

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 31 March 2022

Garden Waste 2021/22 – Registration Performance

Executive/routine	Routine
Wards	All
Council Commitments	25

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Transport and Environment Committee:
- 1.1.1 Note the number of garden waste registrations in 2021/22 and the progress made towards further process and system developments;
 - 1.1.2 Note that investigations are on-going to identify system improvements which could enable direct debit/recurring payment options for future years; and
 - 1.1.3 Approve retaining the mid-year sign up window between December and May.

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Report

Garden Waste 2021/22 – Registration Performance

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on registrations for garden waste collection in 2021/22 and progress made towards further process and system developments.
- 2.2 This report also updates Committee on the outcome of the investigation to extend the mid-year window to be continuously open, in addition to the main summer period sign-up/renewal period.

3. Background

- 3.1 In [February 2021](#) the Council agreed to revise the charge for Garden Waste collection to £35 per bin, as part of the budget proposals and achieve full cost recovery. Benchmarking against other Scottish Local Authorities who charge for this service has shown that the charge of £35 is consistent with the services offered by them and is at the lower end of charges.
- 3.2 As part of this revised charge, an investment in administration support and system development was included to allow the mid-year sign up window to be greatly expanded in order to increase flexibility and address the complaints.
- 3.3 In [June 2021](#), Committee agreed an expanded registration period for Garden Waste. The expanded sign up period now runs from early December to the end of May. Committee requested that consideration be given to providing a registration window which was continuously open, in addition to the main summer period sign-up/renewal period.

4. Main report

Main Registration Window

- 4.1 The main registration window took place between 22 July 2021 and 1 September 2021, with collections commencing from 8 November 2021.
- 4.2 The main registration saw approximately 68,000 subscriptions for 75,000 permits, which is a slight reduction (1.4% (998) subscriptions and 1.5% (1,154) permits) compared to summer 2020; with the number of exemptions claimed remaining stable at just under 9%.

- 4.3 The annual registration period provides an opportunity to review collection routes, and to issue collection calendars and permits ahead of the next collection year commencing. In 2021, the collection model was revised to improve service performance and resulted in all properties being rerouted, with a large number of collection day changes for customers.

Mid-year Registration Window (up to end of February)

- 4.4 Previously the mid-year registration window ran for two weeks around January/February.
- 4.5 The expanded registration window between early December and end of May was introduced in December 2021 and, between December and the end of February, there were 4,622 subscriptions for 5,006 permits; with the number of exemptions claimed being 8%. This brings the total number of subscriptions in 2021/22 so far to approximately 72,700 subscriptions and 79,750 permits.

Business Case Comparison

- 4.6 Compared to the total subscriptions in 2020/21, as at 28 February 2022, 2021/22 registrations are currently down 2.5% (1,839) subscriptions and 3.2% (2,605) permits. It is expected that this will reduce further as the mid-year window continues.
- 4.7 Compared to the full cost recovery business case, the low and medium sign up scenarios have been exceeded and the service is on track to meet the high sign up scenario which was based on retaining 2019/20 paid registrations (as it stands at 28 February 2022, registrations are 913 paid permits away from this).

Further Process and System Developments

- 4.8 Good progress has been made on training and embedding the full garden waste registration, subscription management processes and stages of the collection year within the administration team.
- 4.9 In 2021 the processes in place for the main summer registration window were refined, improving data quality and addressing issues ahead of the registration window closing. This resulted in a reduction in the number of customers requesting replacement permits by approximately 30% (450).
- 4.10 The expanded mid-year window has required all related processes to be amended to support this change and to address the impact on processes which now overlap, for example: managing the current customers' collection year; registering and data quality assessments for new customers; routing and mailing permits for the previous month's mid-year registrations; and commencing collections for those going live.
- 4.11 A number of the remaining complaints received are as a result of not having a direct debit payment option in place. This issue is due to the ongoing requirement for active registration, meaning customers must actively sign up each summer to ensure their collections continue rather than a passive registration where payment is automatically taken, and customers enrolled.

- 4.12 The service is continuing to work with colleagues in ICT and with system providers to investigate potential solutions to this issue.

Widening Mid-year Window

- 4.13 Appendix 1 provides a summary of the developments being considered for garden waste, including to provide a continuously open mid-year registration window.
- 4.14 The analysis concluded that, while there would be benefits of a continuously open mid-year registration window, these are offset by downsides (such as confusion over which year the customer is registered for and risks that changes to collection days may be required regularly to accommodate new collections).
- 4.15 The issues around implementing a direct debit solution have been well documented. Due to the overall benefits for garden waste customers of introducing direct debit payment facilities, it is proposed to retain the mid-year registration window as December to May, and to focus on investigating a suitable direct debit and/or recurring payment solution for customers.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The changes and improvements in the garden waste collection processes continue to be monitored with refinement and further improvements identified and implemented, where possible. This includes monitoring the impact of new registrations on collection routes and the risk of having imbalanced collection days which require a change in day for customers during the year.
- 5.2 As the sign up levels during the wider mid-year window are still unknown, the full impact is unclear. This is, however, expected to be minimal if properties signing up throughout the year are spread across the city. Whereas there is likely to be a greater risk where new registrations come from a single area. An analysis of December's registrations indicates that registrations were spread across the city, with new subscriptions received on around 46% of streets serviced.
- 5.3 If Committee approve the report recommendations, the registration periods will remain as they are currently, and work will continue to investigate suitable direct debit and/or recurring payment options for customers.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The financial impact, both in terms of implementing the changes proposed in this report were factored into the calculations for the full cost recovery proposal as part of the budget setting process, and as such there is no additional financial impact caused by the recommendations in this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The proposed changes to the registration process reflect customer demand for a more flexible process.

- 7.2 The Integrated Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the proposal to increase the charge to £35 per permit. The impact of this wider window will have a positive impact on residents who miss the main window, choose not to sign up in the main window or move into Edinburgh or a property with a garden during the year.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Revenue Budget 2021/26](#) – Report to Full Council, 18 February 2021

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Options for Widening Mid-Year Registration Window.

Appendix 1 – Options for Widening Mid-Year Registration Window

The following options have been considered for widening the mid-year window further.

Rolling Year

This would see the customer's 12 months collection period running from the point their collections commence rather than the fixed collection year end for all customers.

The benefits of this for the customer include:

- Customers receive a full year service regardless of when they register; currently mid-year registrations continue to pay full price; and
- Customers can register at the point of the year they would like rather than within the set windows.

However, the negatives of this for the customer include:

- As customers will all have different renewal dates, it would no longer be possible to carry out the extensive marketing campaign that supports the summer window. Instead, customers would only receive a reminder via an email or letter (this is currently part of the main registration window communications approach). It is known that customers can miss the current sign up window due to forgetting to register; and this approach has the potential to increase the number of customers who miss the registration point before their service year ends and only realise when collections stop;
- Following the point above, if the customer does not register before the end of their service year collections would stop whilst continuing for neighbours with time left on their permits. This can lead to confusion about why their bin was not uplifted and a gap of service until they register and their registration is processed;
- Rate changes (such as the increase to £35) or service changes (such as the introduction of the 4-week suspension over the festive period) would result in customers being on different arrangements to others depending whether registering before or after the change; and
- It would be difficult to administer multiple collection years running concurrently as multiple different permit stickers would need to be used at the same time; and this would be confusing for residents and collection teams.

Mid-year Window Length

The service aims to ensure the registration period is as long as possible so that residents can join the service at any time however there are times that this is difficult or not feasible to do. The periods not currently covered by the mid-year registration window have been assessed below.

September to November

This is the period between the main summer registration window closing and the mid-year window opening.

Customers are encouraged to sign up for the garden waste service during the main registration window which runs from roughly the end of July until early September. When this window closes the garden waste team are fully focused on processing, routing, and mailing permits to customers ahead of the new collection year commencing. This includes a number of complex processes against a tight deadline.

In 2021, approximately 260 people contacted the Council via email between September and end of November requesting details of how to register for the service. The reasons for missing the summer registration were mixed and included missing the reminder notification; moving into a property; and not realising they hadn't registered yet. There were 831 calls between September and October, including calls asking to register, payment enquiries, requests for replacement bins, reports of missed collections from current customers, and requests for updates on permits being issued.

There would be limited customer benefits from expanding the registration window further due to the seasonality of the garden waste growing season itself.

The main benefit to the customer of opening the mid-year registration window during this period would be customers not needing to wait until December to register and potentially forgetting to sign up when the mid-year window opens.

The negatives for the customer include:

- The risk of delays to the summer window affecting the vast majority of customers, or customers registering for the mid-year and having a lengthier wait between paying and service commencing whilst the summer registrations are processed. This is due to the volume of registrations during the summer window and the complexity of the processes to ensure that the service can be fully operational by early November each year; and
- Registrations opening in November has been considered with routing taking place in December. However, this carries significant risks around mailing permits during the festive period and with the service suspended until mid-January collections would not commence until last two weeks of January. Remaining with the mid-year window commencing in December allows the routing to be carried out in January with permits mailed at the end of January and collections commencing in the first two weeks of February.

June to November

This is the period between the mid-year window closing (end of May) and the service year ending (early November).

The benefits for the customer of opening the mid-year registration window during this period include allowing a longer opportunity to join for the remainder of the collection year. This is expected to predominately benefit those that have moved into a property with a garden during this period.

The negatives for the customer include:

- Registrations too close to the end of the year would result in the customer receiving only a few weeks service, or no service at all if very close to the end of the collection year. This would cause confusion for the customer on need to also register in the main window for the service to continue into the next year; and
- The likelihood of causing confusion, particularly during the period where the main registration window takes place for the following year and where the communications on the two different registration become very complex. This increases the risk of customers potentially not signing up correctly (for example, a current customer signing up for the new year again or a new customer signing up for the current year but not understanding they need to sign up for the new year at the same time).

Direct debits

As outlined in the main report, it is recognised that a direct debit solution would improve the service for the vast majority of customers and would address a number of the common issues that arise for customers accessing the service due to removing the need to actively register each year.

The issues around this have been well documented however activities are underway to investigate options to address the barriers to enabling this to happen.