

ITEM 8 Garden Waste Collection Service

Report of the Head of Environmental Services (Portfolio: Environment)

Recommended:

That the contents of the report and the continued success of the Garden Waste Collection Service be noted.

SUMMARY:

- The following report provides details of the Garden Waste Collection Service, the contribution the collection of garden waste makes to the overall recycling rate and assurance that the service is fit for purpose.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the Garden Waste Collection Service, the contribution it makes to the overall recycling rate and to provide assurance that the service is fit for purpose.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Garden Waste Collection Service began on 10 May 2004. At the time, the service was designed around the collection of garden waste using reusable sacks that were returned to the resident following collection.
- 2.2 At the same time, a borough wide ban was introduced for garden waste in black household waste bins.
- 2.3 By January 2005, 9564 households had joined the service and 12,761 sacks had been sold.
- 2.4 The service was initially supported by a DEFRA award of up to £565,000. The award covered the capital costs for the purchase of the two original collection vehicles and the initial revenue operating costs.
- 2.5 The DEFRA award also allowed for the opportunity to employ two recycling officers on fixed term 1 year contracts. Their role was to encourage participation in the service, solve queries and problems, to work with local groups and to give presentations and attend events.
- 2.6 The Controlled Waste Regulations 1992 and 2012, both list various types of household waste for which collection charges can be made. Both include garden waste and as such, the service has been chargeable since its introduction in 2004.

Charges are made based on the number of receptacles subscribers wish to have. The charging regime allows for discounts for second and additional sacks or wheeled bins.

- 2.7 The service has seen a few amendments to its charging structure since its introduction including moving from complicated quarterly prices to annual subscriptions and removing the Early Bird and Concessionary Rates. The current, simplified charging structure can be viewed below:

	Annual Charge
First Subscription	£31
Additional Subscriptions	£17.50

- 2.8 The cost of the Garden Waste Collection Service is regularly benchmarked against neighbouring authorities. This shows that the charges in Test Valley are amongst the lowest being made and represent good value to those that choose to subscribe. For example, the most expensive in Hampshire is Hart at £68.85 for a 240 litre wheeled bin and £45.90 for a sack. This is closely followed by East Hants (£68 for one bin) and Havant (£62 for one bin). Other examples are Eastleigh £36 (bin); New Forest £32 (sack); Rushmoor £39 (bin); and other neighbours - Wiltshire £44 (bin).

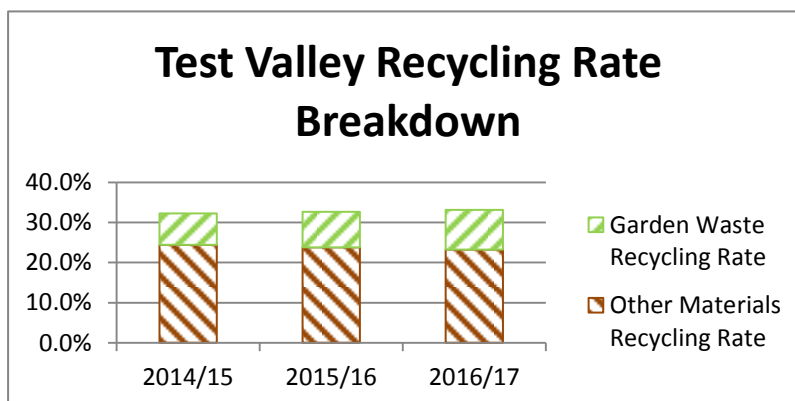
3 Current Service

- 3.1 The service continues to be provided to residents using two frontline collection rounds – one located in the north of the borough operating out of the Portway Depot and the other in the south operating out of the Bourne House Depot. Garden waste is collected every fortnight with the exception of two weeks over the festive period where collections are suspended.
- 3.2 All of the collected garden waste is direct delivered to a composting facility near Stockbridge where it is composted and turned into a product called 'Pro-Grow' - a high quality organic soil conditioner. Pro-Grow can be bought at any Household Waste Recycling Centre or online.
- 3.3 Currently 489 households receive an assisted collection for their garden waste.
- 3.4 The service has obvious seasonal influences. The service is quieter during the winter months, but during peak growing seasons or periods of leaf fall, the service becomes much busier. To ensure the collection rounds continue to perform to high standards, the routes are monitored for efficiency and staffing is increased, but the number of vehicles cannot be.
- 3.5 Since 2004, the service has remained largely unchanged with the exception of wheeled bins being introduced in September 2014. Wheeled bins were not introduced to replace reusable sacks, instead they were provided as an alternative. It is estimated that around 50-60% of subscribers now choose to present their garden waste using a wheeled bin. A charge is made for the purchase of wheeled bins.

- 3.6 The waste collection vehicles that are deployed onto garden waste collections are bespoke and have the ability to lift wheeled bins as well as an area to manually empty reusable sacks. Whilst these purpose built vehicles allow the flexibility to collect using the two different receptacles, the process for emptying bins is particularly slow especially compared to a traditional waste collection vehicle. By virtue of the close proximity to the lifting mechanism when emptying sacks, a safety requirement means that the bin lift is operated manually on the garden waste vehicles and not automatically as on other frontline waste collections rounds.
- 3.7 Demand for the service has always been very high with the number of households subscribing remaining fairly static at around 10,800 per year (approx. 21%). However, the service has seen an increase in demand since the spring of 2016 where subscriptions exceeded expectations reaching 12,000 (approx. 22.5%). The trend appears to have continued with the number of subscribers already reaching 12,000 for the current year. Whilst there is no certainty as to what has caused the increase in demand it is likely that the option of a wheeled bin is more appealing to some householders than a reusable sack. To a lesser extent, the growth in property numbers across the borough will also be having an impact.

4 Performance

- 4.1 Since its introduction, the Garden Waste Collection Service has made a significant impact on the overall recycling rate for the borough.
- 4.2 The following chart illustrates the overall recycling rate over the last three years, clearly showing the contribution that the inclusion of garden waste makes. Over these three years, the collection of garden waste has contributed, on average, 8.85% to the overall recycling rate. Each year the contribution is increasing, having a positive effect on the Council's overall recycling rate.



5 Digital Transformation

- 5.1 The Council's Digital Transformation Strategy 2016-19 sets out how the Council will approach redesigning systems and processes to be agile, innovative and to have the customer at their core.
- 5.2 The strategy seeks to make use of the technology and systems we already have to help keep costs down.

- 5.3 Through using the ‘My Test Valley’ app and other internal systems, providing the ability for householders to self-serve or ‘do it online’ has meant that we have achieved efficiencies and improvements within the service and throughout the wider council.
- 5.4 Of the 12,000 households currently subscribed, 62% receive information about the Garden Waste Collection Service by email and 23% have signed up to pay by direct debit. For those households that do not opt to pay by direct debit, a sample from April 2017 (5000 payments) has shown that 63% chose to pay online and 14% chose to pay using the automated telephone service. Only 23% chose to pay via the Council’s Customer Services team.

6 Pressures

- 6.1 The growth in subscribers is putting significant pressure on the level of resources being deployed on the collection of garden waste. This pressure is felt mainly during the growing season or autumn leaf fall. If the level of demand is sustained, careful consideration will be need to be given on how the service manages. The least desirable option would be the introduction of a third collection round because the overall service costs would significantly escalate. As more customers make the transition to wheeled bins, it may be necessary to consider a shift to a wheeled bin collection only service. By virtue of their design and the mechanism used for emptying wheeled bins means that collections are much more efficient and much less manually challenging than reusable sacks.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Garden Waste Collection Service is thriving. With 12,000 customers regularly subscribing; more than half choosing to use wheeled bins; and a contribution of almost 10% (2016/17) to the Council’s overall recycling rate, the service is almost becoming a victim of its own success and is an essential part of the Council’s approach to waste management within the borough.

<u>Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)</u>			
<u>Confidentiality</u> It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.			
No of Annexes:	0	File Ref:	
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