

SCRUTINY PANEL

9 August 2023

Present: - Councillor Arnold, Councillor Laws (Chair),
Councillor McCarthy, Councillor McLean,
Councillor Smalls, Councillor Willetts

Substitutions: - Councillor Dundas for Councillor Rowe

Also present: - Councillor Goss, Councillor Harris, Councillor King,
Councillor Law, Councillor Scordis, Councillor
Scott-Boutell, Councillor T. Young

418. Have Your Say

Mr Paul T. Smith addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), and to ask for an explanation of the proposed charges, given the current cost of living crisis and the extra cost it would mean for residents. Mr Smith claimed that Colchester recycled less than other local authority areas in North Essex and argued that this suggested that the Council should rethink its recycling policy. Mr Smith stated that he could not see any inclusion in the Council's financial strategy of the reduction in recycled waste tax receipts from Essex County Council, arguing that the financial business plans needed a granular review and to be made transparent for the public to access. Mr Smith asked the Panel to explain why the Labour Party currently stated opposition to the charging for garden waste collection, when its councillors had voted to approve the Budget for 2023/24 in February 2023. The Chairman gave assurance that these points would be addressed under the appropriate item at this meeting.

419. Items requested by members of the Panel and other Members

Councillor Willetts, as a member of the Panel, explained the request he had made in writing, under part (a) of this item. Councillor Willetts noted that several speakers at the most recent Full Council meeting had objected to charges to be levied on individuals or groups who wished to book the Castle Park bandstand for performances. Councillor Willetts believed that the base fee was £250 per booking, with discounts possible for organisations such as charities. A Panel member suggested that this would not be an unreasonable fee, especially if split between different individuals.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, explained that four years ago, the then-Borough Council worked with the Park café which

sponsored the use of the bandstand by performers, meaning that no fees were charged on those performers. The café then pulled out of this arrangement, with the Colchester Events Company [within the Council's Amphora companies] took over the running of the bandstand, and a charge introduced for its use. This was detailed in the fees and charges list published in February 2023. The Council has needed to make savings and achieve income targets. From 2023, a sponsorship deal was again negotiated to underwrite the cost of the bandstand, which again meant that charges could be waived for those booking use of the bandstand.

Councillor Willetts welcomed news of the new sponsorship deal and waiving of charges for use of the bandstand, but noted that sponsorship deals were temporary arrangements and could run out. Councillor Willetts requested that a report be brought to a future Panel meeting to clarify the Council's approach and policy towards the use of community assets which it owned, and guidance as to which could be leveraged for income via charges for use, and which should be kept free for use by the public.

RESOLVED that Scrutiny Panel adds an item to its work programme to clarify the Council's approach and policy towards the use of community assets which it owned, and guidance as to which could be leveraged for income via charges for use, and which should be kept free for use by the public.

420. Garden Waste Charging scheme

Councillor Harris attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel to urge consideration of issues of parity, equality and fairness. Councillor Harris stated that residents of his ward objected to the plans to charge for collection of garden waste, partly because some estates already had wheelie bins whilst others did not. People were offended at the expectation of being charged for wheelie bins whilst others did not receive charges. Examples were given of residents on low incomes and/or who did not currently have a wheelie bin and would be charged to receive one. Councillor Harris some residents would be able to afford the charges, but many had contacted him to raise their concerns and objections. Councillor Harris asked what members should tell those residents who could ill-afford the new charges and requested that the scheme be rethought.

Councillor Tim Young attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel, asking to associate himself with the words spoken by Councillor Harris and stating that he himself had always opposed charging for garden waste collection. Councillor Young explained that he had voted in favour of the Council's Budget for 2023-24 because he was following the Labour whip on the vote, because it was tradition for the sitting Mayor to vote in favour of the Budget, and because the garden waste charges were a small part of an otherwise reasonable Budget. Councillor Young understood the situation but believed the charges would be unfair and regressive. Many Greenstead residents could barely afford food and could not afford further charges. Many did not have space to put a wheelie bin and much of Greenstead was not included in the initial roll-out, even though many had been in favour of it. This was unfair. Councillor Young raised concerns regarding the potential for increased fly tipping and use of black bag collections, and urged that the charging proposals be rethought.

Councillor Scott-Boutell attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel to give an example of a resident undergoing financial hardship and who depended on his gardening to keep his acuity and independence. Councillor Scott-Boutell laid out the views given to her by the charity Age Well East, which emphasised gardening as a way to help older residents stay engaged and active, and improve their wellbeing and positivity, helping to prevent decline. Councillor Scott-Boutell argued that the Council needed to help maintain older residents' independence and ability to stay connected and well.

Councillor Scordis attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel, noting that he had not been able to be present at the meeting where the 2023-24 Budget had been approved. Councillor Scordis suggested that the Conservative Group had not provided an alternative to charging for garden waste collection, and gave suggestions of his own, such as to suspend garden waste collection between October and March, when it was less used, and to look at different bin size options and options for properties with no bin space. Service users could instead use the collected waste service instead. Councillor Scordis argued that practicalities must be looked at and weaknesses in the plans picked apart, and asked whether a start date in January 2024 was too soon. Councillor Scordis raised concern that, were the scheme to fail, the Council may not reach its financial targets and that the Council needed to be ready to go and give good explanations of the scheme from the start.

Councillor Law attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel regarding issues of fairness relating to the charging structure and noting disparity between areas which already had garden waste wheelie bins and those which did not. An explanation was requested as to why the Council operated a hybrid collection system when other authorities had simpler systems that were more coherent. Councillor Law was concerned that the way the scheme would be introduced would cause residents to worry, especially when on low or fixed incomes. Examples were given of residents' concerns and confusion expressed, showing the importance of clear communications with residents.

A statement was read out on behalf of Councillor Rowe, who was unable to attend this meeting due to a pre-existing commitment. Councillor Rowe argued that the imposition of additional charges on residents, already suffering from the cost of living crisis and high taxation levels, was unjust. Councillor Rowe questioned the quality of decision making behind the new charging scheme, and called upon the Scrutiny Panel to recommend that the proposed charging scheme be cancelled. Councillor Rowe criticised the decision-making processes of the Council's Cabinet and recommended, if financial concerns were experienced by the Council, that consideration be given by Councillors as to whether the expenses claimable by elected members should be reduced or removed, rather than increasing charges on residents.

Councillor Lissimore attended remotely via Zoom and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Panel, stating that councillors who spoke against the proposed garden waste charges, but who had voted for them in the Budget, should have raised concerns at an earlier stage. Councillor Lissimore queried why the Labour Group was now campaigning against the charges proposed, after its members had

voted to introduce them. Councillor Lissimore argued that the first pricing model would cause confusion and asked why some would have to pay and others would not. Councillor Lissimore criticised the problems the new scheme would cause those on lower income or Universal Credit, compared to those on higher incomes, and stated that the scheme needed to have flexibility for residents to structure payments to suit them, and for areas where there was no space for wheelie bins. Councillor Lissimore stated that, should the Panel decide to recommend the scheme be rethought by Cabinet, many residents would support such a rethink.

The Chairman gave the background to the plans to introduce a charging system for collection of garden waste, initially voted through as part of the Council's Budget for 2023-24 in early 2023, backed by the party groups which at that time made up the Council's Cabinet Administration. Following the Budget being approved by Full Council, the principles of the charging for garden waste collection were agreed by Cabinet, with this meeting of the Scrutiny Panel having been arranged to discuss and scrutinise the potential options for the scheme, with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste being the decision maker who would decide the final details regarding issues such as charging levels, any exemptions or discounts, and options for the collection service.

A Panel member noted the many speeches made about the pitfalls and wider issues relating to the proposed scheme, arguing that any wider issues needed to be discussed, rather than just the details brought before the Panel at this meeting, and that the Panel should have a chance to do this. Councillor King, Leader of the Council, noted the comments regarding the wider context of these matters, but emphasised that the context for this agenda item was around the specific matters and questions of detail covered within the report provided to the Panel. Months had been spent considering ideas and alternatives to a new charging scheme, following which they had been approved by Full Council, as part of the Budget for 2023-24. A budget gap of around £5.2million had needed to be addressed, with no way to do so without increasing the Council's income. The financial report for the first quarter of 2023 would soon be available, with overspend and budget shortfall leading to an estimate of around £2m deficit remaining. A range of offsetting actions and work were being undertaken to reduce this, but significant challenges remained. These included high inflation, increasing levels of homelessness, internal challenges and significant constraints on staff pay levels. Hard decisions were being made, including pay restraint for senior officers, a recruitment freeze (with any recruitment having to be personally approved by the Chief Executive or Chief Operating Officer) and the drawing down of reserves.

The Leader of the Council explained that the income expected from garden waste collection was baked into the Council's financial calculations and that, should the charges not be introduced, the Council would need alternatives to take the place of the income which had been expected from this scheme. Alternatives were needed, but none had been proposed by opposition councillors. The Leader asked if Panel members would instead prefer that the Council cut its homelessness services, or the support offered to residents affected by cost of living issues, or the provision of sport and leisure facilities. The Leader asked Scrutiny Panel to give its counsel as to how the Council might most fairly proceed with the new garden waste collection scheme. A range of options had been laid out, but the Leader gave assurance that these were

examples, and that any recommendations of the Panel would be considered seriously.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, explained that the potential for charging for garden waste collection had first been examined during lockdown, with a decision having been taken at that time not to introduce charges. The Council's financial position had subsequently worsened, partly owing to the Pandemic. The Portfolio Holder laid out his discomfort with the idea of charging for garden waste collection, but noted the necessity of making the difficult decisions such as this. The Portfolio Holder gave his view that he did not see how it could be fair to charge residents for wheelie bins which they had been using for years. Officers had spent years of work designing a scheme, liaising with fellow local authorities and seeking to be in line with other schemes, looking to create a scheme which would be roughly mid-table. It was stated that most local authorities now charged for garden waste collection, and that Basildon had achieved a 65% sign up rate within the first two months of operating their paid-for collection service.

The Portfolio Holder noted that Colchester was near the bottom of the table for use of wheelie bins, and that he had seen examples where wheelie bins had been successfully used on terraced streets and other places with restricted space. Most other local authorities did not give a choice of wheelie bin sizes, but the Council would do so. Bin sharing arrangements would also be permitted for those with small gardens or on low incomes. The Portfolio Holder emphasised that the Council had consulted, listened, and considered what people had said.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that the new garden waste collection system would only operate with wheelie bins once it had commenced, with an end to the hybrid system in which some areas had wheelie bins and others had hessian sacks. The hybrid system had been introduced to offer options to residents, by area, but was expensive, bad for the health of the collection staff and bad for the environment, as the hessian sacks were not environmentally friendly. The hybrid system had been introduced in 2016, with ward councillors asked to work with their communities to lay out which areas wanted wheelie bins and which areas preferred hessian sacks to be used.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that he had not received a large number of contacts from members of the public regarding the proposed new charges for garden waste collection, and noted that no members of the public had wished to address the Panel at this meeting, although they could have addressed the Panel if they had felt strongly about the issue.

The Panel were informed that fly tipping levels had decreased by around 20%, year on year, and that other local authorities had told the Council that they had not experienced any increase in fly tipping following introduction of fees for garden waste collection.

The Government could have decided to prohibit local authorities from charging for garden waste collection, potentially within the recent Environment Act, but had chosen not to do so. The Portfolio Holder then listed the names of every councillor who had voted to approve the introduction of charges, within the 2023-24 Budget,

and all of those who voted against it, further noting that no budget amendments had been submitted for consideration. The Portfolio Holder stated that, were the charges not to be introduced, around 50 jobs would need to be removed, and asked which officers the Panel would wish to fire in that circumstance.

Rosa Tanfield, Head of Neighbourhood Services, laid out that the Panel had been asked to consider and review a number of topic areas before the Portfolio Holder exercised the authority delegated to him by Cabinet to make decisions on the scheme specifics. Data was provided on kerbside collections of garden waste, with the cost of the current service given as in excess of £1.8m per year. A summary was given of the areas which used wheelie bins and those which still used reusable hessian sacks. The hybrid mix of wheelie bins and bags necessitated a mixed fleet of vehicle types for collecting the different types. This made it difficult to run a resilient service, due to restrictions on what each vehicle type could do. If a lorry designed for wheelie bin collection was used for collecting from re-usable bags, the additional strain on crews would be significantly increased, leading to additional musculoskeletal conditions developing. The data collected showed that there was a better service provision on those routes using wheelie bins.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services laid out the net revenue targets of £15k for the part of 2023-24 which would be covered, followed by £1.3m and £1.6m for 2024-25 and 2025-26 respectively. The launching in January 2024 would be vital to achieve these targets. The options for sharing wheelie bins, and the charges, were laid out, as well as alternative options such as composting. The Council planned to help by providing engagement and training for residents who wished to compost garden waste. A grant scheme was available for community composting, and there were options for using public tips or licensed private disposal firms. There would also be arrangements to assist collections where residents required help. Each resident who joined the new collection scheme would receive a new sticker for their bin each year, to show who is part of the scheme.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services laid out the areas/subjects for which recommendations were being sought. These involved pricing structures, discount provisions, the financial process for residents joining the scheme, and how the Council should deal with the bins already in circulation, and especially those that became unwanted by residents not wishing to join the new scheme.

The pricing model was described as similar to those operated by comparable local authorities. A presentation was given to compare the two options, with Option A's expected to raise revenue of £695k per year, on current assumptions of uptake and need for new bins to be issued, whilst Option B was estimated to bring in revenue of £698k, given those same assumptions. Option A involved a one-off setup fee of £10 for each service user, with an additional charge of £30 if they required a new bin, and a £55 service charge for the year of collections. Option B likewise had a £55 annual charge for a year of service use, but with a £35 one-off joining fee per bin for all who join the scheme. The Panel queried whether, under Option B, residents who joined the scheme and had had a wheelie bin for some years could request a free replacement, should their existing bin break. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that this was the case.

The different options for providing a discount to households receiving benefits were outlined. Option A was to provide no discount. This would ensure the meeting of revenue targets, and would be in line with most local authorities, as most did not provide discounts. Options B1 and B2 showed example systems for providing discounts to residents who were in receipt of Local Council Tax Support [LCTS] discounts. This would be the easiest way to target discounts for households on low incomes. Any discounts offered would negatively affect the gross revenue of the scheme, so service fees for those households not eligible for discounts would need to increase, if the effect of discount provision on revenue were to be countered. Work would need to be done to assess what would be needed, based on the discount level approved. Options B1 and B2 would both offer inclusion in the collection scheme for a £27.50 annual service charge, without an initial joining fee or charge for receiving a new bin. The different options were given for charging residents who did not receive LCTS, to cover the costs of providing discounts.

Payment options were outlined, with an online annual payment being the way in which the Council already collected various payments, was instant and did not require a ten-day wait, unlike when taking payments via direct debit. Research compiled led to a recommendation not to use direct debit payments, as these were overly complex, would require extra resources in IT and back office, would cost more and involved a higher risk regarding technology in set up. The Head of Neighbourhood Services emphasised that local authorities which had started direct debit schemes had moved away from these. Avoiding use of direct debit would also prevent bad debt and cancellations prior to the end of the scheme. A monthly direct debit scheme would increase transaction charges, increase the chance for cancellations part-way through the year, and would increase the scheme cost, which would increase the prices paid by residents.

The options regarding existing wheelie bins were described, including options for those residents who did not wish to join scheme to have their existing bins taken back by the Council, or swapped to go to residents who wanted to have a bin. There was also the option to provide a free collection and pressure-washing service to take back unwanted bins and release them for use by residents who wished to receive one.

The objectives to consider were laid out for the Panel, with the report and presentation given showing the ability to deliver against those objectives. The table at 8.2 of the report laid out the options presented, with green, amber or red used to show each option's deliverability against each objective. Examples included the effect of offering discounts on revenue, the complexity of the system and in communications with residents. The Panel were again cautioned that a recommendation of offering direct debit payment options would jeopardise the deliverability of the scheme in line with budget.

The Panel discussed payment method options, with a Panel member commenting that people had choice in how they paid other charges, such as for insurance. Consideration was given as to how best to communicate with residents about the proposed scheme, including those who did not have internet access. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that her team were working on a communications plan with the Council's Communications Team, including a number of ways to

spread information, including stickers on bins, social media, print media and leaflets, building upon lessons learned from earlier communications on previous changes to waste collection.

The Panel discussed the suggestion for restricting garden waste collection to six months each year. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that staff were employed full-time, whilst a restricted service would affect staffing requirements. If the Council were to remove the service for more than two weeks, the Council would need to look to move towards more use of casual contracts, reduce staffing or engage in costly redeployments. The decrease in garden waste collected would also impact on the credit claim the Council could submit to Essex County Council. The alternative would be to completely withdraw the service, which would achieve the necessary savings being sought. The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste noted that halving the service would not halve its cost, and that the service already relied upon around 20% of its staffing coming from casual staff. The Panel raised the benefit that came from having regular staff who knew their routes.

The Panel discussed the business case, with one member asking whether the bins would be sold or leased to residents, and for guidance as to where the cost of buying additional bins and, if applicable, where the MRP [minimum revenue provision] could be found within the revenue implications table at 4.22 of the report. The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that the bins would remain Council property. Regarding recycling or reusing of existing bins, the Budget for 2023-24 had included funding for a £230k study on how to recycle and reuse Council kit.

The Portfolio Holder was asked if the Council already had sufficient bins to roll out the new scheme, with a Panel member arguing that it would be disingenuous to charge residents for bins which had already been in use for seven or eight years. The Panel member then queried differences as to how the financial projections for the scheme had been laid out in the 2023-24 Budget in February 2023, compared to what had been provided in the report before the Panel, and urged clarity as to the accountancy rules being used to present the information. In regard to questions as to the accounting practices, the Head of Neighbourhood Services gave the advice of the Council's Section 151 Officer that the Council could only account for income received in the year that the service was delivered. The £600k income target given was for residents joining in the current 2023-24 year, to be members of the scheme for the last two months of 2023-24 and the full 2024-25 year. Answering questions about the bins currently in use, John Kellett, Business Improvement Manager, reiterated that they would remain Council property, and explained that they had a 10-year expected lifespan, with depreciation factored in over those 10 years, and were able to be supplied or replaced without upfront charges. The Portfolio Holder added that the bins currently in service had been paid for via Government funding, and offered to clarify the details of this after the meeting. A Panel member pointed out that the scheme could not be marketed as 'buy a bin', given that bins would only be leased, not sold. The Leader of the Council acknowledged this point.

The Portfolio Holder was asked whether the pricing options would include a discount for households which wanted a smaller bin, and whether they could request a different bin size once they had received a bin. The Portfolio Holder clarified that the charges levied would be the same for both bin sizes, with most expected to opt for a

240 litre bin, with the expectation being that this larger size would be bulk-bought by the Council. 140 litre bins would be the smaller size, with a minimum order of 500. Given the economies of scale, it was expected that the cost to the Council would only differ by £3 per unit between the larger and smaller bins. Storage space at the Shrub End Depot was a limiting factor on how many units the Council could bulk purchase and store. The swapping of bins for different sizes was, and would remain, permissible. Other local authorities did not offer choice or swapping.

A Panel member objected to the levying of a £10 administration fee and ongoing annual service charge for people joining the proposed scheme, arguing that people should be given a monthly payment option, to allow them to dip in and out of the scheme. Further questions were raised as to whether the cost of the scheme would remain at the £1.8m projected, should the level of uptake vary from that which was expected, and whether the expected uptake percentage had been benchmarked against comparable schemes in the private sector. The Head of Neighbourhood Services clarified that, if the Council were to examine contracting the service out to the private sector, this would necessitate consideration of contracting out all waste services as a whole. The provision of all waste services inhouse or under one structure increased service resilience and ease of redeploying assets when necessary. Regarding concerns regarding the initial administration fee and annual service charge, and the possible alternatives, the Panel were told by the Head of Neighbourhood Services that it was up to the Panel members to consider their views and any potential recommendations that they might wish to make.

The expected phasing of growth of the proposed scheme was highlighted, with consideration of the effects should the uptake by users vary and happen more quickly or slowly than expected. It was hoped that the target percentage uptake would be achieved or exceeded. Many costs would be fixed costs.

A concern was raised regarding the January launch, in relation to when residents received their first wages/salary after Christmas, and the pressure on their household expenses, and the low use of garden waste collection at that time of year. A Panel member underlined the importance of using the £53k for communications in a targeted fashion. Officers were asked whether residents signing up at later dates would still need to pay for the full year, as if this were to be the case, it would act as a disincentive to join the scheme. The Portfolio Holder explained that the January start for the scheme would allow a soft launch for the service before the peak growing season, and would cater for places with high leaf fall. It would also mean that it could launch with fewer political issues or complications than would be likely in April. Early sign up to the scheme would mean residents would receive 14 months of the service, for the cost of 12. Sign-up and payment could be carried out from October [2023], when the marketing efforts would start. People who signed up after March 2024 would still only be signed up until March 2025, and so would receive fewer months service.

The Panel discussed issues which would affect wheelie bin users, including where pavement or storage space was limited. A Panel member acknowledged that wheelie bins were best for customers and collection staff, but that the Council also needed to recognise that there were some places where such bins would be unsuitable. The Portfolio Holder pointed out that around 65% of local authorities

charged for garden waste collection, with 83% having a full wheelie bin service, including places with many terraced streets, such as Ipswich. There were ways of making such a service work, including the option of smaller bins. There were many issues with the current use of hessian sacks, which were bad for staff health and the environment. Discussions were underway regarding provision of service to sheltered accommodation. The Portfolio Holder did not believe that much garden waste would be put into black sacks by households which were not in the scheme. Operatives checked bags and would sticker and leave bags containing garden waste. The recycling rate for Colchester was once 42%, but the increase of 14 percentage points was one of the best increases in the UK.

A Panel member asked for clarification as to why this matter was on the Panel's agenda, voicing concern that it could appear that the Panel was being asked to become a part of decision making, when the decision making powers lay with Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder. The Portfolio Holder explained that the consultation exercise with residents and councillors had led to a range of options being drawn up. These had been brought for the Panel to consider and potentially make recommendations to him as to which options the Panel considered to be best, before he made the decision as to which options are chosen, using powers delegated to him by Cabinet.

Various questions were raised as to how the scheme would work, including whether residents would have to pay for collection of garden waste that dropped from their neighbours' gardens into their property, and how bins would be rolled out in areas with steep drives or steps, or where other safety concerns were raised. The Portfolio Holder explained that residents could cut back any vegetation from neighbours' trees and bushes, if it overhung their own property, and then return the cuttings to those neighbours for disposal, and that it was residents' personal responsibility to deal with anything which fell into their garden from elsewhere. 83% of local authorities were said by the Portfolio Holder to only use wheelie bins, without offering other alternatives, which showed that it was possible to run such a service. A universal service would lower complexity and cost, with the option available for a smaller wheelie bin where necessary. A 'Frequently Asked Questions' guide would be available for residents, and the Portfolio Holder agreed to provide the dimensions for the two bin sizes and circulate those measurements to councillors.

The Business case underpinning the proposed scheme was scrutinised. A Panel member asked whether the uptake predictions were accurate enough for budget settings, given the difficult financial position and significant cost of the scheme. The Panel member argued that a full marketing exercise should have been carried out, rather than just looking at what other local authorities did. The exercise would need to cover a statistically significant percentage of the local potential service users, otherwise it would not be a meaningful exercise. Panel members argued that the business case was weak without this having been done, and that it was unrealistic to say that the £1.8m cost of running the collection service would be fixed, and would not change significantly if uptake levels were significantly different to the target which had been set, or even if the target was met, being significantly lower than the current percentage of households using the current collection system. A Panel member raised further criticism that the income target was not supported by any data, and asked for the scheme's expected profitability and for a profitability exercise to be

carried out. The Portfolio Holder was urged to find a way to reduce the cost of the service, should uptake be less than expected.

A Panel member stated that, following the Scrutiny Panel's previous consideration of potential unintended consequences of charging for garden waste collection, Councillor Mark Cory, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Resources, had agreed to cancel planned funding reductions to enforcement teams, in case there were to be more bonfires, fly tipping and/or use of black bag household waste collections. The Portfolio Holder was asked whether the increased costs from increased enforcement should be detailed in the report, and what increase in the charge levied on service users was expected to be made per year.

Additional information was requested, such as what would happen when bins were stolen, lost or broken, or otherwise needed to be replaced, and whether residents would be charged for replacements needed. The capital cost of buying new bins was requested, and a Panel member noted that the report did not show take up levels, service costs or revenue generation for the existing local authority collection schemes that had been examined by the Council. The Business Improvement Manager explained that the projected 50% uptake level to be achieved by year three had been based on other local authorities' experiences, with crews being redeployed to replace agency staff. The use of agency staff was explained, including where they were needed to ensure routes were fully crewed. Additional vehicles would be needed by 2024, with spot hires being made when necessary, before new vehicles were purchased. Annual service costs would start to become shown in 2025-26. The wheelie bins would be bought in bulk, with best value being sought in the tendering process underway. Any bins which were damaged in use would be replaced for free, as long as the broken item was returned. Lost bins would incur a charge for their replacement, in a similar way to the scheme operated by Tendring District Council, which did this, but with a twelve-month warranty. The number of bins bought would depend on ongoing uptake levels, with targets based on the experiences of other local authorities over time. Conservative estimates had been used, with scalability built into the service plans as uptake rose over time.

In response to complaints from some Panel members that important financial/business case information had not been provided, the Head of Neighbourhood Services clarified that information, such as the overall expected capital spend, could be found in the Cabinet report 'Garden Waste Collection Charges', received by Cabinet at their meeting on 7 June 2023.

A number of Panel members expressed different preferences for different options, discussing which would be fairest for residents, with one view given that the presentation of options to the Panel as multiple choice questions was not appropriate.

A Panel member argued that they had previously said, when a pay-to-use collection service had been considered in 2020, that there had not been a serious business plan in place and that cost bases, relative to the number of customers, were needed. The business plan presented to the Panel was described as unconventional, and the choices given as being restrictive. The Panel member urged for the provision of a monthly payment option to be provided, potentially as a continuous card payment,

and for the initial administration fee of £10 to be dropped, so as to increase service uptake.

The Chairman noted that there had been many differing opinions on the Panel, and that no formal recommendations had been made, although the Panel's members had expressed their views on the proposal, for the Portfolio Holder to consider.