

**CABINET  
23 June 2020**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE IMPACTS OF COVID 19**

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR ELIZABETH DENNIS-HARBURG

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the service disruption for the collection of garden waste in North Herts since services were suspended due to the Covid 19 outbreak on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and asks to consider and agree initiatives and recompense that recognises the inconvenience caused to our residents.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Council agrees an extension of the current 12 months payment period for green waste collection, for a further period of 2 months [The loss of income based on current (48%) uptake is approximately £186,000].

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To acknowledge service disruption / suspension in our garden waste collection service and demonstrate to residents that the Council accepts the inconvenience caused during the seasonal peak of garden waste production.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Reimbursing all residents that were signed up to the service on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 has been considered by the executive member and officers. This option was discounted as the administrative costs of providing a refund to those affected would not be economic or practical.
- 4.2 Reducing the cost of the next sign up period has been considered. This was discounted as it will not recompense residents who do not sign up to the new subscription period and may benefit residents who have not been affected by the disruption we are seeking to redress. The financial recompense may not be considered sufficient by some residents.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

Consultation was undertaken with our Executive Member and there is a general expectation that fair and proportionate redress will be provided to all residents affected.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

6.1 This is a key executive decision and first went on the Forward Plan on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## **7. BACKGROUND**

7.1 On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 the World Health Organisation declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern for the coronavirus known as Covid 19. During March social distancing measures were introduced along with initial guidance on self-isolation.

7.2 On 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the government issued a countrywide lockdown and strict social distancing measure in an attempt to reduce the rate of infection from Covid 19.

7.3 The shared waste service operates with 126 frontline staff and on 25<sup>th</sup> March 10% of frontline staff were self-isolating with concerns that this number would rapidly rise over the coming days and weeks.

7.4 On 26<sup>th</sup> March the decision was therefore made to suspend garden waste and food waste collections in North Herts.

7.5 A decision was made to reinstate services from 11<sup>th</sup> May resulting in residents experiencing three missed garden waste collections over a six week period.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

8.1 An extension to the existing 12 month paid garden waste service can be provided with minimum overheads and administrative cost to paying customers of the garden waste service. The loss of income is circa £93,000 per month of extension. There are currently approximately 28,000 residents in North Herts that subscribe to our garden waste collection service.

8.2 An extension of two months would see the new start of the next sign up period beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> October. This is after the main growing season and may initially result in a reduced take up of the service.

8.3 It is likely that the majority of residents not signing up for an October start, who have previously used the service will sign up in spring. If the majority of these sign ups are after 1<sup>st</sup> April this will further impact on the financial position for 2020/21.

8.4 Had a reduced rate of £35 for the 2020/21 subscription period been offered the financial implications would be estimated to be in the region of £140,000, assuming a similar level of take-up to this year.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include, at 5.6.8 To monitor quarterly revenue expenditure and agree adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and at 5.6.11 To approve those major service developments or reductions which also constitute Key Decisions. This report covers such proposed changes.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 As detailed above the total cost of extending the 12-month paid garden waste service by two months would be around £186,000. The cost of the extension would be incurred in 2020/21 and if approved will be incorporated into the budget. This is a one-off cost. The Council will include this in returns to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on the financial impact of Covid-19. It is unknown to what extent the Council will receive compensation for lost income.
- 10.2 As highlighted in paragraph 8.3, there is a risk that some residents will not sign up again until after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. This could further affect the budget position for 2020/21, although this could be off-set by an improved position in 2021/22.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There is a reputational risk to the authority if we do not offer any recompense for the suspended service and the inconvenience caused to residents. This could have an adverse effect on our residents' perception of the waste collection service and Council services in general as well as reducing the number of residents choosing to sign up for the service in future. For the vast majority of our residents, there has been understanding and support for our waste collection service and we rely on them to participate in recycling to ensure we maintain our high levels of performance.
- 11.2 There is a risk of reduced sign up numbers as residents are less likely to need the service during the winter months. It is expected that the majority of these will sign up later in March or April 2021.
- 11.3 If the sign up period is not extended this will impact on the length of time available for residents to sign up to the new subscription year. Past experience has demonstrated that short sign up periods put significant pressure on the Customer Contact Centre at Urbaser and would result in poor call answering performance and complaints. A phased sign up period has been planned for this year.
- 11.4 If the sign up period is not extended there is a risk that the new sign up website will not be ready due to delays experienced with Barclays in setting up the direct debit processing due to their Covid 19 related impacts.
- 11.5 The Shared Waste Services client team has two vacancies. Recruitment and training of new staff is impacted by Covid 19. It is therefore not likely that all vacancies will be filled with permanent staff in time for the new sign up period, impacting on capacity within the team. A delay to the sign up period will assist in ensuring the staff resource requirements can be managed.

- 11.6 There is a risk that frontline staff will be affected further by the virus spread. So far only one frontline staff has been confirmed as having had Covid 19 as testing was not available when staff were originally self-isolating. Depending on the impact of future self-isolation, this could lead to further service disruption. Any need for further redress for any disruption experienced will be considered separately in addition to this report.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no equalities implications.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this report.

## **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to suggested recompense. Section 8 indicates that there may be a reduced sign up in the removal of garden waste. It is not possible to quantify the reduction or assess what residents will do with green waste if not collected. Waste may be home composted or otherwise disposed of through residual waste streams.

## **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 The garden waste collection service requires an increase in staffing both within the client team and Urbaser during the sign up period, the impact on staff it is not expected to be over and above the normal increase in resource requirements during sign up which we anticipate will be filled by agency staff.
- 15.2 The Shared Waste Services client team has two vacancies, with a third vacancy from mid June. Recruitment and training of new staff is impacted by Covid 19 it is therefore not likely that all vacancies will be filled with permanent staff in time for the new sign up period.

## **16 APPENDICES**

- 16.1 There are no appendices.

## **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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**18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None