

GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICES & COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE - 3 MARCH 2016

PART I - DELEGATED

8. CHARGING FOR GARDEN WASTE PROJECT (DCES)

1.1 To advise Members of the progress made in introducing charging for garden waste and to make recommendations for the Scheme's successful implementation.

2. Details

2.1 A report to Policy and Resources Committee on 25 January 2016 detailed proposals for charging for garden waste. The decision to take this project forward was deferred until a meeting of Full Council, at which time the Council's budget was set. (Minute PR80/15 refers) At Full Council Members agreed that the charges for garden waste be introduced from July 2016 and set at £35 per year, with a 20% concession for those residents in receipt of Council administered benefits. The general principal should be that the liable person or persons, for council tax, should be in receipt of one of the prescribed benefits, at the time of the application, in order to be eligible for the discount. This should reduce the instances where boarders/friends are living in a non-benefit household, who could then claim the reduced charge for that household.

2.2 It was also agreed that in year 1 (2016/17), the annual charge be reduced to £25 (£20 concession), to reflect that in that year collections would only take place over a nine month period. As detailed within the two previous Committee reports to Policy and Resources Committee (7 December 2015 and 25 January 2016), the charge for a second brown bin was to remain at £70.

2.3 The proposed project plan is attached as Appendix A. It should be noted that although timescales are tight, officers are confident that the dates are achievable. An officers project board has been formed and Members will note that, following the recommendations made by Policy and Resources Committee on 25 January, some actions have already been taken.

- 2.4 Members will note that it is intended that every household will receive a letter in May, detailing how the Scheme will operate. In order to minimise costs they will be directed to make payment via the Council's new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) portal, via the Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) website. When making the payment they will be asked to click and confirm that they have read and understood a standard set of terms and conditions (T&Cs), which will include payment details and other operational issues i.e. the non collection of garden waste bins over the Christmas period. Due to time constraints, officers have not yet had an opportunity to finalise either the letter, or the T&Cs and it is therefore suggested that this be delegated to the Director of Community and Environmental Services, in conjunction with the Lead Member for Public Services.
- 2.5 At the current time, the Council does not have the facility to accept direct debit payments, other than for Council Tax, Business Rates, and Housing benefit overpayments, through the e-pay web and phone payments systems. It is anticipated that direct debit payments will be facilitated by the end of the calendar year. With this in mind, residents initially will be asked to pay for the service by debit or credit card, but be asked to complete a direct debit mandate for all future payments. Paying by direct debit is a much more cost effective option for the Council as there are minimal and reduced administration costs. Therefore, officers recommend that from 2017/18 onwards a surcharge be offered to residents who wish to pay by credit card and that this surcharge be set at £5 i.e. based on existing prices, those paying by any form, other than direct debit will be charged £40 per annum (£33 concessions). Although, £5 may seem a high percentage (14%), it covers the additional administration costs (which are not covered in the collection charge to householders), including the sending out of reminders, taking of payment, issuing new stickers and any bank charges.
- 2.6 Consideration needs to be given to the term 'Council administered benefits'. Officers recommend that only the following 4 types of benefit should entitle a resident to be eligible for the reduced price garden waste collection:
- Housing benefit only (where paid by the council)
 - Housing benefit only (where included with Universal Credit paid by the Department of Work and Pensions ((DWP))*
 - Housing benefit and income based council tax reduction
 - Income based Council tax reduction.
- The DWP are migrating new housing benefit customers to Universal credit. Excluding this group would be discriminatory as they have no choice about having their housing benefit migrated to universal credit.
- 2.7 The table below shows the number of potential residents who would qualify for a discount:
- | | |
|---|-------------|
| Housing benefit only | 618 cases |
| Housing benefit and council tax reduction | 3647 cases |
| Council tax reduction | 862 cases |
| TOTAL | 5127 |

This would not include any single occupiers, who currently receive 25% Council Tax Single Person discount, as their reduction is not income related.

- 2.8 In view of the work involved in putting the scheme in place, officers recommend (to reduce administration and other associated costs) the charge be an annual one, based on the property, with no part-year refunds or transfer of payment to anyone moving house mid-way through the year. People moving into a property upon which payment has not been made for the year, who then request the service should be charged the full £35 if they sign up between April and September or at half-rate (£17.50) if they sign up between October and March.
- 2.9 It is intended that as in previous years, there will be a break to garden collections over the Christmas period, which will enable residents to have their residual refuse collected on a weekly basis over this time span. This will be written into the T&Cs and it will be made quite clear that residents are not paying for 26 collections in any one year and that the Council reserves the right to suspend collections for operational purposes. Officers also suggest that households with real Christmas trees will be able to leave them out on garden waste collection week and have them collected, regardless of whether they have paid to have their garden waste emptied, or not.
- 2.10 Despite setting up direct debit payments, there may be a number that fail each year. In these circumstances a reminder will be sent and the occupier given 3 weeks to pay. If they fail to pay within that timescale, collections will cease and their bin be removed. If this occurs and a resident requests that the bin is returned, officers recommend that a £25 delivery fee be invoked payable in advance, which will cover the costs of both collection and re-delivery, together with associated administration. This charge is in line with the trade service re-delivery fees.

3 Options/Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The collection of garden waste is a non-statutory function and within the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is listed as a service for which waste collection authorities may make a charge.
- 3.2 The average cost of collection and disposal per Three Rivers household per annum is assessed at £32.68. A charge of £35 will therefore cover these costs, but not the cost of introducing and administering the scheme. Although the implementation costs of such a scheme can be estimated at this time, the long-term administration costs cannot. It is however anticipated that by requesting that residents pay by direct debit, any ongoing administrative costs will be minimised.

4. Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations within this report are within existing Council Policy and Budgets. The relevant policy is The Environmental Protection Policy, updated on 24 February 2016.

5. **Financial Implications**

5.1 Projected income for this scheme has been included in the Council's three-year medium term financial plan.

6. **Staffing Implications**

6.1 There will be additional staff required in both the Customer Service Centre and Environmental Protection, in order to ensure that the Scheme is implemented seamlessly by July 2016. These however have been budgeted for and included within the Council's budget setting process.

7. **Customer Service Implications**

7.1 Additional CSC staff will be recruited on a temporary contract to assist with the increased number of telephone calls. This should reduce the impact on CSC service levels through increased customer waiting times and abandoned calls.

7.2 The CSC will also be involved in reviewing scripting and any collection route changes. Time will need to be allocated to ensure that staff members are fully trained to be able to answer a variety of questions about the new service.

8. **Website Implications**

8.1 Any service changes will need to be promoted on the Council's website, which will be updated by Environmental Protection staff.

9. **Legal Implications**

9.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990 allows for the charging of the collection and disposal of garden waste.

10. **Environmental, Equal Opportunities and Community Safety Implications**

10.1 None specific at this stage.

11. **Risk Management Implications**

11.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

11.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Environmental Protection service plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.

11.3 The following table gives the risks that would exist if the recommendations are agreed:

Description of Risk	Impact	Likelihood
1. Resident satisfaction decreases	I	C

2. Not enough households participate	II	E
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11.4 The following table gives the risks that would exist if the recommendation is rejected, together with a scored assessment of their impact and likelihood:

Description of Risk	Impact	Likelihood
3. Residents satisfaction decreases	I	C
4. Scheme not implemented by July – income reduces	III	A

11.5 Of the risks above 1, 2, 3 are already included in Environmental Protection Service Plan.

11.6 The above risks are plotted on the matrix below depending on the scored assessments of impact and likelihood, detailed definitions of which are included in the risk management strategy. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood are plotted in the shaded area of the matrix. The remaining risks require a treatment plan.

Likelihood ↑	A			4			Impact	Likelihood
	B						V = Catastrophic	A = >98%
	C	1,3					IV = Critical	B = 75% - 98%
	D						III = Significant	C = 50% - 75%
	E		2				II = Marginal	D = 25% - 50%
	F						I = Negligible	E = 2% - 25%
		I	II	III	IV	V		F = <2%
	Impact →							

11.7 In the officers' opinion risk 4, if it were to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan, and are therefore operational risks.

12. Recommendations

That General Public Services and Community Safety Committee agree:

12.1 The project plan attached as Appendix A.

12.2 That the terms and conditions of the Scheme and letter to residents be delegated to the Director of Community and Environmental Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Public Services.

12.3 The surcharge for payments not made by direct debit in future years (2017/18 onwards) be set at £5.

12.4 Only those benefits detailed within Section 2.6 be eligible for the concessionary rate and authority to decide on eligibility for concessionary rates is delegated to the Head of Community Services.

- 12.5 That the operational details outlined in paragraphs' 2.8, 2.98 and 2.10 be adopted.
- 12.6 That further reports be brought back to future meetings of the General Public Services and Community Safety Committee, in order to consider the success of the Scheme and review any future charges.

Report prepared by: Alison Page, Chief Environmental Services Manager

Background Papers

Minutes to General Policy and Resources Committee – 7 December 2015
Minutes to Policy and Resources Committee – 25 January 2016
Full Council – 2 February 2016