

**CABINET
31 MAY 2016**

**HEAD OF COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES REPORT NO. COMM1611**

GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE – CONTAINER CHOICE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- This paper seeks approval, as part of the garden waste service, to replace reusable bags with more popular wheeled bins and to replace the plastic single-use sacks with compostable paper sacks.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- The garden waste collection service was launched in 2005 and proved popular, with 4,000 subscribers in the first 18 months. In line with best practice, the default containers were reusable bags and these were supplemented by plastic single-use sacks to help with issues such as leaves.
- In 2010, following pressure from residents and a long approval process with Hampshire County Council, the Council introduced the option of collections via a brown 240L wheeled bin at a higher annual charge. This option proved popular with many customers who used reusable bags switching to the bin.
- The number of customers using the garden waste collection service has increased to around 7,300, of which around, 6,000 use the brown bin, 1,000 the reusable bags and 300 use the plastic single use sacks.
- With the Council re-procuring the contract for waste collection, street cleansing, grounds maintenance and toilet cleaning, this is an ideal time to review the garden waste service.
- The scheme is still growing at around 500 customers per year in total, with existing customers exchanging bags for bins at a reasonable rate. This has happened with limited advertising.

3.0 CONTRACT RE-PROCUREMENT

- Veolia collects garden waste on behalf of the Council under the existing contract. The range of containers has a significant effect on the efficiency of the collection operation, as it is not possible to empty reusable garden waste bags at the same time as wheeled bins due to the risk of loaders being caught in the mechanism.

- Therefore, to service demand in peak season they operate two vehicles and in the winter months they operate one and fold the bin lifting mechanism away when they encounter a bag.
- It is clear from discussions with tenderers that they would be able to operate a more efficient (and therefore lower cost) service by optimising collection rounds, if the reusable bags were removed from the scheme.

4.0 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Waste management operations have been a source of concern for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for a number of years. This is due to the poor overall safety record of the industry with an unacceptable number of accidents, including fatalities.
- The HSE have expressed their views about garden waste collections and in particular the use of reusable bags from a manual handling perspective and the interaction of the crew with the lifting mechanism of the vehicle.
- Based on HSE guidelines, the use of reusable bags is a medium risk and should be examined to identify how the risk could be reduced. Authorities recently audited have been advised to cease using reusable bags and focus on collecting garden waste using wheeled bins.

5.0 SINGLE USE SACKS

- The garden waste service includes an option to use plastic single-use sacks either to supplement the regular service in peak times, or as a standalone option. These sacks have the same problems as the reusable bags, given that they have to be emptied (shaken) into the back of the vehicle, risking interaction with the bin lifts.
- This problem can be alleviated by using biodegradable paper sacks that are thrown into the back of the vehicle entirely, rather than being emptied into it.
- Hampshire County Council have agreed that we can use these sacks instead of single-use plastic sacks. The fibres in the paper will assist the composting process during the spring and summer months when the greener garden waste is more prevalent.
- The paper bags are more expensive to purchase, and it is proposed the Council increase the charge for these bags to cover this.

6.0 PROPOSAL

- It is proposed for health and safety reasons and to provide a more efficient service, the Council ceases to use reusable bags and replace the single use plastic sacks with biodegradable paper sacks for the garden waste collection service.
- If agreed, the proposed changes can be implemented in the following phases:
 - Stop offering reusable bags to new customers. Remove the option from the website, literature and any social media posts.
 - Give notice to current reusable bag subscribers that the service will end once their annual subscription expires. Any customer that will not have space for a brown bin to inform us.
 - At time of renewal, customer to switch to a brown bin, or single-use paper sacks if there is no room for a bin. First year using brown bin to be at reduced rate to not financially disadvantage these customers. Customer may choose not to renew the service.
 - More extensive promotions to encourage new customers to join the scheme.
- The customers that are entitled to the concessionary rate for reusable bags will not be financially disadvantaged as a result of this proposal. However, the Council is preparing to review its Fees and Charges Policy and associated Concessions Policy during the next 12 months as part of point 3 of the 8-Point Plan.
- An Equality Impact Assessment for the proposed changes has been completed and does not identify any likely negative impacts as a result of this proposal. A copy of this assessment is available on the website, or on request.

7.0 FINANCES

- The financial implications associated with this report are complex and difficult to quantify precisely. Significant savings are expected in the new contract as a result of the proposals set out in this report to simplify the service and make it safer. However, a small number of customers may choose to leave the scheme as a result.
- Focussing solely on the impact on income of changing customer numbers:
 - At worst-case the Council could lose subscription income of around £35,000 if all customers currently using bags leave the scheme, although this outcome is considered extremely unlikely. This is equivalent to a £1.18 increase in Council Tax.

- If half the customers currently using bags leave the scheme and the other half switch to a bin, the Council could lose around £14,000 in subscription income. This is equivalent to a £0.47 increase in Council Tax.
- If all customers currently using reusable bags stay with the scheme, the Council could increase income by around £7,000. This is equivalent to a £0.12 reduction in Council Tax.
- The above figures only account for the change in subscription payments and do not include the likely operational service efficiencies through the new contract nor any reduction in administration costs associated with a simplified system.
- The impact on income for the service will be reported through the budget monitoring process.

CAPITAL COSTS

- The capital costs associated with the best-case scenario are likely to be in the region of £17k in 2016/17 to purchase the additional wheeled bins. However, the longer life expectancy of the bins when compared with reusable bags would actually generate a modest saving over the course of time. This would result in an estimated loss of interest of £467.50 per annum on the £17k capital contribution.

PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES

- It is proposed that the fees and charges for the scheme remain unchanged until any changes are fully implemented with the exception that the biodegradable paper sacks increase by £1 per pack of 5 to account for the additional cost of purchasing paper rather than plastic sacks. These are summarised in the table below:

Container choice	Current Charge	Proposed charge
240L wheeled bin (per year)	£39	£39
Single use sacks (pack of 5)	£9	£10

NB: Customers currently receiving (and eligible for) a concessionary rate to continue paying £16 per year, subject to a wider review of concessionary payments

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Cabinet is recommended to approve:
 - For reasons of health and safety and service efficiencies that the Council removes the option of reusable bags replaces the current plastic single-use sacks with paper sacks
 - The fees & charges for the scheme set out above
 - A variation to the 2016/17 Capital Programme of £17k for the purchase of additional wheeled bins for the Garden Waste service
 - A supplementary estimate of £5k for the purchase of paper sacks in place of plastic, noting that the increased purchase costs are covered by the proposed new charges
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Related papers – Equality Impact Assessment – Garden Waste Collection Scheme Changes 2016/17