

Appendix B – Minutes of a meeting of the Executive reconvened from 15th September 2022

At 10.00 am on Tuesday 27th September, 2022 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Jason Smithers (Leader of the Council) (Chair)	Councillor Helen Howell (Deputy Leader of the Council)
Councillor Matt Binley	Councillor Harriet Pentland
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor Graham Lawman
Councillor David Howes	

Also in attendance – Councillors, John McGhee, Jean Addison, Mike Tebbutt, Jonathan Ekins, Wendy Brackenbury, David Jenney, Martin Griffiths and William Colquhoun

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The Chair, Cllr Jason Smithers welcomed Cllr Martin Griffiths to the meeting to address the Executive. Cllr Griffiths spoke to reference the current performance of bin collections in the Wellingborough area and that the introduction of any charge for green waste collections given the current cost-of-living crisis was an error, especially as the vast majority of public consultation responses were against it. Cllr Griffiths concluded by noting that the introduction of a charge would set a dangerous precedent when tackling other levelling-up issues and requested that the issue be put to Full Council for decision.

Cllr John McGhee was then invited to address the meeting. Cllr McGhee stated that the service should be funded from general taxation and considered the imposition of a charge for the green waste service to be a stealth tax. He noted that harmonisation had to occur, but this did not require a charge to be levied across the board as residents had clearly stated that they did not wish to see the introduction of a charge in this regard.

The Chair then invited Cllr Jean Addison to speak on the item. Cllr Addison noted that the public consultation had been well supported, with the vast majority of respondents stating there should be no charge for the green waste service. Cllr Addison stated that a charge for all was not harmonisation, rather levelling-up in reverse and that the will of the people should be listened to.

Cllr Martyn Reuby, Chair of Corby Town Council was invited to address the meeting. Cllr Reuby felt that the proposal to level a charge for the service was regressive, unworkable, and impacted those who could not afford the additional cost, with Corby Town Council opposing the scheme in the strongest possible terms. Residents would

not sign up to the scheme and there would be an issue of contaminated black bins. The Executive was requested to take onboard the outcome of the public consultation and not approve the scheme.

Mr Lee Forster then addressed the Executive and queried how the proposed scheme met with the Council's ambition to have climate and environmental considerations as the golden thread running through its activities, stating that implementation of the charge would be an environmental disaster as residents chose other ways to dispose of their green waste by burning it or hiding it in general waste bins. Mr Forster noted that the Council needed to educate residents on the benefits of composting and provide them with the tools to do so, concluding that introducing a service charge was not the right thing to do in the current financial climate.

The Chair thanked the speakers for attending the meeting before inviting Cllr Graham Lawman, Executive Member for Highways Travel and Assets to introduce a report that asked Executive to consider the future of the garden waste service for North Northamptonshire and to make a decision as to how this would be funded based on a number of service models outlined in the report, together with the associated financial implications.

Cllr Lawman also thanked the speakers for their contributions as well as all those who had taken part in the public consultation process between March and April 2022 and officers involved in the formulation of the proposals before members.

Cllr Lawman noted the need for harmonisation of the garden waste service, especially in regard to bringing the former East Northamptonshire area into line with the remaining Council areas, residents in this area currently paying a £55 annual subscription charge. There was the possibility of legal challenge should this situation not be addressed.

It was heard that aside from the public consultation process, both the Service Delivery, Performance and Customers Executive Advisory Panel and the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee (with Scrutiny Commission members invited) had considered the proposals, with the response of Scrutiny circulated to Executive in advance of the meeting.

Cllr Lawman noted that as a result of the adjournment of the meeting of Executive on 15th September, two minor amendments were required to start dates (from 1st November 2022 to 1st December 2022) relating to an amendment in subscription costs for East Northamptonshire residents and a rebate of £20 per bin per year for all existing garden waste customers in East Northamptonshire who renewed their subscription.

The meeting heard that green waste collections were not a statutory service and currently incurred an annual cost to the Council of £2.695m. The unfairness of the system inherited from legacy authorities was noted, aside from East Northamptonshire's subscription costs, residents who did not have gardens or generate green waste were expected to contribute fully to the cost of the service through general taxation.

Cllr Lawman referenced the outcomes of the public consultation noting that the vast majority of respondents wished to see the service harmonised across the Council area, acknowledging the desire for the service to remain universal through general taxation.

The meeting was advised that given the need for the Council to make significant financial savings in the forthcoming year in line with its Medium-Term Financial Plan, it was recommended that a 12-month service be funded through subscription charges. It was noted that it was likely that such a service model would have been considered even if the former East Northamptonshire area was not being charged a subscription. Over 80% of local authorities nationally charged for green waste collection services and it was stressed that even with the implementation of a subscription service, the Council would still face a significant financial pressure as the subscription charge would not fully fund the cost of operation. The Council would continue to cover the remaining cost of operation through general taxation and Council funding.

Brief details were provided as to how subscriber's bins would be identified should a subscription service be approved, with alternative options to bin collections detailed, including an enhancement to the current subsidised home composting container scheme to promote more home composting as an environmentally sustainable option and to support residents who do not wish to subscribe to the garden waste service. An initial total of 1000 composting bins would be available at a cost of £5 plus delivery to residents. In addition, properties which were not suitable for wheeled bins could access the collection service by way of a compostable sack which could be presented in the same way as the wheeled bin available through an ad hoc pre-pay solution costing £16.50 for 10 x 75 litre sacks.

Cllr Lawman concluded by recommending Executive adopt Option C as detailed in the report, a 12-month subscription-based service to start with effect from 1st April 2023 with the annual subscription charge set at £40/bin/year (for the first bin) and £16.50 for the ad hoc sack collection service. Additional bins would be charged on a full cost recovery basis.

The Chair invited the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Wendy Brackenbury to address the meeting. Cllr Brackenbury stated that at the meeting of the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 16th August, to which members of the Scrutiny Commission had been invited, all members had requested to see a harmonised green waste collection service, with the majority believing this should be provided from general taxation. It was noted, however, that a number of attendees were concerned that continuing the service without a subscription charge would negatively impact the Council's budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Chair reiterated for clarity that the Council would not be making a profit from the subscription service, if approved, a deficit would remain to be picked up by general taxation.

Members of the Executive then spoke in relation to the proposals. All members noted the difficulty of the decision, acknowledging that in the current financial climate a subscription service was not an imposition that the Council wished to make on its

residents, however, there was a responsibility not to run the Council into fiscal difficulties.

Furthermore, there was a view to promote home composting as the most environmentally sound use for green waste and this accorded with the environmental commitments of the Council.

Cllr Matthew Binley stated that he had taken part in the public consultation. To ensure transparency, members of the Executive were asked to indicate who had also taken part in the consultation as set out below. Members confirmed that they were approaching the decision with an open mind, voting on the decision based on the debate detailed above:

- Cllr Matthew Binley
- Cllr David Howes
- Cllr Graham Lawman
- Cllr Helen Howell

RESOLVED

KEY DECISION

That the Executive:

- a) Agreed to harmonise the garden waste collection service across North Northamptonshire;
- b) Recover some of the costs of providing the service only from those who use it by charging a subscription fee for a service operating 12 months of the year (option C as set out in the report).
- c) Agreed that, from 1st April 2023, for North Northamptonshire, the annual subscription charge will be set at £40/bin/year (for the first bin) and £16.50 for the ad hoc sack collection service. Additional bins will be charged on a full cost recovery basis.
- d) Agreed to change the current subscription charge of £55/bin/year in East Northamptonshire to £40/bin/year (for the first bin) for all residents in East Northamptonshire from 1st December 2022. Additional bins will be charged on a full cost recovery basis.
- e) Agreed to apply a rebate of £20/bin/year for all existing garden waste customers in East Northamptonshire who renew their subscription (and only on their next renewal) after 1st December 2022, for a period of 12 months only,
- f) Agreed to provide subsidised home composting bins, as set out in the report, to promote home composting as an environmentally sustainable alternative to kerbside collections of garden waste.
- g) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets in consultation with the Executive Director of Place and Economy to take any further decisions and / or actions required to

conclude this process and implement any approved service updates. This will include, but not be limited to:

- i. finalising the Terms and Conditions of the service;
- ii. approving the updates to the Council's Waste and Recycling Policy in relation to any changes to the garden waste service.

Reasons for Recommendations:

- The recommended option will harmonise the garden waste service across all North Northamptonshire which will ensure parity across North Northamptonshire
- Option C makes a contribution to the overall financial stability of the Council and to its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). It reduces the need to use budgets allocated for other services to fund a garden waste service.
- The recommended course of action will reduce the Council's carbon footprint by reducing the number of Heavy Goods Vehicles used for service delivery, assuming participation is at 40%.
- Current staffing issues, which have been experienced by many local authorities across the country, have reduced the reliability of the garden waste service for some residents, particularly in the Wellingborough area. Reducing the number of crews required to deliver the service reduces the number of staff members required and thus reduces the risk of disruption caused by staff vacancies and absences.
- A subscription service provides residents who need to dispose of garden waste with the choice of whether they wish to use, and pay towards, an opt-in service or whether they wish to use another legitimate disposal route, such as home composting or visiting the Council's Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). The tax contribution from those who do not need the service, such as those without a garden, would be reduced considerably by covering most of the operating costs through the subscription charge. This is considered a more equitable method to fund this optional service.
- The option to use the compostable sacks service provides residents with the choice to have their garden waste collected on an ad hoc basis for a lower price. This seeks to provide an alternative for those with smaller gardens or who are not in a position to subscribe for the 12-month, fortnightly service.
- Home composting is an environmentally sustainable alternative to kerbside collection of garden waste, which the Council wishes to encourage and promote. The subsidised offer for home composting bins seeks to encourage this environmental practice.

- The rebate of £20/bin/year for existing garden waste customers in East Northamptonshire who renew after 1st December 2022 acknowledges the disparity that has existed since Vesting Day in the way in which the garden waste service is funded. It also seeks to retain their custom during the period of transition to the new service.
- The charge for the first bin has been set below the cost recovery threshold in an effort to make it more affordable for residents, particularly in light of the current cost of living pressures. For additional bins, it is not considered appropriate that the cost of providing these bins is met from general taxation and therefore they will be charged on a full cost recovery basis.

Alternative Options Considered – to fully inform the decision on the future of the garden waste service in North Northamptonshire, an analysis of service delivery options has been conducted by an officer working group to identify impacts and benefits for each of the alternative options.

The option to retain the service under the current legacy arrangements was considered, which would continue the situation with different areas receiving different services. The Council had received significant feedback from residents living in the area of East Northamptonshire, who were only able to access the subscription service, whilst other residents in North Northamptonshire had access to a service which did not require a subscription payment. Residents expressed their expectation that parity for chargeable services was one early benefit to them of the recent formation of the new Council. Delaying the harmonisation of the service across North Northamptonshire would not resolve the concerns raised by residents in the area of East Northamptonshire and has therefore been dismissed.

Providing a universal service funded by general taxation has been considered and forms part of the analysis later in this report. It has been rejected on the basis that it does not support the Council's MTFP and requires all taxpayers to contribute towards its operating costs, even if they do not require or use the service. Delaying the implementation of a subscription-based service beyond the recommended date would delay the financial contributions to the MTFP, which are required as a contribution towards balancing the Council's budget in 2023/24 and beyond.

It would be possible to continue charging residents in East Northamptonshire £55/bin/year until 1st April 2023 and offer no rebate. This option has been discounted as it further exacerbates the disparity in the current garden waste services operating across North Northamptonshire and would likely lead to existing customers delaying their renewal until 1st April 2023, which could have further operational and financial implications for the Council. The disparity between those residents located in East Northamptonshire and other North Northamptonshire residents exists due to local government reform. The Council notes that East Northamptonshire residents have paid for a service that other residents have not and therefore to address this unfairness, the rebate of £20 seeks to reduce this disparity. The £20 has been determined by the new subscription rate of £40 less the current rate of £55 plus a small financial sum to acknowledge the disparity.

The subscription charge could be set at various levels to reflect the Council's approach to funding the service. A higher subscription rate would reduce the financial burden on the Council and require individual residents to pay more for the service if they choose to subscribe. The recommended level of subscription charge reflects the Council's objective to recover most of the operating costs from those who use the service whilst being mindful of the current economic conditions putting pressure on households.

Delivering the service via a third-party commercial operator has been considered, but rejected, as it does not align with the Council's current delivery model, whereby waste services are delivered by in-house teams in three of the four operational areas.

It would be possible to reduce garden waste collections to a monthly service. This option has been discounted for operational reasons and because it would be unpopular with residents given recycling and general waste are both collected once a fortnight. A garden waste bin left for 4 weeks becomes compacted, begins to rot (and smell) and produces liquid. This leads to bins that are very heavy and often overweight, which either become unsafe to manoeuvre (for residents and employees), or they break when lifted on the vehicle. The consultation indicated that 10% of properties expect to need two bins under a fortnightly collection service. This is expected to rise significantly with a 4-weekly service. Not all properties will have space for an additional garden waste bin and there is an additional capital cost in providing additional bins to those that request them.