

**Cheltenham Borough Council**  
**Cabinet – 21 December 2021**  
**Garden Waste Charges**

<b>Accountable member</b>	<b>Councillor Iain Dobie, Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services</b>
<b>Accountable officer</b>	<b>Karen Watson, Environmental Partnerships Manager</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<p>Since February 2011, the charge for collecting garden waste has increased on only four occasions: from £36/year to £37/year in February 2014; from £37/year to £38/year in February 2015; from £38/year to £42/year in February 2017, and from £42/year to £45/year in February 2019.</p> <p>It is proposed that from February 2022, the Authority's garden waste collection charge will be increased from £45/year to £47/year per bin with no discount and including an inflationary increase of 4.2% rounded up to £2 to reflect the increased cost of running the service such as the cost of fuel, consumables and staffing. There will be no change to the number of collections per household per year.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>That Cabinet:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Approves an increase in the garden waste collection charge from £45/year to £47/year per bin, in line with the current rate of inflation at 4.2%;</b></li> <li><b>2. Approves the prompt payment discount for households renewing their subscription ahead of their annual renewal date and the spring offer discount be discontinued with effect from 1 February 2022;</b></li> <li><b>3. Delegates authority to the Managing Director – Place and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services to implement the decision.</b></li> </ol>

<b>Financial implications</b>	As detailed within the report.  Contact officer: Paul Jones, Executive Director Finance and Assets paul.jones@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264365
<b>Legal implications</b>	<p>The Council is permitted to charge for the collection (but not disposal) of garden waste by paragraph 4(2) of Schedule 1 to the Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012. Section 45(3)(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 further provides that any charge must be “reasonable” and thus any increase should not be contrary to this requirement. The Act does not define “reasonable” but the usual meaning is that the charges should be comparable with those levied by other authorities and service providers.</p> <p>Under Section 45(3)(a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 the duty to collect garden waste and ability to charge for such collection is dependent on the Council being specifically requested to collect the waste. Accordingly, the renewal process which involves customers actively seeking a new subscription rather than automatically renewing for another year at the increased charge is appropriate.</p> <p>Contact officer: One Legal, legal.services@onelegal.org.uk 01684 272017</p>
<b>HR implications (including learning and organisational development)</b>	None as a direct result of this report.  Contact officer: Clare Jones, Clare.Jones@cheltenham.gov.uk
<b>Key risks</b>	Please refer to Appendix 1 of this report
<b>Corporate and community plan Implications</b>	The garden waste collection service supports key priority 3 in the council’s corporate plan 2019-2023 – achieving a cleaner and greener sustainable environment for residents, businesses and visitors.
<b>Environmental and climate change implications</b>	<p>The Authority’s garden waste collection service supports the environment by diverting organic waste from landfill, thereby saving the cost of landfill tax and the associated production of methane and leachate. Residents who choose not to participate in the scheme can use the county council site at Wingmoor Farm. The change from diesel to HVO in the future will reduce carbon emissions helping the council reach net zero by 2030.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Laura Tapping, laura.tapping@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>
<b>Property/Asset Implications</b>	None as a direct result of this report.  Contact officer: Gemma Bell; gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk

## **1. Background**

- 1.1** The Authority's discretionary, non statutory, garden waste collection service began in February 2011. Since 31 March 2013 the number of garden waste bins collected under the scheme has seen a gross increase of around 1,500 bins per year. Retention rates have remained high at around 95%, reflecting general satisfaction with the service and the net take up of the service has been between 800-1000 bins per year in the earlier years, reducing to 530 in 2017/2018 but recovering more recently to 713 in 2019/20 and, following COVID-19, 1,627 in 20/21. The actual total number of bins collected has increased from 12,781 as at 31st March 2013 to 20,272 as at September 2021.
- 1.2** Since February 2011, the charge for collecting garden waste has increased on only three occasions; from £36 a year to £37 a year in February 2014, from £37 a year to £38 a year in February 2015, from £38 a year to £42 a year in February 2017, and from £42/year to £45/year in February 2019.
- 1.3** Customers subscribing to the service sign up to an annual agreement for the provision of garden waste collections. The annual charge is advertised on the website and from the beginning of January each year all existing customers receive a letter or an email one month prior to their renewal date advising them of the annual charge to renew their subscription and giving them an opportunity to opt in or out of the service. The renewal year for garden waste collections is 1 February to 31 January, not 1 April to 31st March.
- 1.4** Since the start of the service, the Authority has offered a discount for existing customers who renew their subscription ahead of their annual renewal date (a 'prompt payment' discount) as well as a 'spring offer' discount for new bin applications, if customers subscribe between the period 1st February to 31st May. However, now the service is in its 10th year of operation it is considered appropriate to discontinue this discount, something most other authorities do not offer, in order to simplify payment administration.
- 1.5** It is proposed that from February 2022, the Authority's garden waste collection charge will be increased from £45/year to £47/year per bin with no discount and including an inflationary increase of 4.2% rounded up to £2 to reflect the increased cost of running the service such as the cost of fuel, consumables and staffing. There will be no change to the number of collections per household per year.
- 1.6** Whilst it is appreciated that those on low incomes will find the price increase more difficult, the increase is in line with inflation and residents can opt to share the cost of a subscription with a neighbour. The Authority has explored the feasibility of offering discounts to those residents with low incomes or in receipt of benefits, unfortunately this is not possible to introduce fairly due to the variable nature of benefits.
- 1.7** A small number of customers who live in a qualifying road who are not able to have a brown bin collection because they have no space to store a brown bin or there are access issues are able to purchase paper sacks. The delivery charge and the cost of the paper sacks is recommended to increase by 4.2% in line with inflation and this will be agreed within the Authority's budget setting process.
- 1.8** Gloucestershire County Council and Cheltenham Borough Council continue to promote home composting for residents and our website provides useful information along with links to Gloucestershire County Council's home composting promotions and incentives.

## **2. Reasons for recommendations**

- 2.1 The Authority has not increased the cost of garden waste subscriptions since February 2019 and in response to rising service costs such as an increase in fuel costs and general inflation it is necessary to increase the price of garden waste subscriptions to help fund the cost of collection whilst also reflecting the impact of inflation on the service. It is estimated that the impact of increasing charges will increase income by approximately £93,000 per year, assuming the number of customers who cancel subscriptions are offset by the number of new subscriptions, which will contribute to the additional costs associated with collection services.
- 2.2 The proposed increase in charges for the garden waste collection service, if approved, will bring this Authority closer in line with our neighbouring Authority, Tewkesbury Borough Council, which currently charges £49 per year for their garden waste collection service.
- 2.3 The Authority is looking to move away from using diesel in its fleet of vehicles, including those delivering this service, to Hydro treated Vegetable Oil as part of its ambition to reduce its carbon emissions and reach net zero by 2030. This will cost the authority approximately 15-20% more than using diesel and estimated at £50,000 per year. The proposed increase in the garden waste charges will help offset these additional costs and other inflationary pressures facing the authority.

### **3. Alternative options considered**

- 3.1 The Authority could decide not to increase the charges for the garden waste collection service to reflect inflation. This has been rejected on the basis that there is a requirement to support the funding of the existing collection service and there was no increase in charges to cover inflation last year during COVID-19 so this will be the first inflationary increase in 3 years .
- 3.2 The Authority could keep the early bird/spring discount currently offered of £3 however this causes confusion for some customers and adds to our costs requiring staff to reconcile payments and contact customers where errors have been made in the manual completion of the on line payment form. This would be resolved by stopping the discount and having a flat rate charge, like most other authorities, enabling the payment form to auto populate with the correct charge for residents. To reduce confusion for residents and additional staff time costs this is not recommended.
- 3.3 The Authority could decide to price match our nearest neighbouring authority, Tewkesbury Borough Council, who currently charge £49/year however this is considered too great a price increase for residents in the current economic climate and has been rejected in favour of the lower full price increase without discount of £45/year to £47/year as recommended in this report.

### **4. Consultation and feedback**

- 4.1 In advance of the October 2017 service change, the Authority undertook a consultation exercise with Cheltenham residents to understand which type of waste and recycling service they would prefer to receive. As part of the consultation exercise the Authority also asked how residents would prefer to pay for their new waste and recycling service. Of the four options provided: closing the Household Recycling Centre; increasing charges for garden waste collection; closing the recycling banks; or increasing the Authority's other fees and charges, a significant proportion of residents who took part in the consultation (i.e. 1913 out of 3092 – 62%) chose increasing the garden waste charges as their first or second preferred option. Whilst this does show a preference for increasing garden waste collection charges over some of the other options given, it should be noted that it is not known whether those who took part in this consultation were also users of the garden waste collection service.
- 4.2 A further consultation exercise was carried out between 19 December 2018 - 6 January 2019 when charges were last changed. This consultation sought views from residents on how they

used the service as well as a reduction in the number of garden waste collections by 2 per year per customer over the Christmas/New Year period to minimise any service disruption due to severe weather (snow). The change in the number of collections per year was implemented in 2019 and there is no proposal to further reduce the number of collections, this will remain the same as it is now with no further change.

- 4.3** The results of the 19 December 2018 – 6 January 2019 public consultation carried out which had approximately 4,300 respondents, indicates that there are fairly high rates of public satisfaction with kerbside collections provided by the council: 69.5% of residents said they were either satisfied or very satisfied and a further 16.9% of residents saying they were neither satisfied or dissatisfied.
- 4.4** In response to questions specifically about garden waste charges 64.6% of respondents said they knew about the £3 early bird discount and 45.7% of respondents, who were advised that the price increase proposed for 2019 would mean they would pay £1.75 per collection, said they would either be prepared to pay more for their garden waste collection or they didn't know. The price increase on 1 February 2019, the last time the service increased the price, meant that residents paid £1.75 per collection, the price still being charged.
- 4.5** The proposed increase from £45/year to £47/year, removing the discounts previously applied of £3, would mean residents signing up to the garden waste service will pay £1.96 per collection. 19.5% of respondents to the 19 December – 6 January 2019 consultation said they would pay up to either £2 or £2.50 per collection and the proposed increase for 1 February 2022 with no early bird discount falls within this price range.

## **5. Performance management –monitoring and review**

- 5.1** Performance in terms of take-up and income generated will continue to be monitored monthly/quarterly as part of the CBC-Ubico performance monitoring arrangements. Outcomes will be used to inform the thinking on any possible changes to the charges in the future.

<b>Report author</b>	<b>Contact officer:</b>  <b>Karen Watson, Environmental Partnerships Manager</b> <b>Karen.watson@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242 264397</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	1. Risk Assessment
<b>Background information</b>	

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	If the proposed increase in charges for the garden waste collection service is not agreed, then the Authority may be unable to meet its requirement to generate an additional £93,000/year to support service provision and cover the cost of inflation	Tim Atkins	10/11/2021	5	2	10	Reduce	Cabinet approves the proposed increase in charge for the garden waste collection service	30/11/2021	Karen Watson	
	If the guidance around the Environment Act 2021 sets lower charges for garden waste, or removes charges for garden waste collections in 2023/24, this may negatively impact our income stream in future years	Tim Atkins	10/11/2021	5	3	15	Accept	Work should continue to maximise service efficiency and reduce costs	2022/2023	Karen Watson	
	If the charge for the garden waste collection service is increased then take up of the service may reduce, resulting in less income for the Authority.	Tim Atkins	10/11/2021	2	2	4	Accept	A reduction in the demand for the service is difficult to model however fairly stable customer numbers should minimise this risk.	30/11/2021	Karen Watson	
<b>Explanatory notes</b>											

**Impact** – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)

**Likelihood** – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6

(1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

**Control** - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close