

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

8 March 2022

Waste service update on Covid impacts and future development of the council's recycling services.

Executive summary

This report provides an update on the council's recycling performance since the new kerbside recycling service was launched in March 2020 and summarises the impacts of the Covid pandemic on the waste collection and other waste management services. The report also provides brief updates on potential future service developments.

Proposal

That the committee:

- a) note the findings of the report, particularly in relation to the impacts of the Covid pandemic on waste service performance since the implementation of a new kerbside recycling scheme.
- b) note the actions planned to help reduce the contamination of kerbside collected Mixed Dry Recycling.
- c) note the future developments that may arise under the Environment Act 2021.

Reason for proposal

Information update report, as requested by the Committee.

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Waste service update on Covid impacts and development of the council's recycling services.

Purpose of report

1. This report intends to update the Environment Select Committee on the council's recycling performance since a new kerbside recycling service was launched in March 2020, and to summarise the impacts of the Covid pandemic on waste collection and associated waste management services.
2. The report also provides updates on potential future service developments, including those arising from the Environment Act 2021.

Background

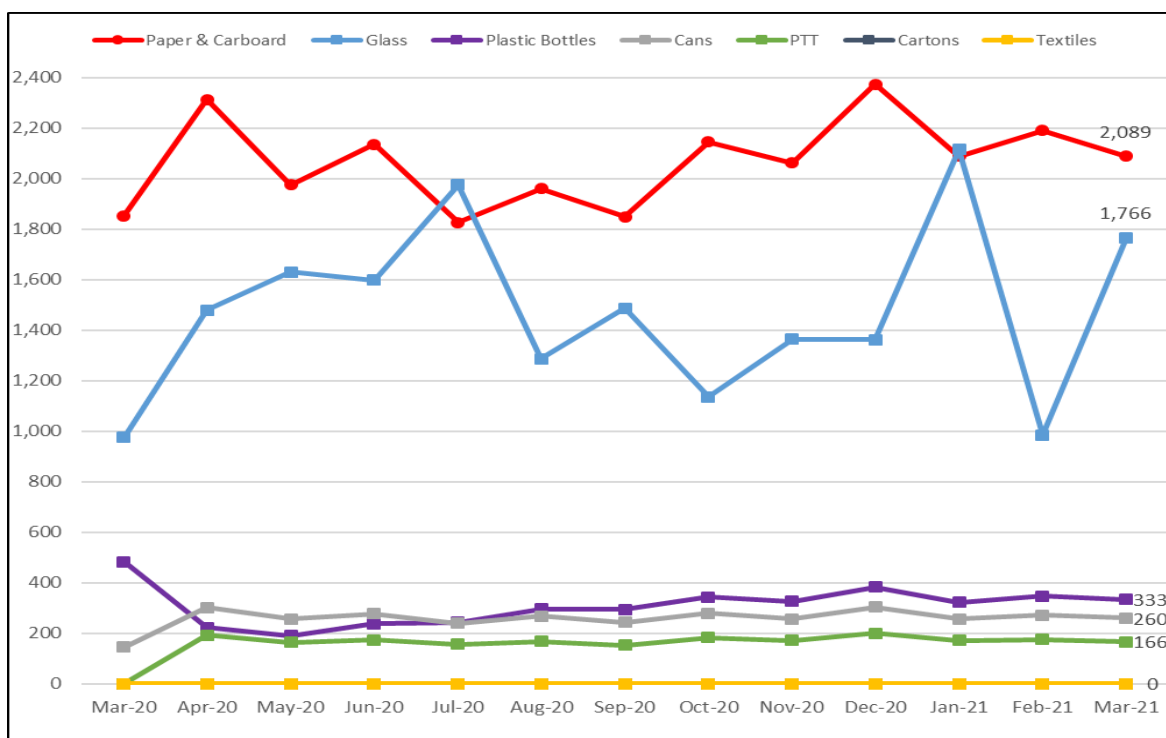
3. Under the Lot 5 waste and recycling collection contract, Wiltshire Council and Hills Municipal Collections Ltd (HMCL) launched a new co-mingled kerbside collection for Mixed Dry Recyclables (MDR) on 9 March 2020. This service change was intended to deliver the following aims and objectives:
 - i. make it easier for Wiltshire residents to use the kerbside recycling scheme, thereby increasing levels of participation
 - ii. improve the council's recycling rate (43.5% in 2019/20)
 - iii. reduce the number of collection vehicles required to deliver the service from the 149 needing to be deployed in 2019/20.
- 3.1 The new collection service provides for the co-collection of plastic bottles, plastic pots, tubs and trays, food tins, drinks cans, cartons, paper and cardboard in a 240 litre blue-lidded wheeled bin. Glass bottles and jars are collected using existing 55 litre black boxes. Collections of both mixed recyclables and glass are typically undertaken by the same "Pod" vehicle in a single pass. Keeping glass separate from the other co-mingled materials helps avoid cross contamination and improve material quality.
- 3.2 Under the Lot 1 waste management contract, Hills Waste Solutions also provided a new Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at their Sands Farm site at Calne, designed to separate the co-mingled recyclable materials delivered by the Lot 5 "Pod" vehicles. The new facility was commissioned in early 2020, and it entered full service to coincide with the commencement of co-mingled kerbside recycling collections on 9 March 2020.
- 3.3 The initial government "stay at home" guidance, aimed at reducing the spread of Covid-19 infections, came into force on 23 March 2020.

Covid impacts – kerbside collections

4. With the majority of Wiltshire residents staying or working from home for a significant part of 2020, the tonnage of material collected at the kerbside in 2020/21 was substantially higher than the tonnage collected in 2019/20:

- i. Mixed Dry Recycling +8,914 tonnes (+21.4%)
- ii. Residual waste +7,408 tonnes (+8.3%)
- iii. Chargeable Garden Waste +3,934 tonnes (+13.6%)

4.1 Changes in consumer habits resulted in a notable increase in home shopping. A persisting phenomenon has been the “Amazon effect”, with significant increases in cardboard tonnage presented for collection, coinciding with a heightened demand for post-consumer card on the recyclate markets. Substantial uplifts in the tonnage of glass collected at the kerbside is presumed to be linked to more consumption of alcohol at home during the various lockdowns, with fewer opportunities to go out to socialise. The table below illustrates the levels of paper and cardboard, and glass, collected throughout 2020/21:



4.2 The rapid and sustained increases in waste and recycling tonnage presented for collection at the kerbside placed immediate and substantial pressures on HMCL. The new MDR service in particular faced significant strain, with extra vehicles and agency staff needing to be deployed in order to cope with the additional demand.

- 4.3 The council's waste team and HMCL regularly reviewed the social distancing guidance from government, Public Health England and the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum, to ensure that services to residents could continue to be provided safely.
- 4.4 Despite the increase in material presented at the kerbside for recycling or composting, the increase in residual waste presented was sufficient to counteract this and reduced the 20/21 household waste recycling rate from the 43.5% achieved the previous year to 42.3%.
- 4.5 The new MDR rounds required further "re-balancing" to account for the tonnage increases and changes in the composition of materials presented for recycling. A rounds re-balancing exercise affecting a total of 28,000 households was completed in July 2021, and successfully stabilised the frontline collection vehicle requirement at 121 vehicles, and securing a net reduction of 28 vehicles compared with the previous kerbside-sort collection service.

Covid impacts – waste management facilities and MRF

- 5 In additional to the high volume of material to be sorted at the MRF, some changes were reported in the 'bulk density' of input material, primarily arising from the increase in cardboard placed out for collection.
- 5.1 MRF 'rejects' reported by contractor as 17.37% on average between April 2020 and April 2021. MRF rejects comprise non-target materials placed in recycling bins, 'fines' (small items that escape the MRF picking lines and sorting equipment) and target materials that have not been captured by the sorted process.
- 5.3 The target materials successfully captured, separated and baled for onward recycling were considered to be high quality, with no loads being rejected by reprocessors, resulting in high process being paid per tonne.
- 5.4 The council receives 79% of the income derived from the sale of materials managed under the Lot 1 contract. Total Lot 1 income for 2020/21 was £1.3m.
- 5.5 98% of the waste collected for recycling, reuse and composting in 2020/21 was managed within the UK and was not exported abroad.

Covid impacts – household recycling centres (HRCs)

- 6 To support the government 'stay at home' guidance, Wiltshire Council closed its ten HRCs on 24 March 2020. At that time, essential reasons for leaving the home did not include travelling to a HRC to dispose of waste.
- 6.1 Revised guidance ('Managing Household Waste and Recycling Centres in England during the coronavirus pandemic') was issued by the government on 5 May 2020. Further government guidance published on 12 May amended The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 to

clarify that a visit to a waste or recycling centre was considered an acceptable reason for a journey outside the home.

- 6.2 Wiltshire Council reopened nine of its ten HRCs on 18 May 2020. In order to comply with the requirement to ensure social distancing and manage the number of people on a site at any one time, it was necessary to reduce the number of unloading bays at most sites by around 60%. Access needed to be managed on a “one in, one out” basis once the reduced onsite capacity had been reached.
- 6.3 Due to high demand, excessive queuing on the highway adjacent to the sites was anticipated. Traffic Management plans were developed with Highways colleagues, and measures were put in place to marshal queuing traffic at all sites when open. This was achieved through a combination of Highways staff and other redeployed council volunteers, together with other citizen volunteer groups. Specialist Traffic Officers were also deployed to help co-ordinate the marshalling activity. The site at Stanton St Quintin did not reopen due to concerns of excessive queuing causing obstructions on the B4122, and the exposure of traffic marshals to moving traffic along this particular stretch of highway.
- 6.4 In an attempt to manage the demand on the re-opened sites, the council promoted a ‘post code entry’ system, where residents were encouraged to only visit on days where their post code was being accepted. This approach was one of a number demand-management options promoted by emerging industry guidance, with some other council’s opting for an entry based on ‘odds and even’ vehicle registration plates, or online booking systems.
- 6.5 Demand for HRC access remained high. To avoid the costs incurred through the continuing deployment of traffic marshals, and allow council volunteers to be redeployed to support other essential Covid-response activities, the council introduced its own online booking entry system on 8 June 2020.
- 6.6 The online booking system was developed jointly between the council’s ICT and waste services teams over a 6 week period, and its implementation immediately resolved the problems with excessive traffic queues on the highways adjacent to the HRCs, and successfully controlled the number of people on site at any one time.
- 6.7 Whilst it is acknowledged that many people were initially unable to obtain a slot at a time convenient to them, the system was regularly reviewed and refined with the number of slots that could be made safely available being significantly increased over time.
- 6.8 8,680 visitor slots per week were originally available when the booking system commenced in June 2020. This increased to 14,248 slots per week at its peak in April 2021.
- 6.9 With the relaxation of some Covid-19 restrictions, Cabinet resolved to remove the booking system from 19 July 2021.

6.10 The tonnage of waste managed through the Lot 2 HRCs fell by 44% in 2020/21 as a consequence of the temporary closures between 24 March and 18 May, followed by essential access restrictions to ensure social distancing at the sites.

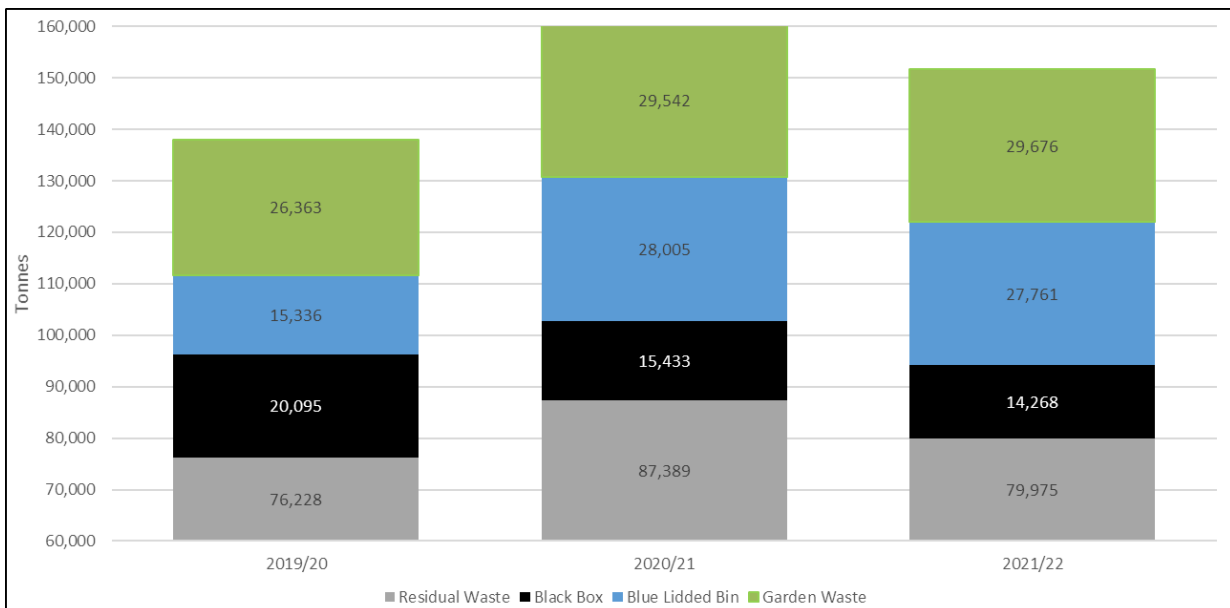
Waste received across HRC network	Tonnes	% change
2019/20	58,250	
2020/21	32,884	- 44%

21/22 (YTD) Performance update

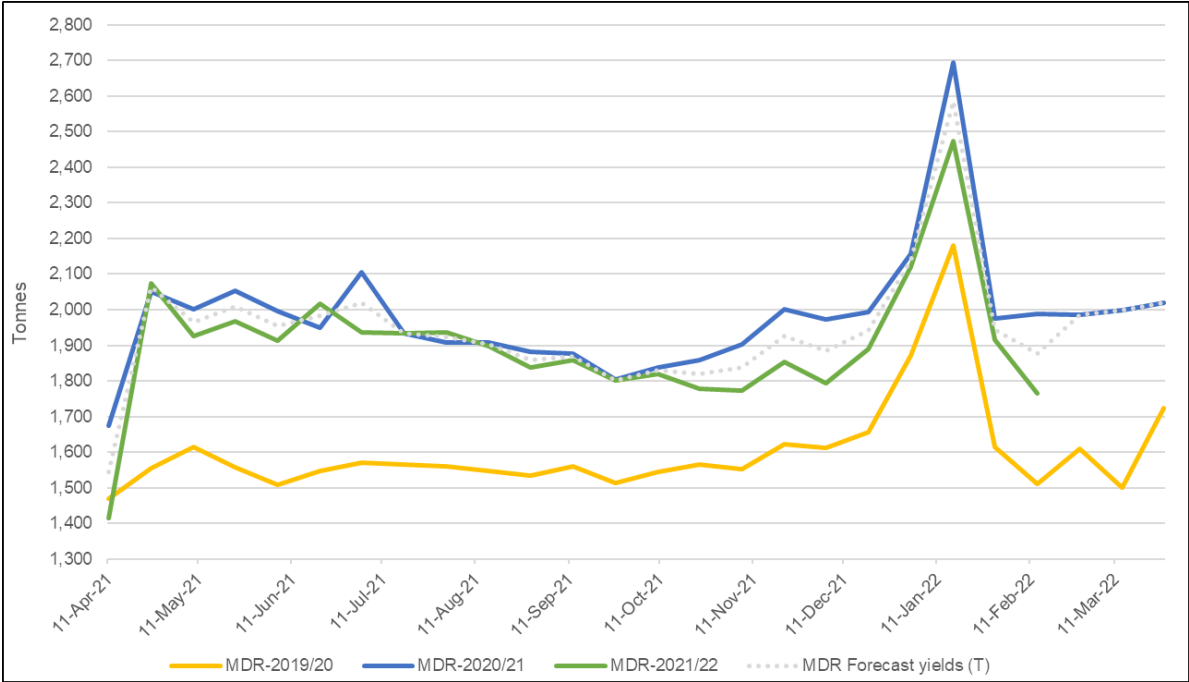
7 The tables below summarise key aspects of performance comparing 20/21 and 21/22:

	2020/21	2021/22 (to Jan 22)	% change
Percentage of household waste recycled and composted	42.3%	43.6%	+ 3%
Lot 1 recycling material income	£1,359,770	£2,589,635	+ 90%
Lot 2 HRC recycling material income	£ 200,900	£ 405,700	+ 102%
HRC tonnage	32,884	40,713	+ 24%
Chargeable garden waste subscribers	86,518	90,750	+ 5%

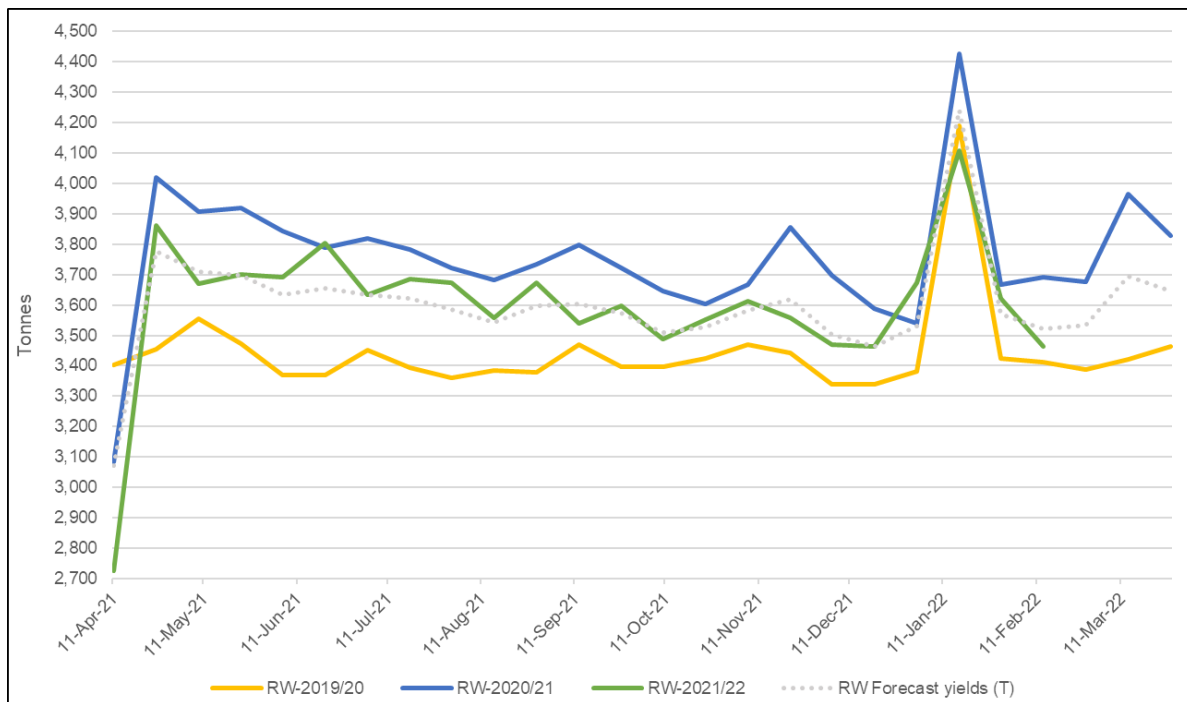
7.1 Tonnage of kerbside collected waste, recycling and composting. 2021/2022 YTD (January) compared to same period in 2019/20 and 2020/21:



7.2 Kerbside collected mixed dry recycling tonnage comparison (19/20, 20/21, 21/22 YTD):



7.3 Kerbside collected residual waste tonnage comparison (19/20, 20/21, 21/22 YTD):



Future activities - Reducing contamination in material collected for kerbside recycling

8. Steps are being taken to deliver improvements in the quantity of material rejected by the MRF, including:
 - 8.1 Social media and communications campaigns to clarify what should and should not be placed in the blue-lidded recycling bins. Campaigns ran throughout the Christmas period and will recommence in late spring 2022. Each Wiltshire household has received a 6-page information leaflet alongside their notification of residual waste collection day changes, which reiterate important recycling messages.
 - 8.2 The waste service is working closely with Enforcement team colleagues to develop processes to contact residents on occasions where their recycling bins are rejected at the kerbside by the collection contractor due to the presence of “contamination” (e.g. non-target/non-recyclable items). This process will include educational interventions at the initial stages. Where the situation reoccurs on multiple occasions, Section 46 notices may be served, and Fixed Penalty Notices issued if these notices are not complied with.

- 8.3 Communal bin locations and bin stores that typically serve flats and other multi-occupancy residential sites are a potential source of contamination due to the larger bins that are typically provided, and lack of a single point of responsibility for the bins provided. These sites have been audited to ensure that the facilities provided are adequate and correctly labelled. New signage will be provided to assist residents make best use of the bins provided, and containers will be upgraded as necessary.
- 8.4 The waste service is working with the MRF contractor to progress the recirculation of material remaining after the first pass of the sorting process. It is anticipated that a second sorting pass will enable more target materials to be extracted and separated for onward recycling.

Potential developments to improve recycling (near term and Environment Act 2021).

9. The waste service is actively working with its contractors to assess the viability of adding small domestic batteries and small waste electronic and electrical (Small WEEE) items to the current kerbside recycling service.
- 9.1 If progressed, the collection of these additional items would be introduced in two separate phases starting with small batteries during 2022/23, as will be subject to operational considerations such as equipping the collection vehicle fleet with suitable storage containers.
- 9.2 A more detailed summary of the expected impacts and opportunities for additional recycling arising from the Environment Act 2021 will be brought to future meetings of the Environment Select Committee. Although further details on the scope and implementation dates of the proposed schemes are expected during 2022, the main points are highlighted below:
- 9.3 A **Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)** for drinks containers is expected to significantly reduce the presence of litter and allow more plastic, glass and drinks cartons to be captured for recycling through a national network of Reverse Vending Machines (RVM) and kiosks at retailers. Stakeholder consultations undertaken in 2021 suggested the DRS scheme could commence from 2023.
- 9.4 A new **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** scheme is aimed at ensuring producers of packaging are made accountable for the full costs of recovering and recycling the material they place into the market, and which ends up in waste streams. Producers will be required to pay into a national scheme, with higher fees applying to 'hard to recycle' items such as black plastic food trays. This approach should incentivise better packaging designed with ease of collection and recycling in mind. EPR funding will be ringfenced for investment in UK recycling infrastructure to reduce the need to export this material to other countries for reprocessing. Local authorities will also be able to claim funding based on providing evidence of the amount of packaging they collect for recycling (and as litter). Councils currently receive no direct funding to support their recycling schemes, and therefore rely solely on the material income to

offset their collection and waste treatment costs. The new EPR model represents a new funding opportunity for Wiltshire Council, and has the potential to drive the packaging industry towards the use of more consistently recyclable materials, and thereby reducing the “non-target” materials currently rejected at the MRF .

- 9.5 Councils expect the following requirements to be mandated through secondary legislation, though detail on the implementation dates are still to be advised.
- 9.6 **Kerbside collection of five key materials** (glass bottles and jars, paper and card, plastic bottles, plastic pots, tins and trays, steel and aluminium tins and cans. Wiltshire council currently complies with this expected requirement. Items such as flexible plastic packaging, such as bread bags and plastic films, may be added to this list by 2026, subject to suitable UK infrastructure and sustainable markets being available (this should be supported by the EPR and Plastic Packaging Tax schemes).
- 9.7 **Separate weekly food waste collections** may be required from 2025, with indications that the net additional costs incurred by councils in collecting (but not disposing) of food waste is to be met by government. Implementation date could be delayed to 2030 for those councils with existing landfill diversion contracts that may be adversely affected by new food waste collections.
- 9.8 **Free of charge garden waste collections** may be required from 2025, with indications that the net additional costs incurred by councils in collecting (but not disposing) of food waste is to be met by government under New Burdens funding.

Environmental impact

- 10 It should be noted that the council and its contractors were able to continue to provide residents with a full waste and recycling kerbside collection service throughout the period of the COVID pandemic, despite the pressures arising from the implementation of a new MDR collection service, increased tonnages and managing the COVID infection risk across the operational waste collection workforce.
- 10.1 HRCs also commenced acceptance of household waste as soon as was safe to do, with effective social distancing measures in place. Our contractors also continued to manage critical waste management facilities by deploying successful infection control measures.
- 10.2 With all recycling and landfill diversion activities continuing through the pandemic, this has helped reduce or prevent the environmental pollution that may otherwise have been caused through non-collection of waste or excessive disposal of waste to landfill.

Equality and diversity impact

- 11 In addition to the comments in section 7 regarding the continuation of waste and recycling collections, it should be noted that 'assisted collections' continued to be provided to those residents unable to present bins and containers out for collection due to their age or infirmity.
- a. Whilst at the HRC sites it was necessary to avoid contact between site visitors and site staff, which initially impacted on the ability of contractor staff to provide assistance to disabled or elderly visits in unloading waste from their vehicles, these arrangements were reviewed and re-introduced as soon as the prevailing safety guidance and reviewed site procedures allowed.

Risk assessment

- 12 Not applicable.

Financial implications

- 13 Not applicable.

Legal implications

- 14 Not applicable.

Options considered

- 15 Not applicable

Conclusion

- 16 Members are invited to review this information report and note the findings made.

Appendices

None.