

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

Decision Made: 02 July 2010

EXPANDING ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

Issue for Decision

To provide a far more effective environmental enforcement arrangement within the borough at no additional cost to local taxpayers.

Decision Made

1. That Xfor Local Authority Support Services (Xfor LASS) be utilised to provide additional wardens to directly tackle street litter and other environmental crimes across the borough.
2. That a range of publicity be undertaken to highlight the more proactive approach to enforcement in the borough.

Reasons for Decision

Introduction and Background

In recent years the level of cigarette litter has increased significantly, mainly as a result of changes to smoking legislation.

The Council as looked at ways of encouraging residents and visitors not to drop litter but surveys such as the national Place Survey has highlighted that satisfaction with street cleanliness has not been lower than other Council Services.

Whilst resources have been reorganised to provide a more efficient street cleaning arrangement levels of littering remain a concern.

The Council has therefore decided to take a more proactive role in tackling the root cause of the problem by increasing the number of officers on the ground

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (2005 Act) gave the Council powers to utilise fixed penalty notices for litter offences. Since the introduction of the 2005 Act the available resources for this work have reduced. Changes have been made to improve the work programme of the current uniformed officers utilising intelligence driven enforcement and

improved procedures, however, providing a dedicated litter enforcement service has not been possible.

The position has also been compounded by the introduction of the Public Health Act 2007 and related no smoking legislation which has significantly increased the amount of cigarette litter in the UK.

Since the previous place survey and feedback from residents and officers the Council has been looking at how our approach to littering could be improved. This is a difficult area as the aim was firstly prevention and then to deal with anyone who does drop litter.

The Council has recently changed the street cleaning operation within the borough to a more area based model of working. This is working very well but there are issues with the level of litter that is dropped by the public.

Although levels of litter are not substantial this does impact on the public perception of Maidstone as a place to live and work as well as satisfaction with the Council. Some enforcement work is undertaken but the Council does not have the capacity or financial resources to be proactive across the borough.

The option of working alongside a private sector provider has been considered and as well as having the advantage of their experience in this area of work provides value for money for local taxpayers.

It is proposed to carry out a trial period of six months where a private company would work alongside council officers across the whole borough.

The company that has been chosen to work alongside Council officers is the Xfor Group who has a track record of supporting local authorities in the delivery of environmental enforcement.

This initiative has also been discussed with the Police and the new Borough Commander who is very supportive of the new approach.

The Local Government Act 2003, Section 119 allows local authorities to keep the resources from fixed penalties issued against certain offences. The Act states that the monies collected should be utilised to provide additional spending to enhance the local environment. The aim is for the initiative to be self funding.

The New Operational Arrangements

It was proposed to introduce the new service from the 1 July 2010, this would run for six months until the end of December. The service will operate across the whole of the borough with enforcement officers working during the daytime and evening.

Any enforcement activity will be the final stage with the promotion of a cleaner, greener borough and a more visible presence also having an impact on littering in the borough.

The number of officers that will be provided by Xfor is governed by the enforcement expectation of the authority. To support the new approach on litter it is estimated that up to 100 fixed penalties would be issued per week.

Xfor will also provide a range of support systems and administrative resources to assist with the correct issuing of tickets, appeals and the payment of fixed penalty notices.

Deployment of the officers within the borough will be controlled by a designated council officer. This will also be informed through work with partner organisations and also feedback from MBC staff within environmental services.

Discussions have also taken place with the Police at a senior officer level and with various departments within the Council. This has included the street cleansing team (to highlight particular areas where litter levels are higher) and also Legal Services in relation to Council prosecutions.

It was also recommended that through the Communications Team a range of publicity material be produced for the local press. This will highlight the need to keep the borough clean and the 'zero tolerance' element - so once litter is dropped an offence has been committed and there is no going back on that point. In addition to ensure that the public are aware that this initiative will not result in additional funds for the council but should improve the local environment.

Following the recent senior staffing reorganisation, an opportunity has been taken to update the overall Enforcement Policy which is attached at Appendix 1 to the report of the Assistant Director for Environment and Regulatory Services.

This should ensure that enforcement decisions are always consistent, balanced, fair, transparent, and proportional and relate to common standards to ensure the public are adequately protected.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

I could decide to do no additional work on enforcement across the borough and leave the position as it is currently. However, levels of litter and, in particular, cigarette litter has increased in recent years and is impacting on the profile of the borough.

I could employ additional officers to undertake the work instead of Xfor. However, the Council would not have access to the systems for checking details and, as well as the recruitment exercise and training for the officers, additional support staff would be required. By also undertaking a pilot there is no long term costs and the initiative can be reviewed and assessed at key stages.

I could ask officers to approach other agencies. However, whilst other agencies may be able to provide officers with a similar background, Xfor

provide a unique package which also provides management and administrative support alongside the enforcement officers.

I could decide just to proceed with the scheme without any publicity, but prevention is a key element of the Council's overall strategy and it is important to highlight the new working arrangements.

I could also decide not to agree the updated enforcement policy at this stage but, given the recent reorganisation and this particular initiative, it was felt that this was a timely piece of work.

Background Papers

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: 9th July 2010

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

Decision Made: 02 July 2010

REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

Issue for Decision

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

Decision Made

1. That the pricing framework be simplified through the incorporation of the Premier (garden waste) and Premier Plus (DIY waste) bulky waste services into the Standard charges.
2. That the fees and charges as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services for bulky waste be endorsed from 1st July 2010 until March 2012.
3. That the weekend freighter service be rescheduled to operate on Saturdays only, to the schedule provided in Appendix D of the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services.
4. That garden waste, household waste (wheeled bins or black bags) and large bulky items, i.e. sofas and baths, be no longer accepted through the weekend freighter service.
5. That the plastic green sacks for garden waste be replaced with compostable bags, increasing the cost of these bags by £0.75 to £3.25 for a roll of 5, which includes the collection cost of the garden waste.

Reasons for Decision

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

It was recommended that the price for a Standard 1-6 item collection be increased by 14%, from £17.50 to £20; Standard 7-12 item collection remain at £30 and Standard 13-18 item collection be increased by 6% from £42.50 to £45.

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.

The proposed prices for the bulky service still compare favourably with other Kent districts. Details of Kent districts 2009/10 prices are attached at Appendix B of the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services.

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 of the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services.

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.

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 of the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services.

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.

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%.

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 of the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services, the majority of the sites with low usage were in rural locations. These sites have been reduced to 30 minutes rather than being withdrawn.

This also eliminates operational issues which have arisen from operating the Sunday weekend freighter service, such as waste being stored at the depot until Monday morning.

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.

Large bulky items will no longer be accepted at the weekend freighter. Residents wishing to dispose of these items will be directed to the bulky collection service or Household Waste Recycling Centre at Tovil.

Household waste in wheeled bins or black bags will 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.

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.

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.

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.

The compostable bags are 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.

The additional cost of the compostable bags will reflect the purchase price of the bags and the cost of the service.

The Council is also committed to increasing the number of retailers stocking the garden waste sacks improving the accessibility to residents.

The annual charge for the collection of garden waste in wheeled bins will remain at £30.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

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.

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.

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.

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.

Continuing to permit garden waste to be disposed of through the weekend freighter service was not recommended as this conflicts with the waste hierarchy principle that reuse and recycling is more favourable 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.

Background Papers

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: 9th July 2010
