

Motion at Council - Green Waste Collections

Cabinet

Date: 6th February 2013

Author: Cabinet Member for StreetSmart and Corporate Services
Head of Public Protection and StreetSmart

Wards: All

Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

1.1 The purpose of this Report is to set out the Council's proposed measures for the management of demand for garden waste collections.

1.2 At Council on 20th September, 2012, the following Motion was approved:

"This Council expresses its concern at the recent increase of green waste collection and a reduction in waste taken by residents to the household waste recycling centre.

This Council requests that the Cabinet Member for Streetsmart and Corporate Services and the Streetsmart Service Delivery Manager produce a report for Cabinet as soon as practicable outlining what action will be taken to manage future demand."

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the investigation that has taken place and the findings outlined in the report;
- 2.2 Note the communications measures planned that will be carried out by the Head of Public Protection and StreetSmart;
- 2.3 Authorise the Board Director for Service Delivery to introduce a limit on the volume of garden waste presented from each house to four bags per fortnight (maximum 90 litres per bag). and,
- 2.4 Advise the Council of the contents of the joint report and of the recommendations in 2.1 to 2.3 above.

3. Detail

Garden waste collection service

- 3.1 The Council offers a garden waste collection service that is free of charge at point of use and where residents may present an unlimited amount for collection. The waste must be presented in green plastic sacks for identification purposes.

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All areas of the Borough receive this service on a fortnightly basis. In most cases this is the same day as the refuse collection day.

Household Waste Recycling Centre

- 3.2 Garden waste may also be taken to the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) at Waterside Park, Cheney Manor Industrial Estate. There are no restrictions on the quantity that can be delivered to this location. The only limitation is that any vehicle over 2m in height may only visit up to 12 times each year, to reduce large quantities of waste, which reduces queuing times and potential abuse by commercial waste producers.
- 3.3 The HWRC is open during the summer, between 0800 and 2000 seven days per week. During the winter, this is reduced to between 0800 and 1630 but remains open seven days per week with the exception of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

2012 collection issues

- 3.4 The tonnages of garden waste produced for the whole summer period will not be known until the end of the financial year (2012/13) but early indications are that there was a significant increase in the amount of waste collected from the kerbside, rather than delivered to the HWRC, although there was a marginal increase in the overall tonnage produced.
- 3.5 The amount of garden waste produced has been approximately 10,000 tonnes per year since 2008. This makes up approximately 10% of our overall waste arisings and contributes significantly to the recycling and composting performance of the Council.
- 3.6 In previous years, it is estimated that 40% of this waste was delivered to the HWRC, whereas in the summer of 2012, it is estimated that only 25% of the garden waste collected was delivered to the site and the 75% of it was presented for collection.
- 3.7 Weather conditions in the early summer period (2012) meant that grass was growing at a much quicker rate than in previous years. This resulted in large quantities of waste being presented for collection and the service becoming inundated. In the most extreme circumstance, this resulted in some areas of the Borough missed a collection day, making a delay of a fortnight. Other areas were delayed by up to 6 days.
- 3.8 Additional resources were put in place by Swindon Commercial Services Limited to enable the collections to catch up. This included double-shifted vehicles and crews and additional rounds. It also involved a change in the collection process to make the kerbside element quicker, yet resulted in additional demand at the

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transfer station, where the plastic sacks required manual splitting to remove the garden waste prior to being sent for composting.

- 3.9 A further delay occurred towards the end of the summer, when the facilities that were available for composting, and storage prior to composting, exceeded their capacity for safe storage.
- 3.10 This longer-term issue had built up due to the over-supply of garden waste and compost in the market meaning that demand for the compost product was not as high and throughput of facilities slowed down. There was also a technical reason: due to the high moisture content of the garden waste, it was taking longer to compost and required more storage space during that time.
- 3.11 Based on anecdotal evidence and conversations with residents' groups, associations and individuals, there are various reasons for them preferring to use the collection rather than the HWRC, even when the service was delayed. Those cited include:
- 3.11.1 Convenience: The collection service remains preferred as it is easy and does not require residents taking time to deliver the waste;
- 3.11.2 Cleanliness: With the waste being wetter than normal, the collection service meant residents didn't have to put it in their own vehicles;
- 3.11.3 Volumes: The volumes that many houses presented would have meant several trips to the HWRC, making it more inconvenient;
- 3.11.4 Expectation: Residents expected the HWRC to have queues and did not wish to 'risk it' by going to the site; and,
- 3.11.5 Cost: With increasing fuel costs, the ability to have waste collected free of charge meant that the residents would not incur the fuel and vehicles costs of taking the waste to the site.
- 3.12 Whilst the external factors of cost and convenience are not able to be influenced by the Council directly, the provision of an alternative site for garden waste disposal in another area of the Borough (i.e. a second HWRC specifically for garden waste) may be possible to reduce the burden on residents and the HWRC at Waterside Park. This will be investigated to determine whether a feasible site (or sites) exist and what consent and permitted will be required.

Communications

- 3.13 In hindsight, it is apparent that the most frustrating element for residents was the lack of awareness and accurate information on the delays, their length and when they could expect the collection to actually take place. Delays can be caused for many reasons and in any of the waste collection services; therefore, the Council is working on developing systems to get accurate data to residents so they are

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aware of when delays are happening and when they can expect the service to take place.

- 3.14 This will include social media and the use of the existing Council feeds for the popular systems, including Facebook and Twitter. A series of standard messages are being developed so that they can be used quickly and by the Officers with the real-time information to reduce delays and improve accuracy. These will be trialled over the winter and rolled out on a service-by-service basis.
- 3.15 Swindon Commercial Services Limited will be extending their roll-out of vehicle tracking and route optimisation systems that will improve the information they have available on the location and efficiency of the collection crews. It is then intended that this information can be combined with the communications to provide publically-available real-time systems where residents will be able to see their collection vehicles.
- 3.16 The same system can also be used to promote the HWRC and highlight when there are low levels of queuing when residents may expect it to be busy. For example, on the Easter Bank Holiday in 2012, there were no queues at the site yet this has historically been one of the busiest weekends.
- 3.17 Additional communications will take place about waste minimisation and reminding residents of home composting opportunities. If possible, the Council will identify sources for discounted compost bins but this is dependent on offers available in the market at that time. The most appropriate period to review this is late Spring 2013.

Operational changes

- 3.18 The main issue during Summer 2012 was the volume of waste presented for collection, whereas previously it had been taken to the HWRC. To resolve this, it is proposed that the Council introduce a limit on the volume of waste collected from each household, of four bags per household per fortnight. All other aspects of the service shall remain the same, including the householder providing their own sacks, of approximately 90 to 100 litres capacity each - any sack larger will not be acceptable.
- 3.19 Any additional waste that households produce can be taken to the HWRC. The majority of households should be able to manage within these limits Additional waste presented for collection will not be taken.
- 3.20 This will provide a consistent load for the collection crews to deal with and not encounter the high-volumes experienced in 2012. It will improve the presentation of waste outside properties, reduce obstructions caused by large volumes, and reduce the manual handling risk of large numbers of sacks that is currently a prevalent risk for staff involved in these collections.

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- 3.21 Due to the restriction, there is a risk that increased volumes of waste will be flytipped. This will require strong enforcement action in those areas where it takes place; however, flytipped garden waste will only be removed where it poses an immediate risk to the environment or obstruction of the highway or drainage. Where excessive amounts of waste are presented, residents will be written to in the same way as side waste for wheeled bin collections is managed and enforcement action taken for repeat offences.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 An additional HWRC is discussed within the report.
- 4.2 Other alternative options have been considered as part of the preparation of the report, including only two sacks and the introduction of wheeled bins. The financial implications and risks of these options limit their viability.
- 4.3 If Cabinet does not wish to introduce a volume-limited collection, the existing service will remain unchanged and will be susceptible to delays due to large volumes in peak periods, as experienced in Summer 2012.
- 4.4 A further option is to consider the introduction of charging for green waste collection to cover the full or partial contribution to service costs. While feasible, practical methods of implementation would be a challenge to raise and maintain sufficient revenue. For example green bags could be purchased either from the Council or from a supermarket. No work has been undertaken on this option because of the Cabinet's standing objection to charging.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 This report does not propose any actions with financial or procurement implications.
- 5.2 Any subsequent actions, such as the investigation into alternative HWRC provision, will have a separate business case to consider these implications.
- 5.3 The introduction of a volume-limited collection will reduce the risk of volatility in costs and ensure the collection service is economically sustainable. The service was originally budgeted at £598,000 per year; however, actual costs have been £850,000 for the last few years, with the overspend being offset by income from recycling. The restrictions on bags will enable the service be reliable within this actual spend.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.4 The Council has a legal obligation, by virtue of Section 45 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, for the collection of household waste. This can be

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constrained through the setting of Regulations and service of Notice but neither are proposed in this report.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.5 Garden waste is a significant tonnage of household waste that needs to be dealt with in a sustainable manner and, wherever practicable, diverted from landfill to avoid the production of methane and other harmful gases.

Links to One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies

- 5.6 The diversion of waste landfill from landfill is a strategic objective and forms part of the Council's aspiration to achieve 60% recycling and composting.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.7 A Diversity Impact Assessment has not been completed for this specific decision because it is covered in the DIA for the overarching Municipal Waste Management Strategy. This identified that disability and race should be clearly considered in future developments. The communications outlined in this report will be considered carefully to maximise understanding wherever possible.

Risk Management

- 5.8 Failing to manage the garden waste collection service in the event of similar circumstances in future years would result in significant reputational and financial impacts for the Council.
- 5.9 The recommendation for safe collection system from the Health and Safety Laboratory is to use wheeled bins wherever possible. We consider that the reduction of the number of bags appropriately limits the risk posed to manual handling of large numbers.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 None

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9. Key Decision/Decision in Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme / Forward Plan for February 2013.