

SUBJECT:	GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE
MEETING:	STRONG COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE
DATE:	28TH SEPTEMBER 2020
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 The waste and recycling service provision across the County must continually evolve to meet challenging statutory targets, volatile markets and increasing costs. This reports sets out measures that will be necessary to achieve national statutory recycling targets, minimise budget pressures and provide sustainable garden waste services going forward. Following the review commissioned by Cabinet on 20/12/19, this report has full findings of the review for consideration, including changing frequency of collection and change of container for garden waste.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Strong Communities Select Committee conducts pre-decision scrutiny of this report and through its scrutiny, considers any further recommendations it may wish to make to the Cabinet. The recommendations for Cabinet are:
- i) To approve the change of frequency of collection of garden waste from weekly to fortnightly.
 - ii) To approve the change of container from an 80 litre garden waste bag to a 240 litre wheeled bin.
 - iii) To consider and approve the charge levied for the future service.

3. Key Issues: Delivery of garden waste service

- 3.1 The chargeable garden waste collection service has now been in operation for over 7 years. The service commenced at £8 per permit per annum and is now £18 for a nine month seasonal service and is planned to remain so for the 2021 season. The price increases have reflected a reduction in grant funding from Welsh Government that helped subsidise the scheme and a better understanding of cost of delivering the service over several years.
- 3.2 The garden waste service is highly regarded by our 11,600 customers and provides a cost effective alternative to taking garden waste to the household waste recycling centres.
- 3.3 Prior to December 2018, garden waste was co-collected and mixed with food waste and sent to for disposal at an in-vessel composting facility. Due to co-collection the costs were

apportioned by an estimated percentage. In 2018 the council secured a long term food waste treatment contract with a substantially lower gate fee, producing electricity at a Bridgend Anaerobic Digestion plant.

- 3.4 A separate garden waste treatment contract with a local Abergavenny based company was also secured in 2018. This means that both material streams have been collected separately in 2019 for the first time and therefore collection costs can be accurately determined.
- 3.5 This year's garden waste service collection costs have been calculated at circa £660,000 per annum against income generated at £330,000. Subsidising garden waste collections across Wales is commonplace. For many authorities it is the only way of achieving the recycling targets and as such services are heavily subsidised. For many residents without transport it is the only way of sending garden waste for treatment.
- 3.6 Balancing the potential recycling fines against the cost of providing the service is clearly important as is providing a highly regarded service at an affordable price.

Options for Consideration

3.7 Option A – weekly reusable bags

The modelling within Appendix 1 demonstrates that if we were to remove the full level of subsidy for the current weekly reusable bag service, an annual charge of £36.28 per permit would need to be introduced to fully cover collection costs.

Option A: income required to cover cost of service delivery £660,000.

3.8 Option B – fortnightly wheeled bin

The modelling demonstrates that the introduction of a fortnightly service using wheeled bins would require an annual charge to the customer of £29.62 per bin to fully cover costs. This is achieved through a reduction in the number of collection vehicles and crew members.

Option B: income required to cover cost of service delivery £500,000.

3.9 Option C - fortnightly bags

The modelling demonstrates an annual charge of £28.82 per permit would be required.

Option C: income required to cover cost of service delivery £525,000.

3.10 Option D - weekly wheeled bins

The modelling demonstrates an annual charge of £53.63 per bin would be required.

Option D: income required to cover cost of service delivery £650,000.

- 3.11 The figures quoted above are based on retaining our current customer base. A fall in customer numbers however, will pose a financial risk as again, we will see a shortfall in income compared to cost of delivery. Therefore, for each option, we may need to consider an additional increase in cost to cover any potential shortfall.

- 3.12 With this in mind, we have modelled the charges we would need to impose to cover costs with a 15% decrease in customer numbers. These are shown highlighted in red within appendix 1 and would bring the 'Option A' weekly bag charge to just under £43 and the 'Option B' fortnightly bin option charge to £35. The £35 for fortnightly bins would bring us closer in cost to our neighbouring authorities currently charging for garden waste collection. (These charges are included for comparison in appendix 5).
- 3.13 The cost per litre for all four options has been included within Appendix 2. It shows that the fortnightly wheeled bin service represents best value for money for the customer, with a lower annual charge and a lower price per litre than the weekly reusable bag service, which as shown, costs nearly twice as much per litre in comparison.
- 3.14 It has been identified that delivering garden waste collections as a stand-alone service with reusable bags (Options A and C) requires very large rounds with increased manual handling for crews, which, could become a potential concern for their health and well-being. Prolonged exposure could bring increased risk of muscular-skeletal injury for our collection crews and we need to mitigate this as far as possible. The manual handling issue would be exacerbated even further with the fortnightly bag 'Option C' as each resident would potentially have twice the amount of bags out for collection each week, we therefore feel that Option C is not operationally acceptable and should not be considered further.
- 3.15 Fortnightly collections, using 240 litre wheeled bins (Option B), is best practice and would reduce manual handling for crews therefore reducing risk of injury whilst providing adequate storage for residents.
- 3.16 Consultation with service users in 2018 (Appendix 6) was 50/50 on the acceptance of wheeled bins as an option, they are likely be more acceptable in comparison to the increased costs of permits for the bagged service.
- 3.17 A second consultation has been developed to gather feedback on proposals. This has been sent to all current garden waste customers and pushed out on social media channels for all residents, results will be published and made available to members following the closure on the 25th of September 2020.
- 3.18 New vehicles for the garden waste service need to be procured as soon as possible to replace our current 2012 plate Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs) in time for delivery March 2021 therefore a decision is pressing.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL - Delivery of garden waste service

- 4.1 Appendix 2 provides an overview of the four options modelled for the garden waste collection service. Some of the key factors included in Appendix 2 are outlined below:
- **Manual handling issues created by garden waste bags** – The garden bags have always been one of the heaviest waste streams to collect due to the composition of the garden waste, exacerbated once the waste becomes wet. When the garden waste was co-collected with food waste prior to 2018 the manual handling issues were mitigated through reduced exposure to our crews. The collection rounds were

arranged so that only around a quarter of properties on each collection round were garden waste customers meaning only food boxes were collected from the majority of households. Following the change of garden waste service to a seasonal standalone service, the collection crew on those vehicles only collect garden waste which could lead to an increase in muscular skeletal issues within our workforce. Wheelie bins will alleviate these manual handling issues and will be beneficial for our workforce in the future.

- **Cost** – As outlined above the garden waste service has traditionally been heavily subsidised by the authority but while the garden waste was co-collected with food waste it was difficult to accurately determine the cost of collection of the garden waste. Now the garden waste is collected separately the costs involved with garden waste are much clearer. To continue the service into 2021 with all subsidy removed the cost per bag will need to be £36.28, this is a significant increase from the £18.00 that was charged in 2020. All of the modelled options for 2021 are a significant increase from 2020 but moving to a wheelie bin service would offer our customers the best value for money. As outlined in Appendix 2 due to the increased capacity of a wheelie bin the cost per litre is much better than the current service.
- **Environmental impact** – The current garden waste service has many issues in terms of its environmental impact, the garden waste bags are replaced very regularly, at the moment we are selling around 17,000 bags per annum, and of these around 12,000 are replaced each year. The average lifespan of a wheelie bin is 10 years, and could be re-used, they would become an asset to the authority, if a customer decided not to renew the service we would collect the bin from them and have the ability to re-sell that bin to a new customer. The current service also relies heavily on permits being printed and sent to each customer each year. A wheeled bin service would not require any permits to be printed, each bin would be fitted with a microchip that would be read by the collection vehicle at point of collection, and it would inform the crew if the bin is a valid customer. The wheeled bins will also be made from 90% recycled material. This is beneficial from a cost and future generation's wellbeing basis.
- **Receptacle size** – The current garden waste bags we sell to our residents are beneficial for our residents who currently receive an assisted collection. A potential disadvantage to moving to a wheeled bin service may be that some of our residents may struggle to move a large bin to and from their garden. This could lead to an increase in assisted collection requests that would put pressure onto our collection crews. As an alternative to wheelie bins for our more vulnerable customers we would continue to offer the reusable bag, this would be taken on a case-by-case basis and we would work with our residents to find the best solution to meet their needs. This would also allow us to utilise the current stock of bags that we have in storage.

The benefit to a larger storage receptacle would be an increased winter storage capacity for the residents who struggle during the winter non-collection months. Residents would be able to fill their bin during the non-collection months and when the service resumed in March it would be collected. During the Covid-19 outbreak

that we have experienced this year we had to suspend the Garden Waste collection service to protect the other key services our residents rely on, if we had wheelie bins in place it would have been much easier to help our customers. They could have continued to fill their bin during lockdown and when services were resumed, the bin would have been emptied with very little disruption for our customers. As a non-statutory service garden waste is going to always be one of the first services to be stopped during an emergency and a wheelie bin could be a valuable asset to our customers moving forward if we do experience additional spikes with the current pandemic or other emergencies in the future.

4.2 Attached as appendix 5 is a comparison of the proposed garden waste service offered by neighbouring authorities.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

5.1 The criteria used to evaluate the success of these proposals include: a reduced level of subsidy for the garden waste service; customer retention rate; reduction in staff sickness absence resulting from manual handling injuries; lower fuel costs and reduced CO2 emissions from less frequent collections collecting a higher volume of waste

6. REASONS

6.1 Long term exposure to lifting the current garden waste bags may lead to muscular skeletal issues and injuries and the transition to a wheelie bin collection service would eradicate the possible problem.

6.2 The increased costs associated with reducing the subsidising of the garden waste collection service can be offset but giving our customers a larger capacity for their garden waste. This will a better value for money service.

6.3 Reducing the environmental impact of the garden waste collection service is important for working toward the Council's policy commitment to reduce its carbon emissions and the wellbeing of future generations.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 If the authority proceeded with Option B there would be no financial impact on the service. The cost of the wheeled bins would be spread over 5 years and would be paid for from savings generated from not having to provide permits or bags.

7.2 All other savings generated via reduced collection frequency and the unit price increase will need to be re-aligned within the recycling and waste department to offset investment in other service changes such as the roll-out of the Polypropylene recycling bags and manage the existing extreme financial budget pressures.

7.3 These changes will be made in line with the roll out of polypropylene recycling bags approved by cabinet in 2017 meaning that the operatives affected would be redeployed in line with Monmouthshire's protection of employment policy.

8.0 WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 8.1 The changes to the services proposed or to be considered further as a consequence of this report have significant positive contributions to make to the Wellbeing Goals. In particular it has strong benefits for a Prosperous Wales, by supporting the ongoing development of a low carbon economy. There is also potential to contribute to Cohesive Communities, by working collaboratively and in partnership with our communities to reduce the impact that waste has upon our communities. There are no negative impacts on the Well-being Goals.
- 8.2 The potential that larger wheeled bins could be difficult for older people or those with disabilities to move was identified. An alternative option identified as highlighted in the body of the report. There are further no significant positive or negative impacts on the protected characteristics, safeguarding or corporate parenting. The principles of Long term, Prevention, Integration, Collaboration and Involvement have been used throughout the development of these proposals (see Appendix 4).

9.0 CONSULTEES:

Enterprise DMT 2nd Dec 2019

Strong Communities Select Committee March 21st and 15th October 2019

Cabinet member

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1 - Garden waste service cost modelling

Appendix 2 - Options appraisal for garden waste service

Appendix 3 - Equality and Future Generations Evaluation

Appendix 4 - Garden Waste service comparison with neighbouring authorities

Appendix 5 – Results from 2019 public Garden Waste consultation

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