

Information/Discussion Paper

Environment O&S Committee - 23 November 2011

Review of the Garden Waste Scheme

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed.

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 Committee requested information on the performance of the garden waste scheme prior to the matter being considered by cabinet on 6th December 2011.

2. Background and History

- 2.1 In July 2010 cabinet considered a report on proposed waste and recycling collection systems and approved a new fortnightly garden waste collection scheme with access expanded to all households (subject to site specific health and safety considerations).
- 2.2 The new scheme was approved as part of a programme of change that included the separate collection of kitchen food waste, increased recycling and alternate weekly collections of residual waste and recyclables. The overall effect of these changes has been a significant increase in recycling and composting. 50% of Cheltenham's waste was recycled or composted in the first quarter of 2011/12, an increase of 14% when compared with the first quarter of 2010/11. This represents 1077 tonnes of waste diverted from landfill in three months.
- 2.3 The new garden waste scheme has now been in operation for 9 months and a review of the scheme is taking place to recommend improvements.
- 2.4 The Gloucestershire Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, approved by cabinet in October 2007, prioritises waste reduction, re-use and recycling as key strategies to reduce waste to landfill. In line with the strategy the council has promoted home composting as a means of waste reduction and diversion of waste from landfill. To support this we have made available subsidised home compost bins as well as information and advice to householders. In the first six months of 2011/12, a total of 169 home composting units were delivered to households in Cheltenham. As this strategy begins to take effect the total volume of garden waste collected for composting will reduce.
- 2.5 The previous garden waste scheme was considered deficient in terms of equality of opportunity. There were a significant number of households not included in the scheme who did not benefit from it. Those householders complained that they were not receiving a service their close neighbours benefited from even though they paid the same level of council tax. Furthermore, because the service was fully subsidised it effectively meant that those households who did not receive the service, including those who live in flats, contributed through their council tax payment to the cost of a service they did not receive. The new scheme aims to be open to every household in Cheltenham for a reasonable charge.

- 2.6** The previous scheme also had inherent health and safety risks due to excessive manual handling of heavy 120 litre bags. With reference to guidance provided by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) it was recommended that the manual handling risks associated with garden waste collections be significantly reduced through the use of wheeled bins. To provide wheeled bins to every existing user under the previous arrangements was unaffordable. At £18-00 a bin the total cost to the council would have been £756,000 and given the pressure on public sector spending this option had to be discounted.
- 2.7** It was considered that the most equitable, cost effective option to address the above issues was to introduce a charge for the collection of garden waste on a fortnightly basis. Customers who subscribe to the service benefit from the provision of a sturdy, manoeuvrable wheeled container for their garden waste and receive a collection every other week throughout the year.
- 2.8** The charge for the service was set at £3.00 per bin per month, payable yearly in advance. This compared well with charges made by other authorities. Charging at the point of collection means that only those householders requiring the service pay for it. As at the beginning of November 2011, just over 11,000 households have subscribed to the service with an average of 30 new orders being received each week since August. It is likely that more householders will subscribe in the spring of 2012.
- 2.9** The income received covers the cost of providing the service. The income received is less than that anticipated but running costs are lower than budgeted and the shortfall in garden waste income has been partly offset by increased recycling income.

3. Consultation and feedback

- 3.1** Officers have consulted the public regarding the new scheme. 281 householders were interviewed to obtain their views on the garden waste recycling service and potential alternatives.
- 3.2** Of those persons consulted at the Swindon Road recycling centre or at one of the garden waste roadshows, almost 95% said they were aware of the scheme. Reasons given for not subscribing to the scheme were price (20%), not enough waste to fill a bin (26%), not being prepared to pay anything for the service (27%) and convenience of the Swindon Road recycling centre (13%).
- 3.3** Of those persons consulted who live in hard to access areas with limited storage space, only 68% were aware of the new service. Reasons given for not subscribing to the service were price (20%), not enough space for a bin (16%), not enough waste to fill a bin (32%), convenience of the Swindon Road recycling centre (12%) and having very little garden space (24%). Only 8% said that they were not prepared to pay anything for the service.
- 3.4** When those householders in hard to access areas with limited storage were asked if they would be interested in an alternative service using disposable paper sacks at a fixed charge of £36 per annum only 22% responded positively. When those same householders were asked if they would be interested in an alternative service using disposable paper sacks on a pay as you use basis 48% responded positively.

4. Emerging alternative proposals

- 4.1 In response to concerns about price it may be reasonable and affordable to offer a discount for a fixed period to existing customers who are renewing their subscription or as an incentive to new customers. The discount would be of sufficient value to generate interest but remain affordable to the council. Other authorities offer a small discount and believe it has a positive impact.
- 4.2 In response to demand for an alternative service in the hard to access areas with limited storage it may be possible to offer a collection service using 75 litre compostable paper sacks provided on a pay as you go basis. A bag service at a fixed charge of £36.00 per annum has less support from households who live in hard to access areas (see para 3.4 above). It would also be more expensive to administer and therefore be less cost effective.
- 4.3 This service would be limited to the streets listed in appendix A of this paper. Unfortunately it would not be possible to offer the alternative bag scheme throughout the town. The compostable bags and consequently the garden waste within them cannot be windrow composted along with the brown bin waste. The bagged waste will be treated via the more expensive in vestal composting process and must therefore be collected separately.
- 4.4 Bags could be made available for purchase at the Municipal offices and Central Depot Swindon Road or could be delivered for a charge.
- 4.5 Any new or revised scheme will be publicised by leaflet drop to households in those streets where it will be made available.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The views of the committee will be fed back to the cabinet. Cabinet will consider the final report on the Garden Waste Scheme on 6th December 2011.

Background Papers	Cabinet report 27 th July 2010. Proposed waste and recycling collection systems.
Contact Officer	Rob Bell, Assistant Director, Operations 01242 264181, rob.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk
Accountability	Roger Whyborn, Cabinet Member Sustainability, 01242 231458, cldr.roger.whyborn@cheltenham.gov.uk
Scrutiny Function	Environment