

Policy Finance and Development	28 <sup>th</sup> October 2014	Matter for Decision
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Title: **Green Waste – Residents’ Choice of Collection Method**

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### URGENT DECISION

The Chairman of this Committee has agreed to the admission of this item under Section 100 B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 as an additional item of business which needs to be considered as a matter of urgency. The reason why this matter needs to be considered before the next meeting of this Committee is to meet procurement timelines for continuation of frontline services.

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 This report sets out how the present green garden waste collection scheme operates. It highlights some of the complex operational issues the Council faces. It then sets out some possible options as to the way forward with a suggested solution.

#### 2. Recommendations

That Members approve **Option 6.7** as set out in the report in that:

- 1.1 The Council provide households with re-usable green garden sacks free of charge for garden waste.
- 1.2 Members are asked to decide on a limit of either two or four sacks to be provided to each household
- 1.3 Where a household’s requirement is more than two or four (dependent on the decision of 1.2 above) garden sacks, the use of sacks will be replaced with a bin free of charge. A bin can hold up to eight to ten sacks worth of green waste.
- 1.4 Households which put out less than two or four garden sacks will also have the choice of being provided with a free bin.
- 1.5 Additional bins will be made available to ensure there is an unlimited collection service
- 1.6 Members are asked to decide if there should be a charge made for any additional bins and if so, on what basis that charging scheme would be.
- 1.7 Members are asked to approve the high profile implementation strategy as set out in Section 7 of this report.

#### 3. Information

The green garden waste service presently operates as follows:

1. The garden waste scheme is available to every household in the borough and there is a collection every two weeks. There is a participation rate of

approximately 50% and 3,000 tonnes of garden waste is collected per year.

2. There is no limit to the number of free reusable sacks on request.
3. The scheme was originally set up so that each household could have four free reusable sacks. Additional sacks were then allowed and charged at £3.30 each. This charge was then stopped so that each household could have a free and unlimited number of sacks collected. This was all in anticipation of the Council setting up and operating its own composting site, which for technical reasons now cannot be progressed. These reasons were reported to the Service Delivery Committee in September 2013. The Council's collection rates for green waste averages 75,000 to 80,000 re usable sacks every two weeks.
4. The collection is carried out by a dedicated green waste vehicle that collects 5 days per week and is operated by a driver and a crew of 3. Every Monday each of the domestic refuse vehicles also collects garden waste operated by a driver and a crew of 2. This service has operated all year round but will now cease in December 2014 and January 2015 and recommence in mid February 2015 as very little green waste is produced in those months. This will free up the refuse and recycling workforce to deliver waste and recycling literature such as the annual collection calendars that ordinarily incur the costs of an external distribution company. This also provides an opportunity for enhancing promotion of recycling. During these months it will also enable rotation of crews to facilitate training and save on agency staff costs.
5. For health and safety reasons the weight limit for each sack is 7kg which has resulted in some properties having up to 40 sacks emptied every two weeks.
6. All the green garden waste collected is transported to the County Council operated Kibworth Civic Amenity site. From November 2014 this site is likely to be in Countesthorpe.

#### **4. Operational Issues**

4.1 As previously explained overleaf in order to divert as much green waste away from landfill as possible the Council extended the scheme so that there is no charge for any additional sacks. This was to encourage residents to recycle as much of their garden waste as possible and in anticipation of the Council setting up and operating its own composting site.

4.2 It was established from the Health & Safety Executive that if more than six sacks were being lifted in a minute then the weight of each sack should be between 5 and 10kg. The HSE Risk Assessment for the handling of sacks which assesses this is attached in **Appendix 1**. From 2011 onwards, due to this, all residents were advised in the annual calendar that sacks should not be put out that weighed more than 7kg. This has had to be strictly enforced during the last year with the ever increasing number of overweight sacks that were being put out; some of these containing up to and over 20kg per sack of green waste. The increased volume of garden sacks since 2001 has resulted in crews reporting potential serious injuries from lifting and emptying the increased

volume. They have also reported increasing abusive behaviour towards them when overweight sacks are “stickered” as uncollectible due to excessive weight.

4.3 Crews all receive health and safety training, have regular team meetings, are issued with and wear the appropriate personal protective clothing and the Manager and Supervisor continually spot check working practices on the rounds.

4.4 An analysis of sickness statistics for the last few years shows that approximately 10,000 hours have been lost. A significant amount of this has been due to musculo skeletal injuries such as back pain/sprains/strains eg hernias. This is primarily as a result of the manual lifting and emptying of bags and sacks. Sickness absences are covered by the use of agency staff and there would be a direct cost saving if sickness levels were reduced of up to £2,000 per month.

4.5 The crews are now instructed to “sticker” and leave any sacks over the weight limit. To counter this, residents simply request more free sacks and put less in them so they are below the weight limit and the Council collects them. This has resulted in the following:

- i. Residents are very unhappy. There is a huge amount of resident queries and complaints average ten a day when sacks are left behind which all take time to answer and respond to.
- ii. Whilst the weight is being distributed over more sacks the mechanics of lifting and tipping by the crew are repeated much more often which still poses an increased health risk. Even if there are a number of sacks all just below the 7kg limit, there is still an argument that the crews are handling excessive weights overall.
- iii. Over 100 new reusable sacks are being requested every day – requests are up by approx 500 calls compared to the past 2 years. This together with the complaints blocks the switchboard for significant periods.
- iv. The cost of the additional sacks is £128 per 100 which equate to an extra £2,560 a month.
- v. It is estimated that approximately 20% of residents are putting out up to 20 + sacks at every collection some have been up to 40 sacks. This appears to be a localised issue with particular concentrations in Oadby and parts of Wigston.
- vi. One full time member of staff had to be diverted as a dedicated resource to deliver these sacks. This ceased as a result of the Waste Task Group at the end of August 2014. The Council will continue to deliver sacks to those vulnerable, frail and disabled residents on the assisted list. Sacks are available to be collected by any resident from Brocks Hill.
- vii. Major logistical and operational problems as it takes so long to collect and load all the additional sacks, crews are not now able to finish their rounds on the set and advertised days so additional resources are needed the following day or other collections are delayed

- viii. Because the sacks are open if it rains then the sacks that weigh below the 7kg weight limit become sodden increasing the weight. This is frustrating for residents and crews and is outside of any control mechanism
- ix. Diverting the Supervisors and Manager into having to spend their time visiting the most difficult complaints. This can average between one and two hours per day.
- x. Very low moral within the workforce made worse by the abusiveness of some of the residents.

## **5. The Council's Dilemma**

The Council cannot continue to operate the existing system as it is at the moment due to the factors highlighted above. It must, however, take the following into consideration when determining how to find a solution that moves the service forward as positively as it can in the circumstances:

5.1 It has a duty of care to its workforce and must therefore accept the findings in the HSE Risk Assessment by limiting the weight of each sack to approximately 7kg based on the volume being collected.

5.2 It may not want to be seen to be reducing a front line service by limiting the amount of green waste that it is prepared to collect.

5.3 It may not want to be seen to be re introducing charging for additional sacks collected over a certain number (two or four).

5.4 It does not want to introduce bins without giving residents a choice.

5.5 It must accept that in order to deal with the additional demand for the service there will be an increase in revenue costs.

5.6 There is considerable uncertainty about the continued County Council funding of recycling credits for green waste from April 2015 which could amount to a loss of approximately £80,000 per year.

5.7 As this is a core service it is good practice that its operation should not be funded from reserves. Any additional costs will have to be prioritised against all other service pressures as growth bid for the 2015/16 base budget.

## **6. Possible Options Including Financial Implications**

### **6. 1 Continue with the Service as Now**

The Council cannot continue on an operational basis with the system as it is at the moment due to the factors highlighted above

#### ***Positive Consequences***

From the residents' perspective who are satisfied with the green bag system the service will appear as it does now.

The service will continue to be free

The service will continue to be unlimited.

### ***Negative Consequences***

Residents are frustrated by the weight limit per sack and the need for them to use and spread this over voluminous numbers of bags

Some residents have expressed the view that they would like the choice of a bin or sacks

The Council would have to fund additional operating costs of approximately £30,000 per year

There will still be fundamental operational issues such as the logistics of changing collection rounds and health & safety.

Workforce sickness levels will continue to be high and moral would continue to be low

The Council cannot continue on an operational basis with the system as it is at the moment due to the factors highlighted in this report.

## **6. 2. Stop the Service**

### ***Positive Consequences***

The Council could justify this on the basis that Leicestershire County Council proposes in its Medium Term Financial Strategy to withdraw paying recycling credits. This would be a loss of £80,000 per year towards the cost of the service

All the operational issues would disappear immediately

There would be an annual revenue cost saving of £145,000

The Council would need to purchase two less refuse vehicles making a capital saving of approximately £300,000

### ***Negative Consequences***

It is a high profile service that residents highly value so there would be a significant amount of complaints which would have a negative effect on the reputation of the Council

The amount of green waste going to landfill would increase

There maybe an increase in fly tipping

## **6. 3. Limit the Number of Sacks Collected to Two or Four**

### ***Positive Consequences***

From the residents' perspective the very basic service of a sack collection would appear to continue as it does now

It would solve some of the operational issues

It would contain revenue costs to the present level

### ***Negative Consequences***

Residents would be unhappy at having an unlimited service changed to a limited service resulting in a drastic increase in complaints

The amount of green waste going to landfill would increase.

The Residents would have to take garden waste in excess of the bag limit to the civic amenity site themselves

There is likely to be an increase in fly tipping

Health and safety concerns would still not be fully addressed specifically lifting, inhalation and abuse

## **6.4. Charge for any Sacks Collected over Two or Four**

### ***Positive Consequences***

From the residents' perspective the very basic service of a sack collection would appear to operate as it does now

Residents may not wish to pay for any additional sacks so there may be a reduction in demand which may solve some of the operational issues

It would contain revenue costs to the present level if it creates an income stream that would offset some of those costs

### ***Negative Consequences***

Residents would be unhappy at having a free unlimited service changed into one where charges were introduced so there would be an increase in complaints

There will still be fundamental operational issues that may not be fully resolved in that it does not resolve the issue of unlimited sacks; but this will dependant on the number of residents who wish to continue with sacks

Health and safety concerns would still not be fully addressed specifically lifting, inhalation and abuse

Workforce sickness levels likely to continue to be high and moral likely to continue to be low with a system that still has the potential of an unlimited sack collection service

There would be an increase in the amount of green waste going to landfill

There maybe an increase in fly tipping

The Residents would have to take garden waste in excess of the bag limit to the civic amenity site themselves

A charging system will be impractical to introduce, complicated to administer and audit and likely to need increased resources

## **6.5 Introduce Bins to replace Sacks**

### ***Positive Consequences***

It will solve all of the operational issues

The service can continue to collect unlimited green waste

The service can continue to be free of charge

Residents would have a choice of joining the scheme and having either a large or small bin

It will reduce revenue costs on the following basis:

Supply of reusable sacks	£ 35k
Reduction in Agency Staffing	£15K

Total Revenue Savings per annum	<b>£ 50k</b>
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If the Council decided to charge for additional bins it would create an income stream that would offset some of the revenue operating costs

### ***Negative Consequences***

Residents will not have a choice and will have to use a bin rather than sacks which they may be unhappy with

Residents may be unhappy about the ascetics of there being bins in the borough

There may be some properties where bins will not work

If the number of bins were limited or additional bins charged for then it is likely that residents would be unhappy

There will be an increase in capital costs through borrowing in order to pay for the bins

23,000 properties with an opt in rate of 65%	= 15,000 properties
15,000 properties x £17.30 (cost of a bin)	= £260k.

**6.6. Provide residents with two or four Sacks free of charge with additional sacks chargeable or Free Unlimited Bins. The Council could decide to charge for additional sacks or bins.**

**Positive Consequences**

Residents will have an individual choice if they want sacks or a large or small bin

The service will still be unlimited but there will be a charge

The service has the opportunity to be a totally free service ( ie keeping within the sack limit/bins provided free of charge ) or partially free

Depending upon how many residents choose bins instead of sacks it would result in some of the operational issues disappearing

Revenue costs will be reduced in proportion to the number of residents that choose bins rather than sacks. This could result in an annual revenue saving in the region of £15,000.

If the Council decided to charge for additional bins or sacks it would create an income stream that would offset some of the revenue operating costs

**Negative Consequences**

There will still be fundamental operational issues that may not be fully resolved in that it does not resolve the issue of unlimited sacks; but this will dependant on the number of residents who wish to continue with sacks

Health and safety concerns would still not be fully addressed specifically lifting, inhalation and abuse

Workforce sickness levels likely to continue to be high and moral likely to continue to be low with a system that still has the potential of an unlimited sack collection service

Residents may be unhappy about the ascetics of there being bins in the borough

There will be an increase in capital costs through borrowing in order to pay for the bins of in the region of £120,000 dependant upon take up.

Residents may not be happy if a charge is now introduced for additional sacks over two or four and may not be prepared to pay. This could result in more waste going to landfill and more fly tipping or residents will have to take garden waste in excess to the civic amenity site themselves

Residents may not be happy to pay for additional bins. However the demand for additional bins is not expected to be as great as additional sacks because the first bin will take the equivalent of eight to ten garden sacks



A charging system will be impractical to introduce, complicated to administer and audit and likely to need increased resources

**6.7 Provide Residents with Two or Four Free Sacks. If any additional sacks are requested then a free bin would be provided. The Council could decide to charge for any further additional bins.**

### **Positive Consequences**

Residents that use no more than two or four sacks would see no change from the existing system.

If residents wish to put out more than two or four sacks they would be given a bin, free of charge that would take the equivalent weight of up to 8 – 10 sacks.

Residents who put out less than two or four sacks would also have the choice of if they want sacks or a bin.

The service will still be unlimited

The service will still be free using sacks or a bin which will hold up to the equivalent of 8 -10 sacks. Council can decide if it wishes to charge for additional bins

If residents wish to share the new bins then the Council will work with them to facilitate this.

The Council will work with the owners of terraced houses who have limited storage space to see how they can best accommodate the new bins if they want them

Revenue costs will be reduced in proportion to the number of residents that request bins rather than sacks. This could result in an annual revenue saving in the region of £25,000.

Depending in how many residents use a bin then a proportionate amount of the operational problems would disappear.

If the Council decided to charge for additional bins it would create an income stream that would offset some of the revenue operating costs

### **Negative Consequences**

There still maybe some operational issues that may not be fully resolved but this will be dependant on the amount of residents with sack collections

Residents may be unhappy about the ascetics of there being bins in the borough

Residents maybe unhappy as they will have no choice but to have a bin if they want more than two or four sacks

There will be an increase in capital costs through borrowing in order to pay for the bins of in the region of £130,000 dependant upon participation.

Residents may not be happy if a charge is introduced for additional bins which they may not be prepared to pay and could result in more waste going to landfill and more fly tipping

## 7. Suggested Solution

7.1 Through a process of elimination and in order to achieve a balance that would hopefully be the most acceptable to residents and would work operationally and financially **Option 6.7** above is suggested as the best way forward ie. **Provide Residents with Two or Four Free Sacks. If any additional sacks are requested then a free bin would be provided. The Council could decide to charge for any further additional bins.**

7.2 It must be emphasised that this suggestion is only in relation to the collection of garden waste, if approved, it will not inevitably follow that domestic refuse and recycling collections will also be collected using bins.

7.3 If this is approved by members then implementation would be based on the following:

- Borough wide publicity from November 2014 onwards to notify all residents that the existing scheme will cease at the end of November 2014 and will be replaced by a new scheme from February 2015. Easter 2015 falls in the middle of April.
- There will be a leaflet drop to every household in the borough together with an article on the website and updates to the Forum meetings and on all the Notice Boards.
- A separate leaflet will also be attached to the reusable garden sacks so that all existing service users have additional notification.
- As part of this the Council will also advertise to all residents heavily subsidised compost bins which will be delivered direct to their homes.
- The publicity will offer various and many ways of how residents can contact the Council to request bins or sacks right up until the scheme starts in 2015 and then afterwards.
- All residents will be given the choice of continuing with up to two or four sacks or a 240ltr or 140 ltr bin and can change them if they are not happy when they are delivered.
- If the number of requests for sacks subsequently reduce then it may be possible to deliver them direct to the household.
- All residents who put out less than two or four sacks will also be given the choice if they wish to have a bin
- Although the existing scheme will finish at the end of November 2014 the Council will be flexible and make one off collections after that date if requested.
- The Council will offer to take away and dispose of any unwanted existing reusable sacks if the resident chooses to have a bin

- If residents wish to share the new bins then the Council will work with them to facilitate this.
- The Council will work with the owners of terraced houses who have limited storage space to see how they can best accommodate the new bins if they want them. A survey of the high density terraced houses in the borough has identified that approximately 12% of those households currently recycle garden waste. These household will be free to choose if they still want to have up to four sacks
- The Council will publicise and then collect real Christmas trees in January.
- Each household will be given the opportunity to have up to four sacks or a 240lt or 140ltr bin delivered to them free of charge and emptied free of charge every two weeks.
- Residents will be able to put as much green garden waste in their bin as they can fit in – usually between 8 -10 sacks worth.
- Additional support can be provided to those residents who have been historically putting out excessive amounts of green waste.
- Residents will be able to continue to use four sacks but must restrict each sack's weight to 7kg
- At the present time four of the six districts in Leicestershire charge for the collection of additional bins of between £20 and £27 per year.
- There will be no dedicated green waste collection vehicle as there is now but the new fleet of refuse vehicles will be flexible enough to be able collect sacks, bags and bins on the same round.
- Staffing levels will be reduced due to operational efficiencies.
- There will be a review of the scheme at the end of the first summer's operation.

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### Background Papers:-

<b>Implications</b>	
Financial (PL)	The recommended option (6.7) provides revenue savings to the General Fund which could compensate for the additional revenue costs (interest and minimum revenue provision) of the borrowing required to fund the additional capital cost of the wheeled bins.
Risk (PL)	Decreasing financial resources – CR1 and Effective utilisation of assets/buildings (health and safety implications) – CR5
Equalities (KG)	It is of concern that the current scheme has a negative impact on the health and safety of employees in respect of their age, disability and gender. An EIA is required to consider the mitigation of such negative impact.
Legal (KG)	The duty of care owed to employees particularly in respect of their health and safety has to be of paramount

	<p>concern. The fact that the employer has the knowledge of these associated health and safety risks and an alternative is not adopted to mitigate those risks, is likely to lead to personal injury and/or breach of contract claims by affected staff.</p>
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