

+



SOUTH  
KESTEVEN  
DISTRICT  
COUNCIL



# Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee

13<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Report of Councillor Patsy Ellis &  
Councillor Rhys Baker Cabinet  
Members for Environment and Waste

## Provision of Mobile Phone Recycling

### Report Author

Kayleigh Boasman - Head of Waste Management and Market Services

 [kayleigh.boasman@southkesteven.gov.uk](mailto:kayleigh.boasman@southkesteven.gov.uk)

### Purpose of Report

This report provides preliminary exploratory information for a domestic kerbside mobile phone recycling collection service.

### Recommendations

**The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:**

- 1. Note the contents of the report and consider whether there is a valid business case to introduce a kerbside mobile phone recycling collection service.**

Decision Information	
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes
Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Clean and Sustainable Environment High Performing Council
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

## 1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

### ***Finance and Procurement***

- 1.1 This report confirms that there is currently a wide range of existing options for the recycling of mobile phones, many of which are already well used by the community. Therefore, there is no immediate justification for the Council to establish a service which would be an additional cost to the taxpayer. This would be an unbudgeted cost and therefore funding would need to be identified if this proposal is to proceed.

Completed by: Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and s151 Officer.

### ***Legal and Governance***

- 1.2 Local Authorities are not required to collect used mobile phones from households. There are already a number of options available for residents to recycle their phones with retailers, charities and household waste recycling centres.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection and Monitoring Officer)

### ***Health and Safety***

- 1.3 A full assessment of the risk and required mitigation, including a safe system of work and appropriate training for operatives would be required. Appropriate

containers would need to be procured/adapted to ensure the safe collection, storage, and transportation of mobile phones.

Completed by: Phil Swinton, Emergency Planning and Health & Safety Lead

### ***Climate Change***

- 1.4 Recycling can help to extract the raw materials from used mobile phones and support the move towards a circular economy. The options for household mobile phone collection set out within the report are not expected to generate additional trips for the Council's waste collection vehicles, therefore not adding to the carbon emissions of operating the vehicle fleet.

Completed by: Serena Brown, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer

## **2. Background to the Report**

- 2.1 Mobile phones typically last around two years in today's market, with the latest models relegating older devices into cupboards, drawers or being discarded into the waste stream. When electrical items with batteries are discarded into the waste stream, it can increase the risk of waste combusting and there have been increasing occurrences of this happening across the country in recent years.
- 2.2 Currently Local Authorities are not required to collect mobile phones from households and the Department for Environment & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) consultation (Environment Act 2021) on the separate collection of recyclables does not propose to introduce this item. Furthermore, under the WEEE Regulations, both producers and retailers of mobile phones have a legal obligation to offer a take back service on mobile phones.
- 2.3 South Kesteven District Council is unaware of other authorities who participate in this type of recycling and the introduction of a scheme would invariably have operational and financial implications, such as,
- Possible disposal barriers
  - Theft of the mobile phones prior to collection (data not being wiped on the mobile phone)
  - Lack of demand from residents as they have alternatives methods of disposal.
  - Customisation of the refuse freighters.
  - Increased collections by staff

### **Recycling, Re-Use, Refurbishment Options**

- 2.4 Residents already have access to a wide and varied selection of well-established disposal options that confirm there is no demonstrable need for take up of a

Council scheme. These options also enable residents to choose to donate old mobile phones for charitable purposes or to receive a monetary reimbursement.

### **Charities**

- 2.5 Most charities accept old mobile phones, whether they are working or not. They can raise valuable funds by passing them on to mobile phone recycling companies (Recycle Now). There are both in-store and post options which can be easily accessed at no cost to the person wishing to recycle the mobile phone.

### **Schools**

- 2.6 Some schools also collect old phones which are then sold on for reuse, refurbishment, or recycling.

### **On-Line Companies**

- 2.7 Many online companies will send a freepost envelope to recycle a mobile phone and, depending on the age and condition of the phone, offer payment for the device.

### **HWRC**

- 2.8 Mobile phones can be taken to local Household Waste Recycling Centre and placed in the small 'electrical items' container.

### **Producer Responsibility**

- 2.9 The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations state that '*all distributors must offer free takeback on WEEE*' and websites such as Recycle Now offer postcode searches which allow consumers to enter their postcode and find their nearest recycling points.

## **3. Key Considerations**

- 3.1 Officers were tasked with looking at mobile phone recycling from households. At this point we are unaware of any other authority collecting mobile phones directly from household premises. Rushcliffe Borough Council, in Nottinghamshire, offer a mobile phone battery recycling service whereby residents can remove the battery from their phone, and place it out for collection with other household batteries as part of their kerbside battery collection service. It would be possible to mirror Rushcliffe's model as SKDC have recently approved a kerbside battery collection service for households. The new battery collection service is due to be operational from the summer of 2024, timescales are dependent upon the Environment Agency's (EA) approval of the permit variation which will allow batteries to be stored at Mowbeck Depot. The Waste Team are currently working with the EA and other partners to establish a timeline for implementation.

## **South Kesteven District Council**

- 3.2 **Regulations** – South Kesteven District Council is a waste collection authority and as such does not hold the appropriate Environmental Agency Licence or the capacity to store mobile phones at its depot. If the mobile phone collection service were to be implemented a variation on the current depot site permit would need to be applied for.
- 3.3 Lincolnshire County Council do have facilities to store mobile phones, however, this is via the collection of Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and arrangements would have to be made with them if they were agreeable.
- 3.4 **Operational Implications** - The refuse fleet is not currently adapted to carry mobile phones separately. However, post the introduction of household battery collection the container designed for them may be able to be adapted. (Although both items would need to remain separate). Alongside the collection element, the disposal of the waste would need to be considered as it would need to be removed from the RCV daily and, if it cannot be stored at the depot, transported to a disposal point.
- 3.5 If a proposed scheme were to be introduced either the Council would need to provide an approved bag / container for householders (this may be an ongoing cost) or the resident would need to present the batteries in a suitable receptacle / bag which was acceptable to the disposal authority. Looking to the scheme set up in Rushcliffe, residents are advised to 'Put your used household batteries in any bag and leave it on the top of any colour bin on any collection date'. If SKDC were to follow this method there would be no requirement to purchase additional bags/receptacles.
- 3.6 The introduction of mobile phones as a separate collection from properties may add some additional time in terms of collections. Any increased collection time would be dependent on the take up of the scheme and method used for collection and presently we are unable to estimate what the volumes of waste would be.

## **4. Other Options Considered**

### **4.1 Other Options:**

- a) **Status Quo** - Continue as currently, with residents using the existing retail outlets, trade in schemes, charities, and household waste recycling centres to recycle their old / unwanted mobile phones.

No Additional Cost

- b) **Communications Campaign** - Carry out a managed communications campaign promoting mobile phone recycling and highlighting the current options available e.g. take back schemes. This could be achieved through social media, the Council's website, and other communication channels to raise the profile and benefits of recycling mobile phones safely.

Cost - up to £2,500 depending on the type, timescale, and extent of campaign.

- c) **Mobile phone battery recycling service** – As per Rushcliffe Borough Council's model, SKDC could give residents the option of recycling their mobile phone battery alongside other batteries which will be collected within the new battery kerbside collection service.

Cost – Communications campaign to market the change to residents – up to £2,500.

- d) **Kerbside Collection** - Implement a kerbside scheme with residents providing their own bags/containers. To be implemented alongside a communications campaign.

Purchase vehicle container and retrofit vehicles £8,000 (estimate from 'Provision of Battery Recycling Service' Cabinet report), and communication campaign £2,500.

Total Cost £10,500

#### 4.2 Table 1 – Summary of Estimated Costs

Item	<b>Option (a)</b> Status Quo	<b>Option (b)</b> Comms Campaign	<b>Option (c)</b> Mobile phone battery only	<b>Option (d)</b> Kerbside collection
Adaption of Container for 32 vehicles	£0	£0	£0	£8,000
Comms campaign / ongoing	£0	£2,500	£2,500	£2,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£2,500</b>	<b>£2,500</b>	<b>£10,500</b>

## 5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are invited to consider the following points and recommend a chosen option –

- Local Authorities are not required to collect used mobile phones from households.
- Producers and retailers are obligated by law to offer free take back schemes for this waste and some offer financial incentives for doing so.
- Other authorities have not introduced similar schemes in respect of the collection of mobile phones.
- There are varying costs for each of the options which the service will need to absorb as detailed in 4.2 should a scheme be implemented.
- There are significant number of retailers who provide trade in schemes, charities who accept them, and household waste recycling centres within walking, cycling, and driving distance of residents.
- Mobile phones left out may be stolen by third parties as they have a value.
- The Introduction of the scheme would show South Kesteven Council's Commitment to:
  - a responsible sustainable recycling management system
  - a commitment to protecting the environment.
- Collection of batteries from households may eliminate any issue for rural communities who may not have any readily available collection point and for those whom travel is difficult.

## **6. Consultation**

### **6.1 Report for information only, no consultation at this stage.**