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| Subject: | Resources & Fleet Closed Bin Lid Policy & Removal of Liners |
| Date: | 8 April 2025 |
| Reporting Officer: | Stephen Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet and OSS |
| Contact Officer: | John McConnell, City Services Manager (Resources and Fleet) |

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| Restricted Reports | |
| Is this report restricted? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. | |
| Insert number <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime | |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? | |
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometime in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues |
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| 1.1 | <p>The purpose of this report is to inform members of two operational issues which have Health and Safety implications and to seek approval for operational changes / policy enforcement to ensure the Health and Safety of Waste Collection Operatives as they carry out their collection duties.</p> <p>This report was discussed at PGLCF on 27th March 2025, and officers were requested to bring this report to the next People and Communities Committee.</p> <p>These issues centre round</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The practice of some households of attaching large bin liners to general domestic (black) bins and the safety requirement to prevent their use 2. The overfilling of bins and the subsequent adaptation / modification of bin lifters on the backs of vehicles following a fatality in mainland UK and the subsequent coroner's findings and recommendations. <p>Whilst necessary both changes have the potential to increase disrupt bin collections and the report also provides details as to how the service plans to mitigate against any potential disruption caused.</p> |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2.1 | Members are asked to note the contents of this report and agree to the next steps as outlined in paragraph 3.29 and detailed in Appendix 2. |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| 3.1 | <p>Background</p> <p>In January 2014, the Council adopted its 'Waste and Recycling Collection Operation Policy' which covered the policies and procedures concerning the collection of Household Waste. For relevance, in relation to overfilled bins and unsafe bins, section 2.31 states:</p> <p>'The council may reject for collection, waste and recycling receptacles if the following reasons exist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the bin is too heavy due to, for example, it contains heavy waste such as construction / DIY / soil etc; • If the bin contains hazardous or other waste material deemed to pose a risk under health and safety; • If the wrong receptacle has been presented for collection; • If unapproved multiple bins are presented (point 2.10); • If the wrong materials have been put into any receptacle (point 2.29); • If the receptacle appears to be damaged or is otherwise in an unfit state to be emptied safely; |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the receptacle is not compatible with the council's waste collection vehicle; • If the receptacle contains electrical appliances / items (WEEE). (These should be disposed of through the council's bulky household waste collections, detailed in Section 3 of this policy • or at the nearest recycling centre.) • If the bin lid is not fully closed and could cause a health and safety problem; • If the bin has no lid/damage to wheels, body or axel • Domestic clinical waste' |
| 3.2 | <p>Domestic Bin Liners – Background</p> <p>Belfast City Council has an operational protocol, in alignment with the contamination policy, confirming the non-collection of comingled compostable (brown bins) and comingled dry recyclable (blue) bins, that are presented with bin liners. However, this protocol does not currently apply to residual (black) bins and as a consequence there has been a year-on-year increase in the use of bin liners is black bins across the city. It is believed that in the areas with the greatest occurrence, the bin liners are supplied and fitted by companies that provide a black bin cleaning service and examples of bin liners used are illustrated in the pictures below.</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>It has been recognised by operations that the use of these bin liners had the potential to snag on equipment and bin lifters on occasion and this had a risk of dislodging the bin from the bin lifter as it was being lowered from the collection vehicle. Risk assessments advised operators to stand in safety zones behind vehicles when emptying bins.</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>Recently a black bin detached from the lifting clamp, injuring an operative. The bin was lined with a liner tied around the clamping edge of the bin as illustrated in photograph 1 below. The investigation concluded that the liner between the clamp and the bin most likely contributed to the bin slipping out of the clamp.</p> |
| 3.5 | <p>There are currently several serious Health and Safety issues arising from the use of bin liners including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bin liners can impact the lifting gripping force resulting in the bin detaching and falling, placing staff and the public at risk. • Bin liner usage is not considered in any waste collections risk assessment. • Bin liners can become entangled in the lifting mechanism causing an unsafe overhead load during collection. This presents a safety risk to the operative to remove the liner (see photos 1 - 3). |



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

3.6 In addition, General waste (black) bins often contain sanitary waste, pads, dressings and disposed nappies, along with dog faeces. Instances of needles have also been reported by staff. On review it has been established that bin liners contribute to the splashing/spillage of putrid substances and liquids onto staff and onto the street as the content of the liners are not fully emptied into the collection vehicle and can become entangled with the bin lifter mechanism.

3.7 Waste Collection management are currently dealing with staff impacted by waste materials falling from the bins and liners onto their persons. Putrid liquids, debris, glass, sanitary waste and surgical needles have all been reported. See photos 4 and 5 below



Photo 4



Photo 5

3.8 In order to clear the snagging of the bin liner, operators have to manually disentangle the bin liner from the lifting mechanism. Although there are Safe Systems of Work (SSOW) in place to allow this to happen, it is not best practice to have this situation occur in the first place as it still exposes the operator to any remaining waste within the liner. Given the accidents that have occurred, and the risks posed to operatives it is felt that removing this risk completely is the correct option.

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| 3.9 | <p>Waste Collections Operations have discussed the matter with Health and Safety colleagues. Departmental Health and Safety has carried out some comparisons with other Councils as to their approach to bin liners. They have advised:</p> <p><i>‘Bin liners have increasingly been raised as a safety concern across Northern Ireland. The liners have the potential to get caught on lifters or caused bin to detach for lifters which have resulted in a number to incidents and injuries to our operatives. The council has a duty of care to prevent injury to our staff, given that we are aware of the safety issues involve with these liners it would be prudent to put in place measures to eliminate this potential risk to our staff.</i></p> <p><i>Other Councils eg LCCC, ABC, CC&G, Mid & East Antrim and F&O all have put steps in place whereby bins are not collected if there is a bin liner attached to the bin.</i></p> <p><i>Failure for us to take action on this could result in further incidents/significant injury to our operatives which we could have prevented, therefore we would be liable for any claim or prosecution in light of this.’</i></p> <p>Scale of the issue</p> <p>3.10 Resources and Fleet , through the Departmental Performance and Improvement Unit, commissioned a survey in August / September 2024 to ascertain the size and spread of the issue of bin liners (alongside overfilled bins detailed below)</p> <p>3.11 The exercise covered a total of 6195 bins¹ across selected routes covering all areas of the city. It was found that found that a range, from 0% up to almost 33% of presented bins, on surveyed domestic black bin routes, had bins lined with single use plastic bin liners. Overall, a total of 6.6% of presented bins surveyed were lined. The survey would indicate that the issue of lined bins may be concentrated in areas in the West and perhaps the North of the City. See Appendix 1 - Summary of Survey Findings.</p> <p>3.12 Impact upon Bin Cleaning companies</p> <p>With the exception of prohibiting the fitting of a bin liner this measure will have no other impact upon Bin cleaning businesses. It does not prevent them from cleaning the bin. It will only prohibit the fitting of the plastic liner.</p> |
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¹ The sample size will give a confidence level of 99% with a 2% margin of error

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| 3.13 | <p>Background to the Issue of Raised Bin Lids</p> <p>Operational crews have been raising for some time the issue of overfilled bins as a both a safety reason and a reason for non or missed collections.</p> <p>As per the Collections Policy mentioned above, section 2.31 states a valid reason for rejection of collection to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the bin lid is not fully closed and could cause a health and safety problem <p>Until now Waste Collections worked in a pragmatic way in that if an individual bin was open slightly then crews would be expected to collect. However, in effect this was running contrary to Council Policy.</p> |
| 3.14 | <p>Fatality in Coventry 2023 and the subsequent findings from the Coroner's report.</p> <p>However, unfortunate events have resulted in major safety issues that have a direct impact on the collection or otherwise of bins with open lids.</p> |
| 3.15 | <p>In Coventry in 2022 there was a fatality as a result of the operator being caught by the bin lifter and lifted into the back of the collection vehicle and crushed. As part of the coroner's findings, it was stated that the bin lifter mechanism, under certain circumstances, allowed bin lifts to be raised without differentiating what the bin lifter was actually lifting, causing the operator to be lifted into the back of the Refuse Collection Vehicle and subsequently crushed.</p> |
| 3.16 | <p>As part of the response and actions following the fatality referenced above, it has been made clear by the Vehicle and Bin Lift Manufacturer (Terberg / Dennis Eagle), that the practice of emptying bins with open lids runs contrary to the Operator's Training Procedure supplied by the Vehicle and Bin Lift Manufacturer, which states as follows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always ensure that the lids of wheeled bins are closed before presenting them to the binlift • DO NOT attempt to empty overfull wheeled bins, this can lead to spillage and falling objects which could cause personal injury or damage to the bin lift equipment |
| 3.17 | <p>They have informed Councils that allowing this practice to continue is at the user's risk.</p> |
| 3.18 | <p>In order to prevent a reoccurrence of the fatality, the bin lifter manufacturer has agreed with the coroner to carry out certain modifications to the lifting mechanism. For 'in service' vehicles there will be a 'Bin lift Compaction Control Upgrade (BCCU)' software upgrade to prevent the compaction (crushing) of items suspected of not being 'bin' waste, that may have been lifted and dropped into</p> |

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| | the main body of the vehicle (the person may still be lifted but the compacting mechanism will be shut off). |
| 3.19 | For newly manufactured vehicles, new additional sensors will be attached to the bin lifters. Any object presented to the lifter, or enters within the safety zone of the lifter, that is greater in height than a standard bin (eg an operative or Member of the Public) will not be lifted as the sensor will disable the lifter. As a consequence, any bin presented with a raised lid will trigger the sensor and the bin lifter will cut out i.e. the vehicle will not lift overfilled domestic bins. In this instance the person will not be lifted. |
| 3.20 | This issue is of immediate concern as the Council has already taken ownership of 5 of the modified vehicles with 19 more on order, due to arrive by end of 2026. All subsequent Refuse Collection Vehicles will be designed with this safety feature as standard. If we consider that Waste Collections service currently collect approximately 54 routes per day, then currently 9% of routes cannot lift bins with raised lids and this figure will rise to approximately 48% within 2 years. |
| 3.21 | In addition, BCC has 38 'in service' vehicles. All of these have now received the software retrofit and drivers and operators are receiving refresher training on the vehicle modifications and their safe operation. As already outlined this training instructs them to operate the vehicle in line with the Operator's Training Procedure supplied by the Vehicle and Bin Lift Manufacturer as detailed in 3.18 above. |
| 3.22 | In light of these developments, it is essential to plan the cessation of the practice of emptying overfilled bins. |
| | Open Lid Data Survey |
| 3.23 | As outlined above, the Departmental Performance and Improvement Unit carried out a survey in August / September 2024 to ascertain the size and spread of the issue of raised bin lids. |
| 3.24 | The exercise covered the same 6195 bins across selected routes covering all areas of the city. It was found that an average of 9.5% of bins surveyed presented with raised bin lids, ranging from 2.9% up to almost 18.4% of presented bins. The survey would indicate that the issue of lined bins may be more widespread across many areas of the city. See Appendix 1 Summary of Survey Findings. Some examples of overfilled bins are shown below – (Photos 6 – 8). |



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8

Next steps

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A Project Team is currently in the process of developing an implementation plan in relation to tackling the two issues highlighted in this report. The draft plan includes a detailed exercise with Marketing and Comms, and proposes the following next steps. The latest iteration of the plan is attached at **Appendix 2**:

1. Phase 1 (March 2025) CMT report & political engagement. Phase 1 would also include TU & staff engagement and updating of Health & Safety documentation.
2. Phase 2 (Apr 2025) On-boarding focusing on Community engagement & Awareness and staff training
3. Phase 3 Bedding in phase 12th May 2025 for 6 weeks - Amber Bin Tags – Notify residents of non-compliance without penalty for three cycles - Monitor Reports & Feedback – Adjust messaging based on common issues.
4. Enforcement of full policy 23th June 2025 – onwards.

4.0 Appendices - Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Summary of Survey Findings
 Appendix 2 – Outline Plan as at 31/03/2025
 Appendix 3 – Mock Up Bin Tags pre and post 23rd June 2025