



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED:
All

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
Cabinet Briefing
Cabinet

17 March 2008
31 March 2008

Improving Corporate Waste Recycling and Reducing the Use of Disposable Plastic Carrier Bags in Leicester

Report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration & Culture

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to seek approval to implement recycling schemes for all waste arising from Council buildings and depots and to establish a voluntary project with retailers to reduce disposable plastic carrier bag use in the City. Approval is also sought to cease using disposable plastic carrier bags in the Council.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Council has committed itself to recycle or compost 40% of its own municipal waste (EMAS Target 5.1). A significant start has been made to address office paper waste recycling at New Walk Centre (NWC) and some Centrally Located Administrative Buildings (CLABS), but a significant amount of work needs to be undertaken to extend recycling facilities to all staff in council buildings and depots.
- 2.2 In order to achieve EMAS Target 5.1 there needs to be a fresh corporate initiative with the full support of both Members and Corporate Directors. It is proposed that a steering group is to be formed of Departmental representatives and co-ordinated by a dedicated Waste Minimisation Officer to ensure the municipal waste recycling initiative is adopted.
- 2.3 Diversion of the Councils own municipal waste from landfill is essential to offset future significant budget pressures as the landfill tax rises will escalate at a greater rate than inflation and failure to achieve required biodegradable waste diversion will attract fines of £150 per tonne.
- 2.4 Internationally, a lot is happening to reduce the use of disposable plastic carrier bags. Ireland has imposed a tax on the use of disposable plastic carrier bags that has generally been successful. China recently placed a ban on certain types of disposable plastic carrier bag. This is because the bags have a significant environmental impact. They create a litter problem and are estimated to take over 100 years to decompose in landfill sites. The best environmental option is reusable bags.
- 2.5 There is a significant desire in the UK to reduce the use of disposable plastic carrier bags and over 80 localities and Councils are assessing the potential to undertake

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projects locally. The London Councils Group deposited the London Local Authorities (Shopping Bag) Bill in parliament during November 2007. The Bill will give London local authorities the power to ban the issue of disposable bags. However, local activity may be overtaken by national events. The City Council has raised the issue with central government and the response has been that the government wishes to eliminate single use carrier bags, and will legislate and impose a charge if retailers do not take voluntary action.

- 2.6 It makes sense to undertake some work locally because the disposable plastic carrier bags form part of the household waste stream and the Council has a responsibility to treat and dispose of the waste, including the cost. Although Leicester has the ability to process such bags into a refuse derived fuel at the Bursom Recycling Centre, the best environmental option is not to have to deal with them in the first place.
- 2.7 To address the policy on both the initiatives, the Cabinet Lead Member for Environment & Sustainability gave a commitment to Council on 4 October 2007 that all council buildings would have access to recycling facilities within 4 years and on 22 January 2008 Council approved the proposed project to reduce disposable bag use in Leicester.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to:

- i. Support the extension of waste recycling schemes to all council buildings and depots;
- ii. Establish a voluntary project with retailers to reduce disposable plastic carrier bag use in the City;
- iii. Cease the use of disposable plastic carrier bags in the City Council as soon as possible and certainly before the start of the voluntary project: above; and
- iv. Request that regular progress reports are provided to the Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment & Sustainability.

4. REPORT

Improving corporate waste recycling

- 4.1 In 1999, the Council adopted an EMAS target to recycle and compost 40% of its own waste (EMAS Target 5.1).
- 4.2 In 2005, a paper recycling scheme was introduced in New Walk Centre as a pilot to test the acceptability and practicability for office recycling. This scheme has been a major success and it is estimated that it is diverting over 100 tonnes of paper a year from landfill and staff are very positive about the scheme. Since the pilot trials the scheme has been expanded in to other CLABS.
- 4.3 In response to a question put at the Full Council meeting on the 04/10/07, the Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment & Sustainability made a commitment to ensure that staff in all council buildings had access to recycling facilities within 4 years.

- 4.4 In order to achieve this commitment, a steering group will be established, comprising key officers from departments, who will oversee the implementation of source segregated waste recycling schemes to all council buildings.
- 4.5 To support this work, a new Waste Minimisation Officer will be created on a temporary basis, who will provide the necessary waste expertise and to co-ordinate and implement agreed plans of action. The officer will be supported by colleagues from both Waste Management and the Environment Team. Regular progress reports will be provided to the Cabinet Lead Member for the Environment & Sustainability.

A voluntary project with retailers to reduce 'disposable' bag use in the City

- 4.6 At the Full Council meeting on the 22/11/07, members carried the following motion:
- i. Require the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs requesting that the Government commissions a report on the options for reductions in plastic bag use, to include an assessment of the effects of a 20p per bag levy.*
 - ii. In Leicester, seek to support and encourage retailers, businesses and commercial manufacturers to eliminate excessive packaging, in particular the widespread use of plastic bags, replacing them where necessary with reusable bags made from natural fibres or strong paper, and with cardboard boxes or cartons.*
 - iii. Council requests that Cabinet call for a report on what further actions the Council could take, and what powers it has to encourage, promote and develop a plastic bag free Leicester.*
- 4.7 The letter required in *i.* above has been sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.
- 4.8 In England and Wales, over 80 localities are pursuing voluntary initiatives to reduce disposable plastic carrier bag use. Other localities similar in size to Leicester include Brighton, Bristol, Bradford, Durham, Exeter, Hereford, Ipswich, Walsall, York and Kirklees. Northampton is the only city in the East Midlands.
- 4.9 It is proposed that a voluntary initiative is developed in Leicester with the following objectives:
- In a specific area of the City, reduce 'disposable' plastic carrier bag use by introducing a voluntary 'Leicester Life Time Bag' and ensuring that remaining 'disposable' bags are the most environmentally friendly option. Part of the initiative will be to identify the most environmentally friendly option for the both types of bag.
 - Raise awareness of the environmental impacts of 'disposable' plastic carrier bag use and the availability of the 'Leicester Life Time Bag' across the whole City.

- 4.10 The initiative would involve the following stages:
- a) Select one or more areas of the City (eg. part of the City Centre, a neighbourhood shopping centre such as Queens Road).
 - b) Consult with stakeholders and form a working group (eg. Chamber of Commerce, retailer representatives, the Carrier Bag Consortium, the local media).
 - c) Seek commercial sponsorship for the 'Leicester Life Time Bag'.
 - d) Establish the project.
 - e) Undertake an associated city-wide awareness raising campaign.
- 4.11 The City Council should also cease to use disposable plastic carrier bags at the first possible opportunity and use the 'Leicester Life Time Bag' instead. The Regeneration & Culture Department has already committed to this on a departmental basis and Museums, Libraries and the Energy Centre are already taking action. This should be complete before the voluntary initiative with retailers begins.
- 4.12 In order to achieve this initiative, the co-ordinating officer will be the Waste Minimisation Officer outlined in 4.5 above with the assistance of colleagues within Waste Management and the Environment Team.
- 4.13 Local authorities do not currently have the power to introduce an outright ban or introduce a levy on disposable plastic carrier bags.
- 4.14 The London Councils Group, which represents the 32 boroughs and the City of London, is proposing a private bill. The London Local Authorities (Shopping Bag) Bill was deposited in parliament on the 27th of November 2007. The Bill will give London local authorities the power to ban the issue of disposable bags.
- 4.15 However, local activity may be overtaken by national events. The City Council has raised the issue with central government and the response has been that the government wishes to eliminate single use carrier bags, and will legislate and impose a charge if retailers do not take voluntary action.

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 Individual building managers have budgets for the collection and disposal of their municipal waste, which is undertaken by Cleansing Services via a service level agreement. The cost for collecting and disposing of waste to landfill is becoming a costly option through the action of both the UK government and European Commission.
- 5.1.2 The UK Government has imposed a landfill tax for every tonne of waste sent to landfill and currently this is £24 per tonne, representing half the actual gate fee. This is set to rise by £8 p.a. both next year and thereafter to encourage diversion from landfill. For budget holders this tax escalator represents an increase of 16% which is significantly above the rate of inflation.
- 5.1.3 In addition, for biodegradable waste such as paper, food waste, parks green waste etc there is an EU Landfill Directive which requires the UK to adopt reducing biodegradable landfill targets with definite milestone dates. These are a 25% reduction by 2009/10, a 50% reduction by 2012/13 and a 75% reduction by 2019/20 and cover all municipal

waste. Each local authority has been given annual landfill allowances, which reflect this accumulating reduction and at each target year the accumulated biodegradable landfill tonnage should equal the available allowances. If the Council landfills more than its allowances, there is an imposed penalty of £150 per tonne for every tonne over.

- 5.1.4 Recycling schemes will initially cost more to operate, but with the increasing landfill tax and threat of landfill allowance fines the Council will significantly benefit by offsetting future costs.
- 5.1.5 There will be some modest capital costs required for new storage containers such as individual trays and communal bins for office waste, but to assist Departments a bid of £50k has been made within the Local Area Agreement, as municipal waste diverted from landfill is one of the new national indicators (NI 193) from April 2008.
- 5.1.6 The cost of the temporary post of Waste Minimisation Officer who will be responsible for the implementation of both the initiatives set out within this report will be funded from the 2008/09 Waste Efficiency Grant.
- 5.1.7 Although not yet identified, it is anticipated that the costs for the “Leicester Life Time Bag” and the promotional material for a city-wide awareness campaign will be provided by commercial sponsorship.
- 5.1.8 A reduction in the use of disposable plastic carrier bags will reduce the amount of household waste collected but an estimate of any financial savings is difficult because it will depend on the success of the scheme. However, the principal driver for removing disposable plastic carrier bags from the market place is a significant environmental benefit as it has been calculated that land filled disposable plastic carrier bags take over 100 years to decompose.

Martin Judson, Head of Finance R. & C. (Ext. 297390)

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 This report recommends a quantitative extension of an existing recycling scheme, rather than any qualitative change to it, together with the establishment of a voluntary project with retailers that Full Council has resolved to implement. Existing powers permit both actions. The most straightforward form of “commercial sponsorship” may be the provision of “Leicester Life Time Bags,” rather than financial sponsorship and the Council sourcing production of these bags. In any event, a commercial sponsor may require acknowledgement of its involvement through its mark/logo appearing on these bags and that may discourage buy-in to the project by other businesses. A more detailed consideration of the powers to encourage, promote and develop a plastic bag free Leicester (required by Full Council) will need to take place as this voluntary project develops, its aims become clearer and possible legislative changes indicated in this Report take place.
- 5.2.2 The reduction of disposable plastic carrier bags in the City needs to be carefully considered in the context of the Council's Waste PFI contract with Biffa Leicester Limited (Biffa) as it may impact significantly upon the City's waste profile. This in turn could lead to claims from Biffa for the contract to be varied as a result of this change which is outside their control. Whilst there are undoubtedly environmental benefits for

the reduction there may be a consequential commercial effect, not necessarily disadvantageous and/or significant, upon the Council.

Rebecca Jenkyn, Senior Solicitor (Ext.29 6378)
Greg Surtees, Senior Solicitor (Ext. 29 6453)

5.3 Other Implications

| OTHER IMPLICATIONS | YES/NO | Paragraph references within the report |
|-------------------------------|--------|--|
| Equal Opportunities | No | |
| Policy | Yes | All |
| Sustainable and Environmental | Yes | All |
| Crime and Disorder | No | |
| Human Rights Act | No | |
| Elderly/People on Low Income | No | |

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Budget Statement March 2008.

7. CONSULTATIONS

The London Council's Group

8. REPORT AUTHORS

Steve Weston,
 Head of Waste Management,
 Environmental Services,
 Regeneration & Culture Department.
 Ext. 298582

Mark Jeffcote,
 Senior Policy Officer,
 Environment Team,
 Regeneration & Culture Department.
 Ext. 296765

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| Key Decision | No |
| Reason | N/A |
| Appeared in Forward Plan | N/A |
| Executive or Council Decision | Executive (Cabinet) |