

NEW WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE - PROJECT UPDATE

Committee: Operational Services

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Author: Waste and Environmental Services Manager

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Contact officer:

Nick Baker, Waste and Environmental Services Manager
nick.baker@eastcambs.gov.uk , 01353 616313, The Grange, Ely

1.0 Issue

- 1.1 This report provides an update for Members on the progress being made towards implementing the necessary changes to the Council's waste and recycling collection service, as previously approved by Full Council.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members note the progress made on this project to date and that the project remains on budget and on track.

3.0 Background/Options

Original Approval

- 3.1 Changes to the Council's waste and recycling collection service were agreed by the Operational Services Committee and ratified by Full Council in October 2024. This followed implementation of the Environment Act 2021 and related secondary legislation, along with a complete review of the service to ascertain the best service delivery option for the future.
- 3.2 The main changes agreed were the provision of a new weekly collection of food waste and the replacement of black bags with a wheeled bin for residual waste (i.e. rubbish not for recycling). This required a wide range of supporting work, such as project management, a communications plan and a waste collection service policy to reflect the service changes.
- 3.3 The proposed changes had significant financial implications, both for capital expenditure on waste collection vehicles and containers, as well as future revenue costs for delivering the food waste collection service. Government New Burdens funding covered the capital costs associated with separate food waste collection, whilst a capital allocation from reserves was used to purchase the new bins to replace black sacks, and new vehicles with bin lifts.

Government has also provided transitional revenue funding to set up the food waste service but, at the time of writing of this report, the level of any longer term revenue support for new burdens is still to be agreed by government.

Project Management

- 3.4 With the new service being rolled out to every household in the district, it was considered essential to take a project management approach to this very significant change in service; this to ensure a smooth transition, with as little disruption as possible to our residents.
- 3.5 A Project Board has been formed with all key officers involved and a detailed project plan developed, with a number of key workstreams and themes identified as critical to a successful delivery of the service changes, whilst minimising service disruption. The Project Board's work to date, and especially since the last update to the Committee, has concentrated on the following:

Risk management

- 3.6 As discussed in previous reports, the management of risks associated with the project remains critical to its successful delivery
- 3.7 Every household will be affected by the changes around additional waste containers and collection of different waste types. In addition, new collection rounds will mean that many residents (approximately 18,000 households) will also see a change in their collection day. With changes of this scale, detailed planning and management of the operations, communications, and response to operational issues has been and continues to be undertaken.
- 3.8 As well as the direct risks to the project, any issues that arise from service disruption may lead to wider corporate risks, such as customer dissatisfaction and reputational damage, financial impact and health and safety issues. Risk management has therefore been central to everything the project team has done so far.
- 3.9 A risk register has been established as part of the Project Plan, so that all of the workstreams involved and decisions made are considered and scored in terms of what might go wrong, and the impact that may have on the project. In turn, officers have developed controls to reduce the likelihood of risks becoming a reality, along with mitigation measures, to reduce their impacts to an acceptable level, should they become a reality. This work is discussed further below.

Risk 1 - Recruitment

- 3.10 Risks around staff recruitment are highly significant to the project, both for additional permanent staffing at ECSS for crew and drivers, and temporary council staff to cover anticipated additional work throughout the project.
- 3.11 The risk around operational recruitment was recognised early in the project, especially with a wider shortage in HGV drivers. ECSS colleagues are already working with agencies to supply these, as well as through the usual recruitment channels and there has been some internal staff development to higher level positions.

- 3.12 In addition, the recruitment of two Environmental Services Officers, initially on 12-month contracts, within the Council's Waste Client team, has enabled the successful resolution of hundreds of escalated customer queries and issues arising from the new service since their arrival in October, following the first communication to all households.
- 3.13 They have also commenced the community engagement work, which will be essential in informing residents both before and after the roll out of the new service. At the time of writing, they have attended 24 events across the district, at schools, community groups, libraries, supermarkets and local shops and this will continue up until the delivery of bins commences.
- 3.14 Importantly, they have also completed a survey of all communal bin arrangements in multi-occupancy properties. This has built better relationships with managing agents and social landlords and, in turn will lay the foundation for better waste collection arrangements at those properties and hopefully maximise recycling.
- 3.15 Recruitment is now underway for temporary staff in the Customer Services team to manage residents' calls for at least a six-month period across the run up to and launch of the new services.
- 3.16 As has been previously noted, all of these temporary staff are funded from additional New Burdens transition funding. Of key importance now, is to complete recruitment to full capacity early on which, in turn will allow us to deliver the project on time whilst minimising impacts on other service delivery across the Council.

Risk 2 - Collection Round Restructure

- 3.17 With a comprehensive review of the waste collection service being completed over a year ago, officers have been able to plan well in advance for the changes that will now follow. A key part of this has been the early completion of waste collection round optimisation, by experienced outside consultants, to ensure efficient working for the Council.
- 3.18 This activity completed in summer 2025 and the resulting data has been taken forward by ECSS colleagues. This not only gave a first-hand view of potential issues with the proposed round structures, but also provided positive engagement and buy-in to the proposed changes by the collection crews, who have been able to inform the round designs, and identify early any changes that were required.
- 3.19 The work has now been further refined and will be the subject of a wider officer meeting in late January, to sense check all the rounds. Once this is completed, the rounds will again be amended as needed, before eventually being uploaded onto the digital round management system which is shared across ECSS, the Waste Client Team, and our bin delivery contractor, as well as Customer Service Team.

3.20 There will be some final adjustments made for new customers in the period leading up to the new service starting and these will be made in parallel with the collection crews commencing familiarisation with new rounds before the new service commences in June 2026.

Risk 3 - Procurement

3.21 Orders for all major items and services (collection vehicles, waste containers, and bin delivery) were placed in late 2024 to minimise risks associated with late delivery. Officers are in regular contact with suppliers of these, in order to ensure we are made aware of any production issues, variations or potential delays.

3.22 As well as giving a good margin for any potential delays, this delivery schedule also gives ECSS time to arrange fleet management and other training for the new vehicles, in advance of the new service commencing.

3.23 Bins and caddies will be delivered to the Council over a period of around six weeks from mid-March. As part of the capital spend, Officers have procured an experienced external contractor to deliver all waste containers to households, commencing in mid-March 2026, and taking approximately eight weeks to complete. An additional two weeks' contingency is included in the delivery contract, for any issues which may arise.

3.24 As there is insufficient space at our depot for the 43,000 sets of bins and the vehicles delivering them, a temporary distribution depot is being provided, using much of the car park extension at Littleport Station. This has required additional procurement of security and various works, with bins stored in a secure area and a security presence on site 24 hours a day for the duration of the distribution work. A full health and safety plan is also in place, along with a welfare facility for those working on the site.

3.25 There will clearly be a reduction in parking availability as a result of our use of the car park and a full communications plan will be in place for all users of Littleport Station. Local members have already been made aware of this well in advance, as have immediate neighbours to the site and Littleport Town Council.

Risk 4 - Communication

3.26 Communication was identified as the greatest risk factor within the project, with timing and accuracy of information provided to residents critical to success. Key to this has been undertaking much of the work very early, which has allowed officers to be well prepared for delivering the key messages to residents, which will be needed later on.

3.27 Good progress has been made in delivering the Communication Plan with, overall, a very positive response to the initial communications which went out to all residents in late September. Most have welcomed the introduction of black bins for rubbish to replace the black bags currently in use.

3.28 However, and as anticipated, there were many queries relating to the new service, and many requests for larger bins or alternative service provision. These have been dealt with initially via the Council's website and the Customer Services team, with more complex or difficult cases then escalated to the Waste Client team and in particular, the additional staff which we took on for this purpose.

3.29 Many of these issues have been dealt with by discussion or letter, but a large number will require site visits to resolve and, at the time of writing the report, this work is expected to take until late January to complete.

3.30 There has been a planned slow-down in additional communication regarding the new service across December and January, which has allowed officers to focus on other matters. We have worked with our dry mixed recycling processor, Biffa, to promote messages on contamination of dry recycling material, especially the disposal of lithium batteries, following fires at the processing plant and also one in a dustcart owned by the Council. In addition, we have covered the usual Christmas-related waste messages.

3.31 Comms assets (leaflets, bins tags etc) are now being completed to take forward as we move nearer to the new service. This includes the introduction pack for the new service, which will give details of changes to bin collection day and additional instruction as to what materials can and cannot be placed in the council-provided waste and recycling containers from 1st June. In addition, social media content and vehicle livery messaging will start to increase from March, when the new bins are delivered to residents.

3.32 All of this work seeks to gain maximum participation in the new service from its commencement, with as few negative issues, such as contaminated material, as possible.

3.33 As has been previously advised, it is almost inevitable that some residents will contact local Members and, to assist with such queries, officers will provide additional information to Members, to help them deal with constituent queries. However, if members are in any doubt, they should not hesitate to refer residents to the Council's Waste Client Team via the usual routes.

4.0 Arguments/Conclusions

4.1. Since the last update to the Committee, officers have continued to make good progress on this important project. A risk-based approach has been taken in all of this work.

4.2. To date, the key areas of work have increased, with additional staff dealing with many queries from residents, to help them adjust later, to the new service. In parallel, ECSS colleagues have continued work to finalise the routing of the new collection rounds. Work on communication has continued and the arrangements for operating the temporary bin delivery depot have been completed.

4.3. Overall, the waste service change project remains on track and within the approved budget, for a successful launch of the new service in spring 2026.

5.0 Additional Implications Assessment

Financial Implications		Legal Implications	Human Resources (HR) Implications
Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)		Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA)	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
No		No	No

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The broad financial position of the new services arrangements was described in detail in previous reports and has not changed significantly since that time. The overall project costs are still expected to be within the current approved budget.
- 5.2 As described previously, government New Burdens capital funding was provided for the budget items required for food waste collection, i.e. new vehicles and food waste caddies, and these have been ordered. Similarly, the Council's capital funding has been utilised as approved for new black bins for rubbish and new collection vehicles with bin lifts.
- 5.3 For the period leading up to and immediately following the launch of the new food waste service, some £280k transition funding has also been provided by government for additional revenue costs, which the Council is expected to incur on that part of the overall project.
- 5.4 There will be a need to utilise some Council reserves and which is currently under discussion with the s151 Officer, to be included in the 2026/27 budget. Such use of reserves was originally approved by Council in late 2025.

Human Resource Implications

- 5.5 The report recognises there is a need for additional temporary staff to support the waste service change project. At the time of writing, such staff are already working in the Waste Client team and are now being recruited for Customer Services, with ECSS also requiring additional staff across the operational service. This has been costed and is currently within the transition funding provided for this purpose.

6.0 Background documents

None