

REPORT TO: Environment & Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 25 November 2015

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Environmental Services

SUBJECT: Garden Waste Collections

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with information in respect of the Council's garden waste collection service.

2. RECOMMENDATION: That Members consider and comment upon the report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At their meeting of 25th March 2015, Members of the Board received a presentation on the Council's garden waste collection service. Members were provided with an overview of the introduction of a charge for providing the service which had been agreed by Full Council as part of the 2015/16 budget setting process, following savings proposals presented by Officers.

3.2 Members were advised that local authorities are legally entitled to make a charge for the separate collection of garden waste and that the significant and continued cuts to the Council's funding had led officers to recommend the introduction of a charge in Halton. The income from charging for the service was intended to make the service self-financing; meaning it would not require a subsidy from Council budgets.

3.3 Members requested that an update be presented to the Board once the chargeable service had been implemented and this report provides information in respect of the issues previously raised by Members together with details of the financial implications and other impacts of the scheme.

4. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Service Take-up

- 4.1 The chargeable service came into effect from 1st June 2015. Prior to this date, all households that are offered a garden waste collection by the Council were provided with an information leaflet advising of the new charge and explaining the reasons for its introduction.

Overall, there was a very positive response to the introduction of the charge and at the time of writing this report 15,215 households had subscribed to the service; which represents a take-up rate of over 36% of eligible households.

Financial Implications

- 4.2 The cost of the service for the 2015/16 subscription period is £30 per bin per year, or £25 per bin if paid online via the Council's website. As a number of householders requested to pay for additional bins to be emptied the number of paid subscriptions totalled 15,721 which resulted in income of **£405k**.

The income received from subscriptions is sufficient to cover the operational, management and administrative costs associated with providing the service; meaning that the objective of making the service self-financing has been achieved.

Garden Waste/Residual waste Analysis

- 4.3 An analysis has been carried out between garden waste tonnages for the four month period following the introduction of the charge in June 2015 compared to the corresponding period in 2014. This was to assess the impact of the charge on the tonnages of kerbside collected garden waste and that deposited at the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

4.3.1 Kerbside Collected Garden Waste

June to September 2014:	3,232
June to September 2015:	1,831
Difference	- 1,401 Tonnes

4.3.2 Garden Waste Deposited at HWRCs

June to September 2014:	737
June to September 2015:	1,099
Difference	+ 362 Tonnes

- 4.4 The above information shows a reduction in the amount of garden waste collected at the kerbside and an increase in that deposited at the HWRCs. This was anticipated as some residents were expected to make their own arrangements to deal with their garden waste.

- 4.5 The increase in garden waste at the Household Waste Recycling Centres is significantly less than the reduction in the amount collected through the green bin service. Reasons for this could include less garden waste being generated in 2015, some residents choosing to home compost their garden waste or private gardeners taking away waste from householders who have paid to have their garden maintained.
- 4.6 Members had concerns that some residents may deposit garden waste into their black bins to avoid paying for their green bin to be emptied; resulting in increased disposal costs. Mechanisms were put in place to mitigate the risks of this occurring. Collection crews were asked to be vigilant and if garden waste was found in black bins, they were left unemptied. Residents were then advised that the bin would not be emptied until the garden waste had been removed and properly disposed of. An analysis of black bin waste shows that there was a reduction in the number of tonnes collected between June and September 2015 compared to 2014, indicating that garden waste being placed in black bins does not appear to have been a significant issue.

Payment Rates

- 4.7 As stated above, a £5 discount was applied for payments made on line. To help minimise administrative costs it is a common practice for retailers and service providers to encourage online payments by offering customers a lower fee/charge compared to those who pay by making direct contact with the organisation. In recognising that not all residents may have access to a computer, and that some may have limited skills, the Council offers free equipment and internet access from a number of Council libraries and other community facilities across the borough to provide opportunities for residents to pay online. Despite the Council offering and promoting these opportunities, very few residents actually used these facilities to make payment.
- 4.8 The information below shows the breakdown of how subscription payments were made. As can be seen, the vast majority of payments were made online but almost 2,300 subscriptions were made via the Contact Centre or One Stops Shops at the full rate of £30.
- Via Web: 13,415
 - Via One Stop Shops: 1,665
 - Via Contact Centre: 631
- 4.9 Overall, there was not an adverse public reaction to the introduction of the garden waste charge and the number of complaints and negative comments received was relatively low. Of those received, one of the major issues related to the Council offering a discounted rate for online payments, with residents claiming that this approach was discriminatory and that those who were unable to make online payments, or who preferred not to, were being penalised. This is a matter that Members may wish to give consideration to.

- 4.10 As the service is managed on a self-financing basis, with all costs associated with operating the scheme needing to be recovered, the Council is unable to offer concessions to specific groups of people. The service charge therefore applies to all households who request the service to be provided regardless of the personal circumstances of the occupiers. Similarly, there is no discount applied to subscribing for the collection of more than one green bin. Members are advised that neither the lack of a concession nor the offer of a discount for additional subscriptions were the subject of any noteworthy level of complaint or challenge from members of the public.

Fly-Tipping

- 4.11 Members had queried whether the introduction of the charge would lead to significant increases in the fly-tipping of garden waste. Prior research showed that other councils that had introduced similar schemes had not seen such an increase. Officers have been closely monitoring this matter and the tables below show the number of incidents of fly-tipping for garden waste and for other general waste items reported to the Council since the introduction of the charge.

Table 1 - Incidents of Garden Waste Fly-Tipping

Month	2015	2014
June	6	7
July	8	9
August	11	9
September	15	2
Total	40	27

Table 2 - Incidents of 'General Waste' Fly-Tipping

Month	2015	2014
June	60	36
July	53	70
August	54	47
September	67	46
Total	234	199

- 4.12 The information in Table 1 shows that there has been an increase in the number of reported incidents of fly-tipping of garden waste compared to last year. Whilst this is disappointing, the overall number of reported incidents of fly-tipping remains relatively low. The information in Table 2 shows that the number of incidents of fly-tipping of other waste has also increased during the same period when compared to the previous year.

- 4.13 The increase in 'general waste' fly-tipping, together with the fact that there was actually a reduction in garden waste fly-tipping incidents for the first two months of the subscription period, could suggest that the overall increase in the number of incidents of garden waste fly-tipping was not attributable to the introduction of the charge for collections. Furthermore, it should be noted that as these figures are the number of reported incidents, it may be that there has not been an actual increase in fly-tipping, merely that residents are becoming more vigilant and notifying the Council.

Scheme Administration

- 4.14 As a new scheme, systems for the implementation and management of the chargeable collection service were required to be developed which included the development of new ICT systems, web applications, online payment mechanisms, Customer Service Delivery systems and administrative processes. A robust system of identifying subscribed properties was also needed to ensure that collections were delivered to those households that had paid for the service and also to reduce the potential for abuse by non-subscribed householders.
- 4.15 Council officers developed and introduced new and innovative systems and processes for the management of the chargeable garden waste service. Indeed, the Council is actively promoting its newly developed ICT systems to other local authorities who may be looking to introduce garden waste charges; representing a potential income generation opportunity for the authority. Officers consider that other local authorities would benefit from adopting the customer service and administrative processes that the Council has introduced and these are also being shared and promoted as best practice.

Summary

- 4.16 The decision to introduce a charge for garden waste collections was not taken lightly but the Council's financial position was such that it was no longer possible to maintain the service free of charge. As well as providing an opportunity to deliver a self-financing operation; thereby contributing towards the Council's budget savings target, introducing a charge represented a fairer approach as only those who requested the service would pay; in the same way that charges are only made for bulky items collections to those households that request one.
- 4.17 The information set out in this report seeks to demonstrate that the Council has successfully developed and introduced a new chargeable scheme which has made a positive financial contribution to the Council's budgetary position, whilst maintaining a valued front line service which is reflected in the public response and take-up rate.
- 4.18 Members of the Waste Topic Group; Councillors Sinnott, Zygadllo, Stockton and Chris Loftus, are thanked for their contributions to this report.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no new policy implications associated with this report.

6. OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The financial implications are set out within the body of report.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.1 Children and Young People in Halton

No direct impact

7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

No direct impact

7.3 A Healthy Halton

No direct impact

7.4 A Safer Halton

No direct impact

7.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

No direct impact

8. RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1 There are no equality or diversity issues as a result of this report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Council Report 4 th March 2015 – Budget 2015/16	Municipal Building	Strategic Director - Community and Resources
Environment & Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board Report 25 th March 2015 – Garden Waste Collections	Municipal Building	Strategic Director - Community and Resources