

Part I

Item No: 4(a)

Main authors: Durk Reyner/Kirsten Roberts

Executive Member: Helen Bromley

All Wards

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

SPECIAL CABINET - 9 JANUARY 2017

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES)

FUTURE GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the council's budgets have been under immense pressure over the past few years, mainly due to the essential austerity measures introduced by the previous and current governments.
- 1.2 The Council's core government funding has been halved to £4m in 16/17, and we understand that this grant will be reduced further by £1.5m or 37% by the end of the decade. Although the council has a proven track record of delivering efficiencies (£11m of savings have been made since 2010) we continue to be faced with significant financial pressures, with reducing scope to find further savings without impacting on frontline services. To put this into context, we will need to make £2m of savings in the medium term in order to balance our books.
- 1.3 The council is therefore continuing to review all services with a view to making further efficiencies by either cutting expenditure or increasing income, and it is within this context that the garden waste collection service is being reviewed
- 1.4 Throughout November 2016, the council consulted with the public on the perceived value of the service and on different charging options for future garden waste collections. The objective of the consultation was to gauge whether, when given the option, residents would prefer to pay a charge for the existing collection of garden waste, or discontinue the service, in light of the financial savings that the council is required to make.
- 1.5 4,516 responses were received and the results of the survey are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 1.6 A summary of the key objections and comments made, and questions asked by the respondents is attached in Appendices 2 and 3 for Members' full information.
- 1.7 Members will see from the responses received and from the considerable press and public comment that this is not a popular proposal. However, it is important for Members to give full, detailed and objective consideration to all aspects of this proposal, including the impact on the council's budget, and consequent impact on other services, of not introducing this service change.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that, having fully considered all relevant matters:
- 2.1.1 Cabinet notes the key findings of the consultation
- 2.1.2 Cabinet agrees to the introduction of a charge for the existing garden waste collection service.
- 2.1.3 Cabinet recommends to the Council to approve a one-off capital budget of £100,000, required for implementation of changes to the waste collection system and that this is added to the 2016/17 capital programme.
- 2.1.4 Cabinet recommends to the Council to set a charge for the garden waste collection service of £35 for the first bin per property per annum and £60 for the second bin per property per annum, commencing in the new financial year 2017/2018.
- 2.1.5 The Cabinet agrees the following collection policies and operational procedures in connection with this garden waste collection service:
- a) Those who do not join the chargeable garden waste collection service will not have their garden waste collected
  - b) Those who join the chargeable garden waste collection service will not be able to present kitchen food waste in this bin
  - c) Black refuse bins will not be collected if garden waste is presented in this bin
  - d) Food waste may temporarily be re-directed to the black refuse bin, until such time as an alternative collection and treatment solution can be found
- 2.1.6 All other Council's existing collection requirements under Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will apply to all waste collections.
- 2.1.7 Cabinet recommends to Council the approval of any consequential amendments to the Waste Management Plan and any other council policies necessary to incorporate the above.

## **3 Explanation**

### **Background**

- 3.1 A garden waste collection service was first introduced in 2001 and residents were charged a fee for the purchase and collection of sacks. In 2005, a service was rolled out to provide brown wheelie bins for those that opted into the garden waste collection scheme and a charge was still applied for the purchase and collection of sacks. This scheme continued to be popular and was rolled out further across the Borough in 2007 and again when the alternate refuse and recycling collection (ARRC) service was introduced in 2011.
- 3.2 The collection of garden waste is a service for which a charge can be made by the council. Therefore, in the light of the continuing financial pressures facing the council, this is an area that should be given serious consideration for the

introduction of a charge in line with many other councils across the country. Currently over 50% of English councils charge for this service, with many more in the process of contemplating introducing a charge in the forthcoming years.

- 3.3 If the Council introduces an annual charge of £35 for the collection of garden waste, it is anticipated that a minimum of £400,000 net income per annum would accrue which will be used to offset the costs of operating this service, currently around £1.1m per annum.
- 3.4 Any charge for this service would be optional for all residents which will mean that only those who "opt in" to the service by paying the annual charge, will have their garden waste collected by the council. It would not apply to those residents who choose not to use the service, for example, those who live in flats, who do not have a garden, or prefer to use another disposal method.
- 3.5 Residents who do not wish to use the service will be able take their garden waste to one of Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs), and home composting will also be promoted.

### **Food Waste**

- 3.6 Composition audits undertaken on residents' bins indicate that the amount of food waste collected within the brown bin is relatively low, compared to the amount of garden waste collected and the majority of food waste generated is still disposed of in the black refuse bin. The latest survey data for the Borough indicated that over 65% of food waste is being put into the black (residual) waste bins.
- 3.7 The council cannot make a charge for the collection of food waste which means that if a charge for the garden waste service is introduced, residents will have to divert their food waste to the black bin for the time being.
- 3.8 However, the council will carry out a review of the various food collection methods adopted by other councils and will look to implement the most effective and efficient collection method as soon as is practicable.
- 3.9 Food waste reduction and home composting are recognised as the preferred methods for residents to minimise and manage any food waste generated as these have the smallest environmental impact, and this will also be promoted in campaigns by the council.

### **Consultation**

- 3.10 The council has consulted with the public on different charging options for future garden waste collections. A total of 4,516 responses were received. Further details of how the consultation was carried out and an overview of the consultation outcome is summarised in Appendix 1.
- 3.11 The option to continue the service, with no charge being introduced, was not presented in the Council's consultation because the objective of the council's consultation was to gauge whether, when given the option, residents would prefer to pay a charge for the existing collection of garden waste, or discontinue the service, in light of the financial savings that the council is required to make.

- 3.12 In addition to residents responding to the council's consultation, there was an "alternative survey", emails to Councillors and officers, comment on social media forums (e.g. Twitter and Facebook), a Welwyn Hatfield Times Twitter poll and representations made in person. These 'informal' communications strongly expressed a preference for the current service to remain, and this should be given due weight by members when making their decision on how to proceed.
- 3.13 A summary of key objections received by residents is provided in Appendix 2.
- 3.14 Frequently Asked Questions are provided in Appendix 3 which will be continually reviewed and updated throughout the implementation and roll-out of the scheme, should this be agreed.
- 3.15 In view of the consultation responses, it is recommended that a charge of £35 for the first bin per property per annum is introduced which will optimise participation in the scheme.
- 3.16 The consultation responses indicated that some residents would be willing to pay for an additional brown bin. Therefore with this in mind, residents will have the opportunity to apply for a second brown bin to help them recycle more of their garden waste, if needed. The subscription for the second bin should be set at £60. This subscription is to offset the additional costs a second bin would impose on the service. If a large number of residents purchased a second bin, further resource e.g. another collection vehicle and crew would be required to best deliver this optional additional service.

#### **Data Management System (In-Cab):**

- 3.17 Subject to cabinet agreeing to the introduction of a charge for this service, this report also makes a request for additional budget in this financial year 2016/17 to enable these changes to progress, should they be required. This would enable a subscription service to commence in the next financial year (2017/18) and cabinet is being asked to make a recommendation to the council for this additional budget.
- 3.18 A one-off capital budget of £100,000 will allow officers to develop the necessary data management system required to improve data management. The data management system would enable the council to hold an electronic database (in-cab) for those residents that subscribe to a chargeable garden waste service.
- 3.19 The in-cab system will also allow collection crews to report real time information from the collection rounds to the Contact Centre. For example, crews would be able to report whether a bin has not been collected, for example if it was not out on boundary, found to be contaminated or had side waste left by the bin etc. This information could be relayed to the Contact Centre soon after a road had been attended. There would be a significant improvement to the way this information is currently managed and relayed back to the Contact Centre.

## **Implications**

### **4 Legal Implication(s)**

- 4.1 In line with The Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012, garden waste is a household waste for which a collection charge can be made.

### **5 Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 The procurement and implementation of an in-cab system will require a one-off capital expenditure. This is a new project and is not on the current capital programme and therefore a capital budget of £100k in 2016/17 is required. The capital budget is also required for integration of the in-cab technology with the council's payment system. There are other mobilisation costs associated with the introduction of a chargeable service, but these will be contained within existing budgets.
- 5.2 If the Council introduces a charge of £35 per annum for the collection of garden waste, it is anticipated that a minimum of £400,000 net income could be generated per annum, which will be used to offset the costs of operating this service, currently £1.1m per annum.
- 5.3 The Council receives funding from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) based on its waste performance e.g. waste reduction, recycling and diversion from landfill. This is through a financial mechanism called the Alternative Financial Model (AFM), which returns some of the savings which the county council receives from the reduction in overall waste collected from all councils in Hertfordshire. The introduction of a garden waste charge will impact upon the level of funding the council receives through the AFM. For example, as it is anticipated that a small proportion of food waste may be disposed of this may reduce the amount of funding received. The actual sums involved are unknown at present, but it is anticipated, on balance, that the impact of the changes to payments from the AFM from the county would be relatively small in comparison to the reduced net costs for providing the garden waste service.

### **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 The key risk is that if the recommendation to introduce a garden waste charge is not agreed, that the garden waste collection service will be discontinued, based on the need to bridge the council's funding gap.
- 6.2 If the recommendations are agreed, a full project risk register will be developed for the implementation and roll-out of the scheme.

### **7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)**

- 7.1 There are no known security and terrorism implications associated with this recommendation.

### **8 Procurement Implication(s)**

- 8.1 Any procurement required will be undertaken in line with Council's procurement rules.

## **9 Climate Change Implication(s)**

- 9.1 The introduction of a garden waste collection charge will allow the council to maintain a high recycling rate, whilst continuing to divert garden waste from landfill.
- 9.2 Food waste may be re-directed to the black refuse bin, until such time as an alternative collection and treatment solution can be found. This will slightly increase the amount of waste disposed of through landfill or energy recovery. However, food waste prevention and home composting will also be promoted to reduce the impact on climate change.

## **10 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the following Council's Corporate Priorities:
- Protect and Enhance the Environment;
  - Help build a Strong Local Economy; and
  - Engage with our Communities and Provide Value for Money.

## **11 Equality and Diversity**

- 11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in connection with the proposals that are set out in this report and no significant differential impacts were found. The proposed charge has been set at a level which the council believes will ensure this service is affordable for all household groups. In addition, residents on the assisted waste collection will continue to receive garden waste collections as previously agreed if they choose to subscribe to the service.

Name of authors	Durk Reyner and Kirsten Roberts
Title	<i>Head of Environment and Community and Environment Manager</i>
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Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

None