

9 August 2023

Report of	Head of Neighbourhood Services	Author	Rosa Tanfield & John Kellett
Title	Garden Waste Charging scheme		☎ 0330 053 8047
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 At its meeting on 7 June 2023, Cabinet agreed to the introduction of a chargeable garden waste scheme to commence in January 2024. The decision, whilst difficult, was agreed to support the Council in closing an unprecedented budget gap.

1.2 Cabinet also agreed:

“Authority be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste to adjust the scheme as may be needed, taking account of early take up and experience, to include discounts and promotions.”

1.3 The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste, prior to deciding on the way ahead asks the Scrutiny Panel for their views and recommendations. That they should consider the time, deliverability and budget implications of the recommendations and complexity of different options, taking account of best practice elsewhere.

1.4 The topics are:

- Topic 1: The pricing model
 - Option A – as proposed and agreed by Cabinet (sign up, annual charge (+ charge for wheeled bin where needed))
 - Option B – a single signup fee and annual charge
- Topic 2: Receipt of benefit(s) discount
 - Option A – as proposed and agreed by Cabinet (no provision)
 - Option B1 – residents on Local Council Tax Support receive a discount, with all other residents seeing an increase on the charges proposed in the pricing model option A
 - Option B2 – residents on Local Council Tax Support receive a discount, with all other residents seeing an increase on the charges proposed in pricing model option B
- Topic 3: The financial process for residents
 - Option A – as proposed and agreed by Cabinet (online annual card payments)
 - Option B – Direct debits
 - Option B1 – Annual transactions
 - Option B2 – Monthly transactions

- Topic 4: The process for dealing with unwanted wheeled bins already in the community
 - Option A – as proposed and agreed by Cabinet (residents can request a pickup)
 - Option B – Community based drop off and pick up

1.5 All options, in the main, are deliverable within the timeframe set. Each option has been adjusted to meet the revenue budget set and agreed by Cabinet, apart from the impact of 'alternative options to the financial process for residents' (topic 3, options B, B1 and B2).

2. Action Required

2.1 The key objective of the garden waste scheme is to meet financial revenue targets to support the raft of measures in place to meet the significant budget deficit faced by the Council. The proposals set out to reach an overall net revenue target of:

- £15k in 2023/24
- £1,321k in 2024/25
- £1,658k in 2025/26

To reach these targets, Cabinet agreed that the service must launch in January 2024.

2.2 It is requested that Scrutiny Panel consider and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste on the following topics of the garden waste scheme and the options set out within this report:

- (a) The pricing model (option A or option B);
- (b) Receipt of benefit(s) discount (option A or option B1 or option B2);
- (c) The financial process for residents (option A or option B, option B1 or option B2);
- (d) The process for dealing with unwanted wheeled bins already in the community (option A and/or option B).

2.3 In considering these topics of the scheme and the recommendations to be made to the Portfolio Holder, the Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider:

- Time and deliverability of the recommended option/s, mindful the service must be launched in January 2024 (with public communications starting in October 2023);
- The budget and the income to be secured from the recommended option/s;
- The simplicity and ease of explanation and operation of service from the recommended option/s;
- Best practice and how the proposed recommended option/s compares.

3. Reason for Scrutiny

3.1 Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider this report on the new arrangements for garden waste collection as agreed by Cabinet on 7 June 2023, and for the Panel to make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste that ensure consideration has been given to the topics of the scheme set out in the report. The focus of this report is on those topics that were discussed in the main at Cabinet on 7 June 2023 and are set out above (Section 2) and further within this report.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 Like all local authorities, Colchester City Council is facing significant financial challenges. Faced with a significant budget deficit, and £10m of extra costs, the Council has agreed to a raft of savings and income generation measures to balance its books.
- 4.2 In this context a range of budget options for saving and income generation were approved by Full Council on 22 February 2023. One of these decisions was to introduce a charge for garden waste collections. Garden waste collection is a discretionary service and current legislation enables councils to apply a charge. In doing so, the Council can protect essential services. This will also ensure only those who use the service pay for it.
- 4.3 At its meeting on 7 June 2023, Cabinet approved the introduction of the proposed opt-in paid for garden waste service to replace the existing service with effect from January 2024, along with the capital funding and procurement of replacement vehicles.

Current garden waste collection operations

- 4.4 The Council currently collects garden waste from 70,531 kerbside and 1,184 hard to reach properties within Colchester (86,853 total properties in Colchester).
- 4.5 The cost to deliver this service is estimated to be £1,812k (2022/23). This includes staff and vehicle costs, the provision of replacement reusable bags and brown wheeled bins. In 2022/23, £45,284 was spent on replacing reusable bags for 42,721 resident requests.
- 4.6 The Council currently receives payment from Essex County Council, who are the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), that support the operation of garden waste services in Colchester, and these are known as credit claim payments and are paid on each tonne of household garden waste the Council collects for composting. Compost credits are paid in accordance with the Inter Authority Agreement and service delivery plans. Only household green garden waste passed to the WDA for reprocessing is eligible for a compost credit payment. For 2022/23 the Council received £265,049.05.
- 4.7 The Council has a contract with Essex County Council for the processing of the material, which is delivered directly by the Council's collection crews to Birch Airfield Composting Ltd for composting. It is recycled into nutrient-rich compost. Please see <https://birchcomposting.com/> for more details.
- 4.8 The Council provides a wheeled bin-based garden collection service to 12,751 properties as of 1st April 2023; this accounts for 18% of all garden waste kerbside collections, with 82% of kerbside properties in Colchester using reusable bags for garden waste collections. Wards with a wheeled bin service include Mile End, Greenstead, St Anne's and St John's, Old Heath, and the Hythe, Berechurch, Shrub End and Stanway.
- 4.9 To service this mix (i.e., reusable bags and wheeled bins) kerbside garden waste collections, the Council run a mixture of fleet:
- 1 x Bin Lift Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCV) (serving households who have wheeled bins)
 - 4 x Open Back RCV's (cannot service wheeled bins)
 - Additionally, to address capacity needs, on a Friday a second Bin Lift RCV is used.
 - Hard to reach service is currently delivered using 3 caged vehicles.

- 4.10 The mixture of vehicles makes the resilience of delivering the service difficult, especially if the Bin Lift RCV is unable to run, because the Open Back RCVs are unable to service wheeled bin properties. Whilst crews can service reusable sack routes with a Bin Lift RCV safely, this is not recommended due to the additional stretching and possible strains to empty the bags.
- 4.11 Crews, which are made up of one Team Leader and two Operatives, are assigned to each vehicle.
- 4.12 Crews that work on black sacks/garden waste bags have higher level of sickness (11 days per Full Time Equivalent (FTE)) because of musculoskeletal injury than those working on wheel bin routes (8 days per FTE). Research has consistently proven that the level of musculoskeletal injuries associated with using wheeled bins are lower.
- 4.13 Analysis of the levels of missed bins from both forms of collection identify that it is higher on sack rounds than on wheeled bins (e.g., wheeled bin produced 8.21% of reported missed bins but represent 18.35% of the population.)
- 4.14 There is a limit on the number of gardens sacks that residents can present each fortnight – 4 sacks or one wheeled bin. The standard issue wheeled bin is 240 litres.
- 4.15 Residents who may face difficulties with presenting any recycling or rubbish for collection (including garden waste), are able to apply to the Council for an ‘assisted collection’. This means that following an assessment by an officer, arrangements will be made for the crews to collect the recycling and rubbish from an agreed location on the resident’s property. Assisted collections are not available from flats.

Proposed scheme as agreed by Cabinet on 7 June 2023

4.16 The following outlines the current proposal:

- A wheeled bin only service will be provided, where assisted collections will continue to be provided.
- Fortnightly collections will continue, with a pause of two weeks (i.e., one collection cycle) each Christmas to enable staff and vehicles to be redeployed on higher priority and volume routes.
- It will launch mid-January 2024 after the Christmas 2023 pause.
- Households will be issued with a sticker each year to place on their bins, to provide visible back up to the on-board systems for the crews.
- Residents can share a bin if this better suits their needs, as long as one resident subscribes

Best practice / benchmarking / lessons learnt

4.17 Extensive research has been undertaken with other local authorities to help develop the proposal, avoid mistakes, and maximise service performance. These Councils are referenced within the report and further details are provided below:

Bins for Garden Waste:

The standard bins offered by local authorities is a brown or green 240 litre garden waste wheeled bin.

In Colchester, the Council provides 240 litre brown wheeled bin for garden waste and will continue with this as standard. However, it is proposed to offer residents a smaller 140 litre brown wheeled bin as an alternative. This bin would fit through smaller doorways (this has been tested at a property in New Town with a typical door size of those types of smaller and older properties to confirm the bin can fit through). Additionally, having a smaller footprint may suit residents with smaller gardens.

Service Stickers:

Almost all authorities contacted used an 'Annual Service Sticker' to give a clear visible entitlement to the service. Where authorities do not use stickers there is evidence of service abuse (Tendring District Council).

Colchester City Council stickers will include personalisation of the address, an end of subscription date, a web link to the online calendar and other useful information. It would be placed on the front of the bin to be easily visible to crews.

Alignment of Charging to Financial year:

All Councils tend to align charging to financial year as has been proposed for Colchester.

Payment Options:

No Council offers refunds for part year cancellations. The Council proposed no refunds for part year cancellations.

No Council offers a 6-month option for Garden Waste collection to cover the main growing season only. The Council proposes not to offer a 6-month collection option.

Operations:

Some Councils collect less often in the winter and most suspend collections for 4 weeks around Christmas. The garden waste collection will pause for 2 weeks over the Christmas period as it does already.

Proposed Pricing Model

4.18 The basic Garden Waste proposition consists of up to 3 charges:

£ set-up + £ Bin (if needed) + £ Service

4.19 There will be a one-off set up charge of £10.

4.20 Where a customer requires a wheeled bin there would be a charge of £30 to cover supply of a wheeled bin and delivery to the address. This cost may change during the year if the cost to the Council increases or decreases (i.e., if the cost to the Council decreases, the cost to the customer will decrease). If a household already has a wheeled bin, there would be no charge for a wheeled bin.

4.21 There will be an ongoing service charge initially £55/year per bin.

Revenue implications

4.22 The current assumptions are that most of the revenue costs will be met by the approved revenue budget. The following table sets out the estimated revenue implications of the proposals agreed by Cabinet.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Revenue implications	£000s	£000s	£000s
Recurring Expenditure			
Financial reconciliation and stage payment processing	12	12	13
Operational costs	1	1	1
Seasonal vehicle hire	-	24	25
Community grant offer	2	5	5
Print, media, and comms	53	34	36
Saving on garden sacks	(45)	(45)	(45)
Borrowing costs - MRP	-	83	163
Borrowing costs - Interest	25	45	59
Total expenditure	48	159	257
Income			
Income Season 1	(99)	(596)	
Income Season 2		(1,075)	
Income Season 3 (inc, renewals)			(2,066)
Recycling credit income (reduced from non-take up)	36	191	151
Total income	(63)	(1,480)	(1,915)
Overall Net Revenue Impact	(15)	(1,321)	(1,658)

- 4.23 *Financial reconciliation and stage payment processing*
An allowance has been made for additional resource that will be required in addition to the current standard service to process and reconcile payments.
- 4.24 *Operational costs*
An additional cost associated with transferring digital onboard devices has been allowed for the replacement of the vehicles.
- 4.25 *Seasonal vehicle hire*
It is expected, as currently experienced, that there will be an increase in the presentation of garden waste for collection at peak periods when the weather encourages rapid growth in gardens. To meet this seasonal demand, an allowance has been made for the hire of additional fleet.
- 4.26 *Grant offer*
As part of the proposals to support alternative and community-based options for dealing with garden waste, the Council will offer an annual grant scheme that will help the setting up of Community Composting schemes.
- 4.27 *Print, media, and comms*
As a commercial offer, investment will need to be made into promotional activities and materials, and in addition, there will be an annual cost associated with the printing and distribution of stickers for residents to identify their bins and sign up to the scheme.

4.28 *Savings on garden sacks*

As garden sacks will no longer be provided, there will be no ongoing cost associated with the replacement of these. Any new wheeled bins are proposed to be funded by the resident and so no cost is represented here.

4.29 *MRP (minimum revenue provision)*

MRP is the minimum amount which a Council must charge to its revenue budget each year, to set aside a provision for repaying external borrowing (loans).

4.30 *Interest*

Interest is payable from the point money is borrowed; depreciation becomes payable in the financial year after the assets are purchased.

4.31 *Income*

The Medium-Term Financial Forecast sets out an overall net revenue increase of £600k in 2023/24 and £725k in 2024/25.

4.32 Seasons 1 and 2 (i.e., 2023/24 and 2024/25) income is all from new subscriptions only and assumes a 11% and 17% uptake of eligible households, respectively. It is in Season 3 (2025/26) and subsequent seasons/years that the Council will also achieve renewal revenues.

4.33 Due to accounting rules, the Council is required to show the income in the financial year which matches the year of delivery of the service. Therefore, for those new customers subscribing in 2023/24 (estimated to be £695k of income), it is shown in the table above that the Council will account for circa £99k of income in that year, and £596k in 2024/25. Income from new customers subscribing in 2024/25 will be accounted for in that financial year. This means that it is anticipated that there will be a shortfall against the budget saving in 2023/24, but this is expected to catch-up in 2024/25. This shortfall will be monitored and managed as part of the overall in-year financial position.

4.34 The assumptions on subscribers are those numbers needed in the first two financial years to provide the forecasted revenue. The periodicity of signup is uncertain and indeed based on data from Basildon Council it is possible we could achieve the 50% target much quicker possibly during 2024-25 financial year.

4.35 *Recycling credit income*

Due to a percentage of the tonnage of garden waste currently being collected reducing, this will impact on the funding received through credit claim. This is reflected in the calculations of the overall revenue outturn:

- In 2023-24 the reduction in Credit Claim income will be small due to the existing universal service operating for the first 3 quarters and the only quarter of the new service being the winter quarter when arisings are typically lower.
- In 2024-25 the reduction will be more significant on the assumption we will achieve a net 28% signup during this year.
- In 2025-26 our assumptions are to achieve a net 50% of eligible properties subscribed.

4.36 There are other significant factors that impact arisings for garden waste including:

- The weather: warm and wet weather promotes growth; and cool and dry weather such as in 2022-23 resulted in a significant reduction in arisings and income.
- Evidence from other authorities including Peterborough City Council suggests that the residents who do subscribe tend to be heavy users – three years into launch Peterborough City Council is achieving 60% of previous weights with less than 50% of the original households.

Topic 1: Pricing Model

- 4.37 Benchmarking has been undertaken on pricing models of other local authorities. These are set out in Appendix A.
- 4.38 The current pricing model options have been designed to generate the required revenue. In both options:
- residents would pay a £10 fee to request a home move within the City which would cover administration costs of moving the subscription to a new property and sending the customer a new personalised sticker with the new address.
 - residents who have lost their wheeled bin would be expected to pay a charge of £30 for replacement including new sticker and delivery.
 - any damaged wheeled bins will be replaced on a like for like swap basis at no cost.
- 4.39 The proposals set out to reach an overall net revenue target of:
- £15k in 2023/24
 - £1,321k in 2024/25
 - £1,658k in 2025/26

Option A: Current Proposed Pricing Model

- 4.40 The current proposed model is as follows:
- £10 one off set-up fee to reflect the costs in establishing the new Garden Waste Service
 - £30 charge if a wheeled bin is required to deliver service
 - £55 Service Charge for 25 collections per annum
 - *£95 in total for the first year, if the resident needs a bin (£65 if no bin is needed)*
- 4.41 This model delivers an estimated revenue of £695,805 based on
- an 11% sign up (7,758 subscriptions) during 2023-24
 - 82.28% of subscribers needing a wheeled bin
- 4.42 This model is dependent on charging residents for the cost to provide a wheeled bin where a wheeled bin is not available on the premise.

Option B: Alternative Pricing Model

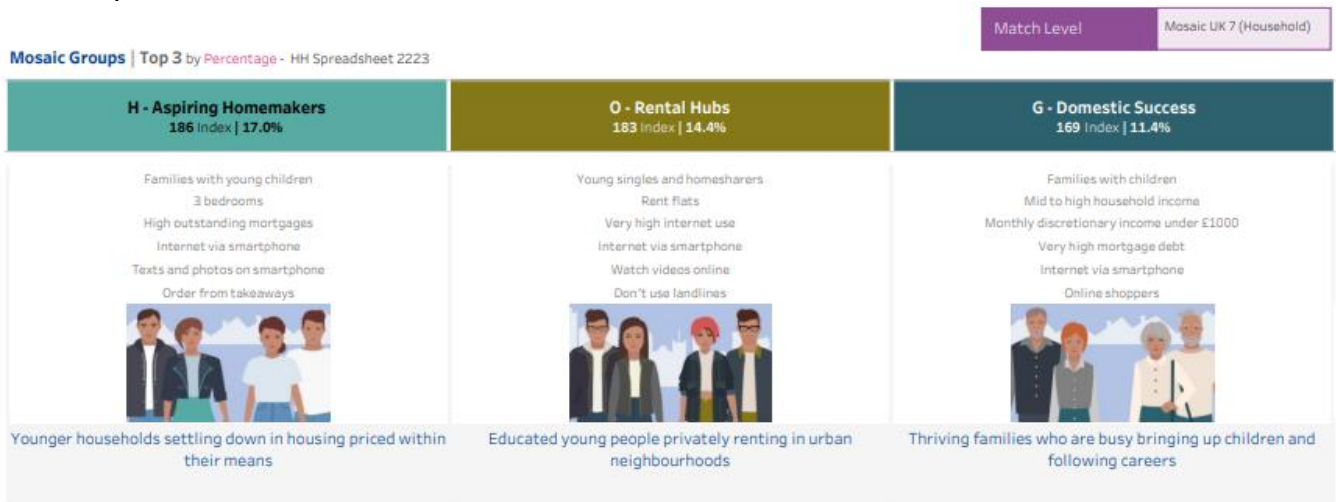
- 4.43 An alternative model would be to charge all residents a one-off set-up charge covering the expected costs for wheeled bins needed irrespective of whether the specific resident needed a bin.
- 4.44 In this case the proposed model would be:
- £35 one off joining fee per bin for all subscriptions
 - £55 Service Charge for 25 collections per annum.
 - *£90 in total for the first year*
- 4.45 This option would deliver an estimated gross revenue of £698,257 based on the same assumptions:
- an 11% sign up (7,758 subscriptions) during 2023-24
 - 82.28% of subscribers needing a wheeled bin
- 4.46 The alternative model would result in all residents paying the same one-off and ongoing service fees.

Topic 2: Receipt of benefit(s) discount options

- 4.47 Colchester City Council would be unable to check entitlement for a discount for any benefit other than Local Council Tax Support (LCTS). Hence if it were decided to offer a discount or free service then receipt of LCTS checked once annually ahead of the renewal process would be the only option. In practice an extract of the relevant LCTS claimants' addresses would be used to populate the Garden Waste service inventory so that discounts could be automated as part of sign up.
- 4.48 Residents in 5.9% of Colchester City Council kerbside properties are currently eligible for LCTS equating to 4,161 properties.
- 4.49 To understand this section of the community, a Mosaic assessment has been undertaken and based on postcode data, the consumer classification is interpreted as follows:



- 4.50 The interpretation across the whole of Colchester is:



- 4.51 For the purpose of modelling it is assumed that 50% of these eligible residents would subscribe (i.e., 2,080).

4.52 The discount for eligible LCTS recipients would impact the gross revenue at a given level of subscription, hence if the Council were to offer discounts for residents in receipt of LCTS, then the service fees would need to be increased to generate the same revenue from a smaller subset of full priced residents.

Option A: No LCTS discounts as per Current Proposed Service

4.53 In general, most local authorities do not offer discounts for residents in receipt of LCTS support on the basis that Garden Waste is not a mandatory collection. Our current proposed service does not contain a LCTS discount.

Option(s) to offer discounts for LCTS:

4.54 If it were recommended to support LCTS discounts the Council would then need to layer the impact of discounting on top of the pricing options to re-assess the impact on those residents not receiving LCTS discounts.

4.55 It is assumed the Council would offer the following to LCTS claimants:

- free sign-up/bin, and
- half priced service

Option B1: Impact of LCTS discount on Current Proposed Pricing Model (paragraphs 4.40-4.42)

4.56 The Current Proposed Pricing Model is £10 set-up, £30 if a wheeled bin is needed and £55 Service Charge (£95.00 in total for first year including sign up).

Number of LCTS Subscriptions:	2080		
One off set up revenue lost cost:	2080 * £40	=	£ 83,200
Half priced Service Charge lost:	2080 * £27.50	=	£ 57,200
Total revenue impact at 50% sign-up (loss)		=	£140,400

4.57 By year 3 the assumptions are that the Council will reach 50% sign up rates across the City based on other councils' performance and will have 35,265 residents subscribed. Removing the 2,080 LCTS recipients then leaves 33,185 residents who would need to pay more.

4.58 To recover the loss and meet the revenue budget income set:

- the £83,200 one off set up costs
 - the £40.00 (£10 + £30) Set-up/Wheeled bin charge would become ~£42.50
- the £57,200 Service Charge LCTS discount
 - the £55 Service charge would become ~£56.72

4.59 So, the new Standard Service Pricing would be:

- £12.50 one off set-up
- £30.00 wheeled bin (where needed)
- £56.72 Service Charge cost
- £99.22 in total for first year including sign up (£4.22 increase)

- 4.60 LCTS discounted would be
- £0.00 one off set up
 - £27.50 Service Charge cost

Option B2: Impact of LCTS discount on Alternative Pricing Model (paragraphs 4.43-4.46)

- 4.61 The Alternative Pricing Model is £35.00 joining fee and £55.00 Service Charge (£90.00 in total for first year including sign up).

Number of LCTS Subscriptions:	2080		
Joining fee revenue lost cost:	2080 * £35	=	£ 72,800
Half Priced Service Charge lost:	2080 * £27.50	=	£ 57,200
Total Revenue impact at 50% sign-up (loss)		=	£130,000

- 4.62 Adopting the same assumptions on sign-ups then the £130,000 will need to be recovered from non LCTS Residents:

- 4.63 To recover the loss and meet the revenue budget income set:

- the £72,800 joining fee costs
 - the £35.00 joining fee would become ~£37.20
- the £57,200 Service LCTS discount
 - the £55 Service Charge would become ~£56.72

- 4.64 So, the new Alternative Pricing Model with LCTS discounts would be:

- £37.20 joining fee
- £56.72 Service Charge
- £93.92 *in total for first year including sign up (£3.92 increase)*

- 4.65 LCTS discounted would be:

- £0.00 joining fee
- £27.50 Service Charge

Topic 3: Payment process for residents

4.66 During development of the proposed service several options have been considered for payments. Our recommend option is Online Annual Card Payments.

Option A: Online Annual Card Payments:

- 4.67 Online Card payments are the Council's standard method to collect smaller payments. Colchester City Council has an existing working interface which is used for several existing payments including Bulky and Electrical Special Collections, Allotments and Fishing Licences.
- 4.68 Transaction costs are the same as for one off direct debit and are driven by the number of transactions in a month.
- 4.69 Additional staffing will be required in Contact & Support to handle calls for subscriptions from those residents without internet access and to handle queries.
- 4.70 Online payments are instant and on successful collection the required orders for stickers, bins and to set an address up on the Council's operational back office and onboard systems (e.g., RouteSmart / Fusion) can flow automatically and without the 10-working day direct debit regulatory delay.
- 4.71 Online payments should allow the Council to offer live service within 10 working days after the resident has subscribed (Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils suggest 4 weeks at busy times of the year).
- 4.72 The Council's existing online payment portal has been scale tested to ensure it can support assumed volumes and the code is currently being reviewed to confirm it is as efficient as possible.
- 4.73 On renewal the system would email all digital subscription residents with a link to renew.

Option B: Direct debit:

- 4.74 The research from other Councils has confirmed that direct debit is not recommended for Garden Waste payment collection because using an annual direct debit model is overly complex, requires significant unfunded Payment Team and ICT Support resource and will generate extra resident calls at a time when Contact and Support capacity is looking to be reduced.
- 4.75 Implementing direct debit is a high technical risk and will cost more than other methods, both one off costs and ongoing. This will lead to delay in launch, and impact on the revenue income to be achieved which may lead to frontline cuts being required to deliver the required savings in 2023-24.

Option B1: Offering Annual Direct Debit as a payment mechanism

- 4.76 This option introduces a minimum dwell time of 10 days due to regulatory direct debit notifications. This is a significant delay to being able to start service without risking bad debt for failed transactions. Additionally, there is a £20 charge every time a customer invokes the direct debit guarantee, which further risks the financial position of the proposal.

4.77 This option would require an additional 5 staff: 2 in the Payments Team to manage direct debit transaction messages, 1 in ICT to monitor transaction failures and 2 in Contact & Support to answer queries. Additional staff costs (over card payments) are:

Payments Team	£ 53,000
Contact & Support	£ 46,000
ICT	£ 36,000
Total additional resource costs:	£135,000

Option B2: Offering Monthly Direct Debit as a payment mechanism

4.78 Offering monthly payments significantly increases the transaction costs (for example offering payment over 3 months would triple transaction charges.) There is also an increased likelihood that residents would subscribe during a heavy period of garden collection and then cancel the direct debit. Colchester City Council would then be left with a volume of small debts which would be very difficult to collect.

4.79 This option would require an additional person in the Payments Team (3 in total) to deal with increased volumes of transaction messages.

Total additional resource costs increase to £161,000

Benchmarking

4.80 As a standard, councils collect payment from all new customers via online card payments. During research officers spoke to Peterborough City Council. They had adopted direct debit in the first season. Within 3 months they stopped the direct debit option due to significant resource and other costs in dealing with subscriptions and managing the volume of addresses and bank accounts. All customers were then moved to online card payments.

4.81 Some existing councils (e.g., Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Council) allow existing subscribers to pay via direct debit but require all new subscribers to use online card payments.

4.82 Technical assessment of offering direct debit suggests significant technical one off and ongoing support costs along with the need for permanent Payment Officers to manage the direct debit transaction lists.

4.83 Almost every council offer single annual payments for Garden Waste. This ensures no bad debt and prevents residents cancelling payments before completion of the subscription.

Topic 4: What to do with existing wheeled bins in the community

Option A: Existing proposal – residents can request a pickup

- 4.84 The report to Cabinet in June 2023 set out that as part of the proposed new scheme, the Council would include an option for residents who do not wish to subscribe to the Paid for Garden Waste service but who already have a wheeled bin, to enable them to have their bins collected for free:
- assuming the bin is empty
 - it is placed on the boundary on a specific day, and
 - on the understanding that they will need to fund any new bin if they subsequently subscribe to the service in the future.

Option B: Community-based drop off and pick up

- 4.85 An alternative or additional offer could be that the Council enables residents to pass brown wheeled bins they do not want to other residents who would like to take them for free.
- 4.86 Wards with a wheeled bin service include Mile End, Greenstead, Old Heath and the Hythe, Berechurch, Shrub End and Stanway.
- 4.87 It is proposed as a one off, for the Wards with wheeled bins (Mile End, Greenstead, Old Heath and the Hythe, Berechurch, Shrub End and Stanway), that residents are invited to bring unwanted bins to a central location in the Ward on a Saturday morning. Officers in attendance will clean the bin off a high-pressure jet wash and then enable other residents who would prefer a re-used bin to come in the afternoon and collect a bin.
- 4.88 This would support the reuse of the bins, without the need for purchasing new bins.
- 4.89 The cost of supporting a free second-hand service outlined above with two operatives, a large van and a Karcher jet wash for 5 hours would be £400 each Saturday. To run 6 events once would cost £2,400.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 The financial implications of the options are set out in detail within the report. A summary is provided below:

Topic 1: Pricing Model (no revenue impact)

- **Option A:**
 - £10 one off set-up fee to reflect the costs in establishing the new Garden Waste Service
 - £30 charge if a wheeled bin is required to deliver service
 - £55 Service Charge for 25 collections per annum
 - *£95 in total for the first year, if the resident needs a bin (£65 if no bin is needed)*
- **Option B:**
 - £35 one off joining fee per bin for all subscriptions
 - £55 Service Charge for 25 collections per annum.
 - *£90 in total for the first year*

Topic 2: Receipt of benefit(s) discount (no revenue impact)

- Option A:
 - No discount

- Option B1:

<u>Standard Service:</u>	<u>LCTS discounted:</u>
○ £12.50 set-up	£0.00 One off
○ £30.00 wheeled bin (where needed)	£0.00
○ £56.72 Service cost	£27.50 service cost
○ <i>£99.22 in total for first year including sign up (£4.22 increase)</i>	

- Option B2:

<u>Standard Service:</u>	<u>LCTS discounted:</u>
○ £37.20 one off	£0.00 One off
○ £56.72 Service cost	£27.50 service cost
○ <i>£93.92 in total for first year including sign up (£3.92 increase)</i>	

Topic 3: Payment process for residents

- Option A: Online Annual Card Payments **(no revenue impact)**
- Option B1: Annual direct debit **£135,000**
- Option B2: Monthly direct debit **£161,000**

Topic 4: What to do with existing wheeled bins in the community

- Option A: Existing proposal **(no revenue impact)**
- Option B: Community based approach **£2,400**
- Option A + B: Existing proposal and community-based approach **£2,400**

6. Consultation

6.1 In addition to the consultation commissioned in September 2022 to engage residents, councillors, and other local stakeholders (local business owners and workers), to hear their views on the future of Colchester and how the Council should address the key challenges facing Colchester which will be outlined in the councils Strategic Priorities for 2023-2026 and outlined in the Cabinet report of June 2023, officers also attended a Resident Panels on 27 June 2023.

6.2 At the Residents Panel three principal areas were discussed (marketing material and promotions, existing wheeled bin provision, composting), however many other comments and insight were also captured.

Marketing and promotions

6.3 The key message was to be open about the reasons for the introduction, to use simple language to explain the scheme and let people know it is normal to charge. It was feedback that some of the marketing material presented was misleading. The Panel suggested the marketing and communications should push the advantages of the scheme to the user – how easy wheeled bins are to use.

Existing wheeled bins

6.4 The majority fed back that they would consider having a second-hand wheeled bin, may pick it up for free and would choose it over a new one.

Composting

- 6.5 The majority said that home composting would be an option, although on further discussion it was explored how this may not be an option due to space, pets, and knowledge of how to do it. It was discussed that residents need to be educated about why, how, and what the benefits of composting were. A small number of people said that community composting could be an option.

Other

- Can people sign up whenever they like?
- How flexible is the service?
- No Space/room for wheeled bin
- Our estate was not deemed suitable for wheeled bins previously. At our previous address we were given free bins. Why do we have to pay for a bin when they don't?
- We were told that it was not practical for our estate to use bins in the past.
- There are no wheeled bins where I live – these would detract from the look of the street.
- Nowhere to store wheeled bin securely. Cannot leave on street because of vandalism and misuse.
- Communal bin would be ideal.
- Capacity guide needed e.g., 1 wheeled bin = x white bags so people know what they need
- Can we now have a black bin for our general waste?
- Black sacks are ripped apart by animals.

7. Publicity Considerations

- 7.1 A full communications plan with clear, concise key messages, with a strong call to action to drive for information/subscription will be developed. A range of media will be used, including messaging on residents' bins, and using the best media for engagement (and therefore reach of message) for key messages on our social media channels throughout the campaign. A webpage has already been set up sharing some information, and this will continue to be populated as the scheme develops: www.colchester.gov.uk/recycling-and-rubbish/2024-garden-waste-collection/.
- 7.2 The feedback and insight from the Residents Panel (Section 6) will be used to amend and finalise the final promotional media and communications.

8. Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 Garden waste charging is normal for [65% of councils](#) and more are taking this decision given financial pressures. Not charging would mean additional funding would need to be found from other services, if possible, with potentially more difficult consequences. If the recommendations put forward by the Panel to the Portfolio Holder do not meet with the revenue budget or set out to make additional costs that means it is unable to meet its income budget, the Financial Forecast for the Council could be at risk.

8.2 The Panel have been asked to consider the time, deliverability and budget implications of the recommendations and complexity of different options, taking account of best practice elsewhere. The following summarises the options and the objective risks with a risk rating:

Green – achieves objective wholly.
 Amber – partly achieves objective.
 Red – does not achieve objective.

Topic	Option	Deliverable against budget	Deliverable against timeframe	Aligned to best practice	Simplicity of communications	Simplicity and deliverability of operations
1. Pricing model	Option A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £10 one off set up fee • £30 wheeled bin charge (if applicable) • £55 service charge 	G	G	G	A	G
	Option B: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £35 one off joining fee • £55 service charge 	G	G	G	G	G

Topic	Option	Deliverable against budget	Deliverable against timeframe	Aligned to best practice	Simplicity of communications	Simplicity and deliverability of operations
2. Receipt of benefit(s) discount	Option A: No discount	G	G	G	G	G
	Option B1: Non-LCTS residents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £12.50 one off set-up • £30.00 wheeled bin (where needed) • £56.72 Service Charge cost LCTS residents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £0.00 one off set up • £27.50 Service Charge cost 	G	G	R	R	A
	Option B2: Non-LCTS residents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £37.20 joining fee • £56.72 Service Charge LCTS residents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £0.00 joining fee • £27.50 Service Charge 	G	G	R	A	A

3. Topic	Option	Deliverable against budget	Deliverable against timeframe	Aligned to best practice	Simplicity of communications	Simplicity and deliverability of operations
4. Payment processes for residents	Option A: Online annual card payments	G	G	G	A	G
	Option B1: Annual direct debit	R	R	R	A	R
	Option B2: Monthly direct debit	R	R	R	A	R
5. What to do with existing wheeled bins	Option A: Residents request a pick up	G	G	A	G	G
	Option B: Community based drop off and pick up	A	G	A	G	G

9. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

9.1 The consideration of environmental and sustainability implications of the decision being taken is set out in the table below:

Sustainability theme	Positive environmental impact	Neutral impact/ Not applicable	Negative environmental impact	What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?	How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated
Energy		✓		n/a	n/a
Waste	✓			Encouraging residents to consider other means of dealing with green waste, other than through kerbside collections.	A media campaign will be launched. Composting videos and training will be offered, as outlined in the report

Sustainability theme	Positive environmental impact	Neutral impact/ Not applicable	Negative environmental impact	What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?	How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated
Procurement	✓			Procurement will follow the council rules. However, the move to wheeled bins will reduce the ongoing demand for garden sacks. Wheeled bins can also be refurbished and reused	As the programme is carried out, the council will offer the ability to collect wheeled bins if they are not needed. Promotion of the alternative uses of garden sacks that are no longer needed will be made. Garden sacks can also be taken by our current recycling contractor.
Biodiversity and green spaces		✓		<p>The proposal aims to support home composting which can be used as an environmentally friendly way to fertilise soil and support garden wildlife.</p> <p>There is a possibility that charging for garden waste could lead to fly tipping and bonfires which could harm biodiversity and green spaces.</p>	<p>Communications will take place to promote composting and access to subsidised compost bins and tips for composting.</p> <p>Potential for comms to be used to support campaigns like No Mow May etc. in line with reducing garden waste and creating gardens that support wildlife, in line with Council's approach to management of many of its green spaces</p>
Transport	✓			Fewer vehicles will be required to deliver the service. Reducing the need for a vehicle to	n/a

Sustainability theme	Positive environmental impact	Neutral impact/ Not applicable	Negative environmental impact	What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?	How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated
				<p>travel to all properties and going forward, only travelling to those properties requiring collections.</p> <p>New vehicles will be purchased with the latest engines and propose to be fueled on HVO.</p> <p>There is potential for an increase in residents driving to the HWRC to drop of their garden waste, contributing to congestion and pollution at this site</p>	
Adaption		✓		n/a	n/a
Water		✓		n/a	n/a
Digital		✓		The service will be accessible online, albeit for those that are unable to access the service, support will be provided by the Customer and Support team.	n/a
Community	✓			Promotion and support of community composting will be incorporated into the project.	This will be encouraged through the Community Enabling team and online.
Housing/ Development		✓		n/a	n/a
Carbon Emissions saving		✓		The proposal will lead to a reduction in fleet vehicles used to collect garden waste. There is the potential for mileage completed by the vehicles to be reduced as well because of the	n/a

Sustainability theme	Positive environmental impact	Neutral impact/ Not applicable	Negative environmental impact	What are the positive and negative impacts on carbon reduction / environment?	How will positive impacts be enhanced/ encouraged? And negative impacts minimized or eliminated
				<p>changes to garden waste collections with fewer households to pick up from. There is an intention to use HVO in the vehicles which would also reduce emissions.</p> <p>Increased journeys to the HWRC could lead to more emissions, but it is difficult to determine the impact of this currently.</p>	

10. Strategic Plan References

- 10.1 The proposal links to the vision, themes, and objectives of the Strategic Plan 2023-26 – A City Fit for the Future: Respond to the climate emergency – Continuing to be a leader in waste and recycling collections through the review of waste and recycling services and collection arrangements simplified and revised to support the government recycling collection targets of 70%.

11. Health and Safety Implications

- 11.1 As set out earlier in the report, the previous introduction of wheeled bins to certain areas of Colchester has provided valuable data to help develop the proposals. Implementing wheeled bin collections for garden waste through this project will help improve staff wellbeing and performance.

12. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 This decision and proposal does not have any potential impacts to health and wellbeing outcomes for the public. As set out within the report, those residents who have difficulties manoeuvring wheeled bins will continue to receive support through assisted collections.
- 12.2 It is not considered that community safety or crime and disorder will be impacted.

13. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 13.1 As this proposal is a major change to a policy an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed: www.colchester.gov.uk/chargeable-garden-waste-service/. This

identifies that some protected characteristics may find it difficult to manoeuvre wheeled bins and some may find it difficult to access the service. To address these difficulties, the Assisted Collection Service will continue to help customers who have difficulty in presenting their waste on the boundary of their property. This will extend to assisting with wheeled bins where appropriate. Additionally, website information can be translated via online translation websites/tools. Customers whose first language is not English can request that letters or leaflets are provided in a preferred language. Officers have access to a range of translation tools including text translation, instant telephone translation and face-to-face translation services.

- 13.2 It is considered that the proposals do not breach human rights as a service will continue to be offered.
- 13.3 The Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed should recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel and agreed by Cabinet alter the current proposals.

Appendix A - Local Authority comparators

Research carried out by the Press Association in 2019 shows that 65% of local authorities in England charge for a garden waste service, at an average cost of around £46 per year. Prices range from £22 per year in Richmondshire, North Yorkshire to £96 per year in Harlow, Essex. The Association for Public Service Excellence (ASPE) report "[State of the Market Survey 2022 – Local Authority Refuse Service](#)" indicate that 54% of authorities charge for garden waste collections, up from 42% in 2021, with a further 5% of authorities considering the introduction of a charge in the next 1-2 years.

Benchmarking across other local authorities has been carried out and the results are below. It should be noted that these costs are for the current year, and it is likely that all Councils will be reviewing and increasing their charges for 2024/25 and beyond.

Local Authority	2023/24	
	Garden Waste Charge	Method of collection
Basildon	23/24 £25 first container, £15 others (Part Year) 24/25 £50 first container, £25 other containers (each)	Fortnightly 240L standard or 180L available 37 collections 23/24 46 collections 24/25
Babergh / Mid Suffolk	£10 set up cost. Babergh - £59.00 Mid Suffolk - £59.00 per year	Fortnightly Wheeled bins only Two-week seasonal pause
Braintree	£0 <i>Proposals are being presented imminently (see earlier in report)</i> Additional bins – 180L £35.60	Choice of Small 140L, Standard 180L, Large 240L at no extra cost.
Brentwood	£60 per year for hire of garden bin £4.00 for a roll of 10 garden sacks	Fortnightly
Castle Point	£7 for 20 sacks or £37 for a 240L bin Half price from October	Weekly collection with no winter break - bin or sacks
Chelmsford	£0	Fortnightly collection 240L standard
Harlow	£44 per annum. £33 one-off set up fee for all new customers. After April sign up cost reduces each month. Re-joining fee £10 if service cancelled in the year. Ad-hoc now only accepting compostable sacks purchased @ £20.00 for roll of 20.	Fortnightly Bin or sacks

Ipswich	£0 Charge for additional bin £59.19 per year for 240L bin	Fortnightly 140L or 240L bin.
Maldon	£56.00 full year £28 from 1 st Oct - 31 st March. Additional bins – charged at the same rate as a new subscriber. Bin Provision £31	Weekly collection: March – November Fortnightly collection: December – February 240L
Southend	Veolia provide the service. Garden waste sacks (roll of 10) £11.00 240L bin - £33.00 Subscription buy DD - £69.50 Subscription by non-DD - £82.00 New customers need to buy a bin and subscription.	240L or sacks Weekly collection
Tendring	£90 for the first year (includes £35 set up fee) £55 per year thereafter	Fortnightly with 2-week Christmas break 240L
Thurrock	£0; but charge for wheelie bin replacements: £39.50 for a new wheeled bin £20 for a new wheeled bin if you are aged 60 or over. £20 for a new wheeled bin if you receive certain benefits – proof of entitlement will be needed. Service Suspended	Fortnightly
Uttlesford	£50 for online and cash/cheque payments, 25% reduction if in receipt of LCTS which is £37.50. New customers also required to pay £25.50 for a garden waste bin. Additional bins £23.63	Fortnightly
West Suffolk	£47 per year per bin.	Fortnightly Wheeled bins only Max 4 bin subscriptions