

Cabinet

19th March 2014

Review of the Garden Waste Collection Service



Key Decision NS/19/13
MTFP Ref: NS17

Report of Corporate Management Team

Terry Collins, Corporate Director Neighbourhood Services

Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships

Purpose of the Report

1. To report back to Cabinet on the results of the garden waste consultation.
2. To seek approval to introduce a charge for the collection of garden waste from the kerbside from 2015, in doing so achieving the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings identified from the Review of Waste Charges (£933k) in 2015/16 (deferred from 2014/15).

Background

3. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP4) has identified that the level of savings required in the period 2011 to 2017 has increased to £224m.
4. On 18th September 2013, Cabinet received a report outlining the proposals for the introduction of a charge for the collection of garden waste, along with a financial model to show how savings could be made. Cabinet gave approval to commence consultation regarding the scheme.
5. This consultation gave people the opportunity to have their say on proposed changes to the garden waste collection service in County Durham which includes the introduction of a fee for the service.
6. Garden waste collections are a non-statutory function, introduced by many Local Authorities as a way to meet statutory targets relating to recycling and diversion of waste from landfill. Under the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) system recycling targets were statutory, also landfill diversion targets were incentivised by the landfill allowance trading scheme introduced in 2005 which incorporated fines of up to £150/tonne for excess biodegradable waste going to landfill from a 1995 baseline.

7. Collecting garden waste helped to meet these targets, and while this also had the effect of generating additional waste, many authorities chose to introduce a separate collection service to households, as this waste was easily recyclable.
8. Durham County Council currently provides a fortnightly garden waste collection service to 151,700 properties between spring and autumn without additional charge.
9. A further 7,500 households in the former Teesdale area continue to be served through 3rd Sector group (“Rotters”). Rotters operated the service on a charged basis until 2010 when the Teesdale service became free of charge through support from the County Council.
10. As part of the previous two tier system, a variety of schemes were introduced by the former Districts from 2003. Many parts of the County were excluded from the scheme due to ‘opt in’ or ‘opt out’ methods that were applied as part of the roll out.
11. Approximately 70,000 households received the service at LGR in 2009. This has now grown to approximately 151,700, as a result of the efforts of the County Council to harmonise collection systems. For many households, therefore, the garden waste scheme, while popular, has not been a long-standing service.
12. The service is therefore not currently available to all households; however, there remains a demand for the service from those areas not currently covered by the scheme. Under the proposals, approximately an additional 35,000 properties will be able to access the scheme.
13. A consultation on the proposals was held between Friday 20 September 2013 and Monday 28 October 2013.

Methodology

14. The purpose of the consultation was to get feedback from residents to try and gauge potential take up and preferences if the proposed changes were to be implemented.
15. An engagement plan was developed and approved by the council’s Consultation Officers’ Group. The aim of the plan was to encourage as many residents as possible to respond within the consultation period.
16. Responses were captured through the use of a consultation survey which was available online via the County Council’s website and in paper version on request.
17. The following mechanisms were used to inform the public about the proposals and encourage people to respond by completing the survey.

- **Press release** – a press release was issued encouraging people to respond to the survey.
 - **Town and parish councils** - town and parish councils were contacted with a request to encourage residents to respond. Promotional posters were also issued to town and parish councils.
 - **Area action partnerships** –area action partnerships were contacted with a request to distribute details of the consultation via their networks. A copy of the promotional poster was also issued to AAPs for distribution.
 - **Website** - the survey was promoted on the home page of the County Council's website between 16 and 25 October.
 - **Environment Partnership** – the chairs of the Environment Partnership theme groups were contacted encouraging a response to the survey.
 - **Buzz magazine** – an article was included in the DCC staff magazine 'Buzz' signposting to the survey for those staff who are also residents of County Durham.
 - **Members update magazine** – an article was included in the DCC Members Update magazine to inform local members of the consultation and signposting to the survey.
 - **Customer access points** – information was displayed on TV information screens during October to let people know about the survey and how they could take part. Posters were also issued to customer access points to display. Copies of the survey were available at customer access points for those people who preferred a paper copy of the survey.
 - **Other DCC and community venues** – posters and flyers promoting the consultation were issued to libraries, leisure centres, One Point hubs, children centres and community centres throughout the county.
18. Members of the council's citizens' panel were also surveyed for this consultation. The citizens' panel is a sample of residents from the County Durham population who agree to take part in council consultations. 2722 members of the panel were issued with this survey.
19. The citizens' panel survey included an additional question about which other areas of the waste management service could be considered for future savings.
20. A total of 2117 responses were received via the survey – 1066 (50.4%) from the general public and 1051 (49.6%) from the citizens' panel. The responses from Citizens' Panel and members of the public are kept separate in this report.
21. Additional feedback was also received from Barnard Castle Town Council, Horden Parish Council, Seaham Town Council, Brandon and Byshottles Parish Council, and Hunstanworth Parish Meeting. A separate email response was also received from a member of the public. This feedback has been summarised as follows:

Barnard Castle Town Council	Not opposed to introducing a charge, and happy to pay fee to Rotters; felt consultation was a futile exercise.
Horden Parish Council	Highlighted risk for increased fly tipping; would like to see discounted rate for residents who have fewer collections throughout the year.
Seaham Town Council	Wished to express concerns about those who were struggling financially and the risk of increased fly tipping.
Brandon and Byshottles Parish Council	Understands the need for the council to make savings however, concerns were raised over increased fly tipping.
Hunstanworth Parish Meeting	Felt boundary should be extended to include customers in the west of the county or waste would create more pollution.
Other feedback	Suggested initiating a community led project for neighbourhood composting.

Summary of key results

- **Current usage of service** - the majority of people responding to the survey currently use the garden waste collection service: citizens' panel (71.5%); general public (92.8%).
- **Reasons for not using current service** - of those respondents that don't currently use the garden waste collection service, the most common reasons for citizens' panel members are because they don't have a garden (37.8%) or because they are not within the scheme area (27.1%). The most common reasons for respondents from the general public are because they don't receive the service (26.1%) or 'other' reasons (36.2%), mainly because the service is not provided or because they compost/recycle instead.
- **Willing to pay for service** – when asked if respondents would be willing to pay for garden waste collections to allow the service to be provided in future, 31.3% of citizens' panel respondents indicated they would, 59.6% would not be willing to pay and 9.2% did not know; 29.8% of the general public would be willing to pay, 59.5% would not be willing to pay and 10.7% did not know.
- **Service offers and discounts**¹ – when asked about sign up offers, 42.2% of the citizens' panel would be more likely to sign up if an early payment discount was offered; 33% would like an online discount with 27.2% selecting a three year discounted sign up. The general public's responses followed a similar trend, 40.4% would like an early payment discount; 36% would like an online discount, 23.7% selected a three year discounted sign up.
- **Number of bins required** - the majority of people would only want one garden waste bin if they signed up for the service: citizens' panel (89.9%); general public (85.5%).
- **Preferred methods of payment** – the preferred methods of payment for citizens' panel members are online using debit or credit card (44.4%) and direct debit (25.2%). A higher proportion of the general public prefer online

using debit or credit card (57.5%) and 24.1% of the general public prefer direct debit.

- **Other methods of disposing garden waste**¹ – when asked how they would dispose of their garden waste if they didn't want to sign up to the service, the most common responses from citizens' panel members were to 'take it to the household waste recycling centre' (46.5%), followed by 'put it in the general rubbish bin' (32.5%), followed by 'compost it' (29.5%). The most common responses from the general public were to 'put it in the general rubbish bin' (52.3%) followed by 'take it to the household waste recycling centre' (42.5%), followed by 'compost it' (26.5%).
- **Other comments on the plans** – common comments on the plans were concerns around increased fly tipping and a belief that the service should be funded by council tax.
- **Areas for future savings** – the majority of citizens' panel members thought an increase in bulky waste charges should be considered if further savings needed to be made in the area of waste management in future (64.5%). A third of respondents (34%) felt a withdrawal of the garden waste collection service altogether should be considered and 5.6% of respondents suggested the closure of more household waste recycling centres.

Other Authorities / Benchmarking

22. More than 35% of local authorities in England currently apply a charge for garden waste collections with many more considering implementation. Benchmarking has indicated that the average service charge across local authorities in England is £39.43 per year however authorities offer schemes based over differing number of weeks per year. An estimate of a benchmarked cost per collection across English authorities is £1.61 the equivalent proposed in Durham is £1.25.
23. In addition to those authorities that have established charges, there are a number who have recently introduced charges in response to MTFP pressures; these include Wirral (£35), Chiltern (£35) and Craven (£24). Authorities that have already announced the introduction of schemes for the next season (2014) include Richmondshire (£17), Broxtowe (£30), Ryedale (£27), Derby (£40), South Bucks (£45), Swindon (£40). Authorities that are considering the possibility of introducing a charge include Gateshead, Cardiff, and North West Leicestershire.
24. Established charges within the region include Northumberland County Council charge £23 per season for their garden waste collection and Newcastle City Council charge £20. Gateshead Council is currently considering introducing a charge.

¹ Question was multiple choice and therefore may not total 100%

Risks

25. There are a number of potential risks that are involved in the introduction of a charge for the collection of garden waste, these include:
- Fly tipping – A common concern around the introduction of the charge is that the number of fly tipping incidents will increase. Wirral Council, who recently introduced a charge, did not see any increase in the number of fly tipping incidents. Similarly in Durham after the introduction of a charge for bulky household waste collections a 14% decrease in fly tipping incidents was recorded, and as such any increase in cost has not been included in the financial model. Fly tipping is a criminal offence and is treated seriously by the Council; as such close monitoring will take place to ensure any emerging issues are quickly addressed.
 - Recycling performance - Modelling work undertaken in preparation of the consultation identified a likely decrease in the total amount of garden waste that is collected and as such would have an impact on recycling performance. Consultation results have suggested that of those that do not use the service, waste would be disposed of either via a HWRC, composted or put in the general waste bin. These scenarios were accounted for in the original model with an anticipated reduction of 4% from the current level of 46% of waste recycled.
 - Additional traffic at HWRCs – It is likely as a result of a charge an increase in the traffic at HWRCs will be apparent as customers seek to dispose of their garden waste. These traffic increases will be closely monitored in partnership with the operating contractor to ensure any necessary steps are taken to mitigate any impact.
 - Increased residual waste – as suggested through consultation findings it is possible that customers that do not choose to subscribe to the scheme and do not use HWRCs or composting will dispose of their waste in their residual waste bins. While the financial impact was taken into account as part of the original model, this will be discouraged through communications and education campaigns. Enforcement options will be considered but an education first approach will be adopted. Alternative methods of disposal will also be encouraged through sharing of garden waste bins between neighbours and compost bins.

Summary

26. As the need to deliver financial savings increases, initiatives that deliver savings whilst mitigating impact on residents have to be considered. Taking the popularity of this non statutory service into account, steps should be taken to enable the continuation of the service within financial requirements. The trend nationally for charging continues to increase as budget pressures are felt in all authorities.

27. No charge will be introduced for the 2014 season with the scheme remaining with the current delivery model. However, it is proposed that a charge be implemented for the 2015 season.
28. For the 2015 season it is proposed that that a relatively low price of £20 is charged for collections, which benchmarks favourably nationally. For the 2015 season it is also proposed that a price of £50 is offered to households that subscribe to the service for three years. Other incentives referred to in consultation will be considered for the future.
29. By introducing a charge for the residents of Durham on an opt-in basis this popular service can continue, and be made available to approximately 35,000 more households. Alternatives will be provided to residents through HWRCs and home composting. It is recommended that a relatively low price be charged for collection which benchmarks favourably nationally.
30. The results of the consultation are broadly in line with expectations and with the experience of other councils elsewhere. The assumption had been that 40% of eligible households would be willing to pay a small charge to take up the service with 60% declining to do so. Given the limitations of a consultation process, a 31% positive result is an encouraging indicator; also, the 59% negative response reflects the 60% assumption very closely. While it is important to recognise the consultation exercise represents only a snapshot of opinion, the results are nevertheless encouraging.

Recommendations

31. That Cabinet:-
 - i. Notes the outcomes of the public consultation.
 - ii. Agrees to implement a charge for Garden Waste collections commencing 2015.
 - iii. Agrees to implement a charge for the 2015 season of £20 per year with an option for households to subscribe to the service for three years for £50.
 - iv. Agrees to delegate to the Corporate Director of Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships all actions and decisions necessary to implement a charging scheme for garden waste collections in County Durham commencing in 2015.

Background papers

Cabinet Report 18th September 2013, Review of the Garden Waste Collection Services [Key Decision NS/19/13] [MTFP Ref: NS17]

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The financial benefits of the scheme were outlined in 18th September 2013, Review of the Garden Waste Collection Services

Staffing

There is likely to be a requirement for some temporary staffing during the set up period both operationally and administratively. It is also likely that there will be a reduction of collection vehicles and associated staff once the routes are fully designed and bedded in. It is planned that this will be achieved without the need for compulsory redundancies

Risk

A Risk Assessment has been produced and a reportable risk has been identified. Appendix 2

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality Impact Assessment has been developed in relation to this review and is available at Appendix 3

Accommodation

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Human Rights

None

Consultation

Consultation results are included in this report.

Procurement

None

Disability Issues

Assisted collection arrangements currently associated with the service will be maintained.

Legal Implications

The Garden Waste Collection Service is a non-statutory service.

Appendix 2 Reportable Risk- Introducing Garden Waste Charging.

Risk Description	Potential Impact	Measures to mitigate the risk (if not already in place, state implementation date)	Risk Owner
<p>Existing customers may choose not to opt-in to the service impacting on current service delivery arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residual waste tonnages may increase as a result of increased garden tonnages entering the waste stream resulting in additional cost to the Authority. • Potential of increased garden waste entering HWRC's • The Authority's reuse, recycling and composting rate may decrease and the National Target is to reuse, recycle and compost 50% by 2020. 	<p>Data and financial modelling based on benchmarked information both regionally and nationally demonstrate that despite participation in the opt-in scheme dropping as much as 60% to 40% of current users, garden waste presented would be around 60% of that currently collected. The remaining 40% garden waste not collected as part of garden waste collection rounds would be split as 16% in to residual waste bins, 12% entering Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) and 12% being home composted or "disappearing".</p> <p>Based on these percentage splits and associated tonnages and costs to the authority, the financial benefits of introducing a charge, minus the additional costs associated with the above, result in an overall saving of £976,623.</p> <p>This takes in to account increased costs of disposing garden waste and additional garden waste entering HWRC's.</p> <p>Individual Authority waste targets have been removed (National Indicators and Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme) however there remains a National target to reuse, recycle and compost 50% by 2020. There are no direct penalties for an individual Authority not achieving this. Durham County Councils new range of waste treatment contracts are based on high levels of diversion and encourage high recycling rates which associated with the introduction of Alternate Weekly Collection last year mean any reduction in the reuse, recycling and composting rate will be largely mitigated by the improvements in rates resulting from new contractual arrangements.</p>	<p>Alan Patrickson</p>