

REPORT OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE – 22 September 2009

1 BULKY HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE - EVALUATION

1.1 This item of business was referred by the Review Committee on 22 September 2009 to the Executive with recommendations relating to the new charging scheme for the collection of bulky household waste. An extract of the key elements of the report of the Head of Environmental Services to the Committee is appended.

1.2 It is proposed that the Executive **RESOLVES**

- (1) That the charging regime for bulky waste be retained and that concessions should not be introduced at this time.
- (2) That the 'no refund policy' is endorsed together with the introduction of a voucher scheme in the situation where a service request is made and the item in questions is removed prior to the Council's contractor attending the premises. The request for a voucher shall be initiated by the customer and the voucher must be redeemed within 18 months.
- (3) That officers further investigate with the Police, the Environment Agency and Parish/Town Councils the recent spate of thefts of items awaiting collection by the Council's contractor. (HES)

Appendix

Bulky Household Waste Collection Service - Evaluation

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report has been prepared at the request of the Review Committee to enable an evaluation to be undertaken into the introduction of a charge for the collection of bulky household waste. A charge of £15 for up to 3 items and £5 for every additional item booked at the same time was introduced on 1 April 2009 for which no refund is available.

2 CURRENT LEVEL OF DEMAND

- 2.1 Since the introduction of a charge, there has been a significant fall in the demand for this service. Officers have identified a number of reasons for the fall in demand, but consider that this is predominantly due to the current financial climate, resulting in fewer residents moving house and a reduction in the purchase of large household items. Other factors are that residents are making their own arrangements for the disposal of items, either by taking them direct to a Recycling Centre for Household Waste or seeking the assistance of friends or relatives, requesting the supplier of new items to remove them or using re-use organisations such as the Hamlin Trust.
- 2.2 A separate issue has been identified regarding the fall in demand for the collection of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) such as white goods, which is associated to the current high price of scrap metal. 'Rag and bone men' are regularly touring the District (sometimes as often as 3 times a week, according to anecdotal information from staff living in Ashingdon and Hockley) collecting all metal items such as fridges, washing machines and ovens from resident's properties. There have also been occasions when residents contact the Council to request a refund of our fee, as the item has already been removed by a 'rag and bone man' after a booking has been made, but before our contractor has collected it.
- 2.3 There is a concern that these items are being taken by unregistered carriers and that they are not taken to licensed scrap metal dealers for disposal of individual components. In consequence during the dismantling of fridges/freezers harmful refrigerants (CFC's) could escape into the atmosphere.
- 2.4 The fact that 'rag and bone men' take our white goods, means a loss of two streams of revenue for the Council: loss of the service fee, and also the loss of recycling credits.

3 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

- 3.1 Although there has been some opposition to paying for this service, particularly by residents who have previously had bulky items collected free of charge, many residents expect to pay for this type of service.
- 3.2 Since the introduction of the service the following comments were recorded in respect of those callers who declined to use the service.

Reasons for declining to use the service	
Cost	33%
Will make own arrangements	41%
Wanted a concession	2%
Item too heavy or resident elderly so unable to move from house	1%
May call back/ will call back when has 3 items for disposal	20%
Item could not be taken under scheme	1%

- 3.3 The percentage of callers declining the service was recorded as follows:-

April	28%
May	31%
June	26%
July	10%
August	14.5%

- 3.4 Although a large number of residents have declined the service because of the cost, many accepted that imposing a charge was reasonable, but chose to dispose of the items at the Recycling Centre for Household Waste or make other arrangements.
- 3.5 There is anecdotal evidence that under the free service provided by our previous contractor, there were often complaints regarding the lengthy delay in goods being collected and some residents offered to pay to have a quicker service. Under the new contract, which started in April 2007, the opportunity was taken to significantly improve our response times, which can now be as quick the following day, if a resident phones by 3pm on the day before their normal collection.

Customer Satisfaction

- 3.6 Satisfaction surveys have been carried out on approx. 9% of the residents using the service. Of these residents, 64% were very satisfied with the

service, 22% were satisfied and only 6% were dissatisfied with the service, mostly due to the cost.

Promotion of the new scheme

- 3.7 The chargeable scheme was announced in Rochford District Matters (RDM) on 31 March 2009 and information was provided on the Council website. A letter was also sent to all the known management companies for blocks of flats, advising them of the charge and some of these put this letter up on notice boards to inform their tenants.
- 3.8 In order to make the scheme more widely known, a leaflet was produced to advertise the scheme to residents. This leaflet was distributed to Parish Councils, Rochford and Rayleigh libraries and also displayed in both of our receptions. The leaflet has also been handed out at events that the recycling team attended such as Wild Woods Day and the various village fayres.
- 3.9 As it appears from customer feedback that some residents are still unaware of the charge, it is likely that not all residents are aware of the service at all, so it is intended to revise the existing leaflet and mailout again to libraries, Parish Councils and voluntary agencies, also a further article for RDM Spring edition is planned.
- 3.10 An arrangement with Springboard Housing to collect from its Rochford properties has been agreed at a charge of £5 per item. In a recent meeting with Rochford Housing Association, it also expressed an interest for the same service. To date Springboard have made 30 bookings.

4 POTENTIAL CHANGES TO THE SERVICE

- 4.1 Although all residents are advised that there is a 'no refund' policy when booking, following customer feedback about the inflexibility of our service, the following changes have been made.
- 4.2 If a resident who has only booked 1 or 2 items contacts us before our contractor has been given the daily collection list, we will accept additional items up to the maximum of 3. The cost to the Council in time to deal with this request is limited, and provides a customer focussed approach.
- 4.3 Residents wishing to change the item/s already booked may do so before the collection list has been sent to our contractor.
- 4.4 Residents sometimes wish to cancel for several reasons, even though they are advised before booking that there is a no refund policy, e.g. the resident has changed their mind, or has given the item to a friend or relative. However, an increasing number of these items especially the WEEE items are allegedly being taken by 'rag and bone men' or travellers from resident's gardens before the actual collection day, the resident then requests a refund. Reminding a resident of the 'no refund policy' leaves them very unhappy with the service provided.

- 4.5 Following the receipt of a formal complaint about our 'no refund policy', a voucher scheme was introduced whereby a resident who cancels a collection is sent a letter confirming entitlement to a future collection, up to the number of items previously paid for, without further payment. This has been successfully used on 2 occasions to date.

Concessions

- 4.6 Shortly after the introduction of the scheme representations were received from Stambridge Parish Councillor requesting that the charge be reviewed and if possible waived for the Elderly, as they considered it quite expensive for them. A handful of residents have also requested that a concessionary charge is introduced.
- 4.7 Officers have considered this issue and are of the view that the introduction of a concession would be problematical for the following reasons:
- Additional resources would be required to identify residents on benefits.
 - Sharing of benefit information is not always possible due to data protection.
 - It is not possible to confirm resident's eligibility due to age by phone.
 - Checks regarding eligibility would slow down the whole collection process.

5 RESOURCES

- 5.1 The recycling contract allows for the collection of 9000 bulky items and 7000 WEEE items, per year, within the contract sum. It was anticipated that there would be an overall booking total of 9000 which would equate to an income of approx £11,000 per month or £135,000 per year.
- 5.2 The total collections as at 31 August are 1034 bookings, made up of 1705 bulky and 613 WEEE items, with an income of £15,815.
- 5.3 If the level of demand continues, at the present rate, the estimated income from the scheme will be £38,000 for the 2009/10 financial year. This issue will be addressed as part of the revised estimates process.
- 5.4 A temporary full time equivalent post was created to administer the new scheme. In order to continue the service, at the current level, dealing with bookings, payments, phone calls and follow ups, it is considered that a permanent part time post for 18½ hours per week would be required. This growth item will be considered as part of the forthcoming budget process against other pressures.

6 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The report identifies a recent spate of thefts of bulky items left within the curtilage of private property, awaiting collection by our contractor and makes

recommendations to mitigate our associated losses. Unregistered waste carriers can also be formally investigated by the Environment Agency.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Although there was some expectation of an increase in fly-tipping because of the introduction of this charge, the Contract Monitoring Officers have confirmed that there has been no increase since the introduction of the charge.
- 7.2 There is a concern that unauthorised persons taking refrigeration equipment are unlikely to ensure the safe disposal of refrigerants such as CFCs, that can deplete the ozone layer.

8 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Stambidge Parish Councillor has made specific representations that a concession should be considered for elderly residents using this service.

Richard Evans

Head of Environmental Services

Background Papers:-

None