

## Waste and Recycling Strategy 2018 – 2023

### **Vision for 2018 - 2023**

For Maidstone Borough to be at the forefront of the national drive towards eliminating unnecessary waste, particularly single-use plastics and empowering our residents to live more sustainably and actively engage in the delivery of innovative waste reduction, recycling and collection services.

### **Introduction**

Since Maidstone first adopted a waste strategy in 2010, there have been huge changes within the industry, to EU and UK legislation and to the service provided to local residents. This has seen some significant improvements to performance but has also resulted in new challenges which need to be considered for the future.

Waste reduction and recycling remains a key priority for the Council and for the Country as a whole; however the drivers for change continue to evolve and the environmental movement as well as public focus has matured. Recycling is no longer a new concept and with that comes greater knowledge and understanding, as well as greater apathy. Recycling, for the majority, is part of our everyday lives. However our success is not guaranteed and there is significant uncertainty on the horizon.

This new Waste and Recycling Strategy looks to guide Maidstone through this period of uncertainty and instability in the market, to focus on high quality recycling and prepare it for a new collection contract in 2023.

### **The National Picture**

The waste industry has evolved over decades to respond to changes in legislation, technology and environmental pressures driven by knowledge and cost. Now, more than ever, the need for change is being driven from all directions – from industry, from government and from the Public.

Most recently a successful driver has been the charge for single use carrier bags introduced in 2015 which resulted in 83% reduction in sales. Following Sir David Attenborough's Blue Planet 2 documentary which highlighted the impact of plastic on our oceans, there has been public outcry. More legislation is now expected to ban single-use plastics such as drinking straws and cotton buds from 2019. The Government is also consulting on a levy for disposable coffee cups and a deposit return scheme (DRS) for plastic bottles which it intends to launch later in the year.

However the biggest driver is most certainly the international market. The recent action taken by the Chinese Government to clean up the waste they import has already led to a significant shift in market prices. In July 2017, the Chinese Government told the World Trade Organisation the plan to ban certain imports of waste from December 2017. The initial focus has been on plastic and mixed paper, with instant bans on all unsorted material and a reduction in the contamination thresholds from 1.5% to 0.5% for paper. With 3.6 million tonnes

of paper exported from the UK to China last year, the stability and certainty of this market is hugely influential. In May 2018, China banned US waste paper exports for 1 month meaning this waste stream is likely to flood the Asian markets instead, placing greater competition for high quality recycling and potentially creating unwanted stockpiles of low grade material.

Whilst this may seem a world away from Maidstone, there is no doubt that the repercussions will be felt.

Maidstone's mixed recycling is sent to a local Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to be separated into the different materials and although the majority of the recycling remains in this country, the changes in China affects the market here. Tighter MRF regulations set out in the Code of Practice for England and Wales also has an impact on the value of material collected. There is a growing risk of recycling being rejected and sent for disposal if it does not meet these standards, which has financial implications for the Kent taxpayer as well as affecting our recycling performance. Maidstone as the Waste Collection Authority is required to deliver its waste as directed by Kent County Council, the Waste Disposal Authority. In Mid Kent, the County Council has retained ownership of the waste and recycling and therefore holds the risk and reward of the fluctuating markets. Currently there is a cost for the disposal and treatment of both waste and recycling, however with improved quality there is a greater opportunity to increase value of the material.

Alongside this, national targets for recycling are unlikely to go away. The Government has already indicated that the EU targets are to become part of UK law after the Country leaves the European Union in March 2019. The revised Waste Framework Directive (rWFD) sets out challenging targets of 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030 and 65% by 2035, although there is no indication yet of the implications if these are not achieved. It is also expected that separate targets for individual materials such as paper, plastic, metal and glass may also be set, which will apply even greater pressure on collection authorities such as ourselves.

A focus on specific materials is not new. At the start of the Mid Kent Contract there was significant uncertainty about the future of collection services with the requirement for all authorities to determine whether it was "necessary" to have separate collections of paper & cardboard, plastic, metals and glass to achieve high quality recycling. Whilst the Environment Agency has not taken action to change collection regimes and commingled collections are likely to continue, how to achieve the highest quality recycling and capture rates needs to be considered as part of a new collection contract. Therefore fully and partially separated collections need to be explored alongside the existing commingled service.

The national picture will undoubtedly have a huge impact on what we do next - a new waste revolution focused on single use plastics, ambitious new recycling targets and the delivery of a circular economy package as well as instability in the recycling markets will influence our services.

## **Maidstone's Story**

Maidstone has been at the forefront of recycling improvements in Kent with the early introduction of separate weekly food waste collections, the successful reduction in non-recyclable waste and as the lead authority for the Mid Kent Contract delivering savings of over £1 million to the Kent taxpayer.

The amount of waste recycled in the Borough has increased from 30% in 2010 to over 50% now. Maidstone is now the second highest performer in Kent and unlike many authorities across the Country has maintained performance rather than seen decline. Declining recycling rates have mainly resulted from the drive to reduce plastic in packaging, known as light-weighting and the overall increase in waste which is often linked to economic conditions.

The last significant service change was in 2013 with the addition of glass to the kerbside recycling collection. Maidstone's last waste strategy focused on education and engagement as well as exploring the use of incentives to encourage residents to recycle food waste. This did not achieve the shift in behavior and increase in food waste recycling expected. The results mirrored many of the other trials taking place across the Country, indicating that low level financial motivation does not work and funding is better invested in simple communication.

A comprehensive recycling campaign including videos, social media, leaflets, roadshows and advertising has been carried out over the past couple of years. This has most certainly helped Maidstone to defy the national trend of decreasing performance.

With such an established recycling service, enforcement powers have been positively used to ensure landlords and managing agents take responsibility for the management of waste in their properties. Over 10% of Maidstone's households have communal bins so targeting these properties has been essential to improve recycling performance. Most of these now have communal food waste and recycling collections enabling a reduction in the amount of non-recyclable waste collected.

## **Objectives**

In order to achieve the Council's priority for *A Clean, Green and Safe Environment* and deliver our Vision, we will

- Recycle, reuse or compost over 50% of household waste
- Deliver year on year reductions in the amount of contamination collected
- Maintain the low levels of household waste produced in the Borough, with zero waste sent to landfill
- Increase capture rates of the four target materials – paper & card, plastic, metals and glass
- Produce high quality recyclables which contribute to the circular economy within Kent
- Agree a New Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) for Mid Kent aimed at delivering a cost effective service for Kent taxpayers
- Explore opportunities for the provision of the waste service from 2023

We will also continue to follow the principles of the waste hierarchy – with waste reduction, reuse and recycling being considered before energy recovery and disposal.

### **Reducing Waste, Reducing Cost**

Reducing waste offers the best solution for everyone, as it can save us all money. Whilst this applies to all types of waste, we will primarily focus on food waste and plastic.

We will seek to contribute to the national discussions around prevention of single use plastics, both through our role in the Kent Resource Partnership and engaging directly with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Through the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, we will identify and work with key, local businesses to explore initiatives to reduce plastic packaging and single use plastics to put Maidstone at the forefront of the national waste reduction agenda.

We will continue to promote national and Kent-wide campaigns focused on reducing plastic and food waste – delivering these at a local level. This will include an early engagement with the Government's proposed Deposit Return Scheme.

We will continue to promote and deliver initiatives for the Love Food, Hate Waste campaign and will use our own data on the amount of food waste thrown away to encourage residents to think about what they buy.

We will look for an opportunity for capital investment in waste reduction initiatives which have a tangible effect on behavior and particularly reduce single use plastics.

We will start discussions with Kent County Council and Ashford and Swale Borough Councils to agree beneficial partnership arrangements post 2023.

We will also commission work from the industry to model the future costs of the service and to identify a preferred collection method which will deliver a cost effective service and achieve targets set by Government.

### **High Quality Recycling**

The quality of the recycling we collect will dictate our costs and our performance, and will ensure we can respond to the challenges we face in the market.

We will carry out targeted communications based on the data we have about the waste we collect and the communities we serve. This will sit alongside the Kent-wide campaigns for specific materials, delivered by the Kent Resource Partnership. Our communications will include face to face, social media, videos and direct mail.

We will actively engage with developers through the planning process to ensure collection arrangements are considered and residents have the opportunity to

recycle. New residents will receive welcome packs so they start off on the right track.

We will carry out training for all our collection crews so they are able to help residents to recycle correctly and provide reasons why bins cannot be emptied.

Where appropriate we will use enforcement measures to require the separation of recycling in flats and for those who repeatedly misuse the recycling services.

We will seek to understand the barriers to capturing more recycling through engagement with residents, community groups and housing trusts.

We will support Kent County Council with the procurement of treatment and disposal contracts for Mid Kent's waste to ensure we can deliver material to achieve the highest value and contract performance. This will also include exploring collection options for materials as part of the new collection contract after 2023.

We will continue to explore opportunities to work with the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector in Kent to collect items for recycling and reuse locally, including furniture and textiles.

We will focus on the separate collection of textiles for reuse and recycling and reduce the amount disposed of unnecessarily and incorrectly in the waste and mixed recycling collections.

As a member of the Kent Resource Partnership we will also support the delivery of the Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (KJMWMS).

### **A Borough we are proud of**

Achieving a *Clean, Green and Safe Environment* is at the centre of everything we do.

We will take a zero tolerance approach to littering and will actively enforce against all areas of waste crime.

We will work with the Intel Analyst funded by the Kent Resource Partnership to ensure intelligence is shared across Kent to persistently tackle offenders.

We will continue to support community initiatives to carry out regular clean-ups and recognize the invaluable work they carry out.