

## **AUTHORITY REPORT: BULKY WASTE - REUSE COLLECTIONS**

### **1. Confidential Report**

1.1 No

### **2. Recommendations:**

2.1 Members are asked to recommend the introduction of a robust referral system to the boroughs' call centre scripts to divert reusable items away from the bulky waste collection stream.

2.2 Members are asked to otherwise note this report.

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### **3. Purpose**

3.1 To report on the viability of incorporating reuse activity in to the boroughs' bulky waste collections.

### **4. Background**

4.1 With increasing national focus on the waste hierarchy, which promotes waste minimisation and reuse ahead of recycling, ELWA officers have investigated the viability and potential benefits of diverting suitable items away from the residual waste stream to be sent for reuse.

4.2 A Greater London Authority report defines reuse as follows:

'Reuse is defined as an item or material which becomes unwanted by the current owner but it is still considered to be useable and have an economic value. The owner has however decided to write off its value to expedite its removal and in doing so the item or materials has the potential to enter the waste stream or alternatively be offered for reuse to a reuse organisation.'

4.3 Suitable items for reuse include furniture and household white goods such as fridges.

4.4 In July 2010, the Mayor of London granted the London Community Resource Network (LCRN) £8.1m to deliver a London Reuse Network, and the Mayor's Waste Management Strategy published in November 2011 further detailed the government's intention to see reuse become more prominent in London's waste management.

4.5 In March 2011, ELWA commissioned WRAP, a DEFRA funded body promoting resource efficiency, to report on options for bulky waste diversion in the ELWA region. Working with LCRN, WRAP delivered a paper detailing the available local infrastructure and road maps suggesting how ELWA could make use of it. In the initial stages of their investigation, WRAP's intention was to recommend a partnership approach to introducing reuse activity. However, it became apparent this would not be possible, at least in the short term, because of the boroughs' different waste collection contracts and priorities. Therefore, individual plans were suggested for each borough.

4.6 While the individual plans make reasonable suggestions, they were made without full consideration of ELWA's, and the boroughs', contractual positions. Therefore ELWA's path forward may not reflect the roadmaps outlined in the report.

4.7 The WRAP report suggested that if all recommendations were put in place, approximately 1,000 tonnes of material could be diverted away from landfill in three years. To put that into perspective, over one million tonnes of ELWA contract waste will be processed in that time.

4.8 Bulky waste, like kerbside refuse and recycling, constitutes contractual waste and any bulky waste the boroughs collect must be delivered to Shanks or have Shanks' agreement for it to be delivered elsewhere.

### **5. Current position**

5.1 ELWA officers considered WRAP's report and investigated the possibility of implementing the suggested measures, which fell into two distinct areas:

a) Collections from households.

b) Collections from Reuse and Recycling Centres (RRCs).

- 5.2 Currently, the four boroughs each run a bulky waste collection service, which represents the primary source of reusable objects from households. However, there is a division in the way that the services are carried out.
- a) Barking & Dagenham and Newham both operate a free-of-charge in-house collection service (although LBBD offers a priority service at a charge). Such a service allows for flexibility in altering those operations, without the constraints of a contract. Therefore the introduction of a reuse service is feasible. However, offering a free collection removes one major incentive for residents to opt for a reuse collection, which may also be free or may be chargeable, but will almost certainly be less convenient.
  - b) Havering and Redbridge offer their residents a chargeable service, which is outsourced. Due to this charge, an alternative service that may be cheaper or free should result in buy-in from residents and any collection costs to the council should be covered. However, the boroughs' existing collection contracts could be a potential stumbling block if implementing a new service would not benefit the contractor.
  - c) The boroughs also differ in what they will collect through this service. Newham, at one end of the scale, will collect everything barring fixtures and fittings, whereas Redbridge are more selective and will not, for example, collect black sack waste. The more selective the collection is, the easier it is to extract reusable items. All four boroughs carry out bulky waste collections from outside the property.
  - d) Excluding electrical items, Newham collect bulky waste in compaction vehicles, so nothing is recoverable for reuse. The other boroughs use caged vehicles, which is also less than ideal as the items are open to the elements and can easily be damaged.
- 5.3 The WRAP report identified the existing reuse organisations local to the ELWA region. These are mostly Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) located at the outer fringes of the region or outside of it. A major drive behind the Mayor of London's funding for the London Reuse Network is to provide more reuse outlets, and it is hoped that the 'East Cluster' will see the benefit of this, but at the current time there are limited options available to the ELWA boroughs.
- 5.4 ELWA and borough officers have visited four organisations that can offer an alternative to the boroughs' services. As part of the East Cluster of the London Reuse Network, they are set up to work with each other as needed.
- a) Homestore, based in Stratford, is a charity that provides affordable second-hand furniture to low income households. They currently collect reusable items from the Chigwell Road RRC in Redbridge and have Service Level Agreements with the London boroughs of Islington and Hackney for bulky reuse collections. Their operations could extend to Redbridge, Newham and Barking & Dagenham, but do not reach as far as Havering.
  - b) First Fruits, based in Silvertown, has until recently specialised in the reuse of office furniture but is now developing into a domestic reuse facility with capacity for repair and recycling also on site. This is the largest existing reuse organisation in the area and would potentially be of use to all four boroughs; LCRN intend for it to become one of two 'reuse hubs' available to ELWA, where reusable items can be delivered, repaired and sorted, then distributed to smaller outlets across the region for sale. However, whether this is a sustainable model remains to be seen as First Fruits are very much in transition. A location for a second hub is yet to be found, and in all likelihood this will not be addressed until it can be established that such a system will work.
  - c) Lighthouse Furniture in Brentwood is similar in operation to Homestore, although it benefits from a wealthier local community, which means a higher quality of reusable items is available to them. They would be able to operate in Havering but no further. They put an emphasis on being a part of the local community with work experience and volunteering opportunities available for long term unemployed and disabled people, amongst others.
  - d) The Reuse Partnership (TRUP), based in East Tilbury, largely mirrors the operation of Lighthouse and will also only reach as far as Havering.

- 5.5 The WRAP report's eventual solution is for the boroughs to let comprehensive bulky reuse, recycling and waste collection contracts in partnership with TSOs. However, with two boroughs already engaged in collection contracts and two intending to maintain free collections, this is not an option for the short/medium term.
- 5.6 One route, which would incur minor disruption to existing services and can readily be put in place, is to refer residents who have called the council for a bulky waste collection to a local reuse organisation for them to collect the item(s) free of charge. It would need to be established over the phone that the item is indeed reusable or, if not, the council would carry out the service as it would with the current set up. Referrals are theoretically already happening but in practice there is no robust system in place for referrals at the contact centres.
- a) Such an informal approach does not tie the councils in to any contracts and has the added benefit of minimising the waste collected by them. Formalising this arrangement would allow the boroughs to count all collections made towards their recycling rates, as the TSO would provide information on tonnage. However, this would very likely involve payments from the council to the TSO which would effectively cancel out any savings made by diverting the tonnage from the contract/landfill. This is assumed to be the case based on the Service Level Agreements that the London Boroughs of Hackney and Islington have with Homestore, whereby the boroughs pay Homestore £25 for each collection made.
  - b) The downside is that residents could view such an approach as the council endorsing particular organisations and if the service is not performed adequately the council could be held responsible. However, the organisations in question have a good track record of working with other local authorities.
  - c) For Redbridge and Havering, this should be an effective means of diverting reusable items as the resident would be incentivised by avoiding a minimum charge of over £20, although they would have to make arrangements to be at home for a collection from inside the property (items left outside will not be collected as they may become damaged). Between Homestore, Lighthouse and TRUP, there is capacity to collect from households in Redbridge and Havering.
  - d) For Barking & Dagenham and Newham's residents, an option to have their items collected by a reuse organisation could be financially unattractive; it represents no saving (except to those LBBDD residents requiring a priority collection), an inconvenience and an unfamiliar service. However, for particularly enthusiastic residents, Homestore would be able to collect from these boroughs if required.
- 5.7 An alternative option was explored for Redbridge, whereby all bulky material would be delivered by Redbridge's contractor directly to First Fruits rather than a Shanks facility. There it would be sorted into items that could be reused or recycled, which they have the means to do on site, and any residual waste would be delivered to Shanks for disposal. This would allow reuse and recycling to be introduced to Redbridge's bulky waste service without taking the collections out of the council's hands. However, there are several obstacles which make this option impractical and financially unworkable:
- a) Redbridge would have to alter their collection service to collect from inside of the property. This would involve booking specific days of collection, which does not currently happen. They would also have to use vehicles which protect the load from rain etc, rather than open top caged vehicles.
  - b) Even with an extensive monitoring program, there would be potential for error in the return of non-reusable or non-recyclable material to Shanks, as waste from other parties may be mixed in because First Fruits work with other councils and commercial outfits around London.
  - c) Redbridge would require higher tonne mileage payments for the increase in distance travelled, which would likely negate the savings made in minimising the waste collected. This rules out Havering using this option as they would have considerably further to travel.

- d) This option would not be available to Newham due to the high levels of residual waste collected by their bulky waste service and more importantly their use of compaction vehicles. This applies to Barking & Dagenham to a lesser extent as well.
- e) It remains unclear to ELWA officers whether or not the First Fruits model is self-sustaining. Until the model can be proved effective, no formal arrangement can be entered into.

5.8 The table below illustrates the significant variations in the services offered by the boroughs and the TSOs. This highlights the fundamental changes all four boroughs would need to make to carry out effective in-house reuse collections.

| <b>Service comparison</b>               | <b>Borough service</b>  | <b>TSO service</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Items collected</b>                  | Varies from virtually everything to specific large items. No restriction on broken/damaged items. | Only items deemed reusable, with appropriate fire safety labels. |
| <b>Collect from</b>                     | Outside the property, within a certain number of days from booking                                | Inside the property, on a specific day                           |
| <b>Collection vehicle</b>               | Open caged or compaction vehicle  | Typically a Luton Transit van                                    |
| <b>Charge</b>                           | Two boroughs charge residents, two do not   | Free of charge collections for residents                         |
| <b>Destination of recoverable waste</b> | Landfill or limited recycling   | Reuse or recycling   |

- 5.9 WRAP's report suggested a container be placed at each RRC for the receipt and storage of reusable items. The upper limit of this would be to have a workshop and retail space on site, where items could be repaired as necessary and sold on. However, due to limited space this would not be an option at ELWA's sites.
- 5.10 Chigwell Road is the only RRC which currently utilises a reuse container. This is not promoted to the public; rather, it is kept closed at one corner of the site. Site staff are expected to intercept any items that could be reused and put them in the container themselves. When, previously, the container was promoted and left to the public to use as they would any other area of the site largely at their own discretion, it quickly became apparent that a discerning eye is needed to decide what is and what isn't suitable to be reused. Reuse organisations have to be very selective about what they can collect. Understandably, a person with limited understanding of the reuse process might, with good intention, place items in the container that could not be reused and it would quickly become contaminated. As it isn't sensible to constantly man one container, it was felt more appropriate to run it in this way. When the container is close to full, site staff contact Homestore to empty it.
- 5.11 ELWA officers believe there is space at each RRC to site a reuse container, and the staff capacity to effectively utilise it. However, this will need to be discussed with Shanks to fully ascertain its viability.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 With minimal infrastructure and contractual restraints, there is limited scope for introducing reuse activity to ELWA boroughs' operations at the current time. However, there are measures that can be taken now to increase reuse, with a view to bringing in more comprehensive arrangements as and when they become practical.
  - a) Reuse containers can be sited at each RRC to divert reusable items brought in by residents, subject to discussions with Shanks.

- b) A robust referral system can be introduced to the boroughs' call centre scripts to divert reusable items away from the bulky waste collection stream. While it is anticipated that this will be considerably more effective in Havering and Redbridge, there is a case for implementing it in Barking & Dagenham and Newham.

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**7. Relevant officer:**

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**8. Appendices attached:**

None

**9. Background Papers:**

WRAP report – available to members on request

**10. Legal Considerations:**

None

**11. Financial Considerations:**

11.1 The item responds to the report undertaken by WRAP around opportunities to introduce residual waste streams for reuse. The report recommends that reuse containers be sited at RRC sites. This might divert some waste tonnages from diversion but needs to be discussed in advance with Shanks in advance.

11.2 The report highlights that whilst some modest savings could be generated from reuse policies through reduced tonnages, the current inconsistent service delivery methodologies across the 4 constituent councils minimise the type of policies that could be implemented.

**12. Risk Management Considerations:**

12.1 Implementing reuse activity should help mitigate the following strategic risks:

- a) S5 - Adverse media attention
- b) S12 – Failure to meet landfill diversion targets
- c) S12 – Poor perception of Authority
- d) S12 – Increased landfill costs

12.2 Implementing reuse activity should help mitigate the following operational risks:

- a) O9 – Criticism of ELWA and ELWA Ltd
- b) O9 – Customer complaints
- c) O14 - Failure to meet ELWA Pooled/Contractual Targets
- d) O14 - Failure to meet waste minimisation strategy targets

**13. Follow-up Reports:**

None

**14. Websites and e-mail links for further information:**

Homestore – <http://www.quakersocialaction.com/homestore>

Lighthouse Furniture - <http://www.lighthousefurniture.org/>

The Reuse Partnership - <http://www.trup.org.uk/>

First Fruits - <http://www.firstfruit.org.uk/aboutus.htm>

**15. Glossary:**

ELWA - East London Waste Authority

RRC - Reuse and Recycling Centre

LCRN - London Community Resource Network

TRUP - The Reuse Partnership

TSO - Third Sector Organisations

WRAP – Waste and Resources Action Programme

DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

**16. Approved by Management Board:**

23 January 2012

**17. Confidentiality:**

No