

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 MARCH 2016	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	BULKY WASTE REVIEW		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR LIZ TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS
SERVICE:	TRANSPORTATION & STREETCARE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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JOB TITLE:	NATIONAL MANAGEMENT TRAINEE	E-MAIL:	Nina.zuendorf@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the outcomes of the Bulky Waste review and asks HNL Committee to agree the recommendations to improve the Bulky Waste collection service.
- 1.2 The Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-2020 adopted in March 2015 set out an approach for working with residents, stakeholders and partners to improve the way waste is managed with a growing population and limited resources.
- 1.3 The review of the Bulky Waste collection service contributes to the Waste Minimisation Strategy's objectives. The aims of the Bulky Waste service review are to increase the number of items re-used and recycled and to increase patronage by developing the service to become more efficient and more accessible to customers, especially lower income families.
- 1.4 The Bulky Waste collection service was reviewed through process mapping, workshops with the Call Centre and the Neighbourhood Services staff. This was supplemented by an analysis of customer feedback, emails and calls, mystery shopping and data analysis of the volumes and most frequently collected items.
- 1.5 The review helped to create a clear understanding of the current service and revealed some inefficiencies and issues, which are addressed in this report.
- 1.6 Appendix 1: Benchmarking information of other local authorities  
Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment

## 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 To note the findings of the Bulky Waste collection service review set out in 4.3.

2.2 To agree the recommendations for developing and improving the Bulky Waste collection service set out in 4.4:

- That the online booking form be improved to facilitate online bookings and online payment;
- That the items not accepted for collection be clarified and communicated to customers;
- That scheduled dates for Bulky Waste collections be reintroduced;
- That a new charging structure be introduced to charge £31 per item, £5 for each subsequent item and £10 for less than 3 working days' notice of cancellations;
- That the preparation of estimates for larger bulky collections be moved to the Trade Waste team;
- That the reuse rate of household items be increased by signposting customers with reusable items to local charities.

## 3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 On 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015 HNL Committee approved the Waste Minimization Strategy, which set out an approach for working with residents, stakeholders and partners to improve the way waste is managed with a growing population and limited resources. The strategy had been subject to a four week web based consultation.

3.2 The review of the Bulky Waste collection service is part of the Waste Minimization action plan and contributes to the objectives of the Waste Minimisation Strategy:

- To increase recycling and re-use rates
- To minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill
- To increase understanding and engagement in waste and recycling for the local community and key stakeholders
- To ensure effective, efficient, value for money service delivery

3.3 On 28 November 2011 Cabinet agreed to bring Bulky Waste collections back in house and agreed a 25% concession for concessionary Your Reading Passport holders.

## 4. PROPOSAL

4.1 The Bulky Waste collection service was reviewed through data analysis, process mapping and workshops and meetings with the Customer Contact staff, the Neighbourhood Services staff and managers. Service user feedback, customer emails and calls, findings from mystery shopping were also taken into account.

4.2 The aims of the Bulky Waste service review are to increase the number of items re-used and recycled and to increase patronage by developing the service to become more efficient and more accessible to customers, especially lower income families.

### 4.3 Current Service

4.3.1 The Bulky Waste collection service is offered for items that residents would take with them when they move home. Collections can be booked online or by calling the

Customer Contact team that processes and logs orders. Logged orders are then reviewed by the Neighbourhood Services team, who sends out the collection crew to collect the items listed if payments have been received. The process takes a maximum of 7 working days.

#### 4.3.2 Performance and volumes

- The Bulky Waste collection service is broadly cost-neutral.
- The income in 2014/2015 was 50k and costs amounted to 50k, comprised of collection costs, disposal costs and admin costs.
- 1687 Bulky waste orders were placed in 2014/2015. 1115 (66%) of these orders were collected. 72.6% of Bulky Waste orders were for 1-5 items, 10/6% were for 6-10 items, 9.7% of orders were for Fridges/Freezers and 7% of orders needed and estimate.
- The Bulky Waste items most frequently collected were: Mattresses (849), Sofas (789), Bedframes (547), Arm Chairs (341), Tables (213), Fridges/Freezers (164) Wardrobes (137) as well as Shelving, Bicycles, TVs, Vacuum Cleaners.

4.3.3 The Service Review has revealed some issues and shortcomings. Out of 1687 booking requests only 66% lead to a completed Bulky Waste collection. The reasons for failed bookings include requests for items that cannot be collected; customers failing to put the items ordered on the kerbside, failed payments and higher than expected duration or charges that lead customers to cancel.

4.3.4 The length of the Bulky Waste collection process has received negative feedback from customers, who don't want to leave their household items on the kerbside for 7 working days. The long duration increases the likelihood of fly-tipping and items are likely to become soiled and wet, making them unsuitable for reuse.

4.3.5 In addition, delays and inefficiencies cost staff resources and make the service less attractive to customers. Certain aspects of the Bulky Waste service, including the online booking form, charges and provision of estimates, are not straight forward and lead to confusion among staff and customers, resulting in time loss.

4.3.6 All collected items are currently disposed of at the landfill. There is no approach to reuse the Bulky items collected, even though some of the items, including sofas, arm chairs, tables and bicycles, would be suitable for repair and reuse.

#### 4.4 Options proposed

4.4.1 In order to improve the service and achieve the aims of the Bulky Waste Review, "Do nothing" is not an option. It is proposed to implement the following changes that address the issues identified.

##### 4.4.2 Improve the online booking facility

The majority of online forms are not filled out correctly and customers are not able to pay online. As a result, the Customer Contact team needs to contact customers to clarify the online order and to take payment (credit/debit card or cheque). This increases customer waiting time, administration time and costs and should be resolved.

##### Recommendations:

- Remove the online booking system in the short term and ask customers to call directly to book a collection (this has already been done);
- Improve the existing online booking form to facilitate usage, including a drop down menu for bulky items and an online payment facility. This work would be delivered internally by the Digital and Website Manager.

Other options considered:

It is possible to purchase an external bespoke booking system at extra cost, but this has been rejected as incorporating the necessary changes in the existing form would be sufficient and more cost effective.

#### 4.4.3 Clarify items not accepted for collection

Some landlords and residents use the service for house clearances and dispose of disproportionate amounts of heavy items. In 2014/2015, 43% of landlords ordered a collection of more than two sofas/mattresses/bedframes. As a result the collection crew is unable to collect all items with one collection and is forced to return to the property, causing additional costs. It is proposed to restrict the items eligible for collection to reduce costly collections and clarify the service for customers.

Recommendations:

- Create a list of items accepted and not accepted for collection;
- Stop the collection of black bags, which could contain very heavy material;
- Limit the amount of fridges/freezers to a maximum of 2 per collection - we have already limited the number of sofas/mattresses/bedframes to a maximum of 2 per collection;
- Continue offering estimates for very large and multiple heavy items but move the service to the Trade Waste section (see 4.4.6)

Other Options considered:

The option to stop providing the service for landlords entirely has been rejected, since income can be generated by offering estimates to this customer groups. The service provision for landlords will be reviewed further and approaches to this stakeholder group are being investigated.

#### 4.4.4 Reintroduce schedules for Bulky Waste collections

Currently, customers are required to present their Bulky Waste for collection for up to 7 working days before it is collected. This increases the likelihood of fly tipping being added to the items and can cause items to become soiled and wet, making them heavy and unsuitable for reuse.

Recommendation:

Re-introduce collection day schedules for Bulky Waste collections. Customers living in West Reading would leave their items out for collection on a Monday, customers living in East Reading would leave their items out for collection on a Wednesday. Fridges and Freezers would be collected on Fridays.

Other options considered:

Some local authorities offer timed appointments for Bulky Waste collections but this has not been considered at present because it could result in more administrative work and less flexibility for the Bulky Waste collection crew, as they would experience increased time constraints. If the service expands sufficiently in the future to justify a full time 5 day service then this will be revisited.

#### 4.4.5 Introduce a new charging structure

Current charges:

1-5 items: £34.68 (Concessions £26.01; Landlords £42.17)

6-10 items: £46.42 (Concessions £34.8; Landlords £59.77)

This current charging method encourages customers to dispose of multiple large items to get the best value for money. The cost of one standard collection is estimated at £30.49. However, depending on the weight and size of the items and the collection time, the actual cost of collecting 6-10 items often turns out to be higher than £46.42.

**Recommendation:**

To better reflect the actual collection costs and discourage disposal of multiple heavy items, it is proposed to introduce the following new charging structure:

- 1 item: £31;
- Subsequent items up to a maximum of 5: £5 per item (maximum charge £51);
- 1 Fridge/Freezer: £36 (maximum 2);
- Collections over 5 items would be subject to an estimate by the Trade Waste section;
- Introduce an admin charge of £10 for less than 3 working days notice of cancellation.

This is based on the charging structure developed by the London Borough of Enfield (£36 per item, £4 per subsequent item). Enfield has introduced this new charging structure after collecting Bulky Waste free of charge in the past. Enfield currently receives approximately 40 more orders per week than Reading's service.

**Other options considered:**

Benchmarking information on alternative charging structures from local authorities is included in Appendix 1. The proposed per-item charging structure is preferred to other charging structures, because it is easier to understand for residents and the Customer Contact team, it would better cover collection costs and would discourage disproportionate disposal. The price for 1 item approximately covers the cost for 1 collection.

#### 4.4.6 Continue providing 25% concessions

Concessionary Your Reading Passport (YRP) holders, i.e. senior members, members with a disability and members on low income, currently receive 25% concessions on the charges. Customers need to provide their concessionary YRP number to prove eligibility. Customer Contact staff cannot check whether the numbers provided are correct, outdated or whether the YRP holder is on income related benefits. Citizens with limited mobility are less likely to apply for a concessionary Your Reading Passport, because an application requires travelling to one of the issuing centres.

Officers within Customer Service were consulted on ways to change the process of providing concessions to mitigate the issues identified. Ideas to grant concessions to residents who can provide the Customer Contact team with proof of eligibility, e.g. benefit numbers, were investigated. This option would require a policy change and was rejected, because the Customer Contact staff would not have the resources and training to verify the information provided by customers. While Housing Benefits Numbers and Council Tax Support could be checked on internal systems, low income groups who are not on these benefits would be excluded. With the introduction of Universal Credits, Housing Benefits would no longer exist and could no longer be used to proof eligibility.

**Recommendation:**

Continue providing 25% concessions for concessionary Reading Passport members in the short term. However, a full review of the Your Reading Passport scheme will be carried out and take the above findings into account.

#### 4.4.7 Move estimates to the trade waste section

The current process to produce cost estimates for items that are too heavy for standard collections, is cumbersome and labour intensive. The process involves operatives driving to site to assess the items for collection, reporting this to back office staff, who then produce a cost quotation for consideration by the resident.

Recommendations:

- We currently have Officers who are regularly pricing up and producing cost estimates for trade waste, in future they will be responsible for costing the collection of non-standard bulky items.
- Officers are currently investigating the potential for the digitisation of a whole range of frontline services; it is recommended that the costing of trade waste and non-standard bulky collections is used as a pilot area for this investigation.

#### 4.4.8 Increase the reuse and recycling of household items

All Bulky items collected are currently taken to landfill. Linked to the objectives of the Waste Minimisation Strategy the aim is to increase the recycling and reuse rates of Bulky Waste in order to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.

Recommendations:

- Improve signposting via online and phone channels to encourage customers with reusable items to book free collection services already offered by local charities for furniture and WEEE donations<sup>1</sup>;
- Separate the collection of small electronic items (WEEE) from Bulky Waste collections by encouraging residents to use the free kerbside small electrical item recycling collections which will be rolled out borough wide from April 2016;
- Cooperate with local voluntary sector organisations to increase the reuse of collected bicycles;
- Introduce scheduled collections (see above) to reduce the time that items are left for collection and could possibly be damaged, making items more attractive for reuse;
- Encourage residents to cover reusable items for collections to protect from wet weather.

Other options considered:

There are alternative delivery models for co-operating with the voluntary sector to increase the reuse of bulky waste items. For example, the collection of reusable Bulky Waste items could be outsourced to a Third Sector Organisation. This option would require more extensive negotiations with voluntary organisations and a comprehensive business case. Discussions with interested parties will continue but there a number of issues which will need to be resolved before any agreement can be reached.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Improving the Bulky Waste Service would contribute to the following Corporate Priorities:

- Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable - through improvements that ensure the bulky waste collection service is accessible and affordable for the most vulnerable residents. Improvements include an easier process to claim

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Community Action and the British Heart Foundation have agreed to signposting via the RBC website and the Customer Contact team.

concessions; a clearer charging structure, easier online booking and better online information to enable residents with reusable items to book free collection services offered by local charities. The signposting to charities, who sell second hand household items, benefits the most vulnerable served by these charities.

- Keeping the borough clean, safe, green and active - through contributing to the Waste Minimisation Strategy's aims, including:
  - Increase recycling and re-use rates
  - Minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill
- Remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities - through streamlining the Bulky Waste Service processes, which would reduce cost and resources for administration staff, collection and disposal. Making the service clearer and more attractive to customers should increase patronage and generate income.

## 7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant, because the proposed changes would not impact any groups differently than others. Please see Appendix 2 for more detail.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council has a duty to collect household waste by virtue of Section 45 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No expenditure is required for any of the options proposed in this report. Making the service clearer and more attractive to customers should increase patronage and generate income.
- 9.2 The new charging method proposed in 4.4.5 would help cover the actual cost of the Bulky Waste collections. The charge of £31 per item would cover the cost of one collection, which is estimated at £30.49. The proposed cancellation charge of £10 would help to cover administration costs, which are currently not accounted for.
- 9.3 This new charging structure could have an impact on the demand for the service. However, the London Borough of Enfield charges £36 per item (£4 for each subsequent item) and has approximately 40 orders more per week than Reading. Accordingly the demand for the service should not decrease.

## 10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Waste Minimisation Strategy

## Appendix 1: Benchmarking Information

Authority	Charges	Collection process and conditions	Policy for larger items	Booking method	Reuse and recycling initiatives / Third Sector cooperation
London Borough of Enfield	1 item: £36 2 items: £40 3 items: £44 4 items £48 5 items: £52 5 items: £56	Appointments.  Cancellation charge of £15 for less than 3 working days' notice  No refund for cancellations of less than 1 working day notice.	No estimates.  Certain larger items, e.g. fence panels, can be collected for higher charges.	Online booking form - allows for cancellation and rescheduling	Signposting of reusable items to the British Heart Foundation.
Warrington Borough Council	1-3 items: £20 additional items £6.67 each  White goods: free of charge	Scheduled collection days for different areas.  Items must be covered and dry, otherwise not accepted.  No refund for cancellations after 12pm on day before.	No estimates.	Online booking form  phone bookings , payments only via phone	Bulky Waste collection is outsourced to social enterprise Bulky Bob's. Customers place orders with the Council Customer Service team, which creates a list for Bulky Bob's team to make collection.
Bracknell Forest Council	1-3 items: £40.70 Concessions: £20.35  4 to 7 items: £51.90 Concessions: £25.95  3 small WEEE items: free	Appointments (5 working days wait)  No refund for cancellations after 3pm on day before.	No estimates.	Online booking form, phone for information	Signposting to Charities
Thurrock Borough Council	1-3 items: £27 additional items: £7	Appointments	N/A	Online booking form - ability to make appointments and pay online, no calls	N/A



Swindon Borough Council	1-3 items or 1 freezer/fridge: £26.50	Customers advised of appointment (10 working days wait)  Bookings are non-refundable	No estimates.  Maximum of 3 items collected	Phone and email	N/A
Milton Keynes Council	1-5 items: £20; 6-10 items: £40 1-15 items: £50	Items collected on next standard refuse collection day, if booking made 48 hours before. An alternative day can be specified for additional £10	Quotes for larger items	Phone only	N/A
Bristol City Council	1-3 items: £15 4-6 items: £30,  Concessions: free collection of 1-3 items every 6 months for benefit receivers	Cancellation by 2.30pm collection day, change of booking at least two days before collection  Furniture must be protected from rain, glass items must be marked	No estimates. Accept only items that can be carried by two people	Online booking form and phone	After collection, fridges, electric cookers and washing machines are given to charity. Customers need to specify if items are reusable when booking.  Signposting to local charities on website  Items not donated are recycled. Only items that cannot be recycled are sent to landfill
Wiltshire Council	£11.18 per item, Concessions: £5.59 per item	Appointments: will be arranged during booking	Special arrangements/ quotes for specific items	Phone only	Signposting to local charities: Disclaimer at the top of Webpage to contact local charities to arrange bookings for reusable items
Southampton City Council	£10 per item additional items: £5 Concessions: 25% discount	Items, such as sofas and mattresses, must be covered to be kept dry. Won't collect items that have become too wet.	Maximum 10 items collected, maximum 2 freezers/fridges collected	Online booking form and online payment, or phone booking and payment	N/A



## Equality Impact Assessment

### Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed

Bulky Waste Review

Directorate: DENS

Service: Streetcare Services

Name and job title of person doing the assessment

Name: Nina Zuendorf

Job Title: National Management Trainee

Date of assessment: 21.01.2016

### Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?

Developing and improving the Bulky Waste collection service set by

- Improving the online booking form to facilitate online bookings and online payment;
- Clarifying and communicating the items not accepted for collection to customers;
- Reintroducing scheduled dates for Bulky Waste collections;
- Introducing a new charging structure to charge £31 per item, £5 for each subsequent item and £10 for less than 3 working days' notice of cancellations;
- Moving the service for estimates of larger bulky collections to the Trade Waste team;
- Signposting customers with reusable items to local charities to increase the reuse rate of household items.

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

All service users who book a bulky waste collection service in the future will benefit from a clearer, streamlined service with fewer delays. In addition, the service would become more accessible to customers, including low income groups, because

- The online booking form will be easier to use and customers will be able to pay online, which is quick and convenient.

- Customers will have more clarity on the items collected by the bulky waste service, which avoids confusion and frustration during the booking process;

- Customers need to present their items for collection for no longer than 24 hours, compared to up to 7 working days under the current policy;
- The charging structure will be clearer for customers and benefit those that only need to dispose of one item;
- Customers will receive better information on ways to dispose of their bulky items free of charge by donating them to charities. This will particularly benefit those on low income.

The proposal will also benefit staff, because a streamlined, more efficient service will save staff time, resources and frustration.

Making the service clearer and more attractive to customers should increase patronage and generate income. Streamlining the service will save costs and resources, which benefits the Council.

**What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?**

The proposal aims to

- Divert the amount of reusable bulky waste sent to landfill in order to benefit the community/the Third Sector and to reduce disposal costs for Streetcare Services.
- Ensure effective, efficient, value for money service delivery to increase customer satisfaction and patronage.
- Make the service more accessible and easier to use for service users, especially low income groups to increase customer satisfaction and patronage.

**Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?**

- Service Users: accessible, easy to use service that offers value for money and a timely collection of bulky waste.
- RBC service staff: good communication with customers, efficient processes, and clear objectives to deliver the service effectively.
- Managers and Councillors: customer satisfaction, cost-neutrality, contribution to strategic aims and Council priorities.

### Assess whether an EqIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.)

No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, and feedback.

No

If the answer is Yes to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you MUST complete this statement

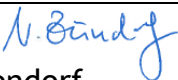
An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

The proposed changes would not impact any groups differently than others.

The changes to the charging system would not disadvantage respective customer groups. The system would be implemented to discourage the disproportionate disposal of several multiple items, the aim is not to increase the amount that customers pay. The charges for 1 item would be cheaper than at present. A 25% concession for concessionary Your Reading Passport members would remain for senior residents, people with a disability and people on low income. All customer groups would be able to give a 3 days' notice to avoid a cancellation charge of £10.

Customers who need to dispose of more than five heavy items, could book an estimate with the Trade Waste team.

Customers without digital skills or internet access could not access the improved online booking form, but could still order their collections via the phone. Signposting would be delivered online and on the phone.

Signed: 

Nina Zuendorf

Date 21.01.2015