

Garden Waste Collection Charging

The council has agreed to introduce a £35 annual charge for brown bin collections across Welwyn Hatfield in the next financial year. The full report, approved by Cabinet outlining the proposals, is available to view [here](#).

The next step is to present details of how the service will work to the council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 January. The report will be available from 20 January [here](#). More information, including how to subscribe to the service, will be available after this meeting.

Impact of the changes

How can you introduce this charge when some of the community has expressed views against these proposals?

We have some very tough choices to make in finding ways to bridge our funding gap.

The council's core government funding has been halved to £4m in 2016/17, and this will be reduced by another 37% by 2019/20.

We have worked hard to deliver efficiencies without impacting on services, saving £11m since 2010. But despite these efforts, there remains a £2m budget gap and we have to find alternative ways of funding services.

Aren't brown bin collections covered by my council tax?

Council tax is a statutory charge based on the occupation and ownership of a property. It helps pay for our services, but we only get to keep 13% of what's collected. The rest goes to Hertfordshire County Council, the police and town and parish councils. Currently your council tax contributes to the cost of running this service but it doesn't cover the full cost and we must now consider other ways of funding brown bin collections.

Local authorities do not bill residents only for the services they make use of. Nor do they make deductions from council tax based on non-use of a particular service, or when additional charges or fees are introduced.

How do you know you'll make £400,000 in savings?

A free brown bin collection service costs £1.1m to deliver and not all residents use it. Many councils across the UK have already introduced charges for brown bin collections and this figure is based on the average uptake in those areas.

Why £35? How has this been worked out?

The average charge nationally for brown bin collections is £41.22 per year, with some councils charging over £90. We consulted on a number of different options and, taking all factors into consideration, are introducing a £35 charge.

What other ways of saving money have been considered?

The council has generated £11m of savings and efficiencies since 2010. Each year our savings are set out in detail in our budget papers. Our budget proposals for 17/18 are outlined in a report to Cabinet [here](#) and include a further £1.3m in efficiency savings. The council's [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#) sets out areas we can balance our budget in the years ahead.

Why is stopping winter collections not an option?

We have considered all feasible alternatives to introducing an annual charge. Stopping the collections over winter months would not come close to generating the level of savings we need to help bridge the funding gap.

Is the council worried about an increase in fly-tipping in light of the survey results (e.g. 24% say “dump it”) or pollution (19% say “burn it”)?

Over half of councils in the UK are charging for garden waste collections, including Three Rivers in Hertfordshire, and there is no evidence to indicate a rise in fly-tipping or pollution. We will also be encouraging alternative ways to dispose of garden waste responsibly, including home composting.

Won't this have a negative impact on recycling rates?

We do not expect a significant reduction in recycling rates and hope most residents will either pay for the service, take their garden waste to their nearest household recycling centre or compost at home.

What about food waste?

Residents will initially be asked to put their food waste in their black bins. We will be re-tendering our existing waste and recycling contract for 2020 onwards and that will give us an opportunity to review the different options for food waste collection. In the meantime, changes to waste processing costs may provide an opportunity to introduce a financially sustainable alternative much sooner. We will also be promoting better food waste management to help keep waste diverted from landfill.

Leaves from council trees fall into my garden, why should I have to pay for them to be collected?

We look after around 45,000 individual trees, plus tree belt and woodland areas. In addition there are many thousands of privately owned trees - all of these contribute to the look and feel of the borough. We hope they are valued by residents across Welwyn Hatfield in all seasons, and any downside of a few weeks of leaf fall each year are felt to be outweighed by the benefits of living in such a green and pleasant area.

There are alternative ways of clearing autumn leaves, including home composting and recycling them into leaf mould – an excellent soil conditioner. The [Royal Horticultural Society](#) and the [BBC Gardening Guides](#) have some easy to follow tips on how to do this.

Service information

Further details on how the paid for service would work will be presented to our cross-party Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (EOSC) on 30 January.

How will you know if people have paid?

Once a payment is processed, you will be added to an electronic data management system which will tell the crews who has paid. You would also be sent a sticker with a unique reference number for each bin paid for.

Is the garden waste collection service compulsory?

No, you don't have to subscribe to the service. Only those properties that have chosen to subscribe will have their garden waste collected. If you do not wish to use the service, you will be responsible for ensuring that your garden waste is managed and disposed of correctly. You can do this by taking your garden waste to your local Household Waste and Recycling Centre or composting at home.

What will happen to unused brown bins?

Initially, residents who don't subscribe to the service would be asked to keep their brown bin at home (bins are assigned to a property, not to the occupant/s). This will give people time to consider the benefits of the service. At a later date we will review the collection of unused brown bins.

Could I have more than one brown bin?

Yes, the council agreed a £60 charge for a second bin to allow residents to recycle more of their garden waste, if needed. This higher charge for a second bin offsets the additional costs a second bin creates.

How will you stop people putting garden waste in their black bins?

Garden waste will not be permitted in black bins and any that are found to be contaminated will not be collected.

When can I sign up and pay?

We will be providing more details, explaining where and how to pay, following the meeting on 30 January.

Can I sign up part way through the year?

Yes, residents will be able to sign up to the service throughout the year. However, the price will remain at £35 to cover collections up until 31 March 2018.

Having just one renewal date means the service is easier to administer, which will keep the service cost down for its users. It also helps prevent people opting in/out for short periods, which complicates the management of collection rounds and would add further expense to the overall service.

Would we be able to share with neighbours?

Yes, you will be able to share a bin between neighbours. However, the bin can only be allocated to one address.

What will stop someone swapping bins?

You will be sent a sticker with a unique reference code assigned to your address and only bins with the correct number corresponding to the right address will be collected.

What would I do with my shredded paper?

Shredded paper can go into the blue-lidded recycling bin and placed in the newspaper recycling caddie.