 Proposed Changes to the Garden Waste Service – moving from bags to bins

Summary

Whilst the council is pleased at how successful the green garden waste service has been since it was launched in 2006, it also recognises that the service needs to be updated.

Concerns have been raised with us by residents, contractors and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) around the safety of using a green bag collection scheme. In addition, given the financial challenges facing local authorities, it is vital that the new waste and recycling contract is as efficient and cost effective as possible.

It is unfortunate that we are being forced into looking at changing a scheme that is so popular with residents, but the council would be behaving irresponsibly if it did not take the opportunity of addressing these concerns when awarding the new contract.

Using bins to collect garden waste not only solves the issues that have been brought to our attention, but is also a more cost effective way of operating the service. The majority of contractors who operate a green garden waste service up and down the country do so using wheeled bins.

By introducing bins, the council is making sure that the future green garden waste service is safe, sustainable and provides better value for money for our council taxpayers.

In addition, as part of the changes to the collection service, we will provide reduced price composting bins and help local communities and parish councils to develop community composting solutions.

Headline rationale and impact mitigation

There are two main reasons why the council is proposing to change the method of collecting garden waste from households from green bags to green bins.

1. To reduce the health and safety risks to operators, users and members of the public and to future proof the contract

2. To make the service more environmentally and financially efficient, enabling us to protect other valued services

Whilst the introduction of bins is essential, we understand that some residents may find bins difficult, either because of the layout and size of their property and garden, or because they have difficulty getting the bins to the kerbside. We will assess people’s circumstances and ensure that arrangements other than bins will be put in place where necessary. It is also worth noting that we will provide smaller 120 litre bins on request, which many residents may find easier to use. As part of the procurement process, the Council is talking to prospective contractors about the exact solutions and the detail will become clearer as the process develops.
1. **Health and Safety**

- Where the council uses a contractor to provide services, it has a **duty** to ensure that the **activities** of that contractor **do not adversely affect the health and safety** of anyone who may be impacted by those activities

- The council’s **ability to fulfil that duty is restricted by the current green bag scheme.** This is because there are a number of **significant and inherent risks which it cannot mitigate:**

  **Manual handling risks for the waste operatives:** the green bag system increases the risk of injury as it involves frequent and repetitive carrying, and lifting above elbow height of heavy, non-rigid, bulky containers containing irregular and sharp protruding items in varying environments, including when it is wet, windy or dark.

  **Risks to pedestrians and road users where green bags blow around onto the highway, increasing the likelihood of accidents:** this risk is particularly high where collections are made on busy main roads and in inclement weather

  **Handling risks to residents when using the bags** many of which are similar to those identified above for waste operatives

- With the current recycling and waste contract due to end, the council has begun the process of awarding a new contract. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance requires the council to **design out risks and hazards** when specifying the details of a new contract. If the council does not take this opportunity to change the garden waste service, it is increasingly likely that the council could be found in breach of health and safety regulations. As a result **we have no choice but to design the new service in a way that minimises health and safety risks**

- The new contract will be for a term of seven years, with an option to extend it for up to a maximum of 20 years. While the HSE hasn’t yet indicated that bag collections for green waste are non-compliant, it is **likely that a bag method of collection will become unacceptable and obsolete** during the course of the new contract. If the council does not make the change now there is a **substantial risk that the new bin system could be imposed on us at a later date.** This would cause significant additional costs to the council such as the purchase of alternative vehicles, and would cause frustration and confusion for residents.

- Officers have already discussed these issues with potential contractors who have indicated that the current bag scheme presents a substantial health and safety risk. Contractors have advised that the current green bag collection system would be a **significant barrier to their willingness to participate in the procurement process**

- In summary it would be irresponsible, both financially and from a safety point of view, if we did not redesign the service now as we tender the new contract.
2. **Efficiency**

- Under the current green garden waste scheme, residents can put out an **unlimited number of green bags for collection** and the contractor has a limited knowledge of which households are likely to present garden waste.

- A green garden waste service which residents sign up to means that the contractor will have better knowledge of the number and locations of properties from which he is required to collect, as well as the maximum number of bins. This allows the contractor to **plan better the collection routes and resources required**, resulting in a more efficient and cost effective service. Initial estimates are that this **could save in excess of £700,000 over the life of the initial term of the contract**.

- The new system would also **minimise opportunities for abuse of the system by commercial gardeners**.

- Limiting how much garden waste can be put out for collection (in the same way as we do for residual waste), together with positive promotion of home and community composting, will **encourage residents to think about alternative solutions for their garden waste**.

- Each year it costs around £1m to provide the garden waste service, of which around £300,000 is spent on processing garden waste collected at the kerbside. **Reducing the amount we spend on collecting and processing garden waste will allow the council to focus more resources on other important services**

- We need to adhere to our principles of **“reduce, reuse and recycle”** for garden waste in the same way as we do for other household waste
What would the service look like?

- Residents will need to register to the service.

- There will be a one-off registration fee per bin – the fee will depend which size of bin is requested, the largest bin available will be no more than £20 per bin, which includes delivery.

- The bin is designed to last for 10 years so although there is a higher one off cost it will be cheaper than replacing bags over the same period.

- There will be three sizes of green bin:

  Standard = 180 litre, the same size as the standard black refuse wheeled bin. The standard size will hold equivalent to two to three of the current green waste bags.

  Smaller = 120 litre, holds equivalent of one to two bags.

  Larger = 240 litre, holds equivalent of three to four bags.

- Residents can request up to two green bins, if they think that they need more than this the waste team will contact them and discuss / assess their requirements.

- There will be no charge for the collection service itself.

- The frequency of collection will stay the same: fortnightly during March to November and every four weeks during winter.

- Residents will be able to pay for their green bin registration fee online, over the telephone or in person at gateways/libraries.

- Assisted collections will be available for residents who find it difficult to take their green bin to the edge of their property.

- We recognise that not all residents will be able to have a green bin for example if there are steps leading to/from the highway collection point. During the dialogue process we will be working with contractors to explore the best solution for such properties. The solution we believe would work is to provide a new smaller garden waste bag which might be emptied by the contractor into a ‘slave bin’ (wheelie bin carried by the collection crew) and then tipped into the vehicle:

  In line with the bin service, residents will need to purchase the new bags, which could be charged at cost price

  Residents who need to use the new bags will be limited to how many they can present for collection each time

- The revised service will start on March 1 2017 with bins being delivered to households in the period prior to this
FAQs

Q. I’ve heard that my waste and recycling collections will be changing, what’s going on?
A. The council’s current waste and recycling contract will end in 2017 and it is in the process of awarding a new contract. This is an opportunity for the council to improve the service. The council is currently discussing options for the new contract with contractors who are interested in bidding for it. These discussions have included extending the times that waste and recycling are collected, including Saturday collections, and helping residents to recycle more. One area of the service being discussed is the green garden waste collections, where the council is proposing introducing wheeled bins instead of the current green bags and residents will be asked to register for the service.

Q. Will I have to pay for a bin, why can’t the council provide me with one?
A. Residents who register for the green garden waste service will need to pay a registration fee. There will be three different sizes of green bin and the fee will depend on the size, but it will not be more than £20 per bin. This includes delivery of the bin which is expected to last for a minimum of 10 years. At the moment residents can pay £2.50 for a green bag which will need to be replaced a few times over a 10 year period. So while registering for the green waste service costs more initially, it should save residents money over time when compared to the cost of replacing multiple green bags.

Q. How many bins can I have and what size are they?
A. Residents will be able to have up to two green bins and the council will be offering three different sizes of bin. The standard size will be 180 litres (the same size as the standard black refuse bin) which will be able to hold the equivalent amount of garden waste as two to three green bags. A larger 240 litre bin will be available which will hold the equivalent of three to four green bags as well as a 120 litre bin, which will hold the equivalent of one to two green bags. If residents think that they need more bins they will be able to request them and the council will work with them to discuss their requirements.

Q. I think I’ll have more green waste than I can fit in a green bin, what am I supposed to do?
A. The council understands the concerns residents have about having too much garden waste to put in the new bins which is why there will be three different sizes of bin available. Information from the current green garden waste service suggest that the majority of residents who use the service put out three or less green bags out for collection – that’s the equivalent of a single 240 litre green bin. Residents who think they need more bins will be able to request them and the council will work with them to discuss their requirements and look at how they might be able to reduce the amount of green waste they produce. The council will also be encouraging residents to try home composting (by offering reduced price composters) which not only reduces the amount of green waste but also produces a soil conditioner that they can use on their garden. Residents will still be able to take green waste to any of the council’s three recycling centres, just as they are at the moment, free of charge.

Q. I don’t have a car to take any extra garden waste to the recycling centre, what do you suggest?
A. The council will encourage residents to try home composting which will reduce the amount of garden waste that needs to be collected. Residents who register for the green bin service may offer to share their bin(s) with a near neighbour.
Q. You say you’re being flexible so why not just give people the choice where they can have a bin or keep their green bag(s)?
A. The types of vehicles that are used to collect green waste are different depending on whether crews are collecting bags or bins. There are differences in the machinery and heights that crews have to lift the containers which means that the same vehicle cannot be used to collect waste from both green bins and the current green bags, so it isn’t possible for the council to offer both options. In addition, it must be remembered that the primary reason for changing the current system of collection is that it does not meet health and safety standards.

Q. Why not just limit the number of green bags that people can put out for collection rather than introducing a bin scheme?
A. The council has considered this as an option, but this wouldn’t address the health and safety issues already described.

Q. Will collections remain free or will a charge be introduced?
A. No, residents will need to register for the new green garden waste service but collection will remain free of charge.

Q. If bins are introduced will the collection still be fortnightly in the summer and every four weeks in the winter?
A. Yes, the frequency of the collection will remain the same.

Q. I can’t have a black wheeled bin so how I am supposed to be able to have a green bin?
A. The council recognises and understands that there are some circumstances where it is not possible for a property to have a bin, for example where there are steps to the collection point. We already deal with these issues in relation to bins for residual waste. Where this is the case, the council will work with residents to discuss their requirements and offer an alternative arrangement.

Q. Where am I supposed to put another bin?
A. It is anticipated that green bins will be stored somewhere in the garden where the green waste is being produced. Where there are access issues at a property, for example if the only way to get into a garden is through the house, the council will work with residents to explore an alternative arrangement.

Q. How will you help me if I can’t manage to put my bin out for collection?
As is currently the case for residual waste bins, we will assess your needs and arrange an assisted collection where appropriate. Smaller bins are also available, which some residents may find earlier to use.

Q. Will I still be able to use my green bags for you to collect garden waste?
A. No, the current green bags will no longer be used when the green bin collection service is introduced from March 1 2017. Residents may wish to reuse the bags but the bags will no longer be collected or provided by the council once the green bin service starts.
Q. The council says it consulted with people on this change, I wasn't consulted – who did you ask?
A. A public consultation was carried out in autumn 2012 when the council’s waste strategy was being prepared. Residents were asked their opinions of the green waste service. While a slight majority of residents responded in favour of keeping the green waste service unchanged, significant numbers also favoured limiting the amount of green waste put out for collection which is what we are now proposing through the introduction of bins. The council does not believe that the proposed change from bags to bins represents a significant enough change to the service to warrant to further, wide-scale public consultation. In broad terms, the service itself is staying largely the same and arrangements will be put in place to deal with circumstances where a bin is not practical.

In addition, whilst residents' view are extremely important, in these circumstances we believe that health and safety requirements must dictate our actions.

Q. When will the green garden waste service change?
A. The new waste and recycling contract will start on March 1 2017 and this is when the new green bin scheme will come into effect. The council will do everything it can to make sure that the change to green bins is as easy as possible for residents and will keep them informed of how the service is changing, including making sure that residents have the new green bins in time for the start of the service.