

**TO: JOINT WASTE DISPOSAL BOARD**  
**11<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

---

**PROGRESS REPORT**  
**Report of the re3 Project Director**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to brief the re3 Joint Waste Disposal Board on progress in the delivery of the re3 Joint Waste PFI Contract.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That Members note the contents of this report.

2.2 That Members ratify their decision to implement an amendment to the Recycling Centre Booking System, so that non-household waste can be identified and charged for, as described at 5.9.

2.3 That Members approve the recommendation at 5.29 for the WEEE bank project to come to an end.

**3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

3.1 None for this report.

**4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 The purpose of this report is to brief Members in relation to progress in delivery of the re3 Joint Waste PFI Contract.

**5 PROGRESS IN RELATION TO WASTE MANAGEMENT**

**re3 and Council Performance Statistics**

5.1 The provisional recycling rates for April-November 2023/24 are presented below, alongside a comparison with the Qtr1-Qtr3 statistics for 2022/23.

	<b>April 2022 – December 2022</b>	<b>April 2023 – November 2023</b>	<b>Change</b>
BFC	54.9%	55.8%	0.9%
RBC	49.8%	49.7%	-0.1%
WBC	53.6%	55.3%	1.7%

5.2 Members will recall that the increase in garden waste seen over the wet summer has contributed to the overall recycling rates.

5.3 Despite the increase in garden waste, the table below shows tonnages of kerbside residual waste have increased in Bracknell Forest and Reading Borough Councils when compared to the same 8 months of 2022/23. At the same time, tonnages of kerbside food and mixed dry recycling (MDR) have declined.

	<b>Kerbside Residual</b>	<b>Kerbside Recycling</b>	<b>Kerbside Food</b>	<b>Kerbside Green</b>
BFC	3.5%	-2.8%	-4.1%	15.1%
RBC	3.1%	-0.7%	-5.4%	15.9%
WBC	-1.2%	0.0%	1.3%	16.6%

5.4 A compositional analysis of kerbside residual waste took place in September 2023, to help the Partnership to obtain insights into the type and quantity of recyclables still present in the 'black bag' waste. Council officers are in the process of analysing the results and making plans to utilise the findings.

### **Chargeable Wastes at the HWRC**

5.5 As Members will recall, whilst Local Authorities are required to accept household waste without charge at their Recycling Centre facilities, there is no obligation to accept non-household waste. Construction and demolition waste is currently classed as industrial waste for the purposes of providing Recycling Centres. The re3 Councils have imposed a charge for receipt of rubble and hardcore, soil from landscaping activities, plasterboard, and asbestos since 2016.

5.6 On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2023, an amendment to the Controlled Waste Regulations was laid before parliament. It specified that, from the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023, construction and demolition waste should be classed as household waste where each of the following conditions are met:

- The waste is produced at a domestic property by occupiers of that domestic property carrying out their own construction or demolition works, including preparatory works.
- The waste is not from construction or demolition works, including preparatory works, for which payment has been or is to be made.
- The amount of waste delivered to any waste disposal site in a single visit is either less than 100 litres and capable of being fitted into two 50 litre bags, or a single article of waste no larger than 2000mm x 750mm x 700mm in size.
- The waste delivered to waste deposit sites does not exceed four single visits per household in any four-week period.

5.7 As a result of the change in legislation, Local Authorities will need to accept some waste that would hitherto be considered construction and demolition waste at their Recycling Centres, without charge.

5.8 As non-household waste will be defined both based on volume, and frequency of deposit, Officers have liaised with the providers of our Recycling Centre Booking System to ensure that the re3 Partnership will be able to identify the non-household waste and minimise the financial implications of the legislation. Following liaison with the re3 Monitoring and Performance Officer over the autumn, a 'DIY module' has been developed by the booking system providers, that can sit alongside our existing system. This will flag to the Contractor's Meet and Greet staff when a user has exceeded their free allowance, and a charge should be made.

5.9 In order to ensure that the DIY module could be implemented from the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, Members of the Joint Waste Disposal Board received briefings in

November and December. Following their agreement to proceed, it is recommended that the Board ratify the decision at this meeting.

- 5.10 Members will recall that in preparation for the change in legislation, Officers liaised with the Contractor about the operational policies that should apply, and that colleagues in the legal and trading standards team at Reading Borough Council agreed the suitability of the proposed procedures. In addition, the Manager for the Council's contract with Bookinglab was consulted, and the Change Management team approved the use of the IT amendment. Communications for residents and staff have been produced and these will be covered in more detail in the Communications Report.
- 5.11 Officers will monitor implementation of the new policies in the New Year and will respond to feedback and challenges as appropriate.

### **Flexible Plastic Packaging Recycling Trial**

- 5.12 Members will recall that the first phase of the re3 project with FlexCollect commenced in trial areas of Reading Borough Council (RBC) on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September.
- 5.13 Officers are working with FlexCollect, our Waste Disposal Contractor, and with Waste Collection colleagues in order to gather appropriate learning from the project. Since the launch, Officers can report the following updates:
- In the first 10 weeks of the project, 4722 blue Flexcollect bags were received in the Material Recycling Facility (MRF). Of these, the waste contractor recorded 30% as empty and 11% as contaminated.
  - In response to findings about the number of empty bags, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are in the process of making amendments to the 'nudge' leaflets, to promote the double knotting of bags. These leaflets will go out to the participating RBC households at the start of the new year. Officers are also planning to include a link to a survey alongside the nudge leaflet, in order to obtain some more information about resident participation in the trial.
  - Officers requested that the re3 Disposal Contractor undertake some sampling on the bags they class as contaminated. This found that 34% of the contents was made up of existing target materials (such as cardboard, paper and plastic bottles) and may therefore be the result of resident confusion. General non-recyclable waste made up 15% of the contents. (This is lower than the overall recycling contamination rate in RBC). The data will be shared with FlexCollect, so that changes to resident leaflets can be considered.
  - RECOUP collected 150 bags of RBC trial waste for analysis on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November. Results are expected in the new year, detailing the composition of the RBC waste (including plastic types).
  - Officers met with FlexCollect and the re3 waste disposal contractor to consider alternative collection methods for flexible plastics. Challenges for sorting the waste in the MRF and in collecting accurate data mean that there are currently no other options for a comingled collection system. However, it should be noted that single use bags are not expected to be the long-term solution to collecting plastic films. The use of bags is currently allowing the re3 partnership to collect data that can potentially be used to develop better solutions for the future.
  - re3 participated in a trial of thinner collection bags. Plastic films were re-packaged in bags containing 20% less plastic and processed through the MRF. This resulted in no

deterioration of capture. Use of these bags in later stages of the project will help to make bags lighter to deliver and easier for residents to tie.

- The waste collection operatives who service the trial area in Reading were asked to participate in a survey, in order to capture their views on resident participation and the impact on the team's working day. These results are currently being discussed with the crew supervisors.
- Officers note the high proportion of flexible plastics identified in the re3 compositional analysis of kerbside residual waste. On average this made up 11% of the residual waste by weight.

5.14 FlexCollect have written an interim report detailing the initial findings from their local authority projects, and this is due to be published shortly. Officers hope to be able to share the headline results with Members at the meeting in January.

5.15 The re3 FlexCollect trial is due to be expanded to include households in Bracknell Forest Council in March 2024. A meeting has been scheduled for the new year to discuss the operational details including suitable rounds and deliveries of bags and leaflets. Officers will provide Members with an update in due course.

### **Wokingham Borough Council Participation in the Flexible Plastic Packaging Recycling Trial**

5.16 When the re3 Partnership agreed to take part in the FlexCollect plastic packaging recycling trial, it was agreed that households from within each of Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council would be able to participate.

5.17 Unfortunately, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, the re3 Councils were informed that Wokingham Borough Council would not be able to join the trial as originally planned. There are several reasons for this.

5.18 On the July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Government announced that it was deferring the commencement of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) element, of its Environment Act changes, by a year, from October 2024 to October 2025. EPR is the scheme via which councils will be funded for supporting the recycling of in-scope items, such as flexible plastic packaging. The deferment increased the period over which the FlexCollect project would need to support trials before EPR could begin to support their continuation and expansion by trial councils. In addition, the expenses from the trial areas (activities such as collecting, transporting, sorting and processing flexible plastics) have generally proven to be more costly than was initially envisaged.

5.19 In response to the budget pressures, the decision was taken by the Flexible Plastics Fund (FPF), which includes manufacturers and brands, to reduce the number of FlexCollect projects. The scale of all projects, bar one, has also been reduced.

5.20 The re3 project was originally expected to be classed as one of nine FlexCollect projects. Under revised arrangements Reading and Bracknell will now be classed as separate trials. In this configuration, it was not possible to include each of the re3 Councils and the FPF made the decision not to pursue the trial in Wokingham. The FPF recognised that the introduction of Alternate Weekly Collections may pose an additional challenge to the FlexCollect trial and noted that there was uncertainty about the use of bags for flexible plastic collections.

5.21 Officers have asked FlexCollect to provide some information on the scale of the funding

gap and will provide further information to Members and colleagues when available. In the meantime, all three councils will share in the learning from the two trials which are progressing.

### **WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) Banks**

- 5.22 At the January meeting of the Joint Waste Disposal Board, Members instructed Officers to investigate the idea of using a network of recycling banks to collect small electrical appliances (such as kettles, irons and hairdryers).
- 5.23 Following discussions with a local WEEE recycler, an application for funding was subsequently submitted to the Material Focus WEEE fund.
- 5.24 Members will recall that the application for funding was successful. It was based on pre-procurement engagement with prospective suppliers. However, in the subsequent procurement exercise, the councils received no bids from prospective service providers.
- 5.25 Officers have since sought to engage with the local recycler who provided information for the funding application, but no further engagement has been forthcoming.
- 5.26 Discussions have therefore taken place with other WEEE recyclers; and Officers can confirm that there is enthusiasm to work with re3 on a WEEE bank project. However it has been advised that significant changes would be needed to the original specification. re3 would need to purchase the banks (rather than rent them), and as such, arrange for the maintenance and insurance of the banks. This would likely mean we would need to undertake separate procurement exercises for the purchase, servicing, and (possibly) maintenance of the banks. We would also potentially need to take a greater role in managing the schedule of collections and dealing with any contamination left in the containers.
- 5.27 Material Focus remain keen to support re3 and would be happy to consider a revised project; even if this involves shorter timescales, fewer banks, and a later start date than was originally planned.
- 5.28 Therefore, whilst a project remains possible, a much greater amount of officer time would be needed both to set up the service, and to manage the ongoing operations, than was initially envisaged.
- 5.29 As a result, Officers now recommend that the WEEE bank project comes to an end.
- 5.30 Funding was initially approved for the provision of WEEE banks and the promotion of repair cafes, and Officers would plan to see in Material Focus would still be happy to support the second activity.

### **Recycling Centre User Satisfaction Survey**

- 5.31 The annual User Satisfaction Survey for the re3 Recycling Centres was conducted in the autumn of 2023.
- 5.32 The survey was once again conducted online (as it has been for the last few years); with invites to participate being sent out to recent visitors through the booking system.
- 5.33 The survey was commenced on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October and 1,617 responses were received for Longshot Lane, whilst 1,506 responses were received for Smallmead.

- 5.34 At Longshot Lane the number of respondents rating their overall satisfaction levels as 4 or 5 out of 5 was 91%. At Smallmead this figure was 92%.
- 5.35 A further comparison of the two sites is presented in Appendix One, alongside the equivalent results from 2022. The results show improved levels of satisfaction at both sites; and across all key areas.
- 5.36 Officers will review the full results of the survey with the Contractor to identify reasons for the changes and to identify further areas for improvement. In response to the 2022 survey, Officers proposed to develop and implement a 'mystery shopper' scheme, whereby a small group of users can provide ongoing feedback about their experiences on site. This has not yet been delivered, but the project remains one that Officers are keen to introduce. This should help ensure that agreed procedures are used consistently at the Recycling Centres.
- 5.37 As part of the 2023 user satisfaction survey, residents were also asked where they recycle key items of waste. The results highlight areas of contamination in the mixed dry recycling and areas where capture rates of recyclables could be improved. A summary of the data is presented in Appendix Two. This data has also been analysed by local authority area and the age of the respondents and further detail will be presented during the January meeting.

### **Reading Borough Council Corporate Survey**

- 5.38 Following the re3 Board meeting in September 2022, Members considered several options for supplementing the Recycling Centre Booking System.
- 5.39 The re3 Board welcomed the use of Corporate User Satisfaction Surveys, or equivalent, at each of the respective Councils, as a way to assess the views of non-users of Council services, including the Recycling Centres. At re3, this could inform future improvements of the booking system and other supporting processes.
- 5.40 A survey commenced in Reading Borough Council in July 2023. In this survey, respondents were asked if they had used the Smallmead Recycling Centre in the last 12 months. Where the respondent had not visited, they were asked about the reasons.
- 5.41 Of the 1,003 respondents, 46% had not recently used the Smallmead Recycling Centre. Of these, nearly two thirds advised that the reason was because they did not need to use the Recycling Centre. Other reasons given (at much lower percentages) included that residents did not own a vehicle, did not know about the recycling centre or did not know how to book. Full results are shown in Appendix Three.
- 5.42 The results indicate that most residents are able to access the Recycling Centre when they need too. However, Officers and Members are keen to identify and address any areas of social exclusion. Officers have therefore undertaken further analysis in order to ascertain if there are links between any barriers to use and demographic factors; including ward area, age and ethnicity. Key results included:
- Younger respondents were more likely to say that they did not know about the Recycling Centre (although the percentages were still very low).
  - Respondents at both extremes of the age spectrum were less likely to use the Recycling Centres due to not being able to drive or access a vehicle.
  - Older respondents were more likely to say that the booking system is not easy to use (although the percentages were still very low).
  - Respondents from Park and Emmer Green wards were more likely to say that the Recycling Centre is too far away, whilst residents in Katesgrove and

- Tilehurst were more likely to say they didn't own a vehicle or couldn't drive.
- Residents of Battle and Thames wards were more likely to say that they didn't know about the Recycling Centre.
- There was one ethnic group where respondents were more likely to say that they didn't know about the Recycling Centre – but there appears to be an overlap with the ward areas in which they live in.
- There was no clear link between the demographic factors analysed and residents who said they didn't know how to book.

5.43 In response to this analysis, Officers plan to share targeted messages via the NextDoor app and to contact local community organisations and libraries with the possibility of disseminating information in order to increase knowledge of the Recycling Centres in the wards of Battle and Katesgrove. Areas have also been identified where future initiatives (similar to the WEEE banks) may have most impact.

### **Glass Collections (Sept/Oct 2023)**

5.44 As Members will be aware, there was a period of disruption to the emptying of the re3 glass banks from the 18<sup>th</sup> of September.

5.45 Glass banks are serviced by the re3 Contractor, and we would usually have two members of staff working throughout the week. Unfortunately in the week of the 18<sup>th</sup>, one member of staff was unable to work due to a broken hip; and potential replacements had suffered a back injury or were recovering from a recent heart attack. A second member of staff was on annual leave. This resulted in a short period of time in which no one was available to empty the banks.

5.46 In order to minimise the impact, the re3 Contractor brought an agency driver in for the week of the 25<sup>th</sup>, and a member of staff returned early from their time off. re3 Officers liaised with the Contractor about the scheduling of the collections to seek to ensure that the period of disruption was minimised, and both the re3 contractor and the council street teams worked to clear any overflows.

5.47 The re3 Councils were financially compensated through the Contractual Performance Mechanism for the period of disruption, and the efforts of the Contractor meant that the catch-up was largely complete by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, with normal collections resuming from this point.

## **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM ADMINISTERING AUTHORITY**

### Head of Legal Services

6.1 None for this report.

### Corporate Finance Business Partner

6.2 None for this report.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 None.

### Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.4 None

## Climate Impact Assessment

6.5 None.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

### 7.1 Principal Groups Consulted

Not applicable.

### 7.2 Method of Consultation

Not applicable.

### 7.3 Representations Received

Not applicable.

## Background Papers

JWDB Reports - September 2023

### Contacts for further information

Sarah Innes, re3 Monitoring and Performance Officer  
01189 373459  
[sarah.innes@reading.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.innes@reading.gov.uk)

Oliver Burt, re3 Project Director  
0118 937 3990  
[oliver.burt@reading.gov.uk](mailto:oliver.burt@reading.gov.uk)



**Appendix One – Summary of User Satisfaction Survey Results**

% rating sites as 4 or 5 out of 5.	Smallmead		Longshot	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Cleanliness	78%	80%	86%	87%
Customer care	83%	86%	82%	85%
Safety posters/advice on site	70%	73%	75%	76%
Queuing	82%	85%	83%	86%
Meet and greet team/Entrance staff	85%	89%	84%	86%
Overall rating	90%	92%	89%	91%

% rating staff as 4 or 5 out of 5.	Smallmead		Longshot	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Helpfulness	89%	91%	87%	90%
Politeness	88%	91%	87%	88%
Knowledge	88%	91%	89%	90%

## **Appendix Two – Waste Disposal by re3 residents**

	At Home via my kerbside recycling collections	At an re3 Recycling Centre (Island Road, Reading or Longshot Lane Bracknell)	At a Local Recycling Bank or Supermarket Collection Point	Via another route for Recycling or Reuse (e.g. Charity Shop or Home Compost Bin)	N/A - I don't recycle this item
Glass Bottles and Jars	7%	17%	73%	1%	3%
Paper and Cardboard	89%	10%	1%	0%	0%
Plastic bottles (e.g. drinks and detergent bottles)	97%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Plastic Pots, Tubs and Trays (e.g. fruit punnets and yoghurt pots)	90%	6%	1%	1%	2%
Plastic films (e.g. bread bags and carrier bags)	32%	2%	32%	3%	32%
Rigid plastics (e.g. buckets)	17%	72%	1%	1%	9%
Tins and Cans	97%	2%	0%	0%	1%
Aluminum Foil	80%	4%	1%	0%	14%
Textiles and Clothing	2%	25%	35%	35%	3%
Food Waste	91%	0%	0%	3%	5%
Garden Waste	54%	39%	1%	4%	3%
Household Batteries	5%	36%	48%	3%	8%

Note: Percentages have been calculated to exclude residents who indicated that they don't produce a particular waste type.

Purple = Possible areas of MDR contamination.

Orange = Areas where capture rates of recyclables could be improved.

**Appendix Three – RBC Corporate Survey Results (“If you don’t use the Smallmead Waste Recycling Centre, please tell us why”)**

