

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT
AND REGULATORY SERVICES**

Report prepared by the Waste Collection Manager

Date Issued: 24 June 2010

1. REVIEW OF FEES & CHARGES

1.1 Key Issue for Decision

- 1.1.1 To consider the adjusting the fees for the garden waste and bulky waste collection to reflect changes to services

1.2 Recommendation of the Assistant Director of Environmental Services

It is recommended that:

- 1.2.1 The pricing framework is simplified through the incorporation of the Premier (garden waste) and Premier Plus (DIY waste) bulky waste services into the Standard charges; and
- 1.2.2 The fees and charges as set out in Appendix A to the report for bulky waste be endorsed from 1st July 2010 until March 2012; and
- 1.2.3 The weekend freighter service is rescheduled to operate on Saturdays only to the schedule provided in Appendix D; and
- 1.2.4 Garden waste, household waste (wheeled bins or black bags) and large bulky items i.e. sofas and baths are no longer accepted through the weekend freighter service; and
- 1.2.5 The plastic green sacks for garden waste are replaced with compostable bags, increasing the cost of these bags by £0.75 to £3.25 for a roll of 5. This includes the collection cost of the garden waste.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.3.1 As part of the Best Value Review and related action plan, it was recommended that the bulky waste service's pricing framework should be simplified to make it easier for residents to understand and that the changes should reflect the cost of operating the service.

- 1.3.2 The contract cost of the service for 2009/10 was £139,931. The service costs are in line with other Kent authorities; however the Council only recoups approximately 41% of the operating costs.
- 1.3.3 The complex pricing structure for varying types of item makes the service extremely difficult to monitor and may deter residents from using the service. There are currently nine different prices for the service dependent on the number of items to be collected and whether they are classed as fixtures or fittings.
- 1.3.4 The definition of the different categories, and what waste is accepted for each, is also a cause of concern for the contact centre advisors. This system relies on members of staff deciding what category an item should be classed as and therefore the price the resident should pay.
- 1.3.5 Analysis of the bulky waste bookings has shown that just over 98% of bookings are for the Standard collection; less than 2% are for the Premier Plus service and Premier collection.
- 1.3.6 A small increase in the Standard prices for 1-6 items, 7-12 items and 13-18 items will facilitate the withdrawal of the additional charges for items classified as Premier or Premier Plus services.
- 1.3.7 The incorporation of the Premier and Premier Plus options within the Standard price will also allow the booking processes to be offered through the internet, improving accessibility to the service as recommended in the Best Value Review.
- 1.3.8 Monitoring of the bulky items collected through this service can also be integrated into the contact centre's process once the pricing structure is simplified. This information will be used to identify opportunities for reuse of bulky items.
- 1.3.9 The Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee also highlighted the need to consider a subsidised price for bulky collections for those residents receiving housing benefits. Research has shown that in Kent only Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge and Malling Councils offer free bulky collections for residents in receipt of means tested benefits. However the figures provided by the authorities have shown approximately 50% of all bulky collections are provided free of charge by these authorities. If Maidstone introduced a similar subsidised collection, this would cost the Council over £30,000 in reduced income. It is therefore recommended that the weekend freighter service continues to provide a free service for residents wishing to dispose of items which cannot be recycled or reused. Larger bulky items such as baths and furniture can still be disposed of for free at the Household Waste Recycling Centre in Tovil.

- 1.3.10 It is recommended that the price for a Standard 1-6 item collection is increased by 14%, from £17.50 to £20; Standard 7-12 item collection remains at £30 and Standard 13-18 item collection is increased by 6% from £42.50 to £45.
- 1.3.11 Unfortunately it is not possible for the service to break even whilst still remaining affordable. If the charges were raised to cover the operating costs, it is likely that the number of residents using the service would decline and therefore the income target would not be met.
- 1.3.12 The proposed prices for the bulky service still compares favorably with other Kent districts. Details of Kent districts 2009/10 prices are attached at Appendix B.
- 1.3.13 Weekend freighter service – Six weeks of monitoring at the weekend freighter sites, as recommended by the Best Value Review, has provided detailed information about the volume of usage, potential for recycling or reuse and distance residents travel to use the service. A summary of this information is provided at Appendix C.
- 1.3.14 The volume of usage of the weekend freighter varies greatly from site to site, with some only averaging a customer every 10 minutes. However other sites are extremely popular with most popular site experiencing 63 visitors in 45 minutes.
- 1.3.15 The schedule for the weekend freighter should therefore be amended to take this into account and the duration or frequency of some sites needs to be reduced. This would allow the service to be reduced to Saturdays only, offering a cost saving of approximately £30,000. The proposed and existing schedules are provided at Appendix D.
- 1.3.16 The revised schedule operates over 10 weeks rather than 8 weeks as previously and in addition thirty sites which occur in close proximity to another site are included within the schedule as alternating sites. This means that 15 are included in the first 10 week schedule and 15 in the second 10 week schedule. An example of this is Grove Green which has three locations; Grovewood Drive North is included every 10 weeks, but Grovewood Drive South and Provender way will alternate.
- 1.3.17 The schedule has also been revised to reduce the travel distances between locations. Sites in close proximity have therefore been scheduled on the same day. This supports the Council's annual carbon reduction target of 3%.
- 1.3.18 Every location has been assessed based on visitor numbers and information provided by Sita UK Ltd regarding the popularity of sites. The time spent at most sites has been reduced by approximately 15

minutes to increase efficiency. Some sites, which showed extremely low usage, have been reduced further. As highlighted in Appendix C, the majority of the sites with low usage were in rural locations. These sites have been reduced to 30 minutes rather than being withdrawn.

- 1.3.19 This recommendation would also eliminate operational issues which have arisen from operating the Sunday weekend freighter service, such as waste being stored at the depot until Monday morning.
- 1.3.20 Information gathered during the six week monitoring identified garden waste as a main component of the waste collected through the weekend freighter. This waste is easily recyclable within Maidstone through the chargeable garden waste or bulky waste collection services, home composting or the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Tovil. Collection of garden waste through the weekend freighter means this goes to landfill rather than recycling which conflicts with Maidstone's objective to increase recycling and reduce waste.
- 1.3.21 Large bulky items should also no longer be accepted at the weekend freighter. Residents wishing to dispose of these items should be directed to the bulky collection service or Household Waste Recycling Centre at Tovil.
- 1.3.22 Household waste in wheeled bins or black bags should remain unacceptable at the weekend freighter to encourage waste reduction and remain in line with Maidstone's other policies, such as the "no side waste" policy.
- 1.3.23 Garden waste sacks – the current garden waste service uses green plastic sacks which are not only not compostable but considerable time is required to split the bags and empty the garden waste into the vehicle. In addition the use of the current plastic bags is a concern for residents with complaints received on a regular basis. A change to a more sustainable bag would be better for the environment and offer a more efficient service.
- 1.3.24 The introduction of compostable bags is estimated to reduce the time spent collecting the garden waste by 30%. Therefore the number of vehicles and operatives could be reduced and offer a saving of approximately £60,000 per year, which will contribute to 2010/11 budget strategy savings.
- 1.3.25 The compostable bags are made from potato starch and are fully compostable. Kent County Council is currently negotiating with the compost facilities regarding the acceptance of garden waste contained in these bags.

- 1.3.26 The compostable bags would be guaranteed to last up to 4 weeks once in contact with organic matter and have a shelf-life of 12 months. This is obviously important to ensure that they are suitable for selling through local retailers.
- 1.3.27 The additional cost of the compostable bags should be included in the purchase price of these sacks in order to reflect the cost of the service.
- 1.3.28 The Council is also committed to increasing the number of retailers stocking the garden waste sacks improving the accessibility to residents.
- 1.3.29 The annual charge for the collection of garden waste in wheeled bins should remain at £30.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 Retention of the complex bulky waste pricing framework and existing charges would mean that the service would remain very complicated and mean this cannot be offered through Maidstone's website, lead to high volumes of phone calls and is likely to restrict the potential customers using the service.
- 1.4.2 Without the increase in charges of the service, the reduction in income from removing the Premier and Premier Plus pricing options could not be offset.
- 1.4.3 Retention of the existing weekend freighter schedule does not provide value for money and does not support the Council's objective to increase recycling and reuse within the borough.
- 1.4.4 However, the complete withdrawal of the weekend freighter service at the present time is not recommended as it offers a viable alternative for some Maidstone residents.
- 1.4.5 Continuing to permit garden waste to be disposed of through the weekend freighter service is not recommended as this conflicts with the waste hierarchy principle that reuse and recycling is more favorable than disposal. Home composting, the garden waste collection service or Tovil Household Waste Recycling Centre should be promoted as the most sustainable options for the treatment of garden waste.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 1.5.1 The recommendations described in this report support the Council's objective to review the services provided to ensure they meet the needs of local people and provide value for money.

1.6 Risk Management

- 1.6.1 A risk assessment of the recommendation has been carried out and is attached in Appendix E of the report.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

X

- 1.7.2 The financial implications of the recommendations are implicit in the report. As well as providing a simpler service, the aim is to improve value for money for local tax payers as well as responding to the feedback received as part of the Best Value Review.

- 1.7.3 Overall the financial implications of the recommendations contained within this report provide the Council with a saving of approximately £90,000 per annum. The majority of this saving will contribute towards the 2010/11 budget strategy savings.

- 1.7.4 The changes to the bulky waste pricing framework have been developed to ensure that any loss in income through the incorporation of the higher priced Premier and Premier Plus services is met by the small increase in standard collection charges.

- 1.7.5 The increased charge of the garden waste sacks will cover the increase in purchase price from the manufacturer. It is unlikely that the increased cost will affect the income generated, however may encourage more residents to hire bins rather than sacks.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

1.8.2 Appendix A – Fees and Charges for 2010/11

1.8.3 Appendix B – Kent districts 2009/10 prices for bulky collection

1.8.4 Appendix C – Summary of weekend freighter monitoring

1.8.5 Appendix D – Proposed Weekend Freighter Schedule

1.8.6 Appendix E – Risk assessment of the recommendations

1.8.7 Background Documents

1.8.8 None

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

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No

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If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

March 2010

This is a Key Decision because: There will be a significant change in the services which will affect the whole borough.

Wards/Parishes affected: All

How to Comment

Should you have any comments on the issue that is being considered please contact either the relevant Officer or the Member of the Executive who will be taking the decision.

Cllr Ben Sherreard

Cabinet Member for the Environment
Telephone: 07789 408452
E-mail: bensherreard@maidstone.gov.uk

Jennifer Gosling

Waste Collection Manager
Telephone: 01622 602400
E-mail: jennifergosling@maidstone.gov.uk