

Waste Services Update

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Graham Gosden, Waste Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The report is to update Members in respect of the following matters;

- The positive progress made in moving garden waste customer accounts to electronic payment methods and the benefits of having done so.
- The revised garden waste routes that were introduced in September 2020, and their benefits realised.
- To provide advance notification of imminent vehicle investment by Biffa and consequent possible future round changes for general recycling and food waste.

Purpose of Report

For noting.

This report recommends that the Committee:

1. Notes the content of this report.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Corporate Leadership Team	N/A
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	5 th January 2021

Waste Services Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p>Impact on Corporate Priorities</p>	<p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i> • <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i> • <i>Homes and Communities</i> • <i>A Thriving Place</i> <p>The report highlights the changes in payment methods and improvement in the Council's data. This data supports the garden waste collection service. These changes have permitted more accurate information for our contractor, which in turn has led to a reroute of garden waste collections in mid-September, reducing vehicle mileage and carbon footprint.</p>	<p>Waste Manager</p>
<p>Cross Cutting Objectives</p>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The garden waste collection service collects over 9500 tonnes of garden waste each year. The material is composted and substantially reduces the environmental impact of waste collection, so supporting the aims of Environmental Sustainability.</p> <p>Full year 2019/20 9550 tonnes April/June 2020 3800 tonnes</p> <p>Officers will update this tonnage data, should more current information be received from KCC before the meeting.</p>	<p>Waste Manager</p>

Risk Management	This report is for noting only. No new risks have been identified relating to the performance of the waste contract for the remainder of the contract term.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	<p>The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings, no additional funding required.</p> <p>The garden waste service is a revenue stream for the Authority, maintaining good service standards is required to maintain the customer base/the income.</p>	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	No staffing implications within this report.	Head of Service
Legal	The Authority is permitted to charge for the collection of garden waste. The improvement in our electronic data will assist the Council's contractor in maintaining collection rounds enabling a regular reliable service.	Legal Team
Privacy and Data Protection	No impact identified	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	<p>The existing standards to ensure services are accessible to all residents will remain in place. These include assisted collections and the option to pay via a traditional payment method.</p> <p>The waste contract has flexibility for changes to be implemented to support residents with protected characteristics should additional needs arise.</p>	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	The reroute will reduce overall vehicle mileage therefore reduce air pollution for all.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	No impact identified	Waste Manager
Procurement	No impact identified	Waste Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 In 2013, the Council entered into partnership with Ashford and Swale Borough Councils and Kent County Council to let a 10-year contract for the collection of household waste and for some street cleansing services, to Biffa Municipal Ltd. This report goes onto analyse two changes to the service that have already been made and highlights the possibility of a third.

2.2 This report is based on data available at the end of September, with information provided in graph and table format within background documents.

The Transfer of garden waste customers to electronic payment methods

2.3 Within the contract, residents are offered an additional "opt in" garden waste collection service, for which, residents currently pay £40 per year for an alternate weekly collection. Historically customer payments and accounts have been managed by the MBC finance system.

2.4 This required a paper invoice to be generated, printed and posted. Once payment was received there was a manual update of our customer database, leading to an update of the contractor's records and payments. Over the years the manual update database had become less accurate. The traditional payment methods were cumbersome and slow and, as a result, a number of account errors were being found.

2.5 These account errors were having a negative impact on the quality of service provided within the borough. Taking a lead from other Council services the department, with the assistance of the Council's Digital Team, decided to move the majority of payers to electronic means. This change started in March 2020.

2.6 Owing to these issues and the Council's broader desire to move towards electronic payments for customers, there was an opportunity to:

- Reduce staff admin work.
- Provide automatic update of records.
- Cleanse and improve our contract data.
- Provide more accurate information to our contractor – so enabling better routing and a more reliable service.
- Provide customers with a simple and more efficient renewal process.
- Ensure that the Waste Service would be advised when accounts lapsed and could then be able to arrange removal of the bin.

2.7 The impact of the change is illustrated in the following tables:

Table A and Graph A

Since March, the Council has renewed over 15,000 accounts on the web-based system. All these customers will receive automatic reminders next year, their on-line renewals will then feed the customer and contractor data base.

Table B

Accurate tracking of accounts also allowed a record to be maintained of late or non-payers, leading to us chasing the debt and ultimately instructing bin removal.

Graph B

Over the same period 230 accounts were renewed by way of cash or cheque payment. These residents remain within the old paper system, with next year's invoice and any updates being completed manually.

Graph C

Where the account at the property has lapsed, we have been able to attempt to recover the bin. There is a delay in this to allow for all payments to be reconciled for each month, and potentially a further delay in attempting to recover the bin, which is scheduled when there is staff capacity.

2.8 Going forward, the contract requires Biffa to use our customer data base and the company is paid according to that. With crews now receiving more accurate data they are now being asked to check more rigorously and refuse to empty bins from properties without a valid account.

Issues identified in the transfer to electronic payment

2.9 Since March six formal complaints have been received about the payment change system. Three about the wording of invoices or letters and three about the actual change of system

2.10 Wording issues have been dealt with by the Digital Team with changes implemented if necessary, at the next opportunity.

2.11 The response to the new system and any collection issues have been managed within Waste Services.

Summary

2.12 The project is just over half-way through the year and has been completed by Officers mainly working remotely. The electronic payment system works well and is almost touch free in terms of manual input

and over 98% of customers are using it.

- 2.13 The paper version is still available should a resident require it.
- 2.14 The changes have also brought about improvements to data accuracy. Over the initial eight months the Council's Digital Team have closely monitored account renewals and resolved data accuracy issues as they arose.
- 2.15 Examples would include, resolving anomalies between web and GIS data, amending address misspellings, updating account date records and the bin type at the property.
- 2.16 The number of accounts where manual intervention has been necessary is estimated at about 400 (average 50 per month). This is a huge reduction on the original system which would have required over 1800 manual actions per month.
- 2.17 Going forward, this data cleansing will also further reduce manual inputs next year, as the original errors have been rectified.
- 2.18 However, account information delays in the old manual system, resulted in the Council chasing some accounts, which had already been paid but not properly recorded.

Revised garden round rounds

- 2.19 The contractor is required to schedule the work so as to complete the fortnightly garden waste collections from paying customers. The original collection areas and rounds were set in 2013.
- 2.20 The increasing popularity of the service (over 15% increase since March 2019) resulted in some crews being overloaded and unable to reliably finish the scheduled day's work.
- 2.21 To maintain contractual service levels Biffa covered this by using other crews to help. This solved a short-term issue; it did not resolve the fact that rounds had become unbalanced.
- 2.22 Using other resources also loses the benefits of round and customer knowledge. Its financially damaging for the contractor, as it increases fuel and vehicle usage, so leading to additional environmental pollution.
- 2.23 Biffa decided to resolve the matter across the whole waste partnership area including Ashford & Swale Council areas, undertaking a complete garden waste round reroute. This was designed over the summer and finally introduced from Monday 21 September.
- 2.24 To clarify this did not impact on waste or recycling collections, changes completed so far only affected garden waste collection schedules.

2.25 The changes for Maidstone residents were promoted by direct mail to affected properties only, they are summarised as follows:

TOTAL Customers	26948	
Remain unchanged	15863	58% of customer base
Day change	3507	14%
Week change	3237	12% same day but alternate week
Day & Week change	4341	16% both day and week change

2.26 The information included an introductory letter and collection day detail leaflet, confirming the new arrangements and any additional interim collections (if applicable). Examples are attached at **Appendix Two** and **Three**.

2.27 Wider communications were also issued via Council social media accounts. This was not intended to detail individual property information but to highlight the general re-routing and signpost where the collection day could be confirmed by a resident.

2.28 Any residents affected received the following:

Day change	Received the collection earlier or later the same week
Week change	Received a collection seven days after their previous, then moved to the ongoing two weekly schedule.
Day & Week Change	When the new collection date resulted in excessive delay, these properties received an additional interim collection FOC before starting the new schedule

2.29 In the first week, there was a notable reduction in missed bins recorded on the system. On Monday week one only four were recorded.

2.30 The first five weeks have provided the least number of missed garden bins in the year and reduced contractors road mileage by about 5%.

2.31 It has been noted that crews return to the depot at a reasonable time and more importantly all within an hour of each other, demonstrating the rounds are better balanced and therefore more resilient.

Issues identified in respect of the revised garden rounds

2.32 Some residents ignored the information and carried on with their original collection schedule. On contact they have been advised of the revised schedule; where advised and within practical limits Biffa returned to clear all bins even though they were not scheduled to do so.

2.33 Where an additional interim collection was provided the public take up of the visit was estimated at less than 30%.

- 2.34 There has been a computer issue linking the web-based post code system to the Councils GIS mapping system. The calendar / mapping system has been taken offline until the GIS team have updated all the details. Residents and Officers may still use the post code look up system which was updated immediately and has always worked perfectly from day one.

Summary

- 2.35 Considering changes affected around 11,000 households, the changes were completed effectively and the new rounds have already shown service improvement. The new rounds have some capacity for additional customers, so a future re-route of garden waste collections is unlikely before the end of the contract.
- 2.36 The main learning point has been the relationship between internal systems at the Council.

Vehicle investment by Biffa and consequent possible future round changes for general, recycling and food waste

- 2.37 The current waste and recycling rounds were designed in 2013, and the initial vehicles purchased at the start of the contract. Biffa have recently invested in the contract with sixteen replacement vehicles that will be in operation in early 2021. These have been proven in operation and will afford the opportunity to consider changing some rounds next year owing to their additional capacity.

Vehicle Changes

- 2.38 Last year there were some issues which affected the standard of service and to address these Biffa have recently invested in 16 replacement vehicles (2019/20 plate). The newer vehicles have gradually been introduced to the contract, with the aim of:

- Increasing payload per vehicle, so increasing the number of properties visited before tipping.
- Reducing environmental impact of the service, by using Euro 6 engines they will reduce vehicle emissions from 180 to 80 mg/km.
- Reducing vehicle down time, newer vehicles will be more reliable, so leading to a more reliable service and they will also improve the visual image of the service for both Biffa and the Authority.

Future Round Changes

- 2.39 Since the start of the contract the number of properties served has risen from 67,000 to almost 73,000 an increase of 8.7%. These properties have been added to the original rounds, as they became occupied.
- 2.40 As new housing developments tend to be estate based, this has resulted in an imbalance of workload from round to round. This results in some

rounds being very difficult to finish within the timeframe; on many occasions they require support from other crews, which makes the collections inefficient.

- 2.41 In order to balance up the workload, Biffa have started to work on a complete re-route of waste and recycling collections. This is in the preparatory stages and is not scheduled for introduction until early summer 2021.
- 2.42 In addition to balancing the rounds, the overall plan will allow Biffa to better manage any future additional properties.
- 2.43 This early notification advises Members that the contractor is designing sensible changes for the improvement of the service. Officers will update Members as the project starts to take shape, and we will assist Biffa by contributing ideas to residents' communications and routing options.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 There are no matters for decision in this report. The Committee is asked to note the contents but may choose to take further action depending on the matters reported here.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the information.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no direct risk management implications.
 - 5.2 The Council continues to monitor the performance of the waste contractor and where appropriate uses the Performance Mechanism to manage performance.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Customer satisfaction with the service is measured through the biannual residents' survey and historically has shown high satisfaction with the services offered.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The waste team and digital team will continue with the shift of accounts to digital electronic means where possible, as well as offering the traditional payment options.
- 7.2 General communications will continue to promote and further increase take up of the garden waste service.
- 7.3 General communication to continue promoting the post code look up system, enabling residents to confirm their collection schedules for all waste services.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix One - Payment system press release
- Appendix Two - Initial Biffa advice letter
- Appendix Three - Sample date change leaflet

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

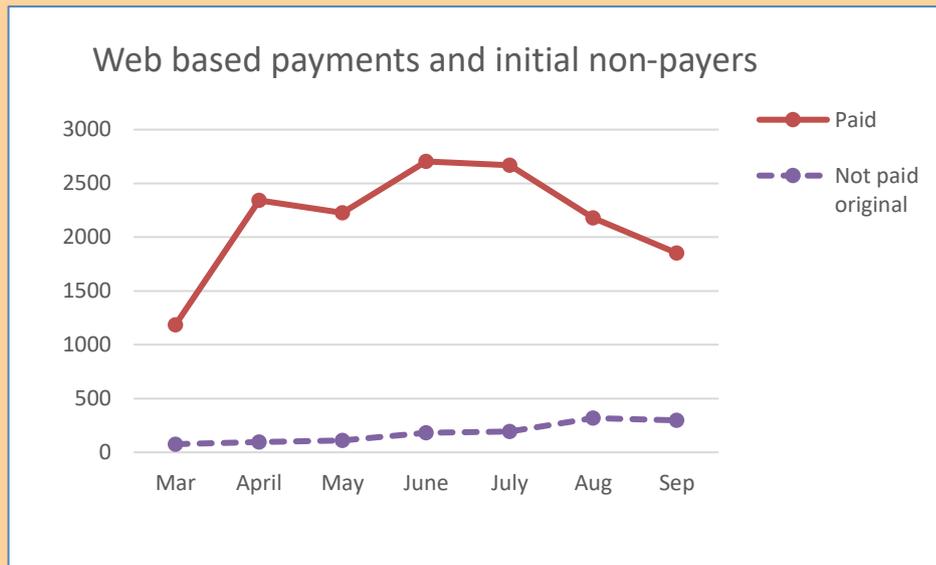
9.1 Table A

The basic data of accounts renewed since March, accounts requiring a follow up and ultimately bins removed to date.

MONTH	PAID	NOT PAID ORIGINAL	BINS REMOVED
March	1186	76	54
April	2341	96	35
May	2227	109	65
June	2704	180	47
July	2668	194	
August	2180	318	
September	1853	296	

9.2 Graph A

Visual interpretation of accounts renewed and initial non-payers.



9.3 Graph B

Bins actually removed from properties.



9.4 Graph C

Accounts renewed using cash or cheque.

Cheque and cash payers

