

CABINET 16 OCTOBER 2017
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*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 5A
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TITLE OF REPORT: ITEM REFERRED FROM ITEM REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 9 OCTOBER 2017 – SHARED SERVICE FOR WASTE AND STREET CLEANSING – SELECTION OF OPTIONS

The following is an extract from the Draft Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 October 2017.

This referral contains only comments and discussion relating to the issue of charging for garden waste. A resume of the complete discussion regarding the selection of options will be available in the full minutes of the meeting

54. SHARED SERVICE FOR WASTE AND STREET CLEANSING – SELECTION OF OPTIONS
Collection of Garden Waste

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services presented the report entitled Shared Service for Waste and Street Cleansing – Selection of Options and in respect of the collection of garden waste drew attention to the following:

In terms of consultation, a questionnaire had been circulated to local authorities across the Country that already charged for the collection of garden waste to inform officers on the potential impacts of the service to which they received 19 responses.

There was a risk of increased fly tipping as a result of this proposal, however data from a “nearest neighbour” in relation to fly-tipping showed no noticeable increase following the introduction of charges.

Charging for garden waste would likely have some effect on household recycling centres, with residents increasing their use of the facilities and discussions had been held with Hertfordshire County Council on these matters.

It should be noted that over 50 percent of local authorities in the England now charged for the collection of green waste.

Members referred to the consultation of residents in North Herts and noted that 85 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the introduction of chargeable garden waste. This was not unexpected by officers.

They expressed concern that there were many valid reasons why certain residents should not be charged for this service including those who were less able to afford the charges or those who were less able to go to the waste and recycling centres and queried what support would be put in place.

There was also concern that the survey did not include an option stating “I am not prepared to pay for garden waste collection under any circumstances”, which may have skewed the data collected and queried whether this was a purely budget led policy.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services advised that the Financial Strategy demonstrated that the pressure on finances was significant and that this would result in Members having to make tough decisions about what non statutory services they wanted the Council to provide and how they wished to provide them.

Other authorities had introduced charging for the collection of garden waste and research had taken place regarding the impact of that, demonstrating that uptake was usually greater than anticipated through public consultation.

The Service Manager – Waste and Recycling advised that the Council had employed consultants to review and advise on the questions included in the survey.

It was inevitable that residents would not want to pay for a service that they had previously received free of charge, but the survey was about exploring whether there was an appetite to pay for the service and what charges may be considered reasonable.

Members were concerned that the Council had asked people whether they wanted to pay and then appeared to take no notice of the response, which had made the perception of the Council worse and were also concerned about the impacts of the introduction of charges on other services within the Council.

The Service Manager – Waste and Recycling advised that the Council had a duty to consult regarding major service change.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services advised that they had undertaken research regarding nearest neighbour authorities and this had demonstrated that take up would likely be higher than the survey results suggested, with Three Rivers District Council reporting a 74 percent take up. He confirmed that the level of take up could have an effect on the Alternative Financial Model,

Members stated that confidence in the Council was currently low and that going ahead with charges, when such a large response had been received against the proposals would reduce that confidence further.

A Member referred to the reasons for recommendation and queried whether the Council should be more ambitious when setting targets regarding recycling.

Questions were also asked regarding whether any research had been undertaken on the possible effects of this policy on the eco system, in that people may choose to cover their garden with concrete or decking rather than pay for the collection of the garden waste

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services advised that NHDC was consistently in the upper quartile regarding recycling and that as higher targets are achieved, it became more difficult to increase the percentage collected.

The Service Manager – Waste and Recycling advised that she was unaware of any research undertaken regarding effects on the eco system.

Members asked whether introduction of charges would result in an increase in the amount of waste going to land fill.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services advised that there was no clear evidence of this from those Council's that had already introduced charges, this would largely depend on take up and the smaller 180L residual bin in North Herts would limit this.

The Service Manager – Waste and Recycling advised that, as part of their research they had contacted many local authorities to ask what they felt were the positive and negative impacts of charging for this service and the response had been that services had been successful and residents had taken up the service as it was often the cheapest and most convenient way to dispose of garden waste.

She noted that, although residents may well put some garden waste in the residual bin, the amount would be limited due to the size of that bin.

In respect of consultation, Members commented that questions could have been phrased in a different way in order to set the financial context and that to go ahead with charging for garden waste collection despite the response from the consultation opened the Council up to criticism.

The Communications Manager advised that this is often difficult in a large scale consultation and more easily done in smaller focus groups.

The Service Manager – Waste and Recycling advised that the Council would likely have been criticised if the question regarding whether residents wished to pay or not had not been included in the survey and that this question had encouraged people to complete the survey resulting in further information being gathered.

The Communications Manager reminded Members that the Council had a duty to consult and to listen, but may choose not to agree with the responses for various reasons.

Following consideration of the Part 2 report, Members debated that Cabinet should consider very carefully and give due weight to the negative responses received to the consultation regarding charging for garden waste collections.

They were also concerned that the public be kept fully informed and therefore Cabinet, if minded to charge for the collection of garden waste, be asked to make every effort to communicate to the public the reasons for doing so.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet be requested to give due weight to the feedback from the public consultation that 85 percent of residents who responded disagreed or strongly disagreed with introducing a chargeable garden waste service alongside weekly food waste collections;
- (2) That, if minded to charge for the collection of garden waste, every effort be made to communicate to the public the reasons for doing so.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the report entitled Shared Service for Waste and Street Cleansing – Selection of Options prior to consideration by Cabinet

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