

**Public**  
**Key Decision – Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Garden Waste Incentive Schemes

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) 6 March 2025  
Cabinet – 18 March 2025

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene  
Cllr Simone Taylor

**Report by:** Andrew Rogan-Head of Operational Services

**Wards affected:** All Wards

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### **Executive Summary:**

The garden waste incentive schemes were introduced as part of the garden waste subscription service changes approved by Cabinet in 2023 and were implemented in April 2024.

These discretionary incentives were tested and developed with community representatives, with the aim of supporting residents to continue with their commitments to compost and recycle green waste. Engagement activities were undertaken with Town and Parish councils and community groups throughout September 2023.

In total 33 local councils (towns or parishes) were represented across 4 sessions, with a total of 58 representatives actively inputting into the viability and support considerations required for several proposed initiatives.

In total, five non-statutory schemes were agreed and implemented.

Those being:

- i. **Saturday Freighters** – a schedule over a 4-week period of vehicles every Saturday between the months of April and September in prearranged locations across the district where residents can deposit their garden waste.
- ii. **Community Bins**-For parishes not included on the 4-weekly schedule the council would contact those outlying Parish Councils, to offer them up to 10 community bins, free of charge, to be hosted at a community location of their choice.

- iii. **Parish Council Bin allocation for land management** - Parish Councils can request free of charge bins, which they can allocate to residents to support them maintaining Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) owned local green spaces in their communities.
- iv. **Subsidised price home composters** – in addition to the current offer of ‘buy one and get a second half price’, HDC will seek to offer residents a subsidised price on the purchase of their first compost bin. residents pay £10 + delivery charges. HDC contributes £17 towards the cost of the bin.
- v. **Free loose compost** – working with Town and Parish Councils, along with Allotment Associations, HDC will provide a limited amount of compost for residents to collect for free.

These services were maiden projects, and due of their unique designs, along with their discretionary nature, it was agreed that all incentives would be kept under review to ensure they aligned with our corporate priority of delivering high-quality, cost-effective services.

Following the first year of implementing these incentives, performance data reveals that four out of the five schemes have demonstrated good value for money and operational efficiency. However, the Saturday Freighter scheme has proved to be both cost-ineffective and operationally challenging.

Our assessment is that continuing the Saturday Freighter scheme is not viable within our current organisational infrastructure and resources. The operational complexities and financial implications of this particular service makes it unsustainable moving forward and does not aligning with our corporate priority of delivering high-quality, cost-effective services. This report outlines key findings from all initiatives, including participation rates and operational challenges.

Garden waste collection now forms part of business-as-usual activity for the service, and as such, flexibility is required to ensure that existing incentives can be delivered in a cost-effective way, whilst also allowing scope for other options to be trialled and implemented where deemed appropriate. Such activity is operational in nature, and decisions relating to operational matters should be vested at the correct level of Council decision-making.

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the findings from the delivery of the incentive schemes that were introduced as part of the garden waste subscription service, and to seek Cabinets approval to:

- i. Continue with incentives that are cost-effective and operationally efficient to deliver.
- ii. Discontinue or modify underperforming schemes, particularly the Saturday Freighter service.
- iii. Embed the garden waste incentives as part of business-as-usual activity and delegate authority for the ongoing management and delivery of garden waste incentives to the Corporate Director of Place, Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene.

- iv. Development and implementation of a comprehensive communication plan for residents about service changes and alternative disposal methods for garden waste.

The proposed delegation is aimed at optimising the garden waste incentive schemes, ensuring continued alignment with our corporate priority of delivering high-quality, cost-effective services, while supporting communities to compost and recycle their garden waste. It would enable agile decision-making based on ongoing performance data and operational insights, allowing for timely adjustments to meet evolving community needs and operational realities.

**Recommendation(s):**

**RECOMMENDED**

For Cabinet to

- i. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Place and Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene, to embed garden waste incentives into business-as-usual activity. This includes the authority to continue, discontinue, or modify schemes as appropriate, and to develop and implement a resident communication plan regarding service changes.

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the findings from the delivery of the incentive schemes that were introduced as part of the garden waste subscription service, and to seek Cabinet's approval to:
- i. Continue with incentives that are cost-effective and operationally efficient to deliver.
  - ii. Discontinue or modify underperforming schemes, particularly the Saturday Freighter service.
  - iii. Delegate authority for the forward management and delivery of garden waste incentives to the Corporate Director of Place and Corporate Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151), in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene.
  - iv. Development and implementation of a comprehensive communication plan for residents about service changes and alternative disposal methods for garden waste.

Huntingdonshire District Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2028 outlines several objectives that should be considered when evaluating the garden waste incentive schemes. The plan emphasises improving the quality of life for local people, creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations, and doing core work well.

In the context of garden waste incentives, the council should focus on delivering cost-effective, high-value services that contribute to the council's goal of working collaboratively with residents and partners, as well as empowering people to reduce demand for traditional public services. Any garden waste incentive program should be designed to support these broader objectives while ensuring efficient operational management and good control of statutory obligations.

### BACKGROUND

- 1.2 The Garden waste incentive schemes were introduced as part of the garden waste subscription service changes approved by Cabinet in 2023 and were implemented in April 2024.
- 1.3 These discretionary Incentives were tested and developed with community representatives, with the aim of supporting residents to continue with their commitments to compost and recycle garden waste. Engagement activities were undertaken with Town and Parish Councils and community groups throughout September 2023.
- 1.4 In total, five discretionary schemes were agreed and implemented, those being:
- i. **Saturday Freighters** – a schedule over a 4-week period of vehicles every Saturday between the months of April and September in prearranged locations across the district where residents can deposit their garden waste.
  - ii. **Community Bins** - For parishes not included on the 4-weekly schedule the Council would contact those outlying Parish Councils,

to offer them up to 10 community bins, free of charge, to be hosted at a community location of their choice.

- iii. **Parish Council Bin allocation for land management** - Parish Councils can **request** free of charge bins, which they can allocate to residents to support them maintaining HDC owned local green spaces in their communities.
  - iv. **Subsidised price home composters** – in addition to the current offer of 'Buy one and get a second half price', HDC will seek to offer residents a subsidised price on the purchase of their first compost bin. residents pay £10 plus delivery charges. HDC contributes £17 towards the cost of the bin.
  - v. **Free loose compost** – working with Town and Parish Councils, along with Allotment Associations, HDC will provide a limited amount of compost for residents to collect for free.
- 1.5 These services were new projects for operational services and their unique designs and discretionary nature, it was agreed that all incentives would be kept under review to ensure they were operationally efficient and delivered value for money.
- 1.6 We have embedded the Garden Waste projects into our Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), effectively transitioning it to Business as Usual (BAU) activity. This approach will allow us to more readily adjust and modify these schemes, ensuring they continue to deliver cost-effective services that align closely with our Corporate Plan objectives. By managing these schemes as BAU, we can enhance our ability to adapt to changing circumstances, optimise resource allocation, and maintain a strong focus on providing efficient and valuable services to our residents.

## 2. KEY FINDINGS

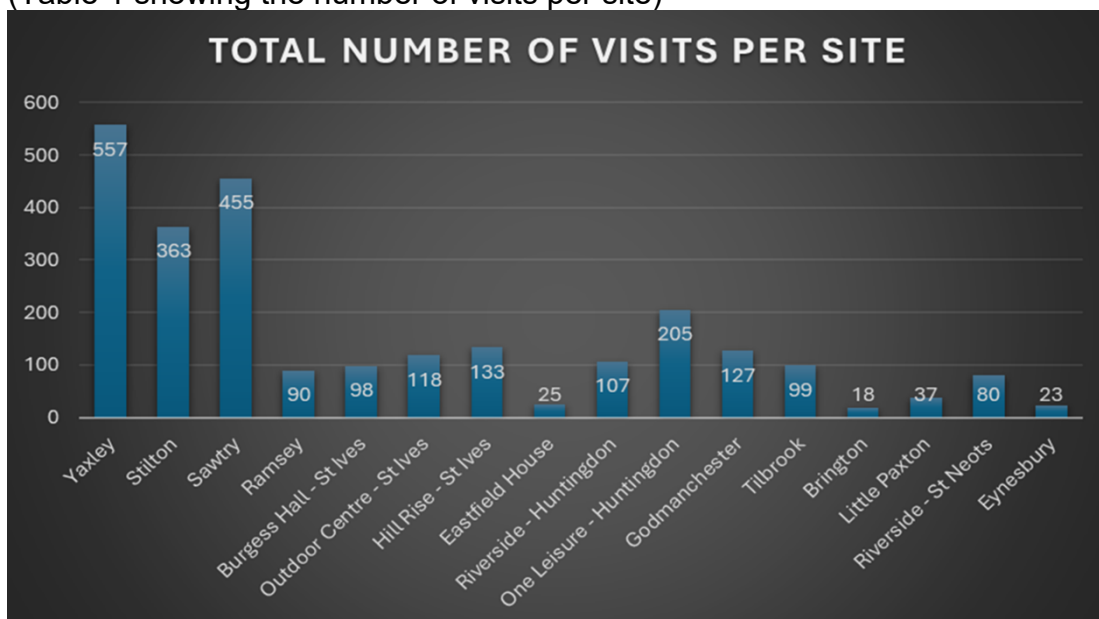
### 2.1 Saturday Freighters

- 2.1.1 Operated between April and September 2024, across a total of 109 sites.
- 2.1.2 2535 visits made in total; this was predominantly residents making repeat trips not 2535 individual residents. In addition, many residents were using their subscription bin to transport their waste to site (valid sticker in place) and many commented they already had a subscription for one garden bin but were using the freighter service to avoid having to subscribe for an additional bin. (Table 1 below shows the number of visits per site).
- 2.1.3 A local business has tried to capitalise on the Freighter service by offering residents to collect their bins, deposit their waste at the freighter location and then return them. (fee Implied)
- 2.1.4 A total of 70.25 tonnes of garden waste collected during the period of operation, however, vehicles collected as little as 50kg of garden

waste from some locations. Fuel usage alone for this collection was 23 litres.

- 2.1.5 Total cost of service delivery over the six month period was around £40K.
- 2.1.6 The overall operational cost of the Saturday freighter service as per ton of material collected was approx. £570 per ton. As a comparison, under the garden waste collections service pre-subscriptions, the cost per ton of material collected was approx. £37.20 per ton. Thus, the Saturday freighters are considerably more expensive to operate and do not demonstrate value for money.
- 2.1.7 This service was operated on overtime, it was complex to manage and impacted on areas such as workshop, drivers' hours and their legally required rest periods and standard rounds during the normal working week. Having drivers available for the Saturdays was problematic, with waste managers often covering the Saturday freighter driving duty.
- 2.1.8 There were several occasions when areas could not be delivered as planned due to staffing issues.
- 2.1.9 Further delivery of the Saturday freighter scheme is not viable within our current organisational infrastructure and resources as the operational complexities and financial implications of this service makes it unsustainable moving forward.
- 2.1.10 It is proposed that for the combination of the reasons above, there is no financial, or operational basis to make the above service sustainable. The service is discretionary; and continued delivery does not make economic sense and creates significant operational challenges/risks. As such, it is proposed that this service is ceased.

(Table 1 showing the number of visits per site)



## **2.2 Community Bins**

- 2.2.1 This was designed to support Parish/Town councils not included on the 4-weekly schedule, HDC would provide them up to 10 community bins, free of charge, to be hosted at a community location of their choice.
- 2.2.2 A total of eight Parish Councils have embraced the offer, and so far, collections have been running smoothly without any significant issues with contamination. However, some areas remain hesitant to participate due to concerns about contamination risks and the responsibility associated with rejected bins. HDC are fully committed to continue to work with Town and Parish councils to overcome some of these concerns.
- 2.2.3 Expanding this service to include all Town and Parish Councils could serve as an alternative to the Saturday Freighter service. While the collection schedule would shift from monthly to a fortnightly basis, it will provide the same annual capacity. Furthermore, this approach would be more targeted, ensuring a more efficient and structured service across the district.
- 2.2.4 This service is low-cost and as the bins are collected as part of the standard rounds, it is straightforward to implement and significantly more efficient and effective than bespoke arrangements like the Saturday Freighter service.

## **2.3 Parish Council Bin allocation for land management**

- 2.3.1 Parish Councils can request free of charge bins, which they can allocate to residents to support them maintaining HDC owned local green spaces in their communities.
- 2.3.2 To date there have been no requests for this offer, however, this service should remain as an option as there is a continued commitment from HDC to support community engagement.

## **2.4 Subsidised price home composters**

- 2.4.1 For a number of years HDC has offered subsidised home composters to residents, however, in addition to the current offer of 'buy one and get a second half price', HDC expanded this to offer residents a subsidised price on the purchase of their first compost bin.
- 2.4.2 The service is delivered through a third party (GetComposting), with minimal administration for HDC staff.
- 2.4.3 The residents. pay £10 plus delivery charges to the composter provider. HDC contributes a further £17 towards the cost of the bin.

2.4.4 To date 350 home composters have been purchased since the scheme started.

## 2.5 Free Loose Compost

2.5.1 HDC, in collaboration with Town and Parish Councils and Allotment Associations, will promote locations where free compost can be collected.

2.5.2 Deliveries were carried out using HDC's skip vehicle and skips, with approximately four tonnes of compost deposited at each pre-agreed location.

2.5.3 A total of 37 Parish Councils took up the offer, resulting in around 150 tonnes of compost being delivered across various sites.

2.5.4 The service has been extremely well received, strengthening relationships with Town and Parish Councils.

2.5.5 The total cost for supplying and delivering the compost was approximately £6,000. Due to contractual obligations under the Cambridgeshire County Council waste contract, the compost must be purchased from a contractor. Overall, this service is low cost and as a minimal operational impact.

2.6 The proposed garden incentive waste schemes moving forward will be:

- i. **Community Bins**- All Parish and Town councils would be offered up to 10 community bins, free of charge, to be hosted at a community location of their choice.
- ii. **Parish Council Bin allocation for land management** - Parish Councils can request free of charge bins, which they can allocate to residents to support them maintaining HDC owned local green spaces in their communities.
- iii. **Subsidised price home composters** – in addition to the current offer of 'Buy one and get a second half price', HDC will seek to offer residents a subsidised price on the purchase of their first compost bin. residents pay £10 + delivery charges. HDC contributes £17 towards the cost of the bin.
- iv. **Free loose compost** – working with Town and Parish Councils, along with Allotment Associations, HDC will provide a limited amount of compost for residents to collect for free.

2.7 As we implement our current strategies, it's crucial to emphasise that these initiatives are not set in stone. We are committed to keeping them under constant review as part of our Business as Usual (BAU) activities. This ongoing assessment allows us to remain agile and responsive to changing circumstances. Furthermore, we will actively seek out and consider new and improved offerings in the future. However, any potential additions or changes must align closely with our Corporate Plan objectives. Additionally, we will carefully evaluate the sustainability of



these initiatives within the context of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). This approach will ensure that we remain innovative while maintaining financial responsibility and alignment with our core organisational goals.

### **3. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 6th March 2025.
- 3.2 Councillor Alban noted that given the uptake figures of the Saturday freighters in the north of the district, would there be opportunity to revisit the possibility of reinstating the service there. The Panel heard that whilst the Waste Management team had done an excellent job in providing this service over the last 12 months, the costs to continue, both operationally and in manpower, were prohibitive. It was noted that workshop staff were required in addition to the collection crew itself. It was noted that community bins were being suggested as a replacement for this service. Following a further enquiry by Councillor Lowe, the Panel were advised that this service could not be moved to a weekday for the same reasons.
- 3.3 Councillor Shaw observed that there had disappointing take up figures of the communities bins to date and enquired if any feedback had been received. The Panel heard that these were only initially offered to areas not covered by the Saturday service but that there had not been any major issues or unanticipated contamination problems. It was noted that the team would be collaborative in working with town and parish councils to develop this scheme further.
- 3.4 Councillor Lowe advised that Broughton Parish Council had embraced their community bins and that they were managing this well. The Panel heard that the community bins would be more accessible to residents than the Saturday freighters which were only available monthly.
- 3.5 Councillor Bywater expressed his disappointment that the Saturday freighter scheme was ended and was concerned that community bins for parish councils would require an impassioned resident to manage the usage. Concern was also expressed that some parishes may not have sufficient space for 10 bins or space within one location. The Panel heard that the scheme allowed parishes to choose a suitable number of bins up to ten and that the team were open to conversations regarding the location of these bins, however it was noted that this would need to remain efficient and effective for the collection team.
- 3.6 It was proposed by Councillor Alban to add an additional recommendation to the Cabinet report, this was seconded by Councillor Shaw and the Panel voted unanimously in favour of forwarding the proposed recommendation to the Cabinet;

ii) that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel be given sight of any decisions made or to be made under recommendation i of the report.

3.7 Following an enquiry by Councillor Lowe, the Panel heard that due to the weight of garden waste, commercial sized bins would not be suitable to be used as a community bin.

3.8 The Panel were advised, following questions by Councillor Bywater, Councillor McAdam, Councillor Hunt and Councillor Shaw, that the scheme was to support vulnerable residents who were unable to subscribe to the garden waste service or to dispose of their garden waste at a local recycling centre. The Panel were further assured that dialogue with parishes would be ongoing to ensure maximum efficiencies for Councils whilst supporting vulnerable residents.

3.9 In response to a question from Councillor Lowe, it was confirmed that grey bins historically contained around 40% organic waste but that a bin would be rejected should it contain excessive quantities of garden waste.

3.10 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

ii) that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel be given sight of any decisions made or to be made under recommendation i of the report.

#### **4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

4.1 Among the five incentives implemented, the Saturday freighter service emerged as the least value for money and the most challenging to maintain. Given the current organisational structure and available resources, continuing this service is not feasible. Moreover, there is a significant risk that persisting with this service could negatively impact the standard waste and recycling collection service. Such disruption would not only incur additional costs for HDC but also potentially damage the organisation's reputation.

4.2 Recognise that there may be some negative feedback from those that have made use of the Saturday service, but this is likely to be minimal in nature, and that can be managed through communication and engagement.

4.3 All other incentives were relatively low-cost and straightforward to implement. However, as previously mentioned, these incentives are discretionary in nature and impose a degree of financial and resource burden on HDC. Therefore, they should be continuously reviewed to ensure they remain operationally efficient and provide value for money.

## 5. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 As mentioned previously, out of the five incentive scheme only the Saturday freighter service was costly and challenging to deliver, however, we have considered a series of options in relation to this particular service.
- 5.2 The first option, "do nothing," presents significant challenges, including complex operational delivery, poor value for money for the public purse, and overall inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Moreover, this approach would negatively impact the waste and recycling collection service along with other service areas within the council.
- 5.3 Another option explored was reducing the service from six months to three months. However, this adjustment would not alleviate the core issues, as the service would remain complex to deliver operationally, continue to provide poor value for money, and persist in its inefficiency and ineffectiveness.
- 5.4 A third option involved changing the location of the service. This approach faces limitations due to the difficulty in finding locations with adequate parking for 26-tonne vehicles and sufficient space for residents. Furthermore, even with a change in location, the service would remain complex to deliver operationally and would not deliver value for money, continuing to be inefficient and ineffective, with a high likelihood of impacting business as usual service delivery.
- 5.5 Based on the considerations regarding the Saturday freighter scheme, an additional option of offering ten bins to all town and parish councils has been proposed. The primary recommendation remains to discontinue the Saturday freighter scheme due to its operational complexity, inefficiency, and failure to deliver value for money for the public purse. However, providing ten bins to town and parish councils could serve as an alternative solution of supporting residents to continue with their commitments to compost and recycle garden waste at a local level.

## 6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

**DO.** Using all our services and ways of working to best serve Huntingdonshire.

**ENABLE.** Huntingdonshire residents and businesses to thrive by listening and working with them.

**INFLUENCE.** Partner organisations and stakeholders by creating a shared vision that benefits Huntingdonshire.

### **Doing our core work well.**

Delivering good quality, high value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Garden waste incentives are discretionary; the council has no legal obligation to provide them, and these optional initiatives can be modified or discontinued based on budget, environmental goals, or strategy changes. Decisions will consider community impact and council resources, ensuring alignment with objectives and financial sustainability

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The garden waste incentive schemes are discretionary and supplementary to the services we provided before introducing garden waste subscriptions. Consequently, these additional services place varying degrees of increased workload across multiple council departments.

## **9. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The schemes promote waste reduction and sustainability, with home composting and free compost distribution offering the greatest environmental benefits. Community and parish bins help manage waste locally but require careful oversight to prevent contamination. Saturday Freighters have the highest carbon impact due to the additional vehicle use in comparison to the other schemes.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

- 10.1 The recommendations seek to improve the delivery of the garden waste incentives through cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency, achieved by modifying underperforming schemes like the Saturday Freighter service. Delegated authority will enable agile decision-making, while a comprehensive communication plan will inform residents about changes and alternative disposal methods, ensuring a smooth transition and maintaining community engagement.

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

Name/Job Title: Andrew Rogan-Head of Operational Service  
Tel No: 01480 388 082  
Email: [andrew.rogan@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.rogan@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)