

**NOTES OF MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON
BULKY HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTION AND
REPLACEMENT WASTE CONTAINERS
HELD AT NELSON TOWN HALL ON THURSDAY 3RD OCTOBER 2024**

PRESENT

Councillor D. Cockburn-Price – (Review Leader)

Councillors

*R. Anwar
C. Church
M. Stone*

Officers present

*David Walker
Paul Preston
Lynne Rowland*

*Assistant Director, Operational Services
Democratic Services Manager
Committee Administrator*

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1. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded of the legal requirements concerning the declaration of interests.

2. REVIEW PLAN

A draft review plan was submitted for approval.

The draft plan included proposed terms of reference and provided background information on why the topics of bulky household waste collection and replacement waste containers had been selected for review by Overview and Scrutiny.

AGREED

That the draft review plan and proposed terms of reference be approved.

3. BULKY HOUSEHOLD WASTE COLLECTION

A review of bulky household waste collection had been included in the Overview and Scrutiny work programme as the free unlimited service for the collection of domestic bulky household items currently provided by the Council was considered to be unsustainable. The purpose of the review was to gain a clear understanding of the financial impact on the Council for the provision of this service, along with any environmental impact, and consider whether a change to the service could better deliver on the Council's priorities.

The Group was provided with an overview of the current policies within Pendle and surrounding areas in relation to bulky household waste collections in a report from the Assistant Director,

Operational Services. The Assistant Director also attended the meeting to answer questions from the Group.

It was noted that, across Lancashire, Pendle was the only Local Authority to provide a free unlimited service. Although Hyndburn Borough Council provided a free collection service, this was restricted to a maximum of six items each calendar month.

This unlimited service was open to abuse, especially by landlords, who used the service to clear business premises when tenants moved.

Information was provided on the number of requests from individual properties in the 12-month period from the 7th September 2022 to 6th September 2023. This highlighted that there had been 34 collection requests from one property, ranging to nine requests made from 22 properties.

Statistics revealed that in the same period there had been 16,130 bulky collection requests. Over half of these had been for the collection of one or two items. A breakdown of requests received from 2021 to 2024 showed that, each year, an average of 6,206 requests had been for the collection of just one item. The yearly average for the maximum of nine items per request was 775.

The Group considered the bulky waste arrangements in surrounding authorities and found that the average charge across District and Unitary Authorities within Lancashire was £14.92 per collection. In contrast, Pendle paid £9 per collection to a subcontractor. The weekly cost to Pendle of the service through July and August 2024 was calculated at £3,393, with an average of 377 collections completed each week.

Based on this level of activity, which currently had a daily cap, the estimated annual cost was £173,043, meaning that the current budget of £140,000 would likely be overspent by £33,000.

It was agreed that this cost to the Council was unsustainable, especially with the wider implications to the waste service section imposed by central Government, and County Council decisions, which included the introduction of a new weekly food waste collection service and the development of a new waste transfer station for Pendle.

It was noted that, for a short period, the Council had charged for bulky household waste collections but, following a change in administration, the charge was withdrawn. During this time, there had been an average reduction of 267 requests per week against current levels of service demand.

Prior to the charge being withdrawn, an annual income of approximately £30,000 had been expected. This was based on a minimum charge of £13.50 per collection of 1 - 4 items and a stepped increase of £13.50 for 5 – 8 items and 9 – 12 items, with an expectation that there would be a reduction in the number of requests.

It was thought that one of the reasons for the decision to re-introduce and maintain the free service may have been based on concerns about a potential increase in fly-tipping. However, it was noted that, even with the current free service, Pendle was the second highest in the country for cases of fly-tipping. When comparing figures from other authorities, those that charged for collections had less fly-tipping.

It was noted that there wasn't an identified pattern across Pendle, although Nelson, with the largest footprint, was the biggest area of need. Members discussed whether the targeted approach to fly-tipping that had taken place in the past, in which large skips had been provided in

certain areas of the borough, should be repeated on a more regular basis. However, it was noted that, although the tonnage collected indicated that the initiative had led to residents saving up their bulky waste for disposal, to continue with this on a regular basis would fail to encourage residents to re-home/recycle/re-use, therefore having a negative impact on the environment.

It was explained that Government income for waste services was based on performance. Pendle's residual waste was currently higher than other authorities and, as Government income was based on performance, this could have a negative effect on the Council's finances.

It was felt that the introduction of a charge may encourage people to consider other options before choosing to skip their items. Details of alternatives for furniture and domestic appliances were provided on the Council's website at the point at which a bulky waste collection was requested.

Members discussed the importance of getting people engaged with the process and the need for effective messages to be relayed. The ongoing press releases which provided information on fines issued for illegally dumping waste, and reinforced the message to dispose of waste responsibly, were welcomed. However, some felt that leaflets and social media weren't as effective as a more prominent, large static banner. It was also felt that any campaign should include a visit to local schools.

It was explained that large signs currently featured on the side of refuse vehicles. This mobile signage allowed for more coverage across the borough and hopefully prevented people becoming blind to the message, as was often the case with static signs.

The Group discussed whether a charge could be introduced with an allowance of one free collection per year and/or the option of agreeing a discount for those on housing or council tax benefits as done at Preston and Wyre Councils. The potential for neighbours choosing to share collections was commented on and accepted that this may happen as a result of any decision to introduce a charge.

It was acknowledged that a computer system upgrade may be required to implement the changes discussed, but that the initial outlay would be outweighed by future savings. Further work would be required on this.

Conclusion

The Group concluded that the free unlimited service for the collection of domestic bulky household items currently provided by the Council was unsustainable. Having considered all the evidence presented in the report of the Assistant Director, Operational Services and in answer to questions of the Group, as well as acknowledging that this was a service that was valuable, useful and convenient for residents, the following recommendation was made –

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) That a stepped charging mechanism for bulky household waste collections be introduced as follows –

Number of Items	Minimum Charge
1 – 4	£13.50
5 – 8	£27.00
9 – 12	£40.50

- (2) That persons in receipt of housing or council tax benefits be eligible for a discount of 50%.
- (3) That it be acknowledged that there may be a cost to developing or amending current software solutions to accommodate the introduction of charges for bulky household waste collections, but that this would be outweighed by future savings.
- (4) That promotion of hubs and charities accepting used household products be increased.

REASON

The evidence presented demonstrates that the free unlimited service for bulky household waste collections currently provided by the Council is unsustainable and that the introduction of a charging mechanism will contribute to the Council's service delivery costs and achieve an income to support the delivery of the Council's critical services. Net expenditure will be reduced and residents will be encouraged to have more consideration for the environment when household goods become unwanted. The introduction of the charges may increase re-use of used household products and the subsequent drop in anticipated demand would reduce the amount of waste being sent for disposal and into landfill. In recognising the number of low-income households in Pendle, a concession for those in receipt of housing or council tax benefits is recommended. By introducing a charge for the service, it will meet the Council's Priority 1 in ensuring that the Council is delivering value for money in the service that it provides.

4. REPLACEMENT WASTE CONTAINERS

A review of replacement waste containers had been included in the Overview and Scrutiny work programme as the provision of a free replacement wheeled bin on request was considered to be unsustainable. As with the review on bulky household waste collection, the Group wanted to gain a clear understanding of the financial impact on the Council for the provision of this free replacement bin service, along with any environmental impact, and consider whether a change to the service could better deliver on the Council's priorities.

The Assistant Director, Operational Services submitted a report which gave an overview of the current policies within Pendle and surrounding areas in relation to the provision of containers for waste and recyclable materials. The report also provided information on the level of activity around the delivery of waste containers and the management of their removal from the public highway between scheduled days of collection.

The Assistant Director, Operational Services remained in the meeting to answer questions from the Group.

The Group was reminded of the Council's alternate week collection scheme for refuse and recycling, in which refuse was collected one week and recycling was collected the following week. The Council's Policy was that households consisting of five people and below would be able to manage with one 240L grey bin for refuse, but there were exceptions to this rule.

Householders could not provide their own containers as they had to be compliant with certain standards to be compatible with the vehicle lifts.

It was noted that, across Lancashire, Pendle remained one of only two Local Authorities who provided a free replacement waste container delivery service. The cost to Pendle was broken down into two elements - the cost of the bin, and the cost for administration and delivery.

It was reported that the Council completed on average over 200 deliveries and exchanges of wheeled bins each week. The weekly cost for administration and direct delivery was £747 and the cost of a 240L bin (with a 10 year lifespan) was £19.25.

The Services budget for replacement containers was set at £150,000. Based on the current level of demand, the budget for the purchase of wheeled bins was likely to be overspent by £46,000.

The full cost to the Council for purchasing and delivering replacement containers in 2024/25 would be in the region of £234,329.

In 2022/23, a proposal to introduce an administrative charge of £15 + VAT demonstrated that an estimated income/saving figure of £52,960 could be achieved, created by the need to buy and deliver fewer bins. The proposal was for administration costs only, as the bin would be free and remained the property of the Council.

It was explained that waste containers should only be presented on the public highway the evening before the scheduled collection day and removed after the collection day. In cases where bins were left on the highway, a letter would be sent advising the household of the rules, which would be followed by formal action if the bin remained on the highway.

It had been noted that the service was open to abuse and had been used by some households multiple times each year. Investigation into the number of requests received since 2021 showed that they annually exceeded 6,000, with 500 of those being for multiple replacement bins. A review of the requests found that in the last three years, one property had requested 23 bin exchanges, one property 14 exchanges, two properties 12 exchanges and 35 properties had recorded between 7 and 10 exchanges.

The service recycled damaged or defaced wheeled bins where possible and as a result, could recoup £1,000 over a 12-month period.

The Group was advised that the Council had previously introduced a charge but, as with bulky household waste collections, this was withdrawn after a short period following a change in administration. One exception was in relation to new build properties, for which there was currently a charge of £28 for each bin. This had been accepted by developers. During the time the charge was in place, there was very little complaint or public resistance.

The Group discussed the potential benefits, or otherwise, of introducing a charge. It was noted that, by charging for replacement bins, net expenditure would be reduced and residents would be encouraged to take more responsibility for the containers provided to them. In turn, this would likely reduce the number of requests for bins which would promote the reuse and recycle policy. The charge could also discourage households from getting an extra grey bin, therefore limiting the amount of non-recyclable refuse for disposal. However, it was acknowledged that a charge may cause difficulties for some, therefore Members discussed the potential to allow one free bin in a specific timeframe and allowing a discount for those on housing or council tax benefits.

The issue of bin theft was also mentioned and it was noted that the bins at Ribble Valley contained an identity chip that contained its allocated address, something which could be explored at Pendle.

Members also considered whether any introduction of charges should be limited to the grey refuse bin only, with recycling bins continuing to be free of charge. This would encourage recycling and could potentially reduce residual waste and improve the Council's performance.

As part of the review, Members had agreed to consider the issues around bin storage capacity along terraces and a suggestion that communal bins be considered. It was initially thought that communal bins could assist in improving the amenity of the area and reduce the financial burden of replacing waste containers as is done now. However, the report and verbal information provided evidenced that this would not be a viable option.

Based on the current schedule of collections, it had been calculated that, for a terraced street containing 20 houses each side (40 houses in total), 27 skips would be required. This was based on a requirement of one container for each scheme, every 4-5 houses. Across Pendle there was in the region of 41,000 dwellings. Providing communal containers on a ratio of one container per four households would result in 30,000 skips being required. The cost to provide these would be £10,455,000.

In addition, considering the limited space on a back street it was likely that containers would have to be located opposite each other, which would reduce the highway width from 3.65 metres to 1.65 metres. This would not allow access for a narrow track refuse collection vehicle, emergency services vehicles or even a medium sized car. If left on verges or designated points within housing estates, parking opportunities would be restricted.

Conclusion

The Group concluded that the provision of a free replacement wheeled bin on request was unsustainable and discussed various potential charging options. Having considered all the evidence presented in the report of the Assistant Director, Operational Services and in answer to questions of the Group, the following recommendation was made –

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) That a charge of £25 + VAT be introduced for administration and delivery of all replacement wheeled bins.
- (2) That an additional charge of £20 + VAT be introduced for the purchase of a grey refuse (non-recycling) bin.
- (3) That no additional charge be introduced for the purchase of brown, blue and green recycling bins and this message be clearly advertised.
- (4) That all charges recommended at (1) and (2) above be discounted by 50% for persons in receipt of housing or council tax benefits.
- (5) That it be accepted that communal bins would not be a viable option and the option not be pursued, but that advice be supplied to new developers where possible.

REASON

The evidence presented demonstrates that the provision of free replacement wheeled bins on request is unsustainable. The introduction of a charge will reduce the Council's net expenditure and will prompt residents to take more responsibility for the containers provided to them. That there be no charge for the purchase of recycling bins will encourage wider use of the kerbside collection schemes for recycling and promote the reuse and recycle policy. In recognising the number of low-income households in Pendle,

a concession for those in receipt of housing or council tax benefits is recommended. It is accepted that the introduction of communal bins is not a viable option throughout the Borough, but that these could be considered in the construction of new developments. By introducing a charge for the service, it will meet the Council's Priority 1 in ensuring that the Council is delivering value for money in the service that it provides.

CHAIR _____