

**Public**  
**Key Decision - Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Garden Waste Subscription Service: Call-in Outcome

**Meeting/Date:** Cabinet – 24th August 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor M Hassall - Executive Councillor for Corporate and Shared Services

**Report by:** O Morley – Interim Managing Director

**Wards affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

Following the call-in of the Cabinet's approval of the Garden Waste Subscription Service on 18th July 2023, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Panel met to discuss the reasons for call-in. This report summarises the matters discussed and the conclusion reached.

### **Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet is

### **RECOMMENDED**

to consider the points as summarised and determine the recommendations contained in the report by the General Manger for Operations attached as Appendix A.

## **1.0 Background:**

- 1.1 On 18th July 2023 the Cabinet approved a series of recommendations in relation to the introduction of a household garden waste subscription service. The decision was called-in by ten Members of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The Joint Panel had been convened to consider and comment on the proposals prior to the Cabinet and the same Panel met on 10<sup>th</sup> August to consider the reasons for the call-in. This report summarises the matters discussed and the conclusion reached.

## **2.0 Deliberations:**

- 2.1 The main areas for discussion were finance and consultation. Regarding financial aspects of the proposal, the following comments were made:

- A process had been established involving Joint Administration political groups to identify and examine options to improve the Council's financial position. The proposal to introduce a subscription service emerged from that process, though it was noted that it had been identified by officers as a potential option a number of years earlier;
- The process did not identify any other options, therefore, without the subscription service it would be likely the Council would have to make service reductions. Executive Members preferred not to do this;
- The Panel discussed that there was a difference between Appendix 5, the financial assumptions used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the financial assumptions table in the original report to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. It was established that the MTFS contained assumptions, but financial impact information had been received from the County Council after MTFS figures were approved by Cabinet in February 2023, that meant figures were updated in the Overview and Scrutiny Panel report which were not included in Appendix 5. It was suggested that the changes that have been made, the reasons for them and the implications for the Council should be reported to the cabinet when it considers the outcome of the call-in;
- The sensitivity analysis showed the impact of lower take up but did not apply this to the financial assumption analysis. Given some other councils have experienced lower take up rates, the panel felt this should be done so that the Council could be fully aware of the implications;
- Members asked a question about the 'breakeven point'. It was explained that the service seeks to cover its own costs. Therefore, if there are significantly lower levels of subscriptions than expected, proportionately fewer staff would be required and vehicles/fuel/insurance would be lower, meaning the service can be scaled up and down as determined by the numbers who subscribe. On this basis it is very difficult to determine a 'breakeven point' for the whole service.

- The cost of delaying the introduction of the service by one year would be £2 million;
- Should the uptake be lower than expected, there will still be a contribution to the MTFs, as opposed to a pressure to the MTFs, as there is currently;
- The financial predictions did not consider inflation;
- The projections do not include salary inflation but, at the same time, income from the Garden Waste Scheme will help to put the Council in a position where it can consider future salary increases.

2.2 The points made in relation to consultation are:

- Some Members of the Panel are of the view that the proposal is of such significance that it should be subject to public consultation. It is suggested that the consultation should seek views on alternative configurations of the service, such as increasing the period between collections. It is further argued that, given the absence within the Council of ideas for other ways to improve the Council's financial position, suggestions also should be requested in this respect.
- In response, Executive Councillors have pointed to their legal obligation to give weight to the likely outcome of any consultation and instead take the view that they are elected to take difficult decisions such as the one under consideration;
- Following discussion on the operation of collections, it has been established that further engagement will take place with town and parish councils. This has provided Members with some reassurance over public impact in the first instance and subsequently for the evolution of the scheme through an iterative process;
- It is understood a petition is being prepared to be submitted to the Council.

2.3 A further theme examined during the meeting concerned the environmental impact of the proposal. Members have been informed that the decision has predominantly been proposed for financial reasons. Information on environmental matters has been obtained, but a full analysis would be highly complex and the particular impact in Huntingdonshire would not be known until the scheme has commenced operation. 70% of waste management authorities in the Eastern Region have already introduced similar schemes so comparison data should be readily available. It has, therefore, been suggested that the environmental impact of the scheme is monitored and formally reported on.

2.4 A final point for consideration is the suggestion that the Council should assess the impact of the proposal on those residents whose income only just exceeds the level that means they should be classed as vulnerable.

### **3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations:**

3.1 The Joint Panel has received a considerable amount of detailed information to assist the call-in process. The Panel has provided robust challenge and a proposal that the Cabinet should be recommended not to proceed with the scheme, which was voted on, did not succeed. The following is a summary of the main points arising from the deliberations:

- The change to Appendix 5 should be identified and an explanation for it provided;
- The Council should monitor and formally report on the environmental impact of the scheme;
- The Council should consult on the principle of charging and on alternative ways of organising the service and also seek suggestions that might help to improve the Council's financial position;
- The sensitivity analysis should be revised to include lower rates of uptake (suggested 15%) up to 2028.

3.2 The Cabinet is

#### **RECOMMENDED**

to consider the points summarised above and determine the Recommendations contained in the report by the General Manger for Operations attached as an Appendix hereto.

**Appendix** – Report presented to Joint Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the Household Garden Waste Subscription Service: 10th August 2023

#### **CONTACT OFFICER**

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