



# Tonbridge and Malling Green Party

## Briefing 3: **Local waste collection and recycling**

October 2017

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### **1 Introduction**

How we generate and handle the waste we create as a society is a key concern for anyone who wants to promote sustainable living and reduce our adverse impact on the environment.

The “green movement” advocates moving from a “linear economy” - take, make and dispose to a “circular economy” that maximises the use of resources, minimises waste and pollution, encourages the production of longer lasting products and uses renewable energy. We want to see lower consumption, less waste and reduced packaging but we must also address waste collection and recycling.

Tonbridge & Malling Borough’s waste collection contract with Veolia (see Contracting below) runs out in February 2019.

TMBC is starting to plan for a new regime (see TMBC Plans below) so we have an opportunity to influence what is put in place.



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## Issues & Priorities

These are just some of the key issues:

- A programme of education and information
- Ambitious but achievable recycling targets
- More kerbside recycling collection
- Importance of separation to increase value
- Garden waste and home composting
- Food waste
- Consultation before decision
- Trials and pilot schemes

## 2 Current situation in Tonbridge & Malling

### Household collection

- Fortnightly collections from green bins - mixed garden waste, food waste and cardboard; and from green boxes - paper and cans.
- Fortnightly collection of all other waste in the grey bin.

### Other services

There are over 40 sites around Tonbridge and Malling for the collection and recycling of a number of different recyclable materials, mostly glass, plastic containers, cans and textiles.

A refuse freighter for bulky items is parked once a month, on Saturdays, in rotation at about 45 locations across the borough.

TMBC also provides a service which can collect electrical items and scrap metal for recycling. A smaller vehicle parks next to the Saturday freighter at all sites.

It will collect any of these items for recycling:

- Small household appliances
- Large household appliances
- Electronic games & toys
- TVs, monitors and computers
- Batteries, including car batteries
- All metals

There are no Household Waste Recycling Centres in Tonbridge & Malling. The nearest ones are at Sundridge Hill, Cuxton; Tovil, Maidstone; Sundridge, Sevenoaks; North Farm Lane, Tunbridge Wells (currently closed). All operated by Kent County Council.



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### **Contracting**

Waste and recycling collection services are contracted to Veolia until the end of February 2019, as is the street cleansing service. Glass and can banks are serviced by Veolia on behalf of TMBC and Tunbridge Wells Borough; the banks vehicles belong jointly to the two authorities.

The recycling banks for plastics, paper and textiles are provided and serviced under separate contracts with other providers. All arrangements are coterminous with the main contract.

The value of the existing contracts for refuse, recycling and street cleansing services is around £3.8m per annum and provides a service to over 52,000 households.

### **Paper recycling - where it goes**

Paper collected via kerbside/green box service (by far the major portion) is direct delivered from the collection rounds to the Veolia transfer station in Medway from where it is bulked up as a discreet grade for onward delivery to one of the two remaining newsprint manufacturing mills (Deeside and Kings Lynn respectively). There are no other dedicated newsprint mills in the country.

The paper from paper banks at recycling sites is delivered to a specialist contractor in Essex where the material is prepared for onward transport to the paper manufacturing industry.

The paper collected via this service becomes the property of the contractor at the point at which we receive payment. Generally this material (being 'News and PAM' grade will go into the manufacture of newsprint/magazine grade for supply to the press). The contractor is responsible for the onward transfer and reprocessing of the material.

### **Green bin waste - where it goes**

The content of the green-lidded bins (garden waste, food waste and cardboard) is directly delivered to Blaise Farm composting facility near West Malling, as directed by Kent County Council (the waste disposal authority).

TMBC has said that: “not all residents are fully utilising the services we already provide. For example, recent waste audits of a large sample of residents' black bin waste showed that 13% was paper that could have been recycled in the green box scheme, and around 30% was garden or food waste that could have been composted using the green-lidded bin.

“Any waste materials placed into the black bin are not sent to landfill. Instead they are used to generate electricity for the local grid, at the local energy-from-waste plant.” *Source: response to Green Party Member, 2016*



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### **3 Performance and Best Practice**

For 2014/15 Tonbridge & Malling ranked 198 out of 351 local authorities, sending 41.5% of household waste for reuse, recycling or composting

(<https://www.letsrecycle.com/councils/league-tables/201516-overall-performance/>)

South Oxfordshire District Council achieved 66.6%. For the same period Ashford Borough Council recycled 53.1% of waste and Maidstone Borough Council 47.8%, placing them 44<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> respectively. Ashford has since increased its percentage to 55.3% and is the best performing council in Kent.

TMBC is performing below average (43%) for England and well below the EU recycling target of 50%.

#### **Food waste**

Weekly food waste collections are a must and will make a big difference, as food is nearly always the largest contributor by weight for what is in refuse and in total household waste.

As food waste is best collected weekly, a single pass kerbside collection for all recycling will be the most efficient and convenient for householders where refuse collection is not also weekly.

It should be noted that some households will put some or most of their recyclables in their refuse, even in high recycling areas, and that this problem reduces when refuse is collected less frequently.

In 2016 Stroud Greens were instrumental in introducing a new food waste recycling scheme for households. In the first two weeks, 60 per cent more food waste than expected was collected. The waste food goes to an anaerobic digester which turns it into methane for use in the national gas main while the digestate is used for fertilizer on farmland.

When materials are collected co-mingled (COM) for recycling, the quality and value of their end-use will be lower. This especially applies to glass, which is

best used to make new containers and saves a good amount of energy. If collected co-mingled, only about half the glass (often less) can be sorted to a quality suitable for containers. The rest will be used for lower grade purposes, often as aggregate, which uses more energy than it saves!

Mixing cardboard with garden waste reduces the quality of the compost produced and makes the process a bit harder as cardboard composts a bit differently to garden waste when done on a large-scale. Including food with garden waste is poor practice, as much



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stricter Animal By-Product regulations then apply which adds to the costs of composting what will mostly be garden waste anyway. Evidence also shows that far less food waste is collected when taken with garden waste than if separate food waste collections are provided.

### **Outsourcing**

Most authorities outsource their waste collection and recycling services to third party contractors. There can be benefits to in-house provision, but not always, especially if in-house teams are resistant to change. Consultants will often advise that Teckal companies now offer the best option. These are arms-length council-owned companies which can also be exempt from competitive procurement requirements.

Part of the benefit can be in the structure and local authority ownership, but part is also in the lower pension costs that result, which also applies when contracting out. The private sector spends less on pension provision than the public sector is able, which Greens would not regard as a benefit, although existing staff should retain their current benefits and it is normally just new staff with lower entitlements (<https://www.letsrecycle.com/news/latest-news/councils-turn-to-teckal-exemptions-for-waste/>).

### **4 TMBC plans**

TMBC is working on a project with two other collection authorities (Dartford Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) and Kent County Council to procure an improved collection and recycling service from 2019.

TMBC councillors have been briefed about early plans for a new service:

- Fortnightly collections from existing green bins and boxes - plastics, metal, cartons, glass, paper, card and cans.
- Weekly collection of food waste in a new kitchen caddy.
- Fortnightly collection of all other waste in the grey bin.
- A new garden waste collection in a new 'Green Bin'. Residents choosing to receive this service will have to pay between £30 and £40 per household per year.

The national average charge for garden waste collection is around £42 per property per annum. Dartford Borough Council, already provides a separate garden waste collection service at an annual cost of £38.



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TMBC says: “It is estimated that joint working and a more consistent approach to collection and disposal of waste and recycling could realise savings over £3m per annum across the three authority areas.”

“There is an expectation that the Waste Services Contract will make a significant contribution towards the contract savings target contained within the Savings and Transformation Strategy.”

“It is felt that additional income generation will be a key part of being able to offer improved collection services, maintain high street cleansing standards and realise an overall saving for this council. Charging for garden waste collection on an “opt in” basis will be a key factor.”

Source: Paper presented to TMBC Street Scene & Environment Advisory Board, 20 June 2017 Report of the Director of Street Scene, Leisure and Technical Services Part 1- Public Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member). 1 WASTE SERVICES CONTRACT RETENDER (<https://democracy.tmbc.gov.uk/documents/s23796/Report%20of%20Director%20of%20Street%20Scene%20Leisure%20and%20Technical%20Services.pdf>).

The tendering process starts in December 2017 with an Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) notice and it seems the procurement exercise will be led by Dartford Borough Council on behalf of the four authorities. The contract will be awarded in July 2018.

### **5 Association of Green Councillors (AGC) responses**

A request posted to the AGC discussion list produced some useful responses which provide a wider background and indication of some of the complexities relating to this issue:

“St Albans introduced a similar system (but no charge for green waste) a year or two ago and is now reaching 60% recycling.”

*Simon Grover, St Peters ward, St Albans City & District Council*

“We collect and sort from the kerbside to gain a high quality (uncontaminated) recyclate and thus a better return when sold to the reprocessors. Better, and less expensive, to sort at source than to comingle and process through a manual recycling facility. Removing glass is an important option (not co-mingling it).

“We have recycling glass, cans, aerosols, plastic bottles, cardboard, paper, textiles, small electricals/electronics, batteries and food caddy collections weekly, non-recyclables/refuse fortnightly, and charge for green waste collections making that cost neutral. We own the recycling vehicles and lease them to Biffa.



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“County is the disposal authority where they are building an incinerator at great cost, conflicting with district recycling aspirations. We recycle 63% and aspire to better. Ultimately, the 'holy grail' is to reduce waste through lifestyle changes. We have one or two

community zero-waste initiatives but they need more support and mainstreaming to have an effect.”

*Chris McFarling, Forest of Dean*

“The UK currently subsidises (such as through waste infrastructure grants that underpin PFI contracts) collection modalities (comingling) that support incineration. If that government subsidy backed more local, proper recycling then sorting rather than comingling would be incentivised instead.

“Evidence is rather hard to come by as many local authority waste contracts are held within large multiyear contracts (PFI or PPP) that are declared commercially confidential.

“Best practice should also include 100% of flats and communal properties in new scheme (from the outset), and wider community recycling facilities and bring sites.

“Seems two basic approaches to recycling with austerity

1. Cut costs, outsource, flatline recycling rates; or
2. Invest to save, control and innovate in-house (ideally) and maximise recycling.

1. Leads to more co-mingling (all recycling in one bin), which tends towards investment in incinerators.

2. Increases supply of higher quality recyclates, greater potential for decent green job creation in UK

“Incidentally if repeal bill goes through we might have passed but not transposed the new EU circular economy directive into UK law so could lag further behind EU best practice in future.”

*Jonathan Essex, Redhill*

“Leicestershire County Council has just taken their household recycling centres back from EMF, Northampton Borough Council were going to bring waste services back in house but then the executive made a political decision to re contract it.”

*Darren Woodiwiss, Harborough*



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### **6 Comments and Recommendations**

Tonbridge & Malling Green Party welcomes TMBC's decision to seek improvements in its arrangements for household waste collection and recycling. We applaud the intention to increase the borough's current rate of recycling.

We also welcome the decision to work with other local authorities and Kent County Council, as West Kent Joint Waste Partners, on improving services. Joint working relationships across authorities can be good value for money but should not come at the expense of a reduction in local responsiveness and attention to details.

We are particularly pleased that the Council wishes to introduce kerbside recycling collection for plastics and glass. This has long been advocated by Tonbridge and Malling Green Party.

The merits of the proposal to charge for a new, separate garden waste collection are finely balanced. On the one hand it seems reasonable to charge for a service that only some householders will need; on the other hand, charging may lead to an increase in garden bonfires and fly tipping.

Ideally, no additional charge should be levied but whichever way the Council decides to go, we believe the situation needs to be kept under review. This is an area where flexibility may be required as some people may have only an infrequent (or seasonal) need for garden waste removal and appropriately located community recycling bins might provide a better answer than individual bins in many areas.

However, collection of green waste (whether charged for or not) is only part of the solution. Tonbridge & Malling gives minimal encouragement to home composting. It could do more, for example by offering and promoting discounted compost bins, like many other councils, including Maidstone, Shepway and Dover.

TMBC suggests that the proposed new services could increase average recycling performance to around 50%. We believe this lacks ambition, considering that the best-performing authority in the country achieves almost 67%.

Given the long-term nature of these contracting arrangements, the opportunity to rethink services comes infrequently and we think TMBC should look to emulate best practice from around the country where a wider range of items and materials can be recycled more conveniently and recycling rates are higher.

There are, though, dangers in focusing purely on recycling targets. It's important to address quality as well as quantity so that good products can be made from the materials collected.



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Collecting food waste and cardboard separately is important as including food waste in a green bin adds to the costs and including cardboard reduces the quality of any compost produced.

TMBC is proposing a 'two-stream with separate food' option as defined by the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

This will mean plastics, metals, cartons and glass all going into one bin with a separate container for paper and cardboard.

The quality of materials, especially glass, will not be as high as with a 'multi-stream' collection option. The multi-stream option should also have lower costs. We suggest that the council does not just go with the Nominal Optimal Method (NOM) but checks the costs of different collection options too.

WRAP has produced an online tool to compare both costs and effectiveness of the different kerbside recycling collection systems (1).

The lowest cost is likely to result from 'multi-stream' collections using two recycling boxes and Romaquip style collection vehicles that allow the crew to sort materials into different compartments on the vehicle.

This video shows how it works <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4iEx2sAfiA>

Once loaded on to the vehicle, materials only need minimal further sorting and some none at all and are hauled in bulk from bays at collection depots. This gives higher quality material than from collections where materials are collected mixed and then sorted at a materials recovery facility (MRF).

The two-stream option proposed by TMBC is better than a fully comingled collection where all materials go in the same bin, but not as good as multi-stream.

Experience has shown that collecting refuse less frequently increases recycling rates. This is because too many households still put some (or even all) of their recyclables in their refuse bin. This has been consistently shown by refuse composition studies and to stop it you need a good recycling service and less "convenient" refuse service.

15 local authorities so far have adopted either 3-weekly or 4-weekly collections, with five more planning similar changes.

The fortnightly collection (as at present) is a good start and we do not advocate moving to a less frequent collection regime at the moment but TMBC should ensure the contract allows a move to further reductions in refuse frequency to 3 or 4 weekly, together with the costs



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and savings this would allow. Analysis by the Somerset Waste Board of new service models could be useful here.

We suggest TMBC looks at the experience of the best-performing authorities such as South Oxfordshire(2) which operates an alternate week system, apart from food waste which is collected weekly.

South Oxfordshire collects and recycles a wide range of items and materials through its doorstep service, including batteries and textiles which helps it to achieve top spot in the local authority recycling league table. The waste collection contract for South Oxfordshire District Council is currently with Biffa.

Although not covered in this contract, we would also like to see KCC invest in Anaerobic Digestion for Kent. Such a system could also be used for farm waste and can produce methane for feeding into the gas grid and high quality digestate for use as a fertiliser.

(1) <http://laportal.wrap.org.uk/ICPToolHome.aspx>

(2) <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/recycling/what-can-i-recycle>



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### **7 Green Party Policy**

Green Party policy in this area comes under the heading *Natural Resources and Waste Management*, with the last major revision in 2006.

Particularly relevant policies include:

NR312 To introduce new priorities for waste management:

- so that unnecessary waste is avoided;
- so that the efficient reuse, recycling and composting or digestion of waste is maximised;
- to work towards a target of zero waste. The zero waste concept encompasses producer responsibility, eco-design, waste reduction, reuse and recycling, all within a single framework with the aim of eliminating altogether waste sent to landfill or incinerators.

NR410 Local Councils will be given full powers to establish waste recovery and sorting facilities for the collection of all domestic and commercial waste and to sell recovered materials to industry for recycling.

NR411 The duty to dispose of waste collected by District Councils will be transferred to Regional Waste Disposal Authorities, controlled by District Councils and other community representatives, with the costs of disposal charged to all District Councils in direct relation to the quantity of waste collected for disposal by each District. This will give District Councils an incentive to promote waste reduction and to increase waste recycling, as they will save directly on disposal costs.

NR412 District Councils will be required to recover for recycling at least 60% of recyclable domestic waste within 5 years. At the end of this period an increased target will be set, which is based on an assessment by the Standards Commission, of how much further unnecessary waste can be avoided and which incorporates targets for waste reduction and the composting or digestion of organic waste.



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### **Transitional policy on municipal waste disposal**

NR414 In the medium- to longer-term, we firmly believe that the policies in this chapter designed to prevent waste arising in the first place are the most important ones to adopt. However, local authorities currently have a statutory duty to dispose of domestic waste, and implementation of the Landfill Directive - which quite correctly imposes progressively diminishing targets on the maximum amount of biodegradable waste that can be sent to landfill - means that local authorities are having to revise their waste strategies. Many authorities have opted for large scale incineration, often in the face of considerable local opposition. Green councillors are necessarily involved in creating new waste strategies, which are only second best and transitional strategies towards the longer-term solutions set out in this chapter.

NR415 In creating any such short-term strategy the following context needs to be taken into account:

- i) while the economy continues to grow in wasteful ways, the domestic waste stream will increase in size, whatever local councils do;
- ii) there is considerable scope to promote greater reuse of perfectly good things that have been thrown away;
- iii) there is growing public willingness to participate in recycling schemes;
- iv) kerbside recycling schemes in some areas currently recover quite high proportions of dry recyclables and compostable waste, and there is scope for replicating this far more widely;
- v) encouraging domestic composting reduces the transport of waste;
- vi) domestic waste is only a part of total waste, which also includes industrial and commercial waste and construction and demolition waste;
- vii) there is very considerable technical development taking place in waste management at the moment, and it is not possible unequivocally to recommend a particular technical route;
- viii) nevertheless large-scale incineration of residual waste (that is after dry-recyclables and compostable waste have been removed so far as they can be) is usually dangerously polluting, and still creates a toxic final product for landfill;
- ix) modern approaches, such as mechanical and biological treatment, anaerobic digestion and possibly even gasification, sometimes used in
  
- combination, may offer reduced pollution and a smaller amount of less damaging material going to landfill;
- x) there is scope with anaerobic digestion and gasification to produce biogas and syngas respectively, which can be converted to hydrogen and then used, for example, to power public transport, such as buses, through fuel cells;
- xi) it is recognised that some of these newer technologies are more expensive than incineration and landfill;



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- xii) it is important not to enter into long-term contracts or arrangements which require large minimum volumes of waste, and so create an incentive to maintain or increase the size of the overall waste stream.

NR416 While there will necessarily be local variation, the most promising approaches seem likely to involve:

- i) having a clear hierarchy of waste treatments, with reuse first, followed by recycling and composting, followed by treating the residual waste in non-polluting ways that produce useful products like biogas and the least possible quantity of inert material for landfill;
- ii) encouraging home composting;
- iii) investing considerable effort in educating and persuading householders to separate their waste into dry recyclables, compostable wastes and residual refuse, and not to place certain hazardous items (for example, paint, pesticides and items containing NiCad batteries) into the municipal waste stream at all;
- iv) aiming to have no more than 20% residual waste, and to recycle and compost more than 80%;
- v) organising kerbside collection of all three streams;
- vi) sorting the dry recyclables either at the kerbside or at a materials recovery facility, and ensuring that the dry recyclables are put to high value uses;
- vii) preferring mechanical and biological treatment and anaerobic digestion, possibly in tandem;
- viii) no incineration of residual waste;
- ix) cautiously exploring the possibility of gasification, but not accepting it if the feedstock contains too many recyclables and if there are pollution risks;
- x) accepting that in the short-term some residual waste after treatment will end up in landfill, but that that waste should be inert and pose no danger to watercourses;
- xi) even without central government specifying it as a responsibility, local authorities looking to reduce, reuse and recycle waste from non-domestic sources within their geographic boundaries.



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### **8 Resources**

**South Oxfordshire District Council:** <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/recycling-rubbish-and-waste> Details of what people can and can't recycle and the frequency of collections.

**Ashford Borough Council**

<https://www.ashford.gov.uk/the-environment/recycling-and-refuse-service/>

**Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy**

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/waste-strategies>

**Lets Recycle** - "the UK's leading independent dedicated website for businesses, local authorities and community groups involved in recycling and waste management."

<https://www.letsrecycle.com>

**Waste and Resources Action Programme**

<http://www.wrap.org.uk>

**Recycling quality specifications** <http://www.resourceassociation.com/recycling-quality-specifications>

**'History, thoughts and reports on recycling'**

<https://dmrecycling.info>

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