

Meeting:	Executive
Meeting date:	3 March 2026
Report of:	Dave Atkinson; Director of Environmental and Regulatory Services
Portfolio of:	Councillor Jenny Kent; Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change

Decision Report: Recycling Review

Subject of Report

1. To review the domestic recycling service including how materials are presented at the kerbside and initiate public engagement and scrutiny to explore the benefits and costs of moving from recycling boxes to recycling wheeled bins for the majority of domestic properties in York.
2. To undertake domestic recycling collections safely for the Council's operational teams and efficiently for residents, while reducing operating costs.

Benefits and Challenges

3. The implementation of recycling bins in place of recycling boxes would increase domestic recycling capacity for those who transition on to recycling bins.
4. Having bins for storing recycling materials would contain contents much better, helping with the management of material and enhancing the environment by reducing litter.
5. Wheeled bins are easier to manoeuvre. This will reduce the bending, carrying and lifting for residents when moving recycling boxes and will reduce musculoskeletal injuries within the service, reducing sickness absence and agency costs.

6. The optimal operating model for the majority of properties would mean collecting recycling bins on a two weekly cycle and alternating between Paper/Card and Tins/Plastics/Glass. Wheeled bins would have over twice the capacity per stream and each stream would be collected every 4 weeks.
7. The move would mean a majority of the city would move from 3 boxes to 2 wheeled bins for recycling. While this is likely not to pose a problem for most, this could present challenges for storage and presentation for some
8. It would not be possible to move to one recycling bin as government guidance dictates that paper and card is kept separate from other materials. This keeps paper and card at a higher quality to be able to recycle and the Council's disposal arrangements mean co-mingling and separation would be costly.

Policy Basis for Decision

9. Affordability:

- a) Kerbside collection costs are funded by council tax contributions and therefore there will be no increase in collection costs.
- b) Currently recycling boxes are free to residents with no limit on the number of boxes required, however currently on average households have 3 recycling boxes. Replacement wheeled bins will be chargeable to residents if lost or damaged, unless by the council's collection teams.

10. Environment:

- a) The move to recycling bins would increase recycling capacity increasing opportunity to recycle.
- b) Simpler recycling reforms mean in March 2027 the Council will need to collect soft film and plastics from the kerbside. Bins will contain new and existing materials better, reducing litter on the streets.

11. Equalities and Human Rights:

- a) Kerbside recycling collections are a universal service and therefore all domestic properties will continue to receive kerbside recycling collections.

- b) It may not be possible for some domestic properties to store additional bins and they may have to remain on box collections. These properties will not be included in any first phase of this proposal. Where possible, recycling bins will be offered to those who want them.

12. Health:

- a) The introduction of recycling bins has many benefits including increased capacity per household, which contributes to a sustainable environment.
- b) Recycling bins have musculoskeletal benefits for residents and operational staff with no crouching, bending, lifting or carrying required.

Financial Strategy Implications

- 13. The draft Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30 includes proposed savings of £520k from the transformation of Waste Services to be achieved over the next 2 years. It is assumed these savings will be delivered from route rationalisation. The implementation of recycling bins sits alongside this transformation work and would deliver further efficiencies. There will need to be a capital investment in recycling bins and depending on the operating model further savings can be found in revenue and potentially future capital for Fleet replacement if single cell vehicles are used for collection. This will be the subject of a future report, if a proposal is taken forward.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 14. Executive are recommended to:

- a) Approve the commencement of public engagement around moving from recycling boxes to recycling bins and the emerging business case to be presented to Scrutiny in May 2026. The scope of properties will be determined by the engagement exercise to inform a business case to be brought to a future Executive meeting.

Reason: To seek ways to improve efficiency of collections, increase recycling capacity, reduce operating costs, decrease musculoskeletal injuries and reduce street litter.

Background

15. Kerbside recycling collections started in the 1990s under a series of trials. City wide fortnightly recycling collections were introduced in 2005.
16. Recycling was collected in three streams (Paper/Card, Tins/Plastics, and Glass). Households on average had three recycling boxes, one for each stream.
17. In 2020, this moved to a twin stream, and the glass was able to be mixed with tins and plastics due to improvement to material recycling facilities by our disposal contractor.
18. Recycling is taken to the Harewood Whin facility, treated to further separate out the collected materials and then traded to generate income for the Council.
19. In November 2025, the Council increased the recycling materials collected from kerbside to include tetra packaging and toothpaste tubes to comply with simpler recycling reforms due in March 2026.
20. In March 2027, simpler recycling reforms meant further expanding collections to include soft films
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/simpler-recycling-in-england-policy-update/simpler-recycling-in-england-policy-update>
21. Collecting soft films presents a new challenge for collection Authorities who do not currently collect this waste type. Officers are investigating how best to gather soft films so they can be recycled, but they are currently permitted to be collected with tins/plastic/glass streams.
22. The Council is not required to offer food waste collections from domestic properties in March 2026 due to having a transitional arrangement in place until 2043.
23. Residual waste is processed through a mechanical treatment plant at the Allerton Waste Recovery Park (AWRP) waste disposal facility to remove any remaining metal and plastics for recycling.
24. AWRP also operates an anaerobic digestion plant that treats the organic waste, such as food waste, and produces a biogas which generates renewable electricity.

25. An energy from waste plant burns the waste which remains after separation of the recyclables and treatment of organic waste, producing steam to feed an electricity generating turbine that produces enough electricity to supply circa 66,000 homes.
26. CYC operates a commercial waste collection service and in March 2025, businesses with 10+ employees were mandated to separate recycling materials from residual waste, including food waste. This new legislation expands to all businesses in March 2027.
27. CYC offers a commercial food collection for businesses as part of our service to collect other recyclable materials and residual waste. All business food waste CYC collects is disposed of at a larger anaerobic digestion plant to create renewable energy.
28. The Council already complies with simpler recycling reforms that mandate paper/card materials, which are kept separate to other dry recycling streams.
29. Some local authorities currently mix all dry recycling materials together, but simpler recycling reforms are likely to mean they need to separate the materials at kerbside as York do currently.
30. Keeping Paper/Card and Tins/Plastics/Glass in two streams is a cleaner way of recycling and as a commodity has much higher value. This currently generates £800k of income for the Council annually and it is critical to maintain this income for Council finances and to meet our environmental objectives of reducing waste and increasing high quality recycling.
31. St Nicks undertake city centre recycling collections on behalf of CYC under contract and includes circa 2568 properties. Collections are aligned to CYC's recycling streams. These properties would not be eligible for bins due to storage challenges.
32. The collection of bins is much more efficient than collecting boxes, and as the service undertakes an optimisation of the whole waste service in 2026, there is an opportunity to ensure that recycling collections are as efficient as possible by moving to recycling wheeled bins.

33. The collection of recycling in boxes does cause challenges with litter. Spilt or dropped materials are sometimes not recovered or weather conditions can lead to materials being blown into the highway. Recycling bins offer better containment of materials.
34. Although recycling boxes are an approved standard of material, they are susceptible to damage, bins are much more durable. CYC provides recycling boxes free to residents at a cost of circa £70k per annum on average to the Council.
35. Emptying of recycling boxes requires crouching, bending, lifting and carrying. Emptying of bins only requires a pushing and pulling movement, which is much safer for operational crews and residents.
36. In the calendar year of 2024, 1281 absence days were recorded as musculoskeletal related. In 2025 calendar year, 1386 absence days were recorded as musculoskeletal related.
37. Absence days are either covered by pool staff or by agency employees, which increases operating costs. CYC should ensure we do what we can to mitigate risk of injuries and increase welfare of employees, and reduce agency staffing costs wherever possible.
38. The proposal to move to recycling bins would not initially include properties in the scope of the recent Bags to Bins project during 2025 and 2026. Further investigation would need to be undertaken to determine if these properties, and those in some other parts of the city, have the capacity to store additional wheeled recycling bins before any decision is made on a changeover.
39. The optimal operating model for properties “in scope” would mean collecting recycling bins on a two weekly cycle and alternating between Paper/Card and Tins/Plastics/Glass. Wheeled bins would have over twice the capacity per stream and each stream would be collected every 4 weeks.
40. The properties that are identified as “out of scope” will be the subject of a further review where suitability to move to wheeled recycling bins will be assessed and options explored.
41. By collecting bins and a single recycling stream at a time, a key benefit is the service would be able to also take small amounts of

side recycling waste and larger items which we currently are not able to do. The service will also review the missed bin policy.

42. DEFRA propose to introduce a future deposit return scheme, (DRS) however the proposals are not yet clear on how such a scheme would work and what the impact on kerbside collections would be.
43. North Yorkshire Council (NYC), with whom the Council share disposal arrangements, are harmonising and optimising their collection routes to follow the method outlined above.
44. Collecting recycling wheeled bins under a new method, would mean single cell vehicles could be procured in the future for recycling collections, meaning reduced capital investment would be required and CYC would have a standardised waste fleet which offers much more flexibility for the service.

Consultation Analysis

45. A Local Authority recycling collection review has been undertaken in order to gain a high level view of the viability of moving from recycling boxes to recycling bins and possible optimal models.
46. An engagement exercise will be undertaken to examine the opportunities and challenges and the scale of the properties that would be “in scope”. The properties in the recent phase of bags to bins would be “out of scope” as a minimum. The business case will then be developed with this information. When public engagement is undertaken it will be clearly mapped in terms of what properties will be “out of scope”.
47. Further engagement will be undertaken as part of second phase with those properties “out of scope” not included in the initial transition to wheeled bins for recycling collections. This is circa 8000 properties included in the Bags to Bins roll out during 2025 and 2026 and other streets identified in the above engagement.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

48. Options for recycling collections below:
 - a) Do nothing and continue with the collection of recycling boxes. This doesn't address ongoing musculoskeletal risks

for operational crews and residents. There is also less opportunity to reduce operational costs and optimise recycling rounds to optimum efficiency, and means continued complaints around street litter from boxes, including associated costs to the public realm team of reactive clearing.

- b) Explore the introduction of recycling wheeled bins to replace recycling boxes. This presents an opportunity to reduce operational costs and increase recycling rates. Also to reduce the physical stress and injury risks for residents of lifting and moving boxes. Collecting bins also reduces the musculoskeletal risks for operational crews. Better containment of materials will contribute to less litter and an improved, cleaner environment.

Organisational Impact and Implications

49. Below are the implications for this subject:

- **Financial:** The report seeks consultation with residents over the introduction of new collection arrangements for recycling across the city. The cost of consultation can be met within waste budgets. The costs of changing arrangements will need to be fully modelled taking into account the capital cost of new bins, the impact on the number and staffing arrangements on rounds and impact on level of recyclates and income levels will all need to be considered in a full business case taken forward to a future Executive report. Any new borrowing will need Full Council Approval.
- **Human Resources (HR):** The proposal has the potential to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of the workforce specifically in relation to muscular skeletal issues. Any changes to operating practices will be managed in accordance with the Councils workforce change policies
- **Legal:** Any commissioning of any new waste receptacles must be done so with advice from the Commercial Procurement Team (see Procurement below). An appropriate form of contract for the supply of any waste receptacles and/or equipment will need to be drafted and completed with support from Legal Services.

- **Procurement:** Any proposed works or services will need to be commissioned via a compliant procurement route under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and where applicable, Procurement Act 2023 and any other relevant procurement regulations. All tenders will need to be conducted in an open, fair, and transparent way to capture the key principles of procurement. Further advice regarding the procurement routes, strategies and markets must be sought from the Commercial Procurement team.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** The move to more manoeuvrable containers with less lifting will be of benefit to both residents presenting waste and operating loading the material.
- **Environment and Climate action:** Waste management accounts for the emission of 21,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) in York (3% of total emissions). There is a need to increase reuse, repair and recycling rates, which is acknowledged in Objective 4.2 of the York Climate Change Strategy. The proposals in this review have the potential to contribute to that objective with improved messaging for residents and a simplified collection process. Changes to recycling rates should be monitored as a result of any new processes being introduced.
- **Affordability:** There would be no additional cost to residents with a move from boxes to bins.
- **Equalities and Human Rights:** The equalities impacts are assessed within the initial draft EIA in **Annex A**. The action plan will be monitored upon implementation.
- **Data Protection and Privacy:** The completion of data protection impact assessment (DPIA) screening questions evidenced there would be no processing of personal data, special categories of personal data or criminal offence data processed, so there is no requirement to complete a DPIA
- **Communications:** The introduction of recycling wheeled bins will require a clear, timely and well-planned communications approach to ensure residents understand the reasons for the change, how it will work in practice, and what it means for their household. Communications will need to explain the benefits in terms of safety, efficiency, capacity

and environmental outcomes, set out container arrangements (including the two-tier model for properties unable to store bins), and provide clear guidance on collection schedules and acceptable materials. Targeted engagement will be important for affected groups, including residents with limited storage space, city-centre properties, and those transitioning from boxes to bins, alongside internal communications to support operational staff. Effective communication will be critical to managing expectations, minimising confusion during implementation, and maintaining public confidence in the recycling service.

- **Economy:** The planned investment will result in net savings to the authority whilst better safeguarding our workforce and improving its resilience, placing the authority and city in a better position to support our economy.

Risks and Mitigations

50. There may be a significant capital investment needed to introduce recycling bins, however, there could be significant revenue and future capital savings in changing the operating model.
51. There are ongoing musculoskeletal risks inherent in collecting boxes. Musculoskeletal related absences are the biggest contributor to lost absence days for the service.

Wards Impacted

52. All Wards.

Contact details

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Background papers

EPAT Scrutiny Bags to Bins

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/g14754/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2029-Apr-2025%2017.30%20Economy%20Place%20Access%20and%20Transport%20Scrutiny%20Commi.pdf?T=10>

EMDS Waste Services

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s162668/Waste%20Report%200October%202022.pdf>

Executive Waste Services – Service Updates

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s172775/Waste%20Report%200January%202024%20FINAL.pdf>

Annexes

- Annex A: Draft Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)