

## Context for decisions

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the Government announced people could no longer leave their homes unless it fell into one of the following four categories: (a) for medical reasons, (b) for essential shopping, (c) to travel to work if unable to work from home, and (d) for daily exercise.

Alongside this, the Government also provided clear rules for the public to follow in terms of social distancing and self-isolation. The Council takes its role as a lead organisation for the city very seriously. Part of that role is to support and uphold the requirements and guidance set out by Government and to lead in setting an example to others.

Decisions were made around that time in response to the above and to enable the council to prioritise the most essential services. This included the suspension of some less essential services.

On May 10<sup>th</sup> the Prime Minister announced a “road-map” with three steps towards the end of lockdown. Guidance from DEFRA was published on 6<sup>th</sup> May and updated further on the 15<sup>th</sup>, which set out revised positions on waste management issues, such as the ability for the public to travel to and use Household Waste and Recycling Centres.

In addition the Council has been managing the effect of Covid19 on staffing levels and responding to changing national health and safety guidance.

The following sections seek to provide information that will allow Members and staff to respond to issues raised by the public in relation to the issues covered.

### FAQ 1: WHEN WILL YOU BE EMPTYING BROWN BINS AGAIN AND WHY DID YOU STOP?

The collection of garden waste from homes is a non-statutory (optional) service. The majority of councils currently charge extra for this service (averaging around £40 per bin a year). In Leeds we empty from 220,000 properties each fortnight and there is no charge. To put that in a local perspective:

- Bradford: 36,500 properties, collection is monthly, annual charge is £40 (+£20 for an extra bin)
- Calderdale: 5,000 properties, collection is fortnightly, annual charge is £42 (+£42 for each extra bin)
- Kirklees: 18,000 properties, collection is fortnightly, annual charge is £38.50 (+£30.80 for an extra bin)
- Wakefield: 135,000 properties, the collection is fortnightly and free

Leeds is the second largest council in the UK. The average amount of black and green bins collected each week is around 400,000. Our priority remains to continue the collection of these black and green bins, on the scheduled day. Two months into the “lockdown” we had managed to complete every route on every day, including over the Easter and May bank holiday periods. In those weeks our crews have emptied over 3.6 million wheelie bins and collected around 40,000 tonnes of household waste for recycling or burning for energy recovery. Homes are currently still presenting around 15% more black bin waste by weight, and about 5% more green bin waste.

Within the above national and local context, the collection of garden waste was not essential during the full lockdown period. There were and still are a number of options open to residents. They include: simply doing less pruning/cutting of grass etc., leaving cut grass on the lawn (it is actually better for it), composting and creating piles of cuttings for insects etc, lots of tips and advice can be found at the [Zero Waste Leeds website](#), [Facebook page](#) and [Twitter account](#). We have also recently agreed a 35% discount for Leeds resident with local company [Great Green Systems](#) for their food and garden waste composting bins.

However, as staff levels have improved and the Covid19 trends appear encouraging, we now feel able to restart the collection on brown bins, without putting at risk the collection of black and green bins.

Collections resumed on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May. It takes 2 weeks to collect all the brown bins across Leeds and so the last homes will get their bin emptied the first week of June.

As Members will be aware from consultations, we are also introducing new routes across the city to add new housing developments and make the routes more efficient, so many residents will find they have a new brown bin collection day. Everyone will receive a letter detailing this a few days before their first collection is due. The letter will include a new “brown bin guide” sticker and a reminder of what can be recycled through the green bin. The new collection days and schedules are already on the Leeds Bin app and the “find my collection day” part of the LCC Website.

Finally, we know there will be unprecedented levels of garden waste to collect. The first day’s tonnage was well over twice the corresponding Bank Holiday Monday’s in each of the last 3 years. It has been several weeks since the service was suspended, and of course most people have been at home more and the weather has been good. We will put on extra crews where we can (though the priority remains black and green bin collections and we are still 10% down on regular staff levels). It is very likely we will not manage to empty all brown bins for at least the first scheduled collection. We ask that residents understand that and bear with us. Our publicity and comms has been very clear about this. The HWRCs are open and there are plenty of slots available to book for those who have garden waste that is causing them a problem to store.

## FAQ 2: AM I ALLOWED TO USE A HOUSEHOLD WASTE AND RECYCLING SITE?

In line with Council’s across the country, the decision was taken to close all eight sites across Leeds with effect from 24<sup>th</sup> March. This decision was taken primarily because the restrictions announced by Government did not include being able to leave the home to travel for the non-essential purpose of disposing of household items or garden waste. The clear message for residents was to Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives. It is worth noting though that we also had 40% of regular site staff off work with Covid19 related issues, a figure that hasn’t reduced much since.

Revised guidance from DEFRA was published on 6<sup>th</sup> May and then further updated on 15<sup>th</sup> May. The latest guidance says that some journeys to HWRCs may be necessary to avoid rubbish building up and a public health risk. Residents should not leave home to travel to a HWRC unless they feel it is essential and should continue to store items if it’s safe to do so.

On 8<sup>th</sup> May a booking system went live for residents of Leeds to book a visit to the first 5 sites to reopen on 11<sup>th</sup> May. A further two sites were reopened on 18<sup>th</sup> May. All sites except Otley (Ellar Ghyll) are now open. We plan to reopen the Otley site on June 1st, with very limited number of slots available to book due to its size, layout and road safety concerns, and for garden waste only initially..

The “booking only” system will stay in place to at least 20<sup>th</sup> June, during which time a decision will be made whether to extend further. It has been enthusiastically received by the public and has helped ensure the sites have been safely managed and controlled, for both the public and staff. Crucially, the queuing to access the sites has been minimal in Leeds. Many other town and cities have seen queues typically of between 1-3 hours. A customer survey is being undertaken which will help inform decision making.

The initial site rules were very strict, so as to ensure the first week or two went as safely as possible and the public and staff were able to social distance. Now we are confident that we can manage some of these issues more safely, we have changed the rules slightly. The main rules are:

- No booking, no entry;
- More than one person is now allowed in a vehicle;
- There is strict social distancing on site at all times;
- Staff cannot physically help customers unload their vehicles;

- Only one person should ordinarily get out the vehicle to unload, but a further person will be allowed out to help with heavy items with the permission of a site attendant;
- Vans and trailers are now allowed (strictly with a valid vehicle permit only)
- Two bookings a week max per household.
- Up to 5 bags or equivalent of inert waste allowed per booking – temporarily free of charge to help reduce contact

The opening hours were extended for the first 3 weeks (to 8pm), but this will return to normal summer hours (8am-6pm) from 1<sup>st</sup> June. For information, the site that typically has the most available slots left to book is Kirkstall. Seacroft is the busiest.

**Trade waste** – the Kirkstall site is open for trade waste, no booking is required but payment is by card or account only.

### FAQ 3: AM I ABLE TO BOOK A HOUSEHOLD BULKY ITEM COLLECTION AGAIN YET?

Yes. This service started taking bookings again on 18<sup>th</sup> May. As before Covid19, the service has a limited number of slots each day citywide. These get booked up quickly and residents need to keep checking the booking site should they need to. To recognise that there are more people unable to make the journey to the HWRCs than normal at the moment, this service is temporarily free of charge.

We ask that people:

- Only use this service where they genuinely cannot attend a HWRC to dispose of their items;
- They cannot wait any longer to store the items;
- The items are put outside at least 3 days (72 hours) before collection is due.

### FAQ 4: ARE YOU EMPTYING LITTER BINS?

When the lockdown was announced we immediately took the step to suspend emptying of litter bins. With over 4,000 bins, it was not practical nor a good use of limited resources to tape up every bin. We did try and do some though, mainly on high streets. This was a bit rough and ready and soon many of those taping ups came loose or were part removed by the public. We initially relied on people getting the message through social media and press that litter bins should not be used. This had some success but many bins still got used – often people stuffing them full of dog-poo bags even when there was no bin liner in. At this challenging time we needed to encourage everyone to take greater personal responsibility for their rubbish.

We then added a sticker to every litter bin to make clear they should not be used and asking people to take their litter home with them. Unfortunately, not everyone did this of course, and so we ensured bins that become full and a potential nuisance for nearby residents were emptied as often as we could.

As we are now in “step 1” of the Government’s road-map out of “lockdown”, the public are leaving their homes more frequently and for more time. Unlimited exercise is permitted and household picnics in parks are allowed. More shops and businesses are open. Ice cream vans can operate! So we are now in the process of removing all covering/taping up of litter bins. We will operate an increased team of litter bin crews citywide that will focus mainly on the known streets/locations where the litter bins are being filled most often, as well as responding promptly to any reports we get. The message to the public is please take your litter home with you if at all possible, but we will empty bins as required.

Please refer any “hotspot”/problem litter bins to your CNT contact for them to make sure it’s on the list for a regular check/visit.

## FAQ 5: ARE YOU LITTER PICKING AND SWEEPING STREETS AGAIN YET?

Due the lockdown restrictions imposed on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, and the Covid19 staffing impact/resource priorities, litter picking was suspended across the city. Where possible some mechanical sweeping has been taking place, as this is safer to undertake and there was opportunity to access empty arterial routes etc.

As we move through Step 1 of the next phase, and approach Step 2, the need for litter picking has returned. The public are now able to undertake “unlimited outdoor exercise” and trips to parks and open spaces. More shops and take aways are opening.

The Cleaner Neighbourhoods Team is restarting litter picking, at locations where footfall seems to be highest and litter unfortunately starting to be an issue again. The resource will continue to be limited and targeted, as other elements of the service covered in this FAQ remain a priority and staffing absence levels due to Covid19 remain relatively high. A priority for litter picking and mechanical street sweeping will be to support town centres/main streets as step 2 of the move out of lockdown sees more shops open to the public and with the importance of supporting the local economic recovery.

## FAQ 6: WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT’S 3 STEPS OUT OF LOCKDOWN?

On May 10th the Prime Minister announced a “road-map” with three steps towards the end of lockdown. He set out an expected timetable for each step. Our service plans to support these stages are:

Service	Full lockdown 24 <sup>th</sup> March – 10 <sup>th</sup> May	Step 1 May	Step 2 June	Step 3 July
<b>Refuse</b>	Black and green bins prioritised/collected	Brown bins to resume (25/5)		
<b>HWRCs</b>	Site closed	5 sites reopen (11/5) 2 more sites reopen (18/5)	Final site to reopen Review of site rules/restrictions	
<b>CNTs</b>	All but essential street cleansing and enforcement services (defined as to deal with a public health concern) stopped	Citywide service managed at an area level, focussing on: Litter bins – dedicated crews making programmed visits to locations where bins are filling up regularly and proactively inspecting other bins where time allows Flytipping – dedicated crews responding to reports of flytips across the city Bulky collections – restart this service (18/5) Street sweeping – dedicated mechanical path and road sweeping focussing on arterial routes, shopping areas/main streets, known litter hotspots. Litter picking - limited service, focussed on shopping areas/main streets, known litter hotspots. Enforcement – focus on flytipping investigation where there appears to be clear evidence available		Return to zonal working. With zonal teams able to resume local schedules for litter bins, litter picking, street sweeping and enforcement activity.

These plans are of course dependant on the resources being available to deliver them (e.g. staff), the safety of staff and public, and any change in the national and/or local Covid19 situation.

## FAQ 7: WHY AREN'T YOUR CREWS FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES OR WEARING PPE?

Throughout the crisis we have been following Government guidance on work practices for the management of waste. This has mostly been through guidance issued by the [Waste Industry Safety and Health \(WISH\)](#) forum and Public Health England.

The guidance for the delivery of essential services is different in some elements from that issued for public life. In general, the guidance is about reducing risk as much as is practically possible, but accepting that there may be some operational reasons for some variation.

The Council has been working very closely with staff, Trade Unions and Health & Safety advisors throughout the Covid-19 lockdown period to review and update procedures and safe working practices, to ensure WISH guidance is being followed in Leeds and to do more where possible. The main priorities have been to enable the highest standards of hygiene possible, as far as practical keep the same crew working together on the same route and to maximise the amount of time spent following social distancing protocols.

Every member of staff has access to anti-bacterial wipes, their own supply of anti-bacterial hand-sanitiser and a liquid soap dispenser on each wagon; as well as the usual PPE such as gloves. Every cabin is independently cleaned at the end of every day and is fitted with an in-cab dividing screen for the crew to use as they choose.

Public Health England currently states: "We do not recommend the use of facemasks as an effective means of preventing the spread of infection. Face masks play an important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals, but there's very little evidence of benefit from their use outside of these settings". Prolonged use of masks may also have problems. For example, wearers may be tempted to adjust the fit frequently risking hand to face contact, masks may become moist so trapping contaminants, germs and similar.

In line with that guidance our advice remains that staff do not use facemasks and for that reason we don't currently supply them to staff. The only exception is staff undertaking bulky item collections, when they are lifting a heavy item (e.g. a fridge) as a pair and are face-to-face within 2 metres of each other. In this situation they would wear the appropriate face coverings/masks.

## FAQ 8: IS FLYTIPPING ON THE INCREASE IN LEEDS DURING LOCKDOWN?

No. In fact it has decreased. We record all reports and complaints relating to flytipping across the city and the figures as at 25/5/20 show:

Month	No. of flytips reported that month		%age change
	2019	2020	
March	841	718	15% reduction
April	899	681	24% reduction
May (to 25 <sup>th</sup> )	693	468	33% reduction
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,433</b>	<b>1,867</b>	<b>23% reduction</b>

Residents can find useful tips and advice on how to manage and reduce their waste on the [Zero Waste Leeds website](#), and [Facebook page](#).

## FAQ 9: CAN I HAVE A BONFIRE IN MY GARDEN?

**We would ask that all bonfires are avoided wherever possible.**

Whatever is being burnt it adds to the pollutants in the air and contributes towards carbon emissions. Smoke from bonfires can cause people with respiratory and other health conditions to suffer. Bonfires may also be a nuisance and an inconvenience to those who wish to sit in their gardens or dry washing. This is particularly relevant at the current time where people are likely to be spending more time at home and in their gardens due to the restrictions and self-isolations in place due to COVID-19. It may also be the case that some households may even be experiencing the symptoms of the virus and could be adversely affected by smoke.

If you do have a fire, it must only be dry, garden waste and must NOT be household waste that will give off illegal, noxious and harmful fumes/smoke. It must also not be creating smoke that blows over the highway/street, this would be illegal and you could face a fine.

You should not be having frequent fires either, even if garden waste. This could be seen as creating a nuisance for your neighbours, in which case you could be fined up to £5,000.

There are plenty of ways to reduce the amount of waste you are producing in the first place and avoid burning what waste you do have. Whether that be leaving your grass cuttings on the lawn, pruning and cutting hedges less for now, composting or creating nature piles of logs/twigs/hedge cuttings. Some tips and advice can be found on Zero Waste Leeds website and social media accounts.

Nuisance bonfires can be reported to the Council on the [LCC Website](#).