



## WIN Focus 7 - August 2010

### Subscription based services: Garden Waste

This document provides support to councils who are considering the introduction of a subscription based garden waste collection service. WIN has gathered evidence from a number of councils who are running such schemes and has brought together advice, top tips and lessons learnt. The options are explored and some of the research other councils have done in order to shape their own services is presented.

Based on existing practices, WIN provides information and support to local authorities - helping them to develop waste, recycling and related services which are best suited to their local area and that best meet the needs and wishes of residents.

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## 1.0 Summary

All councils have been tasked with finding efficiencies, reducing costs and improving services. Under the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992, garden waste is classified under Schedule 2 (Regulation 4), as a type of waste for which a charge may be made. This report has found that the **introduction of a subscription-based garden waste service** could:

### Pros

- ✓ Increase recycling performance and help councils to meet their recycling targets ( - predominantly where no garden waste collection existed prior to introduction of new service)
- ✓ Remove the garden waste element from the domestic waste stream in participating properties
- ✓ Provide additional revenue for the council
- ✓ Provide an opt-in, additional kerbside service, which is inclusive to all residents who wish to take part
- ✓ Maintain a financial incentive for householders to home compost their organic waste, which is the best environmental option
- ✓ Create a fairer system financially for residents in flats, HMOs etc - who do not produce garden waste

### Cons

- ✗ Cause public dissatisfaction & negative publicity, particularly if a previously free-of-charge service was offered prior to the introduction of the new subscription-based one
- ✗ May increase garden waste arisings in those properties taking part, as residents are likely to fully utilise the collection service they are paying for (as opposed to taking garden waste to HWRS or home composting it)
- ✗ May reduce tonnages of garden waste collected on commencement of the scheme, thus lowering recycling performance - especially in cases where the council offered a free-of-charge collection service prior to introduction of a new subscription-based one.

Evidence collected from councils who **suspend their subscription-based garden waste collection service over winter** months has suggested that:

### Pros

- ✓ Significant cost savings can be achieved
- ✓ Tonnages of garden waste collected are typically much lower during this period
- ✓ It may be a better option environmentally due to decreased carbon emissions through the decommissioning of collection vehicles
- ✓ Residents may be supportive of the suspension, particularly if it helps to keep annual service costs down

## Cons

- ✘ Operational issues may occur, particularly when the service resumes after winter
- ✘ Residents may see the suspension of the service as a negative, particularly if they previously been offered an all year round service.
- ✘ A lowering of recycling performance is possible but is unlikely to be significant

With regard to the **type of collection receptacle, wheeled bins and bags** were considered in the report and observations included:

- With the use of bags, operational issues may occur including health & safety considerations and processing problems.
- With the use of wheeled bins, issues identified included higher purchase and administrative costs along with difficulties with traceability and ownership issues.

When councils are considering the **introduction of a new service** this report advises councils to consider costs, risks, operational issues and type of service to be offered. A full public consultation is likely to be required and communications are paramount in order to gain public support, encourage participation and to avoid risk issues such as contamination and low participation.

## 2.0 Approaches to Garden waste

Many different approaches to dealing with garden waste currently exist among councils. The options are varied, types of collections differ and few authorities follow the same model. For more information on choosing the right recycling collection system see WRAP's 2009 report on recognised Kerbside Collection Methods: [Choosing the right recycling collection system](#).

The table below summarises several approaches to garden waste giving pros and cons and further information.

Approach	Pros	Cons	Notes & Links
<b>2.1 Garden waste continues to be accepted into domestic waste collection</b>	May be popular with residents. Do nothing approach, costs remain neutral. No changes may mean no adverse publicity.	Garden waste remains in domestic waste stream and goes to landfill, loss of recyclable materials, lower diversion rates.	This option is becoming increasingly unacceptable due to rising cost of landfill & recycling targets.
<b>2.2 Terminate an existing, free-of-charge garden waste collection service</b>	Could achieve big cost savings for authority.	Could incur significant contractual costs. Unpopular with residents.	Difficult to terminate a collection service without offering an alternative and accessible disposal route for residents. Please also see related notes regarding Northumberland County Council in section 2.5 below.
<b>2.3 Ban garden waste in the domestic refuse collection service</b>	Enforcement action can be taken against residents who ignore the ban. Some councils consider this an essential element to go alongside introduction of subscription-based collection service.	Ban could be unpopular with residents, difficult to administer and relatively easy for residents to ignore.	One council proposed a 3 month 'amnesty' to ensure that residents were fully aware of the new arrangements before any enforcement action began.
<b>2.4 Introduction of 'no side waste' or closed lid policy to limit garden waste in domestic refuse service</b>	Good alternative to a complete 'ban' on garden waste in domestic refuse. Effective at preventing green & other recyclable wastes from entering the domestic waste stream.	May be unpopular with residents. May be difficult & costly to enforce, particularly if council does not have a dedicated enforcement team.	See WIN's case study on Exeter City Council: <a href="#">Education, Enforcement &amp; Legal Lessons</a> for an example of a contamination related legal proceeding by Exeter CC.

<p><b>2.5 Introduce an opt-in subscription-based garden waste collection scheme</b></p>	<p>Additional revenue for the local authority. Opt-in system means a financial incentive remains for householders to home compost their organic waste, which is the best environmental option. See section 2.8 for more on home composting.</p>	<p>May receive adverse publicity &amp; complaints to the council. Full public consultation exercise likely to be necessary. Agreement &amp; support by Members would have to be sought. Cost implications of introduction of new service. Households who take part are less likely to home compost or take garden waste to HWRS, therefore potentially increasing garden waste arisings.</p>	<p>Northumberland introduced a county-wide opt-in subscription-based garden waste collection service in 2009. Prior to this arrangement six districts in the county had differing services varying from a free-of-charge opt-out service through to a £35 opt-in service. The new service gave uniformity to the county's green waste collections. Subscriptions were £20 / year in 2009 and remained at this level for 2010. When the service was introduced, a number of complaints were received from the public, however the level of complaints were lower than expected. The majority were in relation to the new charges but others were concerning lack of collections in the winter and complaints regarding the price difference between the bags and wheeled bin options. The new service also generated adverse coverage in local press.</p>
<p><b>2.6 Suspension of service during winter months. (Also see section 3.0)</b></p>	<p>Service not operational when tonnages are lowest. Cost savings during winter months. Vehicles &amp; staff can be decommissioned / re-located. Carbon savings achieved due to not running collection vehicles during low tonnage months. May also contribute towards waste minimisation targets by reducing the kg/head collected each year. For more info see section 3.0.</p>	<p>May be an adverse effect on recycling performance. Difficulties in first cycle of emptying bins on recommencement of service. For more info see section 3.0 below.</p>	<p>See more detail on savings, as identified by councils in section 3.0 below.</p>

<p><b>2.7 Collection of food &amp; garden waste comingled</b></p>	<p>May be a popular option with residents, especially if the collections of food &amp; garden waste are weekly in conjunction with alternately weekly collections of domestic waste.</p>	<p>Charges cannot be made for food waste. WRAP's research report released in Feb 2010 indicated that combined organic waste collections (garden &amp; food) are less effective in diverting food waste for recycling compared to food only collections. As a result it will be much more difficult to achieve high diversion / recycling targets with combined food and garden collections systems. Furthermore the food waste remaining in the residual bin will need to be managed at increasingly higher disposal costs.</p>	<p>In February 2010, WRAP released a report titled <a href="#">Performance analysis of mixed food and garden waste collection schemes</a> This study looked at the effectiveness of recycling food waste via mixed food and garden waste collections. Also see the following WRAP reports:-  <a href="#">Managing biowaste - cost benefit analysis (update) October 2008</a>  and  <a href="#">Managing biowaste - cost benefit analysis (May 2007)</a></p>
<p><b>2.8 Promotion of home composting / Composting Framework</b></p>	<p>Home composting is environmentally the best option. A cheaper and more flexible alternative for residents in comparison to an annual charge. Good to offer residents alternative options when introducing a new opt-in subscription-based service. Residents can be offered a subsidy to encourage uptake – also possible within the <a href="#">WIN / IESE National Home Composting Framework</a></p>	<p>Not accessible for all householders e.g. those with no garden or small gardens. Onus is on householder to purchase, set up and maintain composter. Householders may give up composting if problems are encountered.</p>	<p>The <a href="#">WIN / IESE National Home Composting Framework</a> has been set up to give local authorities a simple and efficient solution to providing home composting units, accessories and related communications without having to undertake a tender process. Also see the <a href="#">RecycleNow home composting</a> pages.</p>

### 3.0 Making savings through suspending collections over winter

- ✓ **Lower tonnages during winter months.** Tonnage of garden waste generated and collected tends to reduce considerably. Information from councils suggests that the tonnage of waste collected falls to less than a third of what would be expected at other times of the year. (Source: Bromsgrove DC)
- ✓ **The environmental benefit vs environmental impact of collections.** The environmental benefits of composting small tonnages of material collected during this period may be outweighed by the overall environmental impact of the collection service – e.g. vehicles would still need to visit every property, emptying all bins on the collection route, regardless of quantity of material put out. Encouraging the diversion of garden waste to home composting and HWRS can be of great value in helping to maintain recycling of garden waste and in preventing this waste entering the domestic waste stream during this period. The [WIN / IESE National Home Composting Framework](#) has been set up to give local authorities a simple and efficient solution to providing home composting units, accessories and related communications without having to undertake a tender process.
- ✓ **Cost savings** can be achieved through the de-commissioning of vehicles and re-locating operatives for the winter period.
- ✓ **Communications** about such a change in service should be far-reaching and include a variety of local groups such as Parish Councils, Libraries, Leisure Centres, Members, local press, local magazine, on refuse and recycling calendars. Some authorities also offer a one off collection for Christmas trees in January. See the WIN document [Waste Communications Budgets: presenting the business case](#) (Mar '10) for help on establishing a business case for communications spend. Also see [Recycle Now Partners](#) for communications support & downloadable resources.

#### SUSPENSION OVER WINTER....MORE ISSUES TO CONSIDER

##### Cost:

East Lindsey DC estimated that suspending collections over winter would save the council £170,000 / yr.

Bromsgrove DC investigated a re-introduction of collections for the period Dec – Mar in 2007 and estimated that it would cost almost £80,000 to re-introduce & sustain collections during those winter months.

##### Operational:

The first cycle of emptying bins could present a problem if green waste has been left in the bin for the extended winter period and it may be difficult to empty. Also, much larger quantities of green waste may be presented during the first few weeks of the resumed service.



<p><b>Environmental:</b> East Lindsey DC reported that suspending collections would reduce the Council's carbon emissions by 145 tonnes each year.</p>	<p><b>Less recycling?</b> An adverse effect on recycling performance is possible but research has shown it is not likely to be significant. Waveney DC estimated that as the amount of green waste collected during the winter period was low (approximately 1,400 tonnes) the impact on recycling figures was estimated to be in the region of &lt;2%</p>
<p><b>Resident support:</b> Waveney DC consulted their residents in 2004 on whether a 2 month suspension of the green waste collection would be acceptable. 78% of residents surveyed said that this was acceptable.</p>	<p><b>Lack of resident support:</b> Residents may see a suspension as a negative, particularly if they are having the service suspended during winter months when it has previously continued all year round. Positive communications can help with this issue. East Lindsey DC produced an excellent document which is available to look at on WIN: <a href="#">Green Waste Collections – your questions answered</a> This document has a list of Frequently Asked Questions for residents and details how the suspension of the service over winter has contributed to an improvement of the service environmentally and financially, saving 145 tonnes of carbon emissions &amp; over £170,00 each year.</p>

## 4.0 Type of collection – Bags vs Wheeled Bins

Councils will need to consider regularity of collection, how the collections will sit with current refuse & recycling arrangements, participation levels required to make the service cost effective and what vehicle / operative resources will be required. The question of which type of receptacle to use generally falls to two options – bags or wheeled bins. See below for some considerations on each type.

NB: If you are considering purchasing bins, bags or containers for collecting green waste, WIN's [Framework Contracts](#) page provides details of framework agreements that are quick and easy to use and usually mean you can avoid a tender process.

### 4.1 Bags

Councils should consider the following:-

- ✓ **Type of bag** - re-useable, disposable or bio-degradable.
- ✓ **Capacity** – sack size, volume or dimensions and weight limit per sack. This may be determined by bag supplier and by type of collection / loading methods.
- ✓ **Operational & service issues** regarding bags have been identified by councils. These issues included health and safety concerns associated with the lifting of bags and their loading into collection vehicles; capacity constraints with the vehicles given that an unknown number of bags may be put out for collection; processing difficulties at compost sites due to bags not fully biodegrading resulting in a poorer quality end product that is more difficult to sell.
- ✓ **Level of demand** - With 'pay as you go' bag services, councils have also indicated that it is hard to predict what the demand for the service will be on any particular street on any particular day. Vehicles can travel long distances and pick up nothing, conversely vehicles could travel and fill the vehicle unexpectedly from a few homes and have to go off to tip.
- ✓ **Cost of bags & cost to public** – with re-useable bags some councils offer a sliding scale for example - East Hampshire offer first bag @ £25/yr; second @ £12.50; subsequent bags @ £9. Some authorities offer free replacement of sacks if lost, damaged or stolen, others charge. Some authorities offer discounts for residents on benefits & for senior citizens. N.B There may be a link between levels of participation and the charges levied – e.g. the higher the charge, the lower the participation / tonnage collected, it is therefore important to charge at the right level. (see section 5.3 below for more details on charging)

## 4.2 Wheeled bins

An opt-in wheeled bin service whereby residents rent or buy the receptacle from the council for the year may give rise to considerations such as:-

- ✓ **Ownership of bin** – If the council retains ownership of the bin it can therefore be retrieved if the resident decides not to continue paying for the service in subsequent years.
- ✓ **Traceability** – With a subscription-based service, it is important to ensure bins are not stolen or lost from the household that has paid for the service. If a bin is stolen from a property the council may have to replace the bin and it may also mean that some other household will be getting the service without having paid for it. To combat this type of situation, ideally each bin would be registered to a property either by serial number, sticker or bin chip.
- ✓ **Customers opting out** – As and when a customer opts out of the service, the bins would need to be collected to ensure that the household did not continue to receive the service free of charge. These administrative and service costs should be accounted for.
- ✓ **Size** – Will be dependent on collection methods, likely tonnages and frequency of collection. As an example, Bromsgrove DC report that they collect 377kg/hh/yr with a 240 litre bin on a fortnightly basis.

## 5.0 Introducing the Service

### 5.1 Consultation

Consulting your residents will be an important first step before any decisions can be made.

#### Example of a Consultation

In 2005 a full public consultation was undertaken by one Borough Council to find views on the proposed subscription-based organic waste collection service and to determine preferred collection options. A questionnaire was sent out with the council's magazine to all properties and a response rate of 1172 households (2.5%) was achieved.

Of the 617 responses that opted for the wheeled bin proposal, 67% said they would be prepared to pay for the service with 52% of these being prepared to pay up to 50p per week, (£26.00 per annum).

470 responses opted for the notion of paying for a bag collection service, of which 44% were not prepared to pay anything and 55% were prepared to pay.

#### Useful consultation documents

[Bromsgrove District Council's Liaison Leaflet](#) this was sent to residents to advise why changes were being introduced and as part of consultation exercise.

### 5.2 Costs

Councils should consider cost implications including:-

- ✓ Purchase of additional vehicles/equipment
- ✓ Vehicle running costs & fuel
- ✓ Drivers + Loaders / Operatives including overheads
- ✓ Initial purchase of receptacles
- ✓ Delivery of receptacles and on-going replacement costs for damaged / stolen items
- ✓ Administration of scheme – could you centralise this function? See information below on 'keeping administration costs down'
- ✓ Communications budget, marketing, publicity, press, leaflet production & distribution / postage costs
- ✓ Gate fees for organic waste
- ✓ Consultancy fees

But can offset the above with:-

- ✓ Recycling credits
- ✓ Subscriptions

**Keeping administration costs down:** Have you thought about centralising the function for the administration of the garden waste service across the whole of the County area?

**Surrey Waste Partnership with funding from Improvement & Efficiency South East (IESE) is currently looking at a centralised system for administering their green waste services.**

All of the waste collection authorities in Surrey operate subscription garden waste collections. The physical delivery of these services is generally managed as part of the overall waste and recycling services in each authority. There are differences in containment methods (predominantly reusable bags or wheeled bins), differences in disposal points and suppliers and differences in approaches to method and timing of subscriptions. Each authority spends a significant sum administering the renewals as well as managing customers in terms of service issues through the year. There is duplication of effort that will result in savings opportunities if back office functions are aligned and amalgamated either through a third party supplier or through a host authority. The centralised system will include;

- Receiving and processing payments – whether by direct debit [preferred], card or cheque
- Receiving service complaints
- Transmitting orders for collection service to collection agency [contractor or DSO]
- Arranging despatch of containers, bags or sacks
- Forwarding income to participating authorities
- Preparation of management reports
- Advising on and/or arranging service promotions and advertising
- Possibly also involvement in other composting initiatives, e g centralised sale of bulk discount composter, green cones and wormeries
- Providing expert assistance and advice on composting
- Examining further joint ownership with other key partners, e g hospital trusts and private industry

Authorities would have the option of joining into this centralised system on an individual basis as and when appropriate – the system would not necessarily rely on all authorities taking part from the outset in order to function effectively. This would allow the freedom and flexibility for some authorities to join in at a later date, perhaps when the benefits become more apparent.

For further details on this scheme, please contact [Christine.batty@southeastiep.gov.uk](mailto:Christine.batty@southeastiep.gov.uk)

### 5.3 Participation & Subscriptions

It is important to charge at the right level to ensure residents are willing and able to participate. Consideration will first need to be given to the costs associated with introducing and running the service (suggested factors are outlined in section 5.2).

There is likely to be a minimum level of participation at which the service becomes economically viable but equally there may be service and capacity constraints which could limit the expansion, particularly at the outset.

Example 1 – across one county in England, the following schemes and subscriptions are currently in operation:-

#### Example of subscriptions system across county of Hampshire – all councils currently using a bag collection system

Of the thirteen districts & boroughs in Hampshire, eleven offered a subscription-based garden waste collection service (all with bag type collections), one offered a free collection service and one offered no collection service. Subscriptions in the 11 authorities are broken down as follows:-

- Seven authorities offered a fortnightly collection service (six authorities offered one bag, one authority offered two bags). Annual subscription varied - lowest being £23, highest £35 (**Average charge = £27**)
- One authority offered a weekly bag collection @ £25/annum
- Two authorities offered a free-of-charge collection service for the first sack, but residents were asked to pay for subsequent sacks if required.
- One authority made sacks available to purchase charging £1.50 per sack and collected from households fortnightly.

Example 2 – Northumberland simplified the county's system of subscriptions for green waste collections

#### Northumberland's districts had a variety of subscription levels for green waste collection until a uniform approach was adopted in 2009

Northumberland County Council introduced a county-wide opt-in subscription-based garden waste collection service in 2009. Prior to this arrangement six districts in the county had differing services varying from a free-of-charge opt-out service through to a £35 opt-in service. The new service gave uniformity to the county's green waste collections. Subscriptions were £20 / year in 2009 and remained at this level for 2010.

## 5.4 Communications

Further along the line, getting your **communications** right is paramount! Here are some top tips we have collected from speaking to councils who have gone through the process

- ✓ **Dealing with queries & complaints** – Ensure that you prepare a list of likely Frequently Asked Questions early on with standard responses. Make sure your help desk, officers and Members all have copies so that a consistent message can be given to the public & press - right from the start.
- ✓ **Give the alternatives** – It is important to highlight the alternative options for dealing with garden waste, for example home composting and HWRS
- ✓ **Highlight the (increasing) costs of continuing with the existing approach**, particularly if garden waste is currently collected within the domestic waste stream. In a so called ‘free-of-charge’ service all householders are paying for disposal through their council tax, whether they utilise the service or not. With the opt-in service, only those who wish to use it pay for it.
- ✓ Get the right **communications budget** – look at the WIN document [Waste Communications Budgets: presenting the business case](#) (Mar ‘10) for help on establishing a business case for communications spend.
- ✓ **Be consistent with your campaign** and utilise the resources that are already available. See [Recycle Now Partners](#) for communications support & downloadable resources.

## 5.5 Operational issues

- ✓ **More tonnage / household.** If garden waste is currently collected without charge, the introduction of a subscription-based service may see much higher volumes of garden waste generated per household as residents get full value for money. Bromsgrove DC introduced a subscription-based wheeled bin service for garden waste and had previously collected in the same way without charge. They reported:- “Pre charge we collected approx 230kg/ household / year as opposed to 377kg with the charge... previously residents may have presented a bin with a few leaves in it now nearly every bin will be full”.
- ✓ **Requests for smaller bins / bags** An assisted collection or different collection receptacle may be an alternative option for those who have difficulty in presenting the standard receptacle offered.

## 5.6 Risks

Contamination	Low participation	Health & Safety
<p>If communications and public engagement are successfully provided to run alongside the introduction and continuation of a scheme contamination can be managed successfully. Check out the following document on WIN:- <a href="#">Garden Waste Kerbside Recycling Exemplar Campaigning Strategy (Waste Aware Scotland)</a></p> <p>For excellent and detailed information including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Policies to manage contamination</li> <li>▪ Timing and implementation of the campaign</li> <li>▪ Recommended campaign materials &amp; communication messages with lots of great examples</li> </ul>	<p>Consider <b>coinciding start of service with the start of the growing season</b>. This ensures that the service is available when demand is greatest, encouraging householders to quickly develop the habit of recycling garden waste.</p> <p><b>Promote home composting &amp; HWRS as alternatives.</b></p> <p>For <b>help on communication</b> also see the document held on WIN <a href="#">Garden Waste Kerbside Recycling Exemplar Campaigning Strategy (Waste Aware Scotland)</a></p>	<p>See this excellent document on WIN for Health &amp; Safety good practice guidance : <a href="#">Green waste collection: Health Issues (HSE)</a> It is intended for managers, supervisors and operators working with green waste.</p>

## 6.0 Contacts & Links

WIN: [win@southeastiep.gov.uk](mailto:win@southeastiep.gov.uk) & [www.win.org.uk](http://www.win.org.uk)