

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 16 May 2019

Review of Chargeable Garden Waste Policy

Executive/routine
Wards Citywide
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee:
- 1.1.1 approve the revised policy (Appendix 3), and note that the Terms and Conditions will be updated in line with this.
 - 1.1.2 approve that the £25 charge will be frozen for 2019/20 but that the service will cease for a four week period over Christmas (two collection cycles) to allow resources to be used to provide resilience to other services in the festive period.
 - 1.1.3 notes the steps which are being taken to address any remaining customer concerns on an individual basis and discharge the motion pertaining to a refund scheme.
 - 1.1.4 notes the extent to which the service has outperformed its initial targets in terms of service uptake, and that the next registration period is anticipated to take place between 26 June and 7 August 2019.

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Review of Chargeable Garden Waste Policy

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The report reviews the policy and terms and conditions relating to the chargeable garden waste service following the first year of operating the chargeable service, and additionally, responds to the following motion raised by Councillor Lang at Full Council on [22 November 2018](#), as follows:

1) Council notes:

a) The new annual charge for the collection of garden waste which came into force in October 2018. The promise made by the coalition administration that the new charge would lead to an improved service for residents who opted to pay it through more frequent collections.

b) The considerable problems which have emerged since the new collection scheme came into effect with residents reporting multiple cases of missed collections forcing them to put garden waste into landfill or transporting garden waste to recycling centres.

2) Council welcomes the apology issued by the Leader of the Council for the overall level of service seen on waste collection since the new collection schedule commenced but believes further action is needed to reassure residents and respond to concerns.

3) Council therefore agrees to seek a report to the Transport and Environment Committee within two cycles setting out the options to introduce a refund scheme for those who have paid the garden waste charge but where the service provided falls below a certain minimum standard.

3. Background

3.1 In setting the budget for 2018/19 elected members agreed to introduce a charge for garden waste collections. This charge was introduced in October 2018, and was communicated to householders from June 2018.

3.2 This is a non statutory service, and as such the majority of Councils in the United Kingdom (UK) charge for it. Householders can continue to dispose of garden waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres with no additional charge.

- 3.3 A project team was convened to develop the detailed policy and implement the changes.

4. Main report

- 4.1 In October 2018, the service moved from a three weekly to a two weekly collection cycle all year round; with the annual charge of £25 per bin per year, (with exemptions for key population groups (e.g. people in receipt of Council Tax Reduction)).
- 4.2 The charge aims to recover the additional cost of collecting garden waste. The cost of composting the waste once collected continues to be paid for through general funds and is lower than alternative disposal routes.
- 4.3 Customers are encouraged to register and pay online using a 'mygov' account. Alternative options were provided - cash and card at local offices; telephone payment, and cheque. In particular the service allows the flexibility to register more than one address e.g. multiple properties for a relative who is unable to do so themselves.
- 4.4 The service operates on a fixed year October - September (i.e. you register in the summer, the routes are built over a period of approximately eight weeks and the permits and calendars are sent to customers for the service to start in October). The use of a rolling year was considered however, following feedback from other Councils, this was not taken forward on the grounds of administrative complexity.
- 4.5 Two additional fixed registration windows were provided to register but all permits are valid until the end of September no matter when they started. This is designed to offer an opportunity for (mainly) new residents to join the service. However, based on the experiences of other Councils, registration is not permitted outwith these periods, and the £25 bin charge remains the same regardless of when you join.

Customer Response

- 4.6 Appendix 1 sets out the outcomes in terms of customer activity, i.e. how many joined the service, and the routes used to do so.
- 4.7 The vast majority of customers (83%) used the online option. 67,435 customers joined the service and ordered 73,292 permits. 9.63% of customers (10.47% of permits) were exempt from paying for the service.
- 4.8 Most customers registered during the first registration period. Approximately 1,850 registered in the most recent window.
- 4.9 Versus the initial target of 56,700 customers (households and permits) it is clear that the service is considerably over-performing against the original business case.

Policy Review

- 4.10 It is proposed to freeze the annual charge at £25 per bin for the second year.

- 4.11 The policy outlined in Appendix 3 has been reviewed to take account of lessons learned in the first year. Proposed changes to the policy are highlighted in yellow, and are primarily aimed at ensuring clarity rather than being an active policy change. The key points to note are as follows:
- 4.11.1 It is proposed that the service will cease for a four week period over Christmas, to allow resources used to provide resilience to other collections in the festive period. This appears to be in line with the practice in other Councils and is partly offset by the proposed price freeze.
 - 4.11.2 The eligibility criteria, the fixed year (October-September) and the exemption criteria have been made clearer. There was evidence of both genuine mistakes and deliberate fraud in the exemption scheme. No changes have been made to the exemptions themselves although this will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
 - 4.11.3 Where bins are shared (typically in a tenemental area) it has been made clearer that that the bin will be allocated to a specific property. This is to prevent confusion around where the bin is and help resolve any questions or complaints more efficiently.
 - 4.11.4 We will no longer write to every household annually, as the uptake in communal bin areas is extremely low. We will instead write only to households in kerbside collection areas. This will be accompanied by a comprehensive communications campaign, including traditional and social media channels. The use of direct messaging where practicable is being investigated.

Service Failures and Refunds

- 4.12 It is acknowledged that the initial introduction of the service immediately after the rerouting for four day week did lead to problems. These were exacerbated by staff shortages over the festive period. These issues are explained in more detail in separate reports to this Committee.
- 4.13 Overall the service appears to have bedded in and be working normally.
- 4.14 The service's approach to complaints has always been to put them right. The terms and conditions state that where a collection is missed, the crew will come back and do it, unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. severe weather) outwith the Council's control. This is line with the approach of other Councils.
- 4.15 There are a range of reasons for missed collections e.g. crew errors or vehicle failure, and incorrect data being submitted by the customer.
- 4.16 Partial refunds are not issued on an ongoing basis. The cost of each individual uplift over a full year is 96p, so to do so would be impracticable and disproportionately expensive.
- 4.17 Where a genuine problem of ongoing service failure is identified, and the customer prefers this course of action, in extreme cases a full refund may be provided and

the service ceased.

Registration and Payment

- 4.18 The use of digital channels to register and pay for services is Council policy.
- 4.19 This will impact on the chargeable garden waste service in this second year. Registration will again be primarily online. Telephone payments will also be taken, and cash and card payments will be available at the following two locations: High Street and Wester Hailes Locality office at Westside Plaza. Cheques will no longer be accepted to pay for Council services by the summer as they are no longer financially viable to process.
- 4.20 The Waste and Cleansing Service work with Customer and Communication colleagues to communicate these changes as clearly as possible but Committee is asked to note that the service is unable to provide additional payment options in individual cases.

Tonnage Performance

- 4.21 For the financial year just ended the tonnage performance for the garden waste service is lower - this is primarily related to the previous introduction of the three weekly collection cycle, and above all to the hot dry weather reducing growth in what would normally be the main summer period.
- 4.22 Since the introduction of the charge, the garden waste tonnage for October-February 2018/19 overall from all sources is down 952 tonnes, while the kerbside tonnage itself is down exactly 1,000 tonnes when compared to the same period for the previous year.
- 4.23 At the outset it was made clear in the Business Case that this was an expected outcome of introducing a charge, although so far there seems to be little or no evidence of this material transferring to landfill or energy recovery. Again this is in line with the expectation that some people would divert waste to home composting or switch to mulching grass in situ.
- 4.24 Garden waste tonnages are highly vulnerable to change due to the impact of climate and growing seasons. This is the most recent available data at the time of writing, and will be kept under review. However in principle this does appear consistent with the initial Business Case.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The campaign to promote the second year of the chargeable service will commence in summer, and registration is anticipated to be from 26 June - 7 August. All relevant documentation including marketing materials, website and terms and conditions will be updated to reflect the changes to the policy.

- 5.2 This will be followed by a second window in winter to offer the service to people who move to Edinburgh during the year, or who did not sign up then changed their minds.
- 5.3 This service will continue to look at ways in which the period following registration and collections commencing can be reduced to improve the service for customers.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The overall financial performance of the service remains in line with the objectives set out in the original business case.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The review of the policy takes into account learning points from the first year of the chargeable service, and many of the changes are specifically designed to improve clarity based on feedback from customers.
- 7.2 The recommendation to cease the garden waste collection for a period of four weeks in the Festive season is designed to enhance the resilience of other services at a time when there is less demand to dispose of garden waste and there is a particular risk of disruption to those other services.
- 7.3 Charging for the garden waste service allows the continued provision of this non statutory service at a time when the Council faces significant funding pressures, so that it can contribute to the diversion of waste from landfill or energy recovery.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 The existing policy is published on both the Council's Policy Register, and the [garden waste webpages](#)

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 Garden waste customer transaction demographics.

Appendix 2 Garden Waste Collections: Scottish Councils Comparison.

Appendix 3 Chargeable Garden Waste Policy Revised March 2019.

Appendix 1 - Garden waste customer transaction demographics

Transaction profile

Method	Count	Percentage
Web	55968	83%
Phone	6941	10.3%
Locality office (cash & card)	4526	6.7%
Total	67435*	100%

*the number of customers who have registered for the service, not the number of permits issued

Transactions at Locality Offices

Office	Count
East Local Office	554
Drum Brae Hub	311
High Street	825
Kirkliston	87
North Local office (Pilton)	586
South Local Office (Captains Road)	861
South Queensferry	98
West Local Office (Wester Hailes)	1204
Total	4526

*cash and card payments

Transactions by Registration Period

Registration Period	Percentage
18 June-22 July 2018	84%
1-16 October 2018	13%
4-19 February 2019	3%

Appendix 2 - Garden Waste Collections: Scottish Councils Comparison

Council	Annual Charge	Service Design
Midlothian	£35 per bin	Fortnightly, mid March- mid November only
Perth and Kinross	£30 per bin	Fortnightly, all year (same bin also provides food waste collection).
Angus Council	£27.50 per bin	Fortnightly, no collections December or January
Highland Council	£35	Fortnightly, end February to end November only
The City of Edinburgh current	£25	Fortnightly, all year
The City of Edinburgh Proposed	£25	Fortnightly, service stops for 4 weeks (2 collections) in winter to provide resilience to other services.

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Provision of Garden Waste Collection

- Our aim is to make the garden waste collection service available to as many households as is practicable, provided we are able to operate an efficient collection route and that it is operationally feasible to provide the service.
- This is not a statutory service; there is an annual charge for providing this service.
- The charge does not include the cost of composting the material collected.
- The service will operate every two weeks, and the collection dates will be advertised on our website. The service will cease for a period of 4 weeks (i.e. two collection cycles) in winter.
- A variation of the service is available on defined streets in the Colinton area. This service is provided by Tiphereth/Colinton Community Compost. Residents in those streets who register to receive a garden waste collection will receive the sack based service as provided by Tiphereth, and not the standard brown bin service provided by the Council.

Eligibility

- This service is provided for the collection of household waste.
- The Council does not operate a commercial waste collection service, and commercial premises (including bowling greens and similar clubs) are not eligible to receive the service
- Ambassadorial and other embassy premises may be eligible to receive the service but will be required to register and pay for it in the normal way.
- Places of worship premises may be eligible to receive the service but will be required to register and pay for it in the normal way
- Council premises who request the service will be able to do so but must register and pay for the service.
- Organisations who operate community gardens on Council premises may receive the service but must arrange this through the Council service (e.g. libraries, housing, etc) who are responsible for that land, and they will be required to pay for the service.

Exemptions from Payment

- Some people do not have to pay to use the garden waste service, however they must still register to use the service using either their mygov account or one of the other registration routes.
- People who need to register for the service but do not have to pay for it are:
 - People who are in receipt of the welfare benefit Council Tax Reduction (previously called Council Tax Benefit)
 - People who live in a household where someone is registered with Council Tax as being Severely Mentally Impaired

- People who receive the Council's Garden Aid service AND are also exempt from paying for it.

Paying for the service

- The annual charge covers a full 12 month period which runs from October to September. Collections will be suspended for a 4 week period (2 collections) in winter.
- The registration period for the year will take place in June/ July. If you subsequently join the service during a later registration period, you will still be required to pay the full annual charge.
- You can register on our website to receive a reminder to register
- You may register and pay for the service on behalf of someone else, e.g. a relative.
- We are not able to accept householders who wish to join the service outwith a defined registration period.
- The charge will apply per bin – you may sign up more than one bin. We will only empty bins which carry the relevant sticker to show that they have been registered.
- The chargeable service may be transferred to a new property subject to the new property being eligible to receive the service. It will be the responsibility of the customer to provide a minimum of six weeks notice of the change; the customer will be responsible for transferring the bin to the new location.
- If your new property does not receive the service (or is outwith the Council boundary) please leave the bin at the current address so that the new residents can use it for the remaining period.
- If you wish to share a bin with a neighbour, or neighbours, only one person should sign up to the scheme and make payment, and ensure that the bin is properly presented on the correct days.
- The bin will be registered to that property (e.g. their flat) and all correspondence, enquiries or complaints relating to the service must be directed through that person.
- There is no discount for the smaller size bin.
- Residents that qualify under the Council Tax Reduction scheme (previously Council Tax benefit), or where someone at the address is registered as severely mentally impaired, will be exempt from paying for the service.
- http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20127/benefits_and_grants/43/claim_a_council_tax_reduction

Use of the service

- It is important that your brown bin is only used to collect the correct materials as outlined below. All materials must be loose, and not in a bag. **We do not accept any kind of bag or liner in the brown bin.**
- Bins which contain other materials will **not** be collected and we will not issue refunds for these collections
- You must present your bin by 6AM on the day of collection and remove it as soon as possible after collection.
- The bin must be presented at the kerbside outwith your property (except where an assisted collection has been arranged) with the lid fully closed, and in line with our normal policy on the Presentation of Waste.
- Our normal Assisted Collection Policy will apply to this service.

- All bins must display the garden waste collection scheme sticker for the appropriate year.
- Where the service is provided to a Council building or land (e.g. a community garden) it is the sole responsibility of the group responsible to arrange for the bin(s) to be presented for collection and then removed from the street on the correct days.
- Should this prove to cause conflict with the Council's policies on the presentation of waste (e.g. if this means that bins are left out in an area where the other premises are commercial) it may be necessary to review or remove the service.

Collection of garden waste

Collections will take place from 6am on the collection day.

Failed collections

- Collection crews will record instances where bins are not presented or where the contents are contaminated with other types of waste or are too heavy to lift. Those bins will not be uplifted, and no refund will be issued.
- You should remove any contaminants or reduce the weight of the bin, and present the bin again by 6 AM on the next collection date.
- We regret that we are not able to collect garden waste when the contents are frozen due to weather conditions. We will collect on the next scheduled collection; we will not issue a refund in these circumstances.
- Where we are not able to collect your bin due to circumstances outwith our control (such as roadworks or no access) crews will record this and we will seek to return as soon as possible. We will not issue a refund.
- Where we are not able to collect your bin due to circumstances within our control (such as vehicle failure) crews will record this and we will return to collect it within two working days.
- Where we fail to collect your bin as a result of our error, we will return to collect it within two working days of being notified. (Please refer to the operational days for the service).

Materials accepted in brown bins

- You **can** put these in your brown bin:
 - Flowers, plants and weeds
 - Grass cuttings and leaves
 - Hedge clippings, twigs and small branches
 - Christmas trees (all decorations must be removed; Christmas trees may also be presented beside the bin in January only; (please cut trees in half)
- You **can't** put these in your brown bin:
 - Food
 - Animal waste and bedding
 - Plant pots
 - Soil and turf
 - ANY TYPE OF BAG (including bags labelled compostable, degradable or biodegradable)