



Report to Cabinet

Subject **Waste Management Initiatives (Organic Waste)**

Date **20th September 2004**

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1. Purpose of the Report

- i. To inform the Cabinet of proposals for a chargeable organic garden waste collection service to all domestic properties in Gedling Borough
- ii. To request Cabinet views on changes to the waste collection policy as a consequence of operating an organic garden waste collection scheme
- iii. To clarify the consultation requirements taking into consideration the proposals outlined in this report

2. Background

The organic garden waste scheme was originally set up as a trial scheme with the support of a WREN Grant in the year 2001/02. These funds were provided in order for the Authority to ascertain the best operational and collection methods, and to assess participation rates and customer demands.

The current scheme has been operating for three years and is now available to approximately 15,000 properties with additional costs within the current waste management budgets. The scheme in 2004 commenced on 19th April 2004 and the last collection will be made on 10th December 2004 so on average each property will have had 17 collections.

This year, resident participation has been higher, particularly in those areas where the Twin Bin Scheme is operational. This is resulting in some operational difficulties, and additional overtime costs are being incurred, although these are being offset to some extent by the income (recycling credit) currently being received from Nottinghamshire County Council, who compensate Waste Collection Authorities for diverting waste from landfill.

Organic garden waste can be defined as hedge cuttings, grass cuttings, leaves, weeds, plants, shrubs, prunings and small branches (under 8cm in diameter). This excludes kitchen food waste, as Members will recall the problems surrounding this issue when the outbreak of foot and mouth occurred.

There is no legal obligation for Waste Collection Authorities to undertake a free garden waste collection service. Garden waste is a type of household waste for which a charge may be made according to the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992 – Statutory Instrument 1992 No. 588 Schedule 2, Regulation 4 (3).

The problems associated with the current scheme are:

- i. That the scheme in its current form may be perceived as discriminatory as it only serves a third of the Borough. A large number of residents are becoming increasingly frustrated with the current approach and the department receives lots of calls and correspondence on this subject. We have received a petition requesting the service.
- ii. Additional funding in the region of £200,000 would be needed to extend the service to all properties within the Borough.
- iii. The current outlet (local farm) which accepts the green waste and uses the composted material as a soil conditioner has to seek planning permission, and constraints imposed over the first three years have included the number of vehicle movements per week and evidence of soil improvement following compost application. The Nottinghamshire County Council's Planning Department are, I understand, currently considering a new application for an extension of the licence.
- iv. We do not provide a receptacle (bin, box or sack) and therefore residents have to provide their own. This results in lower participation as it's based on an "opt out, use it if you like" principle. Over the past three years, trials have included provision of sacks and use of a wheeled bin (in Ravenshead and in Burton Joyce before the twin bin scheme was introduced) and participation levels increased considerably.
- v. For residents on a weekly collection of domestic refuse it has been just as easy to place organic waste in the domestic bin particularly as the Authority's current policy is to collect bins with bin lids slightly open and with garden waste contained within. Some residents on the Twin Bin Scheme and not on the current organic waste collection scheme are finding it increasingly difficult to dispose of all their waste and may have to visit the household waste centres more frequently.

There are many councils in England and Wales who have implemented services to remove and recycle garden waste for a fee. Many are offered as best practice, such as Sevenoaks District Council, East Hampshire, Bromsgrove District Council, Broadland District Council, Castle Morpeth, and Bexley Heath to name just a few. More locally, Blaby District Council, and Charnwood Borough Council have recently introduced such schemes, (source: Association of Public Service Excellence).

They are mentioned as best practice because they have performed well on at least one of the following:

- Operational issues/collection methods
- Participation rates
- Joint working, (Wyre Borough also collect on behalf of Blackpool District Council)
- Communication and publicity

Wyre Borough Council, Banbridge District Council, Chester City Council and Swansea City and County Council, however, do not offer chargeable services as many have taken up opportunities presented through Government (DEFRA) funding. Sevenoaks District Council have reduced charges by 50% following a successful bid for DEFRA funding. A list of current charges is shown in the appendix 2.

Broadland District Council have taken the opportunity to ban garden waste from the domestic bin arguing that the aim of this new scheme is to divert it from landfill to be composted. The Government's target for reducing biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill commence from 2010 and Nottinghamshire County Council (Waste Disposal Authority) are proposing composting outlets in their new PFI funded waste disposal contract. It will be a requirement for the Authority to remove organic garden waste going to landfill possibly by direction of the Waste Disposal Authority. In addition to this, each Authority that has been contacted regarding a chargeable garden waste collection scheme has strongly advised that we ban garden waste from the black bin as soon as possible.

3. Other Associated Waste Management Issues.

The introduction of the twin bin scheme has created operational problems within Direct Services. The biggest problem has been the increase in weight collected by the refuse crews on a black bin week and as a result the time taken for the daily collections to be completed. It is the department's key objective that we operate the refuse vehicles in accordance with our vehicle operator's licence and stay within the vehicle weight limits and working time directives imposed by law.

Adjustments to the refuse rounds are being made and whilst it has always been recognised that the costs of this service would increase it was believed that savings from the paper/cardboard recycling service could be achieved to compensate. However, the introduction of the kerbside box for glass has increased participation to the extent that the two glass collections rounds cannot cope with the level of increase and extra assistance is provided. As mentioned earlier, recycling credits and income from the glass are enabling these costs to be restricted but adjustments will have to be made to this year's budget and next year's funding requirements.

The good news is that the majority of residents are supporting these initiatives and our statutory recycling targets will be achieved as a consequence.

A recent survey of the NG4 post code (Netherfield and Colwick) highlighted missed bins as a concern with residents. Many streets and culs-de-sac are narrow and vehicle parking is a major problem in this area. Following Senior Management discussions (coupled with the operational issues highlighted above), it was agreed that a key budget requirement for next year would be the investment in another narrow refuse collection freighter and crew. In order to maintain expenditure to a minimum, I propose that the new freighter should be used on both services, refuse collection and organic garden waste until demand for either service (new properties or participation in the new waste disposal arrangements or the organic garden waste scheme) requires further investment.

4. Proposals

The main proposal outlined in this report is the introduction of a chargeable service for the collection of organic garden waste. However, two refuse collection policy issues also need to be re-addressed. The current policies are:-

- i. Garden waste will be accepted in the domestic refuse wheeled container
- ii. Wheeled bins will be collected providing they can be presented safely to the vehicle by the operative. We will not collect overloaded bins.

If we were to heed the advice offered to us by fellow councils currently operating a chargeable service we must ban garden waste from the black domestic waste bin. A ban would ensure that biodegradable municipal waste is being diverted from landfill and recycling targets are met. It would also reduce the amount of weight collected in the black bin on fortnightly collection schedules. Whilst we can introduce a green waste ban from the domestic bin, in reality it will be difficult to administer and residents will "do their utmost" to hide such waste in the bin.

The general consensus from authorities surveyed is that no bin is emptied if it contains organic garden waste. However, we would ask employees to be sensible and empty bins that have old houseplants or flowers as these can be classed as domestic household waste in accordance with the definition. The enforcement policy will be identical to the policy for Twin Bin.

A yellow card will be left if green waste is found in the bin. The contamination must be removed and the bin will be emptied within 3 working days. If a second yellow card is issued then the Waste Management team will visit the householder prior to issuing a red card which will mean replacing the bin with a smaller bin suitable to accept only household waste.

The second issue is far easier to enforce. To prevent overloaded bins we should introduce the "closed bin lid policy" which has been done in all our neighbouring District Authorities. Ashfield District Council introduced this policy last year and although it was unpopular, and received media coverage of the complaints, the Council reduced the amount of waste collected. Combined with the introduction of the twin bin, alternate weekly collections, the amount of space available for garden waste becomes very restrictive.

With effect from April 2005 an "opt in" organic garden waste kerbside collection scheme should be introduced, with the charge rates suggested later in this report. The service proposed is an annual scheme available with either reusable sacks or a brown wheeled bin.

If Members approve of the principles outlined in this report, officers will start preparing a membership scheme. Current ideas include reduced charges for other special collections (limited to two collection per annum), working with local garden centres and nurseries for advertising in literature and offering discounts on garden products, annual reward/competition, horticultural tips in an annual members publication and regular feedback on how well their neighbourhood is doing on recycling (a local league table).

It may also be possible to allow residents to have the soil conditioner to dig back into their garden. The above proposals will be packaged as incentives for joining the scheme.

Take up rates for the scheme will be highly dependent on cost and publicity and like most services on the market it could be some time before demand "peaks" and therefore forecasting income and expenditure is very difficult. Consideration has to be given to what financial outcome the authority requires from the introduction of this service. The following 3 scenarios are available:-

- i. An aggressive commercial venture to make a financial contribution to the Authority's finances.
- ii. A pricing mechanism designed to recover the costs of the service.
- iii. A subsidised service with the Authority determining an annual level of subsidy

Looking at other authorities organic garden waste schemes, some have gone for the commercial venture approach and others to recover costs of the service (and if they do well then all the better!). It must be recognised that initial set-up costs will be incurred and annual administration costs associated with the service will need to be budgeted for.

Therefore, for the purpose of this report, the financial implications are based on recovering costs. As the key variable is the participation in the scheme I am proposing that initially, the new vehicle purchased and the staff employed are initially used on both this service and refuse collection. I have based costing therefore on 3 days refuse collection, and 2 days green waste collection. On a fortnightly collection this would enable in the region of 2,000 properties to join the scheme.

Utilising an old freighter would accommodate additional properties as required, employing staff as necessary. This would enable a further 5,000 properties to be added to the scheme, which would equate to approximately 15% of the Borough participating. This would be similar to other Authorities participation levels such as Sevenoaks District Council.

5. Consultation

If Cabinet Members approve the recommendations outlined in this report, a full consultation exercise will be undertaken over the next month consisting of: -

- i. The Waste Management Team have already been tentatively asking questions at drop in sessions to generate interest and gather the response of the public. From 50 residents that were asked approximately 40 residents were interested in the scheme. The scheme generally seemed a lot more favourable to residents than queuing at a local tip to dispose of garden waste at the weekend.
- ii. A questionnaire will be included in the November Contacts magazine and will be used to gauge the type of service required and public interest for the scheme.
- iii. The questionnaire responses will be analysed according to area to ascertain which areas will need targeting for the green waste service.
- iv. Members will also be approached for their views and feedback from residents.
- v. The consultation will also involve contacting Parish Councils, housing associations, local gardening clubs and other groups.

Following the questionnaire respondents may be asked for further feedback, which will be incorporated in the operational planning of the scheme. It will also be highlighted that this service is the third option available to residents who wish to dispose of garden waste. Home composting and disposing of garden waste at the Household Waste and Recycling Centres will still be promoted.

6. Financial Implications

The main objectives for adopting a chargeable garden waste service are:-

- i. To reduce the amount of green waste in the black domestic bin
- ii. Increase the recycling rate and hit the 21% statutory target for 2005/06
- iii. Recover the costs, which will enable funding to be available for future targets to be achieved (currently unknown).

In considering the fee for an organic waste collection service, we should firstly set out to recover expenditure but also we must take into account the likely participation from our residents.

As illustrated in Appendix 1, the five selected Authorities charge between £19.20 and £30 for the service including a wheeled bin. Sevenoaks District council had a poor response initially with only a few hundred households taking up the option at £50.00. Following a reduction in costs to £25.00 through DEFRA funding, over 5,000 Households have now signed up. Charnwood Borough Council, who actively promoted the service at 50 pence per week, already have 4,500 properties on the scheme and only started it at the beginning of September. Broadland District Council, however, have over 15,000 householders paying £30.00 per annum for the service.

Our proposal would be for the residents to receive a fortnightly collection in spring to late autumn (Finishing in early December) and one collection in January and February; therefore we would guarantee each household joining the scheme 22 collections per annum.

Basing costing on the proviso that the new freighter could be utilised for both refuse collection and recycling, my provisional calculations suggest a fee of between £25 and £30 could ensure the service is self-financing. This is with no additional impact on the General Fund providing participation is around 2,000 households. It is this financial costing that I propose to consult on. Other authorities have successfully marketed their garden waste service at 50 pence per week (£26 per annum) irrespective of the number of collections and it is this marketing principle that I believe we should promote.

I would therefore propose the following fees:-

1	To provide a wheeled bin and to collect on 22 occasions between 1 st April 2005 and 31 st March 2006	£26.00 per annum or pro rata 50p per week
2	To provide each additional wheeled bin and to collect on 22 occasions between 1 st April 2005 and 31 st March 2006	£10.00 per additional bin
3	To provide 4 reusable sacks and to collect on 22 occasions between 1 st April 2005 and 31 st March 2006	£26.00 per annum or pro rata 50p per week
4	To provide 4 additional reusable sacks and to collect on 22 occasions between 1 st April 2005 and 31 st March 2006	£4.00 per additional 4 sacks

(The cost pro-rata shall be calculated on the number of collections remaining in the financial year plus the annual cost of the wheeled bin.)

A three-year membership is available at a guaranteed price of £78.00 for the service shown in option one above. Prices will generally increase each year by inflation from April 2006

7. Recommendations

- i. That Members approve the concept of introducing a chargeable organic garden waste collection service at the rates proposed in the report.
- ii. That the full consultation exercise is undertaken on the principles outlined in this report using the next edition of the Contacts magazine and that the outcome of the consultation process is reported to the cabinet meeting in January 2005.

8. Wards Affected

All Wards

**Organic Garden Waste Service
Comparison of Charges to Residents**

Local Authorities

Collection Arrangements	Blaby District Council Leicestershire	Broadland District Council Norfolk	Charnwood Borough Council Leicestershire	Castle Morpeth District Council Northumberland	Sevenoaks District Council Kent
Method of Collection Provision of 1) Container 2) Sacks	Yes Yes	Yes No	Yes No	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Frequency of Collections	Regularly	20 per annum	Fortnightly	Fortnightly	Fortnightly
Available to all residents	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Charge for Service Provision of 1) Container 2) Sacks	In collection costs 3 bags/£1.50	In collection costs Not available	In collection costs Not available	In collection costs 10 sacks/£1	£25 10 bags /£3
Charge per annum	£19.20 (less than 37p/week)	£30	£26 (50p per week)	£26	£25 was £50 reduced due to DEFRA funds
Other Information	Aim to offer the service to the whole of the district by 2005 Reduced service in the winter	Garden Waste banned from Domestic bin Reduced service in the winter	Authority on black sack domestic refuse service which will be changing by next summer	Authority on black sack domestic refuse service Aim to offer new service to more areas next year	Authority have now removed the charge for the bin also due to funding by DEFRA