

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

7 January 2025

Report title: Refuse Fleet Replacement & Wheeled Bin Pressures

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Whittaker
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Simon Parry
Report Author: Matthew Austin	Job Title: Environmental Services Manager Contact email: matthew.austin@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 548206
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Environment - supporting recycling to reducing waste production
Key Decision: YES	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet RECOMMEND that:

1.1. The Council agrees to replace all “Diamond” lift bins in use across the Residual, Recycling, and Garden Waste services in Bromsgrove District during the 2025/26 financial year with industry standard “Comb” lift bins.

1.2. The Council allocates £2,200,00 Capital funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the 2025/26 financial year for the purchase and distribution of these bins.

2. Context:

2.1. Bromsgrove District Council previously received significant government funding from DEFRA to support waste collection improvements with the introduction of a wheeled bin service in 2004.

2.2. As part of this funding, a decision was made to invest in highly specialised vehicles that used a mechanical arm to pick up wheeled bins and empty them with far less human involvement.

2.3. To support this system, the wheeled bins that were purchased for the new service were required to be compatible with the “Diamond” lift system, which is common on the continent, but was only invested in by three LA’s in the UK, with every other LA investing in the standard “comb” lift mechanism, which is cheaper to manufacture than the diamond bins.

Cabinet

7 January 2025

- 2.4. The benefits of the Diamond system are that it supports bins to self-centre on the lifting mechanism as part of being clamped for lifting, reducing the need for manual intervention.
- 2.5. Unfortunately, the new technology failed to provide the efficiency gains expected, and as a result of prolonged mechanical issues, the decision was taken to revert to a more conventional lifting mechanism and emptying process on our vehicles, although the bins remained.
- 2.6. We have operated this system for 20 years now, and in that time, the other Local Authorities who operated Diamond bins have invested to migrate across to Comb lift bins, due to the increased cost of the wheeled bins, lengthy delays in the provision of diamond bins by manufacturers, and the risk to service provision of operating a non-standard collection fleet.
- 2.7. The last authority to move to Comb Bins was Aberdeenshire Council, with the decision made in 2021/22, leaving Bromsgrove District as the only Local Authority in the UK utilising diamond Bins.

3. Background:

- 3.1. The hire sector does not offer “diamond lift” equipment, due to its rarity in the waste sector, which means that the only vehicles available to support domestic waste collection in Bromsgrove when there is a vehicle failure are the six refuse vehicles operating from the Redditch Depot, as they have been fitted with a reversible lifting system that allows them to empty Bromsgrove Bins as well as the standard Comb Bins, as part of the shared services arrangement.
- 3.2. In the event of a significant event affecting the Bromsgrove Depot, such as a fire or other large-scale accident affecting our fleet, there is currently no way to source sufficient vehicles with the necessary lifting mechanisms to continue the provision of waste collection services for Bromsgrove residents.
- 3.3. As has previously been identified in reports to Council, the Waste Collection Service has had significant challenges in maintaining services over the last two years as a result of an aging fleet and a failed refurbishment programme, that was intended to extend the life of existing vehicles.
- 3.4. To address this, Capital Budgets have been reprofiled to support the replacement of the fleet to stabilise services, but since then we have had difficulty procuring the necessary lifting mechanism on new vehicles, as a result of increased safety requirements by the vehicle manufacturer in response to a fatality involving one of its vehicles whilst in service with Coventry City Council in 2022.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

7 January 2025

- 3.5. In response to the “Future Prevention of Deaths” report by the coroner who reviewed this accidental death, the vehicle manufacturer has made changes to how it constructs and certifies its equipment and variations to it by third parties, which means they are unable to provide the combination we would need to continue with our current collection arrangements.
- 3.6. Having also spoken with the Chief Executive responsible for manufacture of our current bin lifts, there is no route to procure vehicles that can meet our needs at the current time, although they are continuing to work with us to maintain our existing mechanisms, which are experiencing a high failure rate due to their age, and wear commensurate with the 17.5 million bins they have emptied to date.
- 3.7. This is not a long-term resolution, and is costing us considerably more on maintenance than is currently budgeted, as well as vehicle hire costs.
- 3.8. To maintain waste collection services across Bromsgrove District, this will require the replacement of approximately 87,000 wheeled bins, which will allow the fleet to transition to the industry standard lifting mechanism, safeguarding future service resilience.
- 3.9. Whilst costly, this will re-set the condition of our wheeled bins, many of which are over 15 years old now, which is expected to reduce our Capital outlay on replacement bins lost either due to damage to the bin, or issues with our current worn out vehicles and lifter mechanisms.
- 3.10. In addition, this will allow for consideration of how we provide our service to residents, and the potential to mirror the arrangements already in place across the South of Worcestershire.
- 3.11. As part of the Environment Act 2021, the Council has a legal duty to provide a weekly food waste collection service from 2026, and is currently looking at the options for implementing such a service.
- 3.12. As part of this work, it has been identified that food waste makes up to 35% of the residual waste collected in Bromsgrove, with a further 11% made up of items that could be recycled in our existing recycling services.
- 3.13. Although we provide a good quality service to residents, our current recycling rates have plateaued in recent years, and experience in other Local Authorities has shown that pressuring the residual waste stream by reducing the frequency, or reducing capacity, is the means to improve recycling performance, which is what South Worcestershire Local Authorities have done by providing a 180ltr grey bin for their residual waste, which encourages residents to ensure they are recycling everything they can.

Cabinet

7 January 2025

- 3.14. On 29 November the Government set out a new policy statement regarding “Simpler Recycling¹”, which set out a “maximum default requirement” for councils to collect card and paper separately from April 2026, which would require an additional recycling bin to be provided to our residents.
- 3.15. No reference is made to new burdens funding for this activity, and it is recognised alongside this requirement, that councils and other waste collectors will “still have the flexibility to make the best choices to suit local need”.
- 3.16. It is believed that as with previous legislation regarding waste collection, there is scope to maintain our existing comingled approach for now, using a TEEP (Technical, Economic and Environmentally Practicable) assessment², although this will require us to set out how we will attain the required quality of recycling, and so will need to be considered alongside the ERP funding to ensure we can demonstrate the necessary outcomes and benefits to justify this.
- 3.17. Replacing our wheeled bins gives us an opportunity to reduce the size of our grey wheeled bins in order to achieve similar gains to South Worcestershire in the short term, which will also help increase engagement with the new food waste service when it starts in 2026.
- 3.18. Whilst also having a financial benefit in reducing the cost of replacing our existing residual bins, this would potentially limit future variation of the collection frequency on residual waste, such as a three weekly collection interval, which would have the potential to significantly reduce the operating costs of our waste collection arrangements whilst also boosting the use of our recycling collections, which would include the odour elements linked to food waste which are typically the main concern regarding reduced frequencies of residual waste collection.
- 3.19. Bromsgrove has signed up to the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy with all of the other Worcestershire Authorities, committing to work towards the reduction of waste, and a reduction in the size of our residual waste bins, or the reduction of our residual waste collection frequency, would have a significant impact to reduce the volume of recyclable waste disposed of through incineration for energy creation rather than reuse.

¹ This is the umbrella term for the rationalisation of waste collection arrangements nationally to ensure that all residents can dispose of the same core recyclable items wherever in the country they live.

² Officers already reviewing this with the other Worcestershire Authorities as a joint initiative.

Cabinet

7 January 2025

4. Proposals:

4.1. Given that our current “Diamond” bins are limiting our ability to meet our statutory duties, as well as increasing our operating costs, it is proposed that Bromsgrove District Council takes the following steps:

4.1.1. Replace all of our existing “Diamond” wheeled bins with industry standard “Comb” 240ltr wheeled bins (no change in size for any waste streams)

Or

4.1.2. Replace all of our existing green and brown “Diamond” wheeled bins with industry standard “Comb” 240ltr wheeled bins, and replace the existing 240ltr wheeled bins for residual waste, with 180ltr “comb” wheeled bins³.

4.2. In regards to the option to reduce the size of our residual waste bin, although this will support immediate benefits regarding our recycling performance, it may add additional challenges should we look to make further changes to expand our service and/or reduce the frequency of residual waste collection to further pressurise the waste stream and reduce operating costs linked to the non-recyclable waste.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Like for like replacement of all our existing Diamond Wheeled bins would require Capital investment of approximately **£2,200,000**⁴ including delivery and expected credits against the recycled “Diamond” bins.

5.2. A decision to reduce the size of the 240ltr residual waste bins to 180ltrs will reduce that cost by **£60,000**, and would also support increased recycling quantities and take up of the food waste service expected to start in 2026 based on our current fortnightly collection service.

5.3. The cost breakdown of these two options are shown below, and would place an average yearly pressure of **£365,000** per year on Capital repayment budgets from 2025/26 until 2031/32.

³ Reduced capacity offset by the new food waste collection service, which provide a 23ltr food caddy giving 46ltrs capacity per fortnight to residents to offset the reduction in capacity and ensure residents make full and efficient use of our services to manage their waste.

⁴ Estimated cost based on current prices. A tender exercise for the provision, delivery, and recycling will be needed to confirm the final cost and ensure best value.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

7 January 2025

	Like for Like bin swaps across all waste streams	Residual Reduced to 180ltr wheeled bins
Purchasing Costs	£1,810,337	£1,747,490
Delivery Costs	£185,961	£185,961
Collection Costs	£164,084	£164,084
Total Costs (estimated)	£2,160,382	£2,097,535

Option 1 - 240's Residual, Recycling, & Garden	25/6	26/7	27/8	28/9	29/30	30/1	31/2	32/3
MRP	£108,019	£416,645	£416,645	£416,645	£416,645	£416,645	£416,645	£308,626
Repayment		£308,626	£308,626	£308,626	£308,626	£308,626	£308,626	£308,626
Interest	£108,019	£108,019	£108,019	£108,019	£108,019	£108,019	£108,019	

Option 2 - 180's Residual, 240's Recycling/Garden	25/6	26/7	27/8	28/9	29/30	30/1	31/2	32/3
MRP	£104,877	£404,525	£404,525	£404,525	£404,525	£404,525	£404,525	£299,648
Repayment		£299,648	£299,648	£299,648	£299,648	£299,648	£299,648	£299,648
Interest	£104,877	£104,877	£104,877	£104,877	£104,877	£104,877	£104,877	

5.4. It is expected that replacing these bins would reduce costs on vehicle purchase by approximately 2% (£80,000 across the replacement cycle of our fleet), and vehicle maintenance on our waste fleet by up to 8% (£30,000 per year⁵ as a result of the move to the comb lifting mechanism and reduced wear and tear of not having a reversible system with so many moving parts to accommodate the two styles of bin).

5.5. This will also be supported by the financial benefits previously identified as part of reprofiling the Capital Replacement plan for the Domestic Waste Fleet, which will address current overspends on maintenance and hire vehicles, alongside a reliance on Redditch Borough Council vehicles to maintain services.

5.6. In addition to these benefits, the Council has also now had confirmation that DEFRA will be transferring funding of **£1,004,000** to Bromsgrove District Council linked to dry recyclable material through the Extended Producer Responsibilities (EPR) scheme for the 2025/26 financial year, with further funding from this scheme each year thereafter.

⁵ In Chargeable Mechanic's time as well as parts – so some of this benefit will be linked to increased capacity within the workshop to support the entire fleet and further reduce the use of third parties for maintenance support.

Cabinet

7 January 2025

- 5.7. This is effectively a tax on packaging manufacturers under the “producer pays” principle and not direct government funding per se.
- 5.8. EPR funding is intended to support costs of our existing waste collection arrangements and support communication and education on dry recycling to further improve this to divert waste from landfill/incineration; and although there are currently no limits on how this money is spent, this is not guaranteed income.
- 5.9. From 2028 this funding will be linked to the quality as well as quantity of recycling we collect, and may be required to support education and engagement with residents regarding their waste in order to maintain this level of funding.
- 5.10. The government have emphasised repeatedly the need to demonstrate “efficient” collections ensuring a high quality of collected recycling, and it may be appropriate to link this on-going revenue funding with the replacement of our existing wheeled bins, and consideration of whether a split stream recycling service may be appropriate in the future as well.
- 5.11. The additional costs of moving to a twin stream recycling service would be significant as an addition to our existing service, but such a system would support a transition to a three weekly residual collection cycle alongside the weekly food waste service and alternating fortnightly collections of the two dry recycling streams and our existing fortnightly garden waste service, and this would likely generate the highest quality of recycling as well as influence recycling behaviour and engagement to a greater degree with residents to realise the reductions in residual non-recyclable waste identified from previous waste sampling across the District.

6. Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1. As part of replacing the “Diamond” wheeled bins, arrangements would be made for the old bins to be recycled as part of the arrangements, with the raw material fed back into the recycling stream.
- 6.2. Given the likely timescale of this project, it is expected that wheeled bins produced for delivery to our residents will be made with plastic recycled from our existing diamond bins, and further illustrating the circular economy principle of waste reduction.
- 6.3. The value of this recyclable material from our old bins is part of the quoted price for collection and processing of our old bins, which keeps the costs lower for the Council.

Cabinet

7 January 2025

6.4. We do not have the storage capacity or arrangements in place to realise a greater value for this material ourselves.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Wheeled bins are provided to each property to support engagement with our waste collection arrangements, as per Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

7.2. As such, bins remain the property of Bromsgrove District Council, and we can support the change by reissuing the section 46 notice to all residents, with details of the new wheeled bin requirements for residents to access our collection service.

7.3. Procurement is viable through either a competitive tender process, or direct award under a framework, and this will be managed to ensure compliance and quality regarding new wheeled bins.

8. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

8.1. Equalities and Diversity Implications

8.2. Replacement of wheeled bins may impact on residents with medical needs/disabilities.

8.3. This will be managed through direct engagement with those residents currently receiving support under our assisted waste collection arrangements, and included in our communications plan to ensure that any concerns are identified and addressed.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Cabinet

7 January 2025

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Whittaker – Environmental Services Portfolio Holder	
Lead Director / Head of Service	Simon Parry - Head of Environmental Services	
Financial Services	Peter Carpenter – Section 151 Officer	
Legal Services	Claire Green – Principal Solicitor	
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	N/A	
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	Matt Eccles – Climate Change Manager	