

Private and Confidential

Name and address

Lois Dale

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Date

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Dear Miss Lois Dale

Thank you for your letter regarding the council's garden waste service.

Like many councils across the country, we are facing financial challenges. Legally we are required to set a balanced budget over a five-year period, and this is called the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Over the next four years we need to find ways to save money or generate income as rising costs and inflation, combined with cuts in government grants, mean there is a threat to the MTFS of a potential deficit of £9.7m.

As a result, we face a balance between maintaining our statutory services – those we must legally deliver, with those that we know are highly valued but do not come with legal duties. We want to protect against service cuts in all areas, but we must make some difficult decisions to ensure our finances are sustainable for future years.

At a Full Council meeting in December 2022, Councillors agreed a set of budget principles. These principles included the need to protect frontline services, and that non-statutory services (those we are not legally required to offer), such as garden waste collections, or those that compete in a commercial environment should not be a burden on taxpayers who cannot take advantage of them.

In line with these principles, Cabinet Members, at a meeting on Tuesday 18 July, agreed to introduce a subscription service for garden waste collection from April 2024. The current garden waste collection costs the council approximately £800,000 per year – in direct costs alone, and as the district expands, these costs will rise. Meeting the demand will require additional vehicles and staff. By introducing a chargeable garden waste service, we can ensure that the service remains sustainable into the future.

Around 65% of authorities across England and half of the waste collection authorities in the Eastern Region have already opted to charge for household garden waste. Of those 65% of councils that have introduced a similar scheme, the frequent data analysis does not always suggest there is an increase in fly tipping or other negative impacts on the environment as a result of introducing a subscription service. However, these issues will be carefully managed.

Not all properties in Huntingdonshire require a garden waste collection service as they do not have a garden. Introducing a subscription means the service will only be paid for by those households that choose to use it. This is similar to bulky waste collections where only households requesting the service have to pay.


Because only those residents who have a need for the service will subscribe, we will reduce the council's vehicle movement numbers and positively reduce the CO2 emissions of the waste collection service. The forecasted CO2e emissions for a chargeable garden waste service in Huntingdonshire is 802.79 tonnes. This is a 369.17 tonne reduction from our current garden waste service supporting the Council's target of carbon net zero by 2040. These are based on the Carbon Warm factors calculations from DEFRA.

It is also important to note, that currently 42% of the waste we collect in the grey bin is organic waste. Waste that should go into the green bin. We want to work with our local community to find better ways to reduce, recycle, reuse and collect all types of waste. We are committed in supporting residents to reduce waste by encouraging people to think about what they are disposing of. Garden waste, for example, can be composted or used for mulch - these approaches are much better for the environment than our current collection methods. As we look to make the service as accessible to those who want to use it, people will also be able to share bins under their own informal arrangements.

We will work to provide opportunities for District, Town and Parish Councillors to inform the offer of support for all residents as well as providing ongoing communication about the changes. Once the service is up and running, we are committed to monitoring, and if needs be, making any adjustments or improvements.

Our website will also be kept up to date with the latest information and FAQs where you will be able to find out more.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Sarah Conboy
Executive Leader, Huntingdonshire District Council

Frequently asked questions

Why is the council introducing a garden waste subscription service?

Like many councils across the country, we are facing financial challenges. Over the next four years we need to find ways to save money or generate income as rising costs and inflation, combined with cuts in government grants, mean there is a threat that the council could be in a potential deficit of £9.7m.

As a result, we face a balance between maintaining services we are legally required to deliver, so called statutory services, with those that we know are highly valued but do not come with legal duties. We want to protect against service cuts in all areas, but we must make some difficult decisions to ensure our finances are sustainable for future years.

Unlike household waste and recycling, there's no legal requirement to collect garden waste so councils can charge for collections. Rather than remove the service we want to keep the service for those that need and value it.

Around 65% of authorities across England and half of the waste collection authorities in the Eastern Region have already opted to charge for household garden waste.

Not all properties in Huntingdonshire require a garden waste collection service as they do not have a garden. Introducing a subscription means the service will only be paid for by those households that choose to use it. This is similar to bulky waste collections where only households requesting the service have to pay.

Why can't the charge be added to Council Tax?

There is no legal requirement to collect garden waste so many local authorities charge for this service in order to continue to be able to offer collections. Councillors agreed that it was important to continue to offer a garden waste collection service for residents who wish to use it rather than stop it so we will act in line with the majority of other councils and introduce a subscription service.

Council tax itself is a mandatory payment which covers a variety of services such as fire, police, adult social care and children's services including education. You may not use all these services but you still have to contribute to these via council tax. The rules around administration and collection of council tax are set out within the Council Tax (administration and enforcement) regulations 1992. These set out in specific detail how CT must be calculated and billed, even down to detailed instalment calculations, and provide for how action for non-payment must proceed. There is no provision in law for other ad-hoc charges such as that for green bins to be included

We collect council tax on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, The Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Cambridgeshire Fire Authority, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as well as Town and Parish councils across the district.

We keep just 7p of every £1 of council tax collected as the other elements are determined by the other organisations. The council tax we retain is significantly lower than our neighbours, and the national average for Shire Districts.

This change brings the garden waste collection in-line with other not legally required, pay for services, such as bulky waste collections, which is a service only paid for by people who use it.

Is charging for garden waste legal?

Charging for garden waste collection is legal. Under the Controlled Waste Regulations 2012, councils can charge for the collection of garden waste.

Unlike household waste and recycling, there's no legal requirement to collect garden waste and councils can charge for collections. The income from charging for garden waste collections would make the service self-financing. Well over half of all councils in England charge for this service and have done for many years.

Why have the public not been consulted on the proposals?

At a Full Council meeting in December 2022, Councillors agreed a set of budget principles. These principles included the need to protect frontline services and that non-statutory services, such as garden waste collections, or those that compete in a commercial environment should not be a burden on taxpayers who cannot take advantage of them.

As a matter of law, there is no general duty on public authorities to consult before making a decision.

Councils sometimes have a statutory requirement to consult their residents and this is especially true for issues such as planning, or redevelopments. Statutory consultations are bound by legal requirements and can have strict rules surrounding how they should be conducted.

Guidance from the Local Government Association also states that there are a number of situations where a consultation would not be required. This includes where a council's room for manoeuvre is limited (for example by statutory or budgetary restrictions) and as a result any consultation would not change the final decision.

Legally, the council is required to set a balanced budget and given some of the financial challenges we are facing, introducing a garden waste subscription service has been identified as one of the ways we can protect our frontline services and protect against service cuts.

This will impact on lower income households in the district and/or those on lower Council Tax bands. What will be done to support those people?

Not all households with a garden bin use the service - out of the 83% of properties that can access the service, 30% don't regularly use it.

There are a number of ways that the Council continues to support households on lower incomes, one of which is the Council Tax Support Scheme, that calculates the contribution required based

on the benefits they are in receipt of. A review of this scheme in 2023 will ensure the most financial vulnerable residents are offered the greatest level of Council Tax Support award.

Residents in our district who need additional information, advice and guidance can contact the Residents Advice and Information team, who take time to assess the person's personal circumstances and work with them to suggest suitable and sustainable changes and routes to small funding pots that can help to achieve their goals. We will continue to encourage residents on lower incomes to contact the Residents Advice and Information team to explore the ways they may be able to reduce their household expenditure and/or apply for funding if the retention of a garden waste collection service is important in their household to maintain positive physical and mental health.

In addition, households on lower incomes will be welcome to share bins under their own informal arrangements but only one household will be responsible for the subscription and adherence to the T&Cs of the scheme.

What impact will this have on the environment and CO2e reductions?

Not all properties in Huntingdonshire require the service and only those residents who have a need for the service will subscribe. This approach will reduce vehicle movement numbers and positively reduce the CO2 emissions of the waste collection service supporting the Council's target of carbon net zero by 2040.

The forecasted CO2e emissions for a chargeable garden waste service in Huntingdonshire is 802.79 tonnes. This is a 369.17 tonne reduction from our current garden waste service. These are based on the Carbon Warm factors calculations from DEFRA.

Garden waste can also be composted or used for mulch - these approaches are much better for the environment than our current collection methods.

Won't people just put their garden waste in the grey bin adding to operational costs and decreasing environmental benefits?

Currently 42% of the waste we collect in the grey bin is organic waste. We want to work with our local community to find better ways to reduce, recycle, reuse and collect all waste.

Approximately 70% of the food waste from UK households that enters the residual waste stream is edible. By cutting food waste the average UK household can save £500 each year.

We can also expect to see a large volume of garden waste being prevented as resident change their behaviour and adopt new approaches to maintaining their gardens and home composting.

Can I share a bin with my neighbour? If so, how will this be managed?

People will be able to make a personal arrangement with a neighbour to share the cost of the additional garden bin service. We would allocate the bin to the property that pays for it and will withdraw it if payment is not received. If people share their garden waste bin with a neighbour, the householder which pays the annual charge will have overall responsibility for the bin as a bin can

only be allocated to one address. It would be the responsibility of the named householder if the bin is contaminated, misused, or needs replacing.

Were other alternatives to introducing a subscription service considered?

Other options, such as pausing collections in the winter or collecting every three weeks, were considered. However, by introducing a subscription service that is provided all year round, we will be able to protect our frontline services and maintain a balanced budget and set a sustainable Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Currently the cost of garden waste collection is distributed among all taxpayers, through funding diverted from other services, regardless of their usage or benefit. By directly charging for this service, we establish a system where those who actively utilise the service contribute to its funding.

Won't this lead to an increase in fly-tipping?

About 65% of English Waste Collection Authorities have introduced a charge for collecting garden waste and they have not reported an increase in fly-tipping. Officers have been investigating the likelihood of increased fly-tipping based on data from authorities that already charge for garden waste collections. This data shows that the majority have not seen any increase in instances of garden waste fly-tipping, with only a handful reporting a marginal increase in the first year of implementation.

We do have existing effective methods for clearing waste and prosecuting offenders and can issue anyone caught fly tipping with a fixed penalty notice of £1,000. Serious offences of fly tipping are punishable by an unlimited fine or up to five years in prison.

In addition, we invested in new technology such as improved CCTV cameras as well as supporting national campaigns to tackle fly tipping.

Won't this increase pressure on the district's Recycling Centres and concerns for management of increased traffic on the highways?

We have a close working relationship with Cambridgeshire County Council and with them will monitor to see if there is any increased pressure on Household Recycling Centres.