

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

30th September 2020

Report of the Head of Streetcare

Mike Roberts

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Report Title: Kerbside textile collections

1.0 Purpose of Report

To consider the continuation of kerbside collections for textiles.

2.0 Executive Summary

To achieve increasing recycling targets the council has, over time, expanded the range of materials collected at the kerbside, which includes textiles. Some collection issues have arisen and the intention would normally be to review these when the Council's waste strategy is next due for major review in 2022, however the recycling market for textiles has all but collapsed and the result is added costs and wasted effort for the Council, at a time when more than ever every penny counts. Furthermore, there are increasing numbers of outlets in the community for textiles as unlike recycling there is an active reuse market that is willing to pay for sorted clothes. Members are therefore asked to consider whether kerbside textile collections should continue.

3.0 Background

Development of the council's Waste Strategy, aligned as far as meets local need with the Welsh Government's collection blueprint, has resulted in a range of materials including textiles being collected at the kerbside from households in the county borough.

The current 'Recycle+' service was introduced to increase reuse, recycling and composting performance in line with the statutory requirements.

The collection of textiles at the kerbside only makes a very modest contribution to the Council's recycling performance. In 2019/20 approximately 150 tonnes of recycling was collected, of which only 45 tonnes was able to be recycled and included in the Council's total of 7,100 tonnes of 'dry' recyclates for the year (i.e. excluding food and green waste).

With the current 'Recycle+' service, textiles are co-collected with paper in a 40 litre box with a lid. The material is collected using the Council's recycling fleet of 25 Romaquip vehicles and operatives, of which 22 of the vehicles have a separate textile compartment (some of the earlier models have a slightly different design). It is best practice for the recycling operatives to use separate compartments for paper and textiles during the collection process.

The recycling operatives generally discharge the textiles from the vehicles in a separate bay next to the paper bay on arriving at the transfer station at Crymlyn Burrows. The textiles are then transferred into a standard roll-on/roll-off container where they are compacted. The container is on average swapped over 3 times per month.

4.0 Issues

With changing and tightening regulations, recyclers for textiles have dramatically reduced in general, and the largest UK recycler, Wilcox, who was the Council's outlet, has withdrawn from the market. At the same time, the number of community groups, some involving community councils and/or ward members, have been increasingly holding 'cash for clothes' type events around the county borough to raise money for local good causes. Reuse outlets will currently pay in the order of 45 pence per kilo, or £450 per tonne, however it is noted that they only want items for which there is a reuse market and generally don't accept, for example, coats, woollens, and work clothes. Disposal of unsorted textiles is therefore an issue, and if the council were to consider any

form of sorting then the cost in terms of time, money and effort would need to be weighed-up against the income.

In addition to the end market for kerbside collected textiles collapsing, there has also been collection issues. Whilst residents have been instructed to place textiles loose in the collection box on top of their paper, experience however is that the textiles are often co-mingled with the paper, and kerbside sorting is time demanding. This leads to some inevitable contamination of the waste streams on the vehicles. Alternatively, materials are often not presented in the box and the textiles can become wet, dirty and contaminated.

Where a Romaquip vehicle does not have a separate compartment, the textiles are placed in the paper compartment until the material is deposited at the transfer station. When the paper is discharged from these vehicles in the paper bay, both the recycling and transfer station operatives sort quickly through the discharged paper as best they can to remove textiles and reduce contamination. Again, sorting is time and resource demanding and the system provides further potential for contamination of paper and card with textiles.

Where there are separate paper and textile compartments on the vehicles, the separate compartments are not always used exclusively by the recycling operatives due to the preponderance of paper, and textiles are often mixed with the paper to reduce the need for tipping (as any one recycling compartment being full necessitates an off-load).

The result is that the limited amount of textiles being collected leads to contamination of the paper waste stream, reducing the quality of the outgoing baled product. The reduced quality of the recyclate affects the amount outlet contractors are willing to pay for the material, or indeed whether a batch of paper is accepted or rejected (in which latter case the load gets returned). Similarly, textiles can end up contaminated with paper.

The upshot of everything is that textiles collected at the kerbside are currently having to be sent for incineration. If incineration is the only reliable outlet for our kerbside collected textiles then it fundamentally draws into question the value of continuing with a separate collection,

particular as any improvement in the textile recycling market appears unlikely.

Members will be aware of the waste hierarchy, essentially in order to reduce, reuse, recycle, recover, and landfill waste. Reuse is higher in the hierarchy and therefore is preferable to recycling. It is consequently more desirable to consider all unwanted textiles for reuse prior to recycling, and there are reuse markets serving Eastern Europe and Africa. The current recycling system not only acts against reuse in itself, it also leads to matching items such as shoes and garments becoming separated which undermines the material stream's value from a reuse perspective. This makes the textile stream unattractive to 'cash for clothes' type outlets or other parties such as Enfys, the Vocational Skills Centre (NPT), or the Salvation Army, who might otherwise be interested.

Community reuse events are higher up the waste hierarchy and should be supported but at the same time they undermine any value in textiles collected by the Council at the kerbside. Notwithstanding what the Council does community outlets such as reuse events are likely to continue, particularly if there is money to be raised by local groups towards meeting community needs. Furthermore, any material diverted away from the residual household municipal waste stream, by whatever means, reduces the amount sent for incineration and reduces associated costs for the Council.

5.0 Options

The principle options are:

- a) Carry on as existing, try and deal with the contamination issues, and hope the situation with outlets improves;
- b) Reinstigate the use of single use bags for textiles to help reduce contamination issues and hope the situation with outlets improves;
or,
- c) Stop collecting textiles at the kerbside.

As set out above, the current situation is generally unsatisfactory.

In terms of reinstating some use of single use bags for textiles, whilst they provide a convenient collection receptacle, if they were plastic this

would be a retrograde step and against the national direction of travel. Potentially, compostable 'corn starch' bags could be used in mitigation but these are relatively expensive and in either case would result in recurring revenue costs. Whilst any bags might be issued on demand only, costs would be significant and furthermore as 'free bags', they are likely to be used for other things. There is also the potential for such bags to start degrading if left out for a prolonged period leading to collection problems. Residents could be asked to use their own bags if they have any available but that is not necessarily a reliable position and, as above, the national position with single use plastics continues to be tightened. It is also notable that any bagged material has to be un-bagged before processing, and outlets may require sorting prior to acceptance, or a commitment to pay for or take back unwanted material, actions that would likely need to be subject to some form of audit.

On the face of it simply stopping the collection of textiles offers the greatest benefits and most certainty of outcome. However, on its own it could potentially detract from continuing progress towards the current 70% target and 'zero waste' by 2050.

The best approach would therefore appear to be that the Council ceases to collect textiles and alter its marketing accordingly, but then also works with local outlets who are prepared to receive and/ or pay for textiles to promote community events and use of bring facilities such as those provided at council Household Waste Recycling Centres. Potentially the Council could take back textiles that have been sorted at community events which are not suitable for reuse, but which are suitable for recycling. Having been sorted, finding an outlet should be possible. Overall, it is believed community events, bring sites, and third sector collections can provide more than ample outlets for textiles.

6.0 Financial Impact

As an upper bound, based on 150 tonnes at a cost of £130 for 'disposal', the maximum cost of disposing of textiles would be around £20,000, setting aside any implications in terms of contaminated paper etc. On the other hand as a lower bound, if all textiles currently collected were suitable and went for reuse, without any sorting, then the result would be income of up to £67,000. Assuming 50% of collected material were

suitable for reuse the potential income might be in the order of £34,000 a year, but the material would have to be sorted. Because sorting is labour intensive then the cost of sorting, and the maintenance of suitable arrangements for doing so, is going to outweigh the level of income, let alone the cost of any bag provision if needed.

Ceasing to collect textiles from the kerbside will reduce contamination, help to maximise paper income, reduce the number of loads rejected by recyclers, and assist with collection capacity, all of which would help reduce costs. It will also help to support the growing number of 'cash for clothes' type reuse events in the community.

7.0 Integrated Impact Assessment

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

An initial first stage impact assessment has been undertaken, as attached at Appendix 1, which has indicated a full in-depth assessment is not required.

8.0 Workforce Impact

Removing this material from kerbside collections would assist the workforce in their primary purpose of collecting waste.

9.0 Legal Impact

There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

10.0 Risk Management

Ceasing to collect textiles at the kerbside reduces the risk of contamination and consequent reductions in income, or loads being rejected, returned, and having to be double handled. Any negative impact on the Council's recycling performance is going to be minimal.

11.0 Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

12.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (i) The Council ceases to collect textiles at the kerbside and alters its marketing accordingly; and,
- (ii) Officers work with any local outlets who are prepared to receive and/or pay for textiles, to help promote the growing number of community events and the use of 'bring' facilities such as those provided at council Household Waste Recycling Centres.

13.0 Reason for Proposed Decision

To determine the way forward with respect to the kerbside collection of textiles.

14.0 Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call-in period.

15.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Assessment

16.0 List of Background Papers

None.

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