

3. Paper and Card Recycling Options

Steve Bird, Assistant Director Communities and Street Scene presented a report which set out the implications of change for adopting separate paper and card recycling under the government's mandated Simpler Recycling initiative. The initiative recognised there were limitations to mandating separate paper and card collections and recycling, and provided opportunity for local authorities to be exempt if they could show there were Technical, Economic, Environmental or Practical (TEEP) reasons not to implement the change.

The Council's combined rate of recycling and compost had been in the order of 33% with recycling and compost split 50/50 within that rate. Despite best efforts through aligned education and promotion, Lincoln's rate of contaminated recycling (incorrect materials put into recycling bin) varied between 20-30%. Some parts of the city had higher rates than others, however, overall, there needed to be a reduction in contamination to improve performance, for which communication and education were key.

An assessment based on TEEP had been undertaken to assess viability of paper and card recycling. This had resulted in a recommendation to delay consideration of implementing the scheme until 2027 based on the below factors:

1. Set up costs including the costs of additional bins was high.
2. Many properties in Lincoln would struggle to accommodate an extra bin.
3. Food waste collections would begin in April 2026 adding more change and extra caddies on streets.
4. It was expected the Extended Producer Responsibility regulations would see a reduction in food packaging in the waste stream which may call into question whether there would be sufficient paper and card to warrant an additional bin in the longer term.
5. Extra staff resources, not only for collections, but also enforcement would be required.
6. A strict timetable of Community Services contracts re-letting for waste, cleansing and ground maintenance (some of the largest in the Council) were being observed with a commencement date of September 2026. This added a significant work pressure.

It was suggested that the focus should be on improving Lincoln's recycling rates overall and reducing contamination before reconsidering the introduction of paper and card recycling.

In response to discussion and questions, the following was confirmed:

- The most up to date figures had Lincoln's overall contamination rate at 16.6%. It was not easy to predict whether introducing paper and card recycling would reduce the recycling rate or not as it required splitting the existing materials. On

its own, probably not but it would reduce contamination. The long term could not be forecast.

- Biffa had asked if the Council would like to trial new technology that took 700 photos a second of the materials going into the back of the collection vehicle, which could be analysed by AI to assess levels of contamination and provide data on which areas had the highest rates. Communication and education could then be targeted at these areas as appropriate. Analysis would not be drilled down to individual properties but would include streets or areas.
- In tandem with this, the new software monitoring the contractor work would be used to show which properties had presented their bins, and therefore levels of engagement.
- The proposed enforcement system would see tags being affixed to offending bins explaining to residents why they had not been emptied. This also allowed bins to be tracked for checking on the following collection round. If a household repeatedly contaminated their recycling, they would receive up to three tagged warnings. Council officers would engage with residents with a house visit to offer help and guidance on correct recycling, and to ascertain if further help was needed.
- Taking a more aggressive form of enforcement was not favoured in the early stages as it was recognised that most residents wanted to do the right thing, and sometimes simply needed assistance.
- It was not known for how long digital images taken by collection vehicles would be kept. Officers would confirm this outside of the meeting.
- Details such as a change in house ownership, for example would not automatically be highlighted in systems, but could be taken into account if the Council was made aware.
- It was recognised there could be language barriers and differences in cultural understanding in some areas. These could be affecting recycling and contamination rates now and would have to be carefully considered in the new communications campaign.
- Theoretically, there were facilities available to recycle almost all materials, however it could be costly and complex. The UK did not have the facilities to recycle all materials, and some had to be shipped to countries that could process them.
- There would be engagement with ward Councillors to enable them to assist residents before any enforcement programme was launched in any given area.
- Although considered unlikely, if a resident persistently contaminated their recycling following enforcement and offers of help and education, their bin and contents would be removed. This would be paid for by the Council. There was

discussion whether the resident should pay for removal, however it was considered potentially problematic if they refused, or did not have the means to pay. This would be kept under review.

RESOLVED that the recommendation to delay consideration of installing separate paper and card collection in the city until 2027, and to engage with Lincolnshire County Council to develop an education and enforcement campaign be recommend to Executive for approval.