

Meeting:	Executive
Meeting date:	9 September 2026
Report of:	Dave Atkinson, Director of Environmental and Regulatory Services
Portfolio of:	Councillor Jenny Kent, Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change

Recycling Review

Subject of Report

1. York residents are good at recycling. York consistently achieves high levels of washed and separated types of recycling, achieving good value in recycling income and onward use, supporting both council services and the environment. This report outlines proposals to further improve overall recycling waste collection rates and separation by supporting residents to recycle as much as possible from home, helping eliminate the need to put any recyclable items into household waste.
2. The change from boxes to fixed lid wheelie bins will also improve our environment and street scene by reducing litter in our neighbourhoods that is often blown out of the current boxes. Wheeled bins will make handling of recycling containers easier for residents and waste crews alike, by avoiding lifting and carrying.
3. This report summarises findings from extensive, positive consultation, both online and in person, addresses York's particular needs around heritage and terraced housing stock. It also outlines a proposal to meet future government legislation around recycling, enabling CYC to ensure maximum efficiency in waste services.

Benefits and Challenges

4. The implementation of recycling bins in place of recycling boxes would increase domestic recycling capacity for those who

transition on to recycling bins, increasing our recycling rates and supporting our commitments to reduced waste and a circular economy.

5. Wheeled bins with lids attached by hinge for storing recycling materials would contain recycled contents much better, helping with the management of material and enhancing the environment by reducing litter, which can currently cause unsightly littering on our streets, and necessitates cost of separate clean-up. Paper and card are better protected from rain and water damage meaning more of it can be recycled.
6. 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.
7. 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 twice the capacity per stream and each stream would be collected every 4 weeks.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Refuse	Recycling (Paper/Card)	Refuse	Recycling (Tins/Plastic/Glass)

8. Refuse and Garden waste collection frequencies would remain unchanged and on 2 weekly collections.
9. 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, there are exceptions such as terraced areas that may have storage and presentation challenges. The Council in considering the scope of properties moving from boxes to bins, will take a resident focus on storage and presentation and carefully consider factors including aesthetics, accessibility and functionality.

10. In looking at storage and presentation capacity CYC will look to principles of:
- a) Accessibility – Presentation points for containers must be operationally viable. However, maintaining appropriate width across pavements to support accessibility for residents with mobility aids, pushchairs and such like will be at the forefront of decisions on presentations points for containers on collection days.
 - b) Aesthetics – Where operationally viable, the service will support rear storage and central collection points (CCP) in support of maintaining aesthetics.
11. 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

12. **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. Currently on average households have 3 recycling boxes. Replacement wheeled bins will be chargeable to residents if lost or damaged, unless this occurs through fault by the Council.
13. **Environment:**
- a) The move to recycling bins would increase recycling capacity increasing the opportunity to recycle and reducing the need to make journeys to the HWRC for extra items.

- b) Simpler recycling reforms require the Council to increase and simplify how recycling happens at the kerbside. Bins with fixed lids will contain new and existing materials better, reducing litter on the streets and improving neighbourhood environments.

14. 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.

15. 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

- 16. The implementation of recycling bins sits alongside ongoing waste optimisation transformation work and would deliver further efficiencies. There will need to be a capital investment of £2.8m in recycling bins which will result in a revenue cost of capital of c.£280k per annum.
- 17. 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

18. Executive is asked to:

- i) **Recommend to Full Council** approval of the increase in general fund borrowing required to fund capital investment of up to £2.8m in recycling bins.

Reason: *To ensure that the capital programme is fully funded and can be effectively monitored.*

- ii) Approve moving from recycling boxes to 180l recycling bins as standard based on the financial business case supporting the project. The scope of properties in the first phase is up to 63,000. For those properties producing additional recycling materials, larger contain can be requested.

Reason: *To improve efficiency of collections, increase recycling capacity, reduce operating costs, decrease musculoskeletal injuries and reduce street litter as well as providing an adequate kerbside collection service to meet simpler recycling reforms.*

- iii) Delegate authority to officers to find solutions, in partnership with third parties, for some properties in the first, and future phases that may have storage challenges for wheeled bins. This could mean a small proportion of properties within the first scope of change remain on box collections.

Reason: *To ensure residents have appropriate storage space within property boundaries and can benefit from outside space within their property boundary, allowing officers more time to find appropriate solutions for these properties to transition onto wheeled bins for recycling.*

- iv) Approve Waste Services to consider requests for larger 240l containers following standard roll out to support increased recycling and waste minimisation. Special requests for 140l wheeled bins based on exceptional circumstances and a resident is able to reasonably justify the request.

Reason: *To ensure residents have appropriate capacity to increase recycling materials. To allow appropriate storage space within property boundaries and can benefit from outside space within their property boundary.*

Background

19. Kerbside recycling collections started in the 1990s under a series of trials. City wide fortnightly recycling collections were introduced in 2005.
20. Recycling was collected in three streams (Paper/Card, Tins/Plastics, and Glass). Households on average had three recycling boxes, one for each stream.
21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. In March 2026, CYC introduced the kerbside collection of plant pots and toothpaste tubes to widen the scope of materials recycled.
25. National simpler recycling reforms are due to continue to expand over the next few years in an effort to increase recycling rates and improve the environment. It is expected local authority's meet these targets by deadline or accelerate to introduce reforms in advance of requirements.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/simpler-recycling-in-england-policy-update/simpler-recycling-in-england-policy-update>
26. DEFRA have recently recognised the processing market for soft films presents a new challenge and there is currently not an adequate market for processing. Therefore, the introduction of soft film kerbside collections has moved to April 2030, however it is

expected that local authorities continue to prepare to collect soft films from the kerbside and if possible, collect in advance of 2030.

27. Officers are investigating how best to gather soft films so they can be recycled, they are permitted to be collected with tins/plastic/glass streams. Options for future collection of soft films at the kerbside are as follows:
 - a) Loose within containers and these will be processed at the Councils disposal facilities and traded as a commodity. Some off takers prefer this method due to significant investment into mechanical technology.
 - b) Soft films placed in a survival bag (and then placed in containers). This is easier to separate at the disposal facility when picking off disposal lines, and some off takers will accept this as a commodity, but not those who have invested in mechanical technology.
28. 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.
29. The Council already complies with national legislation on simpler recycling reforms that mandate paper/card materials, which are kept separate to other dry recycling streams.
30. Some local authorities currently mix all dry recycling materials together, but simpler recycling reforms are likely to mean they may need to separate the materials at kerbside as York do currently.
31. 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.
32. 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.

33. 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.
34. 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.
35. 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.
36. 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.
37. 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.
38. 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.
39. 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, see Annex G for those streets not in scope of the first phase. 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.
40. Of the 63,000 in scope, circa 16,000 are terraced properties. Waste Services officers have undertaken a desktop assessment of these properties and streets to determine their suitability for storing and presenting wheeled bins as it is accepted these properties may also have challenges. Annex G demonstrates the assessment

outcome of all terraced properties, circa 16,000 terraced properties would receive wheeled bins in the first phase.

41. The remaining circa 10,000 terraced properties (including 2025/26 bags to bins properties) would receive further analysis as part of a second phase given the complexity of these properties and areas.
42. 180 litre bins offer a 30 litre increase in capacity over the 4 week collection cycle, compared to the average household's current output of 3 recycling boxes of 55 litres.
43. 240 litre bins offer an increased capacity of 150 litres as compared to 3 recycling boxes of 55 litres
44. 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 by 2030.
45. A key benefit to collecting bins and a single recycling stream each time is that the service would also be able to also take small amounts of side recycling waste and larger items which we currently are not currently able to do. This can be monitored and of a property is consistently presenting side recycling waste, larger containers could be offered i.e. increase from 180l to 240l.
46. 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, it is anticipated that this might reduce the amount of recycling presented at home. Considering this, a standard and suitable container size should be carefully considered.
47. North Yorkshire Council (NYC), with whom the Council share disposal arrangements, are harmonising and optimising their collection routes to follow the method outlined above.
48. Collecting recycling wheeled bins under a new method, would mean single cell vehicles could be procured in the future for recycling collections. This would be a reduction in cost of replacement vehicle of approximately £480k, in current prices meaning reduced capital investment would be required. CYC would also have a standardised waste fleet which offers much more flexibility for the service.

Consultation Analysis

49. A 6-week consultation and engagement with residents took place between 23 March to 1 May 2026.
50. The consultation received over 13,000 responses. This is a positive response in terms of numbers, and demonstrates residents feel strongly about how their waste and recycling collections take place. Annex A shows the responses per ward.
51. The majority of the responses were from semi-detached and detached properties with this house type amounting to over 80% of the responses. Annex B provides further detail of house type response and ward detail.
52. Annex C shows the main questions and responses from the survey and as expected demonstrated that most properties use 3 recycling boxes.
53. In terms of current recycling capacity for properties, the highest two responses showed that residents use additional containers if they do not have space for materials or they store them until the next collection. Annex C supports this.
54. Residents felt that the main barriers to the current kerbside recycling collections were litter created on the streets and not enough capacity to recycle all items that households can recycle, meaning recyclable items are still being put in the general household waste.
55. The majority of responses felt a move to recycling bins would make recycling easier to recycle.
56. Almost 39% of responses show the main barrier to supporting a switch to bins was lack of storage space although 55% felt there was no barrier.
57. Annex D shows the email communication the service received during the consultation. This is again broken down by house type and varies in feedback. Annex E is drop-in feedback captured.

58. Annex D and E shares feedback in detail but consistently showed common themes:
- i) Space and storage concerns
 - ii) Options for smaller bin sizes
 - iii) Cost of the investment
 - iv) Obstruction and enforcement concerns during collection and just after collection days.
59. Officers answered all queries and questions openly and transparently. This was well received and welcomed by residents and shared mixed outcomes and views, although demonstrated positive engagement and a good example of consultation.
60. Officers presented an overview and analysis of the consultation outcome to the Place Scrutiny Committee on 16 June 2026.
61. The committee welcomed the report and offered positive feedback. Annex H demonstrates the feedback and things the committee suggested the service should consider as part of any transition to wheeled recycling bins.
62. Week commencing 3 August 2026, further consultation was undertaken and led by the Communities team. This was in the form of drop-in sessions targeted at densely populated terraced areas in a bid to gather additional feedback from terraced areas in addition to the consultation held earlier in 2026. The feedback can be seen in Annex H.
63. 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 10,000 properties in total.
64. Another theme highlighted from the consultation was the fire risk with wheeled bins. CYC have sought advice from North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue, the following advice was given: *“We are not aware of any issues with wheelie bins, the main issue known is hot ashes being placed in wheeled bins, which are isolated incidents”*.

Options Analysis and Evidential Basis

65. Options for recycling collections below:

- i) 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. There is also a risk that we are not able to meet simpler recycling reforms by not offering enough capacity through container size.
- ii) Introduce recycling wheeled bins to replace recycling boxes for the properties in scope, circa 63,000 properties. This presents an opportunity to reduce operational costs and increase recycling rates as well as aid meeting simpler recycling reforms. 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

66. Below are the implications for this subject:
67. **Financial:** The report recommends approval by Full Council of the investment in recycling bins for purchase and distribution. The revenue cost of borrowing up to £2.8m will be c.£280k per annum. There will be a revenue budget saving through reduced operating costs from the reduction in loaders required per round as well as revenue cost reductions from reduced staff sickness and agency cover, the level of which will depend on the extent of the roll out of recycling bins. This saving will be used to fund the revenue cost of capital, meaning that the recommendation has a cost neutral impact on revenue budgets.
68. **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.

69. **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.
70. **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.
71. **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.
72. **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.
73. **Affordability:** *There would be no additional cost to residents with a move from boxes to bins.*
74. **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.
75. **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.

76. **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.
77. **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

78. There may be a significant capital investment needed to introduce recycling bins, however, there would be significant revenue and future capital savings in changing the operating model.
79. There are ongoing musculoskeletal risks inherent in collecting boxes. Musculoskeletal related absences are the biggest contributor to lost absence days for the service.
80. As a collection and disposal waste authority, we have a duty to meet simpler recycling reforms and increase recycling rates, adequate sized containers need to be provided to deliver this.
81. Some properties, in particular terraced areas in scope of the first phase, may be concerned about container storage and presentation points. There may be opportunity to review how collections continue to be undertaken for some areas, for example opportunity to move front edge of property collections to central collection points.

82. In support of the previous paragraph, Waste Services will continue to assess and review presentation points and front, or rear storage based on:

- i) Operational viability and safety
- ii) Accessibility
- iii) Aesthetics.

Wards Impacted

83. 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%20October%202022.pdf>

Executive Waste Services – Service Updates

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

Executive Recycling Review

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s187583/Item%209%20-%20Recycling%20Review.pdf>

Place Scrutiny Recycling Review Consultation Analysis

https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s189647/Recycling_Review_Scrutiny%20Report.pdf

Annexes

Annex A – Participation by ward

Annex B – Types of households by ward

Annex C – Survey responses

Annex D – Email communication analysis

Annex E – Drop-in sessions summary

Annex F – Human Rights Equalities Impact Assessment (HREIA)

Annex G – Terraced Properties Assessment

Annex H – August 2026 consultation feedback.