

Subject: Household Food Waste in London

Report to: Environment Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 9 July 2014

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out background information for a discussion with invited guests including the London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB), two London boroughs and industry experts about managing household food waste in London. The Committee formally agreed the scope and terms of reference for this investigation at its meeting on 3 June 2014.
- 1.2 This is the Committee's first meeting in this investigation and has been informed by written evidence submitted by a range of stakeholders. A final report is expected to be published in the autumn.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the report as background to a discussion with expert guests about managing domestic food waste in London.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Mayor considers food waste, making up around 20 per cent (or 600,000 tonnes) of household waste each year, to be a priority waste stream that will play an important role in boosting London's recycling and composting rates and to provide renewable fuel for local low carbon energy generation. The Mayor's waste plans for London are delivered through his municipal and business waste strategies and LWARB, part funded by the Mayor.
- 3.2 While collections for paper and cardboard are well established in London, food waste is currently a much less successfully separated and collected part of biodegradable waste. 23 London boroughs currently collect food waste, either separately or combined with green garden waste. This means that about 51 per cent of London's households have separate food or mixed organics waste collections, for example in Hackney, Merton or Bromley.

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 This meeting will provide the opportunity to discuss a number of issues relating to household food waste in London, as set out below.

Environmental impact of food waste

- 4.2 Reducing food waste is crucial to achieving environmental benefits. Food waste accounts for around 20 per cent of household waste each year in the capital. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimates that 890,000 tonnes of food from households and businesses is thrown away per year in London, of which 540,000 tonnes is avoidable.
- 4.3 WRAP estimates that the cost to London boroughs of disposing of its avoidable food waste is over £50 million per annum. A number of food reduction initiatives already exist in London, for example WRAP's Love Food Hate Waste campaign, which runs and promotes activities to change consumer behaviour.

The Mayor's role

- 4.4 Through London Housing Design Guide the Mayor is able to set strict criteria around housing design, including space standards for the provision of waste storage. Furthermore, the Mayor's London Plan requires boroughs to work towards "zero biodegradable or recyclable waste to landfill" and "managing the equivalent of 100 per cent of London's waste within London" by 2031.
- 4.5 The GLA also owns the London Sustainable Industries Park (LSIP) in Dagenham, which seeks to create the UK's largest concentration of environmental industries and renewable energy technologies, delivering waste-to-energy projects, combined heat and power schemes, recycling and reprocessing facilities.

Barriers to managing domestic food waste

- 4.6 Cost remains the biggest barrier to the collection of food waste. For boroughs opting to combine food with general refuse waste, the environmental benefits of separate food waste collections may not be attractive enough to outweigh the costs of the separate collections. Furthermore, resident participation levels in food waste recycling are not particularly high in London. This is partly due to perceptions that food waste smells, attracts flies and vermin, as well as apathy towards recycling more generally.
- 4.7 Waste collection from flats is particularly challenging, and few boroughs effectively separate food waste from these locations. Barriers to recycling and composting include limited space for waste storage, difficulty for residents to transport waste to a central collection point, and finding ways of engaging diverse and hard-to-reach groups. With nearly half of London's homes comprising of flats, improving food waste collection from these properties presents a great opportunity.

Alternatives to kerbside collections

- 4.8 There are also alternatives to kerbside collection include composting food waste at home, and disposing via special sink and drain systems. In larger developments, on-site small-scale anaerobic digestion facilities with methane recovery might also be an increasingly viable option. Some of these have been used extensively abroad, for example in the USA, but have been relatively underutilised in most parts of Europe where emphasis is placed on kerbside collections of bio-waste.

London's market potential for organic waste processing

- 4.9 Food waste can be processed through a number of ways including energy-from-waste (EfW), anaerobic digestion (AD) or 'in-vessel composting' (IVC). A recent study suggests that there is a capacity need for approximately one million tonnes of food and green waste infrastructure, for example AD plants in London which represents a significant opportunity for development. However, aside from one existing and recently opened AD plant and two planned facilities, there are no other well developed proposals within London.
- 4.10 Although feedstock security is important, considering London's combination of scale of occupied housing stock and large-scale hospitality sector, local authority collected food waste is still in relatively short supply. This is because it is often more cost efficient to collect green waste and food waste mixed together.

Landfill tax and gate fees

- 4.11 Despite local authorities in London significantly reducing the amount they send to landfill, the costs associated with landfilling continue to rise. Having reached £80 per tonne, the Government has confirmed that the tax will continue to rise at the rate of inflation. At present, the tax raised is not returned to local authorities for re-investment in food waste recycling and other sustainable waste management practices. Gate fees for organic waste treatment plants are generally lower than for residual waste plants (in the case of AD, due to subsidies for green electricity generation).

Invited guests

- 4.12 The Committee expects to put questions about food waste management in London to:
- **Wayne Hubbard**, Chief Managing Officer, London Waste and Recycling Board;
 - **William Stewart**, Principal Development Manager, Housing, Land and Property, GLA;
 - **Linda Crichton**, Head of Collections and Quality, Waste and Resources Action Programme;
 - **Charlotte Morton**, Chief Executive, Anaerobic Digestion & Biogas Association;
 - **Steve Didsbury**, Head of Waste and Recycling Services, LB Bexley;
 - **Mark Griffin**, Head of Waste Strategy, LB Hackney; and
 - **Dr Marco Ricci**, Consultant, Italian Composting and Biogas Association CIC.
- 4.13 The Committee may wish to undertake a site visit as part of this investigation. The Committee's autumn meeting slots have been identified as possible dates.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in the report.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications to the Greater London Authority arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report: None

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
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List of Background Papers: None

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