 Households signed up to receive e-mail alerts about bin collections.**

The number of households receiving e-mail alerts for all their bin collections is currently around 25,567. This equates to over 35% of households that put their bins out for collection. Flats on communal bins are excluded from these figures because they don't have to put their bins out. On average, subscriptions are rising by up to 5,000 per year. Each year there is a slight spike in subscriptions during the months of December and January when replacement calendars and a promotional leaflet are delivered to all households.

E-mail reminders are an invaluable aid in reminding residents which bin to put out on which day and is a low cost form of communication. The service is FREE and promoted on an ongoing basis over the website, via the Customer Contact Centre and when the recycling team engage with residents. A more intensive cross-channel communication campaign is most likely needed to increase sign-ups at a faster pace than is currently the case.

In order to provide residents with a more a customer-centric service in the future, the reminder system requires further development to be able to communicate more effectively with clusters of households regarding incomplete rounds, return collections and other changes on an area-by-area basis.

## **2.4 Do any other Councils now collect residual waste 3 weekly?**

Bury Council was the first in England to introduce 3 weekly residual waste collections in October 2014 and made national headlines for doing so.

Not surprisingly other Councils took a keen interest in the story and monitored developments closely. The Head of Waste Management fielded many enquiries and requests for information over the telephone, hosted a number of visits from Officers from other Councils including Reading and The Wirral and spoke at a number of conferences on the subject.

According to an APSE (Association of Public Service Excellence) survey conducted between April and July of this year, to which 115 local authorities across the UK responded, 9% of Councils operate 3 weekly residual waste collections currently, whilst another 63% will change to 3 weekly collections within 2 years, as most pilot schemes have proved to be successful. Motives for doing so are an increase in recycling performance and a reduction in operational costs.

In Greater Manchester Oldham, Rochdale, Salford and Wigan all now collect residual waste on a 3 weekly cycle (providing 80 litres capacity per week). Meantime Stockport, Trafford, Bolton, Manchester and Tameside have converted to a 2 weekly residual waste collection cycle using a smaller, 140 litre bin (providing 70 litres capacity per week). In each case, residual waste capacity has been reduced to prompt recycling behavioural change.

## **2.5 What recyclables can be placed in the blue bin?**

The blue co-mingled recycling bin is for the collection of steel and aluminium food and drinks cans, glass bottles and jars, aluminium foil, aerosols and plastic bottles.

This message has been communicated consistently over a number of years via different leaflets, in the annual collections calendar which is delivered to every household in the borough in November/December every year, on the website and through direct Officer engagement with residents.

Despite all these efforts though there still appears to be considerable confusion amongst residents in respect of which plastics we collect for recycling. Many residents through either ignorance or a misguided desire to 'do the right thing' persist in placing plastics other than bottles in the blue bin. These plastics are collectively termed 'pots, tubs and trays' (PTTs). Unfortunately across GM these plastics are a source of contamination in the recycling bin and should instead be placed in the grey bin.

## **2.6 Why do we only collect plastic bottles for recycling and will this change in the future?**

Mature, stable markets exist for the recycling of plastic bottles. Though PTTs are technically recyclable the same mature, stable markets for these materials do not exist currently. The reality is that those Councils across the UK that collect PTTs for 'recycling' in the majority of cases will almost certainly send the materials for incineration and energy recovery.

A couple of years or so ago the GM Waste Disposal Authority (GMWDA) commissioned a report into the viability of collecting a wider range of plastics for recycling across GM. In essence this would have meant collecting PTTs in the blue bin, in addition to plastic bottles. The conclusion of the report was that it was not viable. The Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) based in Sharston, South Manchester to which all co-mingled recycling collected by the 9 Councils (exc Wigan) is delivered and sorted, would have had to be modified at a significant cost to make this possible. Most importantly though the report reiterated the problems associated with immature end markets.

## **2.7 What happens to PTTs collected across GM?**

In Bury, as well as every other Council across GM (exc Wigan) PTTs are collected in the residual waste bin, along with all other types of non-recyclable waste. This waste is ultimately transported out of the conurbation to a plant in Runcorn where it is burnt and the energy recovered to power an industrial facility with a huge energy demand. The PTTs are not landfilled therefore and are put to a very worthwhile use. They may not be recycled but valuable energy is recovered from them.

## **2.8 Missed Collections**

Please see below the total number of bins reported to the Customer Contact Centre as missed for the previous 3 financial years, as well as the first half of the current year. The figures do not include the self-serve (on line) missed bins forms and are based on a total of 82,850 properties, which does not account for the increase in properties over the 3 year period.

### **2015/16**

<b>Type of bin</b>	<b>Missed Collections</b>
Brown	1583 (out of 2,080,000 collections)
Blue	869 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
Grey	2227 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
Green	816 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
<b>Total</b>	<b>5495 (out of 6,388,000 collections)</b>

## 2016/17

Type of bin	Missed Collections
Brown	2462 (out of 2,080,000 collections)
Blue	1113 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
Grey	2357 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
Green	1209 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7141 (out of 6,388,000)</b>

## 2017/18

Type of bin	Missed Collections
Brown	1799 (out of 2,080,000 collections)
Blue	1004 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
Grey	2553 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
Green	1098 (out of 1,436,000 collections)
<b>Total</b>	<b>6454 (out of 6,388,000)</b>

## 2018/19 – first 6 months of year

Type of bin	Missed Collections
Brown	1167 (out of 1,040,000 collections)
Blue	663 (out of 718,000 collections)
Grey	1115 (out of 718,000 collections)
Green	663 (out of 718,000 collections)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3608 (out of 3,194,000)</b>

Missed collections are a result of different factors such as access problems particularly in narrow back streets, weather conditions and mechanical breakdowns, as well as genuine oversights.

Over the 3 year period (prior to this year) there have been approximately 19,000 reports of missed bins (excluding on-line forms) out of a total of about 19m scheduled collections. This equates to about 0.1% (or 1 in every 1000) reported as missed for various reasons.

### Missed collections in first 6 months of 2018/19.

The service suffered a number of difficulties over this time period, which are perhaps only partly reflected in the figures above.

#### a. Wintry weather

Last winter was the worst suffered in recent memory and it brought with it significant service disruption. There was a snow event on Wednesday 28 February, which severely disrupted collections, meaning that several rounds were not able to be completed that day. Due to the snow and ice, all collections then had to be suspended on the following Thursday and Friday for reasons of H&S. In order to catch up with this work brown bin collections were suspended for the next fortnight and the brown bin crews deployed to collect other waste streams. This inevitably generated many reports of 'missed collections' to the CCC.

#### b. Over reliance on agency staff

The service has in recent years lost quite a number of permanent staff through natural wastage such as resignation or retirement and they have been backfilled by agency staff. It became clear though that there was an over reliance on agency staff, which can contribute to service disruption. In recognition of this, in June of this year 9

Drivers/Team Leaders were awarded permanent contracts and 11 agency Operatives were awarded 6 month temporary contracts, both following an interview process. This has brought more stability to the service and improved service reliability.

### **c. Lack of LGV Drivers**

There is a national shortage of LGV drivers and the Council has struggled as a consequence of this. In the earlier part of this year, when the service lost a number of drivers due to long and medium term sickness, it struggled on some days to mobilise every round. After an intense search a small number of drivers were sourced through an agency and they helped to fill the gaps and get the service back on track. One driver has been retained long term. In addition, 3 Operatives are to be trained and put forward to take their LGV Class II license, to improve the resilience of the service further.

### **d. Aging vehicle fleet**

The majority of the vehicles in the waste collection fleet (i.e. bin wagons) are nearing the end of their lease or have already had their lease extended. This has led to reliability issues which has impacted on service continuity. As a result 3 of the oldest, most unreliable vehicles have now been released and 2 much newer hire vehicles have been brought in. The so called 'Farms' vehicle is of a bespoke specification and the only one of its size in the fleet. It travels along farm tracks, many of which are in a poor state of repair, which places undue stress on the vehicle causing it to break down far more than any other. Because of its unique size (in order to access farms, rural properties and other hard to reach addresses) it is very difficult (if not impossible) to find a replacement hire vehicle at short notice. This means that inevitably collections become delayed, which in turn generates reports of 'missed collections' to the CCC. A business case has been developed for the replacement of a number of vehicles, including the Farms wagon.

It should be noted that whenever it is not possible to empty bins on the scheduled day they are always emptied on a subsequent day. The only exceptions to this rule are when the decision to cancel all brown bin collections for 2 weeks in early March (as described above) was taken and when Monday 'Farms' brown bin collections are disrupted. In the latter case it is because that vehicle is employed collecting other waste streams from Tuesday to Friday every week and is hence unavailable to catch up the 'missed' brown bins.

## **3.0 CONCLUSION**

Over the last few years the Waste Management service has made huge strides forwards, in terms of making efficiencies and thereby significant financial savings, as well as in improving the Council's recycling rate. The majority of Bury residents have taken a positive approach to recycling and we thank them for their help and commitment.

In 2011 fortnightly residual waste collections were introduced, as was an improved container for paper and card recycling and food waste was able to be collected in the garden waste bin. At the same time, iPads were introduced into the collection vehicles, an innovation which attracted national headlines.

In 2014 Bury was the first Council in England to introduce a 3 weekly residual waste collection service, again making national headlines. Other Councils across the country are now following suit, as described above.

Over this time the collected bin waste recycling rate has improved from 27% to just short of 60%, achieving huge savings in avoided waste disposal costs.

Given the ongoing financial challenges that the Waste Management service must face, with an unallocated savings target of £1.2m, there is clearly still work to do. Following the appointment of a new Interim Director of Operations in October a further service review is to be undertaken that will seek to maximise efficiencies and ensure that it is delivering value for money.

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**List of Background Papers:-**

None.

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