

**AGENDA ITEM NO.6****Overview and Scrutiny**

<b>Date</b>	<b>16 October 2017</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Garden Waste Service</b>

**1. PURPOSE/SUMMARY**

Overview and Scrutiny were an important part of the consultation and development of the Garden Waste Service implemented in April this year. This report updates Overview and Scrutiny on the service to date and the learning for the Year 2 deployment.

**2. KEY ISSUES**

- Through the use of effective communications, a dedicated webpage and appropriate support for customers, the Council has delivered this important service change smoothly.
- It is predicted that the garden waste service will be a self-funding service as planned within the Council's CSR process, and medium term financial plan, and as a result will contribute more than £500,000 to the savings target.
- Customer satisfaction with the garden waste service is good at 75% of customers satisfied or very satisfied.
- The service has seen more than 19,500 subscriptions. This is in line with the anticipated levels and represents more than 40% of the domestic properties in Fenland.
- Whilst there remains a risk, the budget forecasts for next year based on anticipated levels of subscriptions, mean that fees and charges for the 2018 subscriptions can be maintained at current levels.
- Subscriptions for 2018 go on sale in December 2017 and will include the continued offer of a reduced price annual direct debit.

**3. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- Members accept the contents of this update report.

<b>Wards Affected</b>	All
<b>Forward Plan Reference No.</b> (if applicable)	
<b>Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Cllr Peter Murphy Portfolio Holder for Environment
<b>Report Originator</b>	Mark Mathews Head of Environmental Service
<b>Contact Officer(s)</b>	Richard Cassidy Corporate Director
<b>Background Paper(s)</b>	Garden Waste Service Terms and Conditions

# 1. BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

1.1 The move to a self-funding garden waste service was a key element of the council's comprehensive spending review (CSR) and medium term financial plan. The CSR objective was to provide a self-funding garden waste service and thereby deliver £0.5 million of the £2.1 million of required savings.

The delivery of this key change to council services involved extensive consultation with customers and learning from other authorities, as shared previously with members of overview and scrutiny. This broad consultation, including the feedback from members of overview and scrutiny, helped to shape this project which is on track to deliver the required CSR savings.

Additions suggested by overview and scrutiny, such as the design of communications, nature of the sticker and payment via instalment were key to the success of the work and proved to be popular.

The service intention was to create accessible online information for all our customers; those who chose to subscribe and those who were investigating other options for their garden waste.

Part of this offer was a competent online payment process that allowed customers to sign up and pay easily. All customers were taken through this same process including those at the shops, hubs and via telephone transactions.

A reduced price direct debit was offered to encourage customers to subscribe early. This would then allow for correspondence and subscriptions stickers to be delivered in good time and for routes and required resources to be designed and in place ready.

Previous work on Fenland's environmental services allow for them to be designed and delivered in the most efficient way possible. The benefit of this previous work is that Fenland has one of the lowest priced garden waste services in the area.

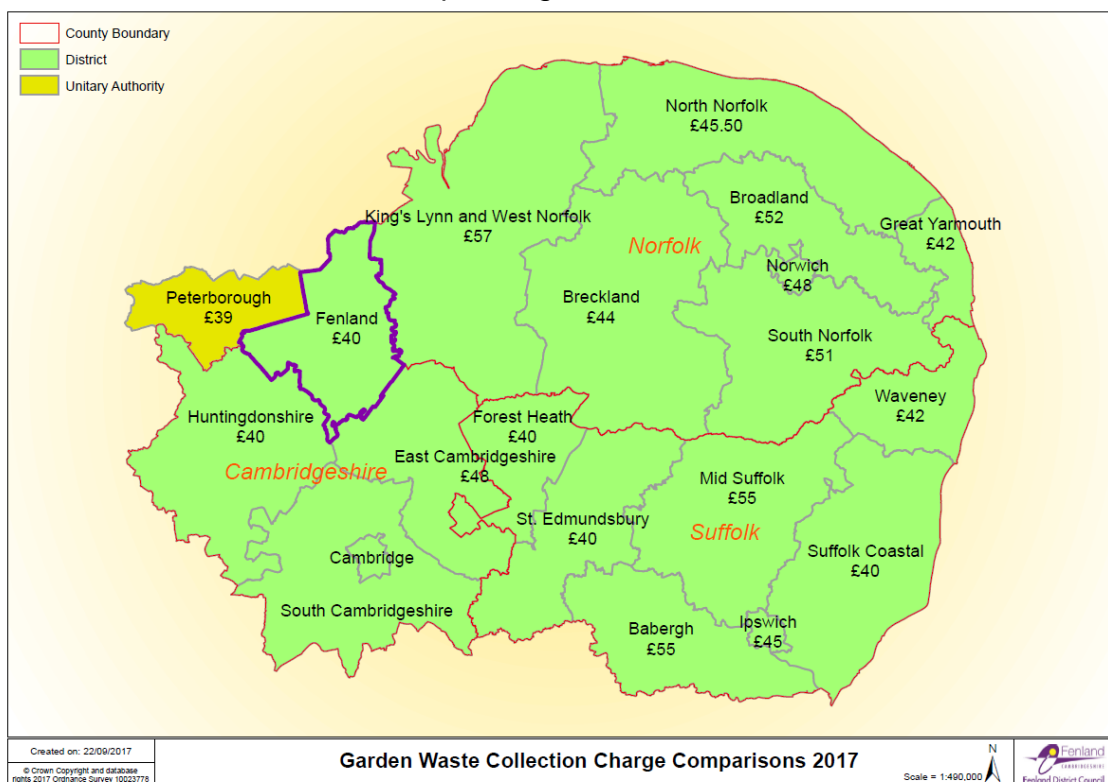


Image 1: Advertised 2017 Garden Waste Service Charges by authority. Hunts, East Cambs and Suffolk Coastal charges are for second bin subscriptions.

## 1.2 Garden Waste Web Pages

The website proved to be a well-used means of communication, with the total number of garden waste webpage hits from December to end of August being 34,800 with 250,000 page views. This resulted in just over 15,700 customers self-serving online through the on-line payment portal and a range of customers accessing information on the options available to them, along with the design of the new service.

## 1.3 Customer Transactions

Customer Services dealt with a large number of garden waste specific telephone enquiries which, at the busiest times, were routed through to specially trained temporary staff.

The online approach has been successful with the majority of customers using the online payment options to sign up for their subscriptions. The remaining customers chose to visit their local shop/hub (2,800) or telephone (900) to purchase their subscription. These assisted transactions make up 20% of the overall transactions to the end of August and were more than 42% in March.

The web based approach and inducement of reduced price annual direct debits can be seen to of been successful, although a number of customers still waited until March, or even later, to purchase their subscription.

The plan and communications for the 2018/19 renewal is designed to encourage more customers to sign up early to ensure that customers have the subscription sticker in place in good time and reduce any potential impact on customers of other services at busy times of year for the shops/hubs and contact centre.

The total number of customers choosing to pay by direct debit was 8,700. The benefit for these customers is that their subscription will renew automatically in February this year and the subscription sticker will be dispatched to them in good time without any further action on their part.

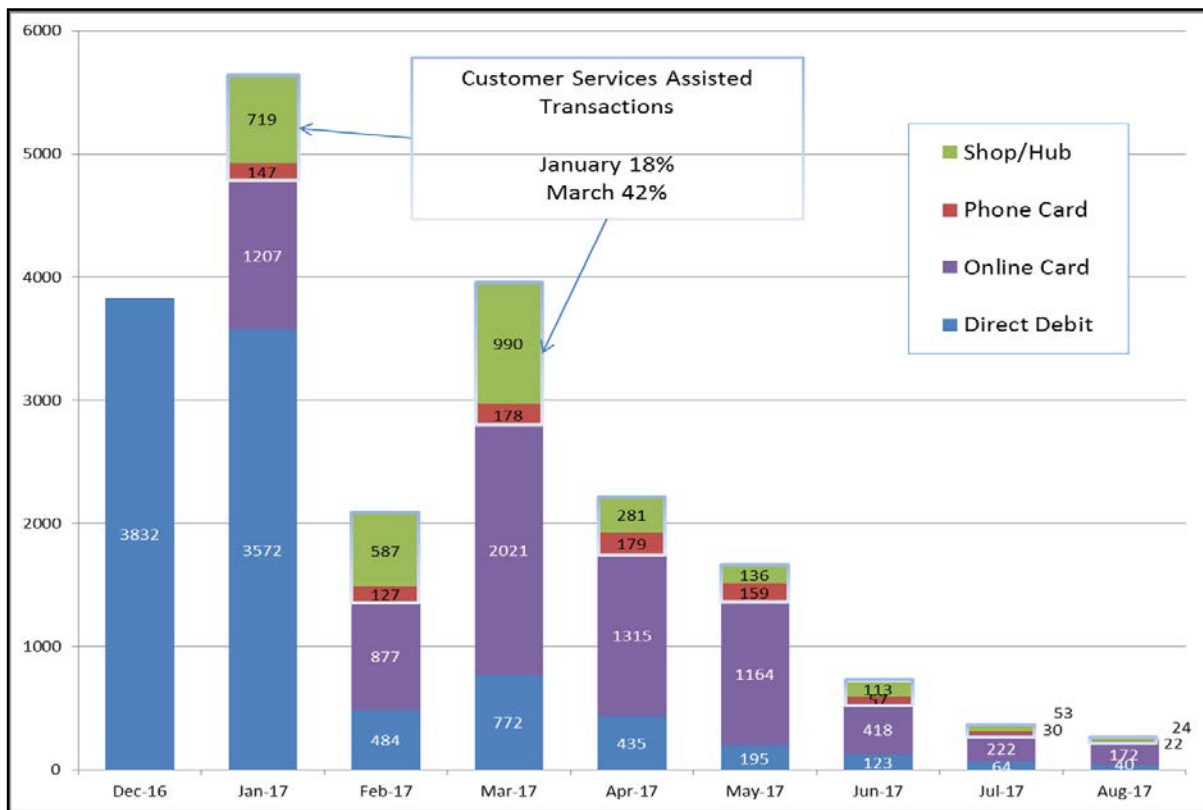


Table 2: Garden Waste Transactions by Payment Method

#### 1.4 Implementation

The communications plan was designed to make sure customers were aware of the new service and to encourage them to sign up in advance of the April commencement date. It also allowed customers to be aware of the other options available to them. In addition to the publicity in newspapers and communications materials, during January all of the Fenland domestic properties were written to advising them of the new service, including the top frequently asked questions along with details of the options available.

From an operational perspective there was a need to understand the level of take-up ahead of April to allow us to plan for the correct resource and to design routes and collection days.

To keep the service as efficient as possible, the majority of the new garden waste service collections are scheduled over 4 days; Monday to Thursday. This meant that during the implementation phase the team also needed to manage the collection day change of up to 9,000 properties whilst designing the new routes for an undefined number of customers.

The implementation and subsequent operational management of the service has been delivered smoothly. The garden waste crews are able to record all collections along with reporting issues using their in-cab system. Crews only collect bins showing a valid subscription sticker. In the first 5 months they have recorded the collection of 153,982 garden waste bins and refused collection of 13,646 garden waste bins presented without a subscription sticker. The information bin tag left for customers has resulted in many of these customers subsequently taking up subscriptions. Missed garden waste collections remain at reasonable levels of around 3 per working day and 100% of scheduled collections have taken place on their allotted day so far.

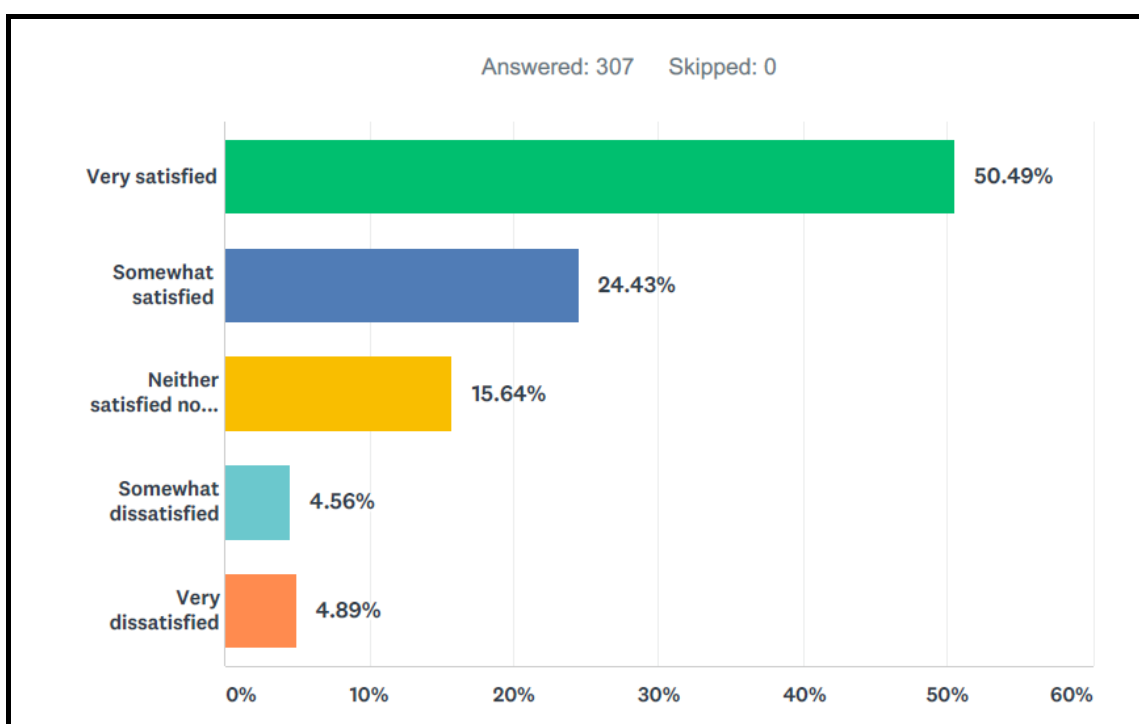
An important part of the implementation plan was a continued focus on ensuring the correct materials were presented by customers in their blue bins along with the monitoring of green bin collections. Alongside the usual intervention work completed, this resulted in 699 bins being refused collection and customers being left with information because the presented blue or green bin contained garden waste.

## 1.5 Satisfaction Survey

During August and September 750 short surveys were sent out to gauge customer satisfaction with the garden waste service. These were sent by post and email with the option to complete the survey online.

The results show that overall the majority of customers are satisfied with the service and with the performance of the garden waste collection staff. Concerns were raised about the cost, the future of the reduced cost direct debit and the lack of recycling for vegetable type waste.

**Table 3:** Garden Waste Customer Satisfaction Survey – Question: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the garden waste service?



From the 307 subscribing customers who responded, 75% (230) were either very or somewhat satisfied with a further 48 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'. This compares favorably with satisfaction surveys of the refuse service; where 88% of customers chose similar levels of satisfaction.

Within the survey customers were given a range of words/phrases to choose to describe the service. The top 4 selected were 'Reliable' (64%), 'Useful' (46%), 'Better than no service' (37%) and 'Reasonable value for money' (27%) with 'Ineffective' (3%), 'Impractical' (2%), 'Poor quality' (1%) and 'Unreliable' (1%) being the lowest 4 chosen areas.

These results reflect the general theme of the original 2016 garden waste consultation in that our customers value the service, feel that the service is reliable and the majority reported to be willing to pay for it to continue.

Customer comments included:

- *“A must for an OAP with a garden”;*
- *“Why cannot put our potato peelings and vegetable waste in this bin”;*
- *“Annoyed we have to pay extra for a service that should already be included”;*
- *“Please keep the service going”;*
- *“It would have been helpful if we could of continued to put food waste in the bin”;*
- *“We wish we could use this service for vegetable/fruit waste”;*
- *“Very satisfied with service – thank you”;*
- *“Why is this not part of Council Tax, there is virtually no public services”;*
- *“why do I have pay for a service that we have had for years when I pay the council for not doing a lot in my area with a large amount of council tax”;*
- *“The problem is the shortsighted decision to only collect garden waste and tell people to put food waste into the general waste bin”*
- *“It’s an absolute scandal that we have to pay for this at all”.*

**Table 4:** Garden Waste Customer Satisfaction Survey – Question: How easy did you find subscribing to the Garden Waste Service this year?

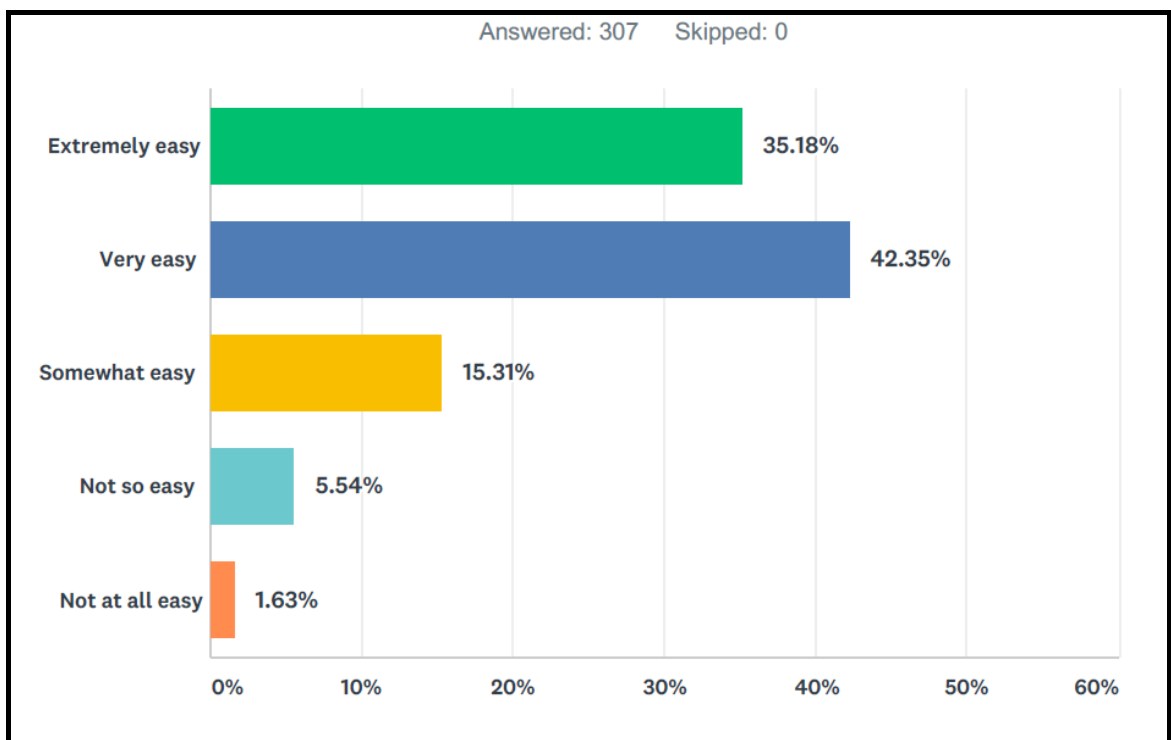
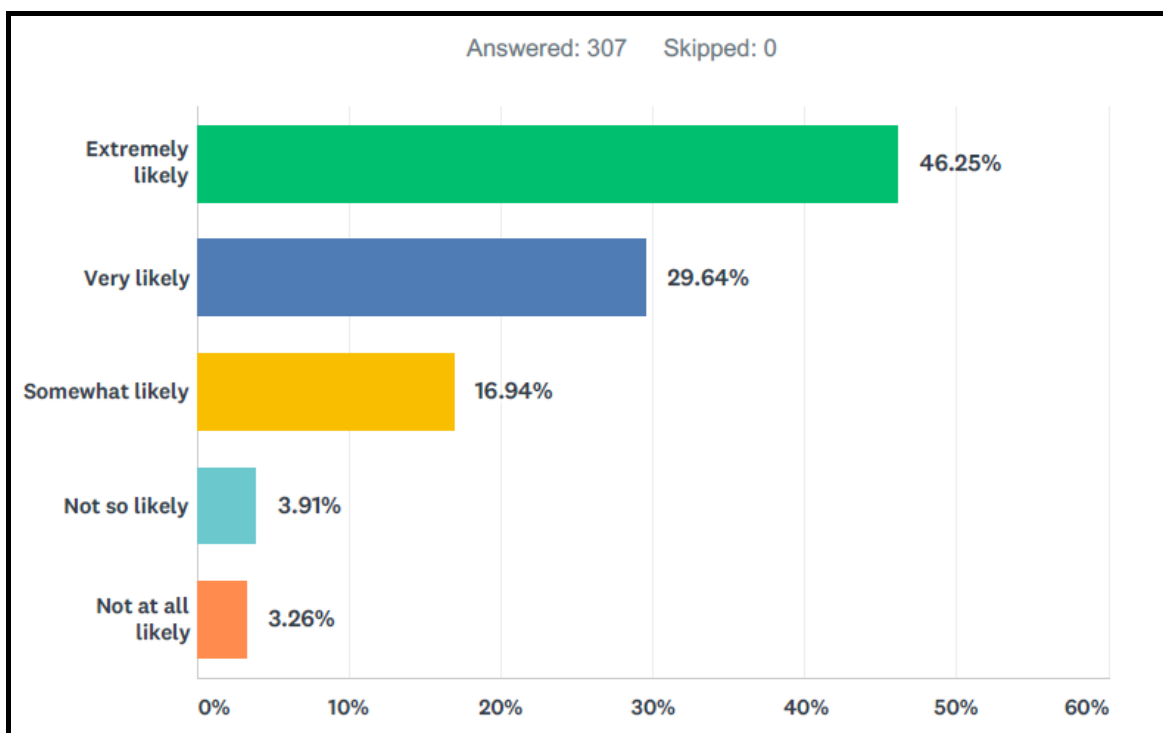


Table 4 shows that the majority of our customers found it easy to sign up to the service. The feedback perhaps reflects the occasional glitches experienced with the online payment forms that affected a small number of customers. At the time the team responded to each customer to capture feedback and make improvements to the webpages and background address data to reduce the issues.



**Table 5:** Garden Waste Customer Satisfaction Survey – Question: How likely are you to renew your subscription for next year?

Notably, 7% of our customers are reporting that they are unlikely to renew their subscriptions. The primary issue raised in the comments was the lack of ability to include vegetable and fruit waste in the brown bin which made up a third of the 90 comments left.

## 1.6 Customer Contact

A large number of customers have been dealt with at the first point of contact by customer services over the telephone and in the shops and hubs. From April to the end of August, 745 of these customer contacts resulted in a request for service being forwarded to the back office for action. These ranged from customers requesting that their unused brown bin be collected to customers complaining that they can no longer put vegetable waste in their brown bin. From the customer enquiries that were dealt with, table 3 sets out the nature of the request and those recorded through the Council's 3Cs process. In relative terms these remained low for April to August.

	Requests for service	Correspondence	Complaint
Removal of brown bin	75	5	
Payment/subscription/webpage Issue	169	4	2
Collection Issue	52	1	
Change of bin contents	11	8	1
Sticker delivery/replacement	348	10	12
Enforcement		2	1
Bin delivery	34		
Change of address/new property	56		

**Table 3:** Garden Waste Service Requests for service and 3Cs record April – August

The largest reported issue for customers was that their sticker had not been received. The majority of these customers were provided with a Courtesy Collection.



Customers reported they had accidentally torn their first sticker, adhered it to the wrong bin, lost it, or had not received it. Since the end of February, the total number of stickers reprinted is 498. This is around 2.5% of those dispatched and something that we will continue to monitor.

There were occasional glitches with the webpages and payment process and 169 customers reported having issues from April to August. Following customer feedback we updated the webpages to improve the customer experience to reduce the issues experienced.

#### 1.7 Flytipping

An increase in flytipping was a concern raised within the consultation of 2016. Just as Peterborough reported, we have seen a small change in the levels of green waste recovered. On average, from April to August, the team report recovering 2 or 3 more instances of green waste each week compared to last year. These are reportedly small amounts of hedge materials or grass cuttings and this work remains within the capacity of the existing cleansing resource.

Customers are however actively reporting instances and as a result enforcement has taken place resulting in 1 fixed penalty being accepted along with 2 written warnings since April.

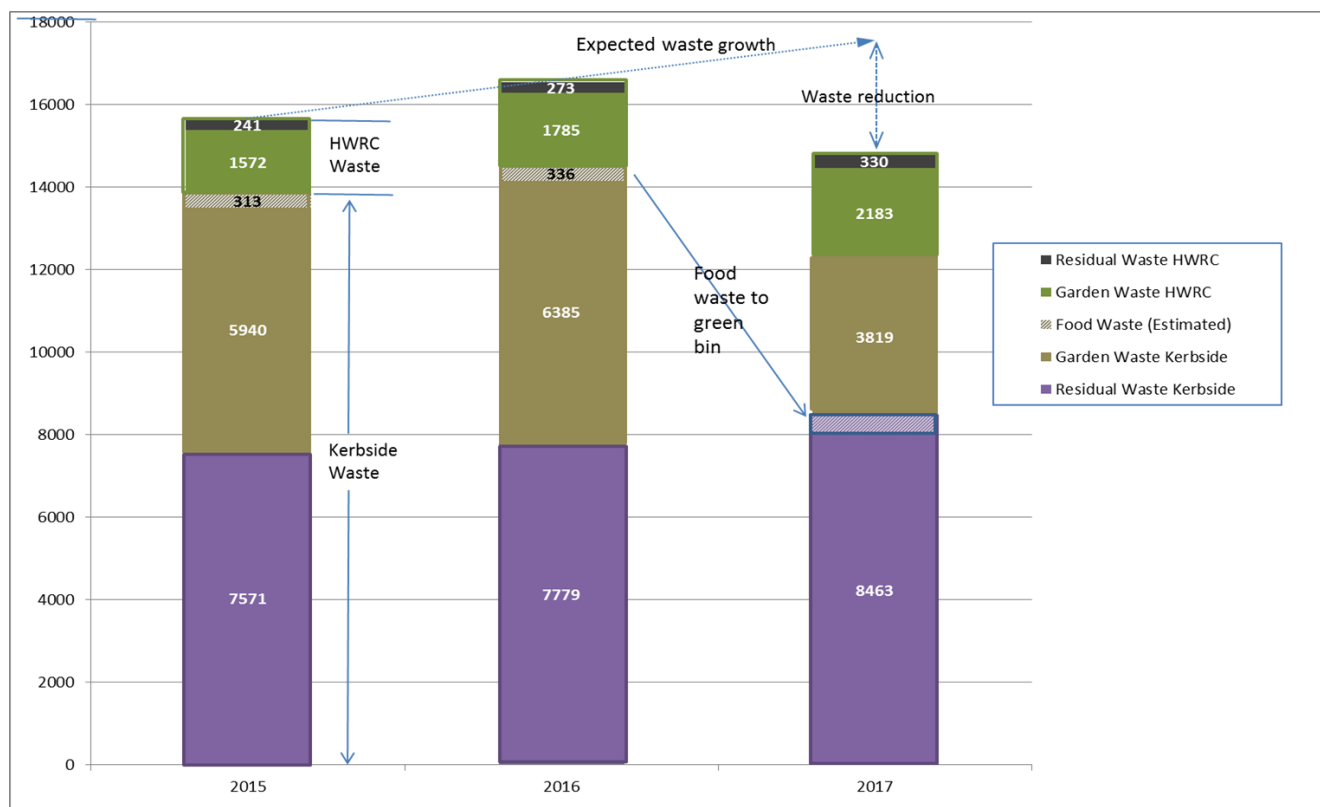
#### 1.8 Bonfires

Bonfires were also an area of concern for customers within the consultation. These are reported as nuisance complaints to Environmental Health. From April to August there were 23 instances of domestic bonfires reported this year. This is very similar to the same period last year when 25 were reported.

## 1.9 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)

The HWRCs are run by Amey Ltd for the County Council. Fenland has 3 sites and Amey report that “whilst the sites are dealing with more waste, the numbers of customers and total waste remain within existing contract resources and none of their operations have been impeded since the introduction of the scheme”.

Amey, who also deal with the materials collected in the brown bins and composted at Waterbeach have reported that they are very pleased with the quality of the materials being delivered in brown bins; where contamination and costs of disposal were an issue for them last year, but have seen improvements this year.



**Table 6:** Tonnes of Residual, Garden and Food Waste Collected Kerbside and at HWRC April – August.

## 1.10 Costs of Treatment and Disposal

The County Council are responsible for the treatment and disposal of domestic waste collected by Fenland and through the 3 household waste recycling centres in the area.

The general trend is for waste collected to increase year on year. This last year we were anticipating the changes in how customers deal with their food waste along with the normal population growth to result in an increase in the amount of green bin waste collected.

In table 6 we can indeed see that the normal waste has increased in line with expectations and with an estimated food waste of around 300-350 tonnes previously in brown bins, and population growth resulting in around 250-300 tonnes, it is no surprise that we have reached 8,463 tonnes of residual kerbside (green bin) waste from April to August.

The waste from Cambridgeshire residual waste collections all goes through the mechanical biological treatment plant (MBT) at Waterbeach. The 7 week process at this

plant dramatically reduces the organic content prior to disposal. The plant is designed to deal with food and organic waste and reduce the environmental impact and landfill costs of these materials.

We can see from the data that the total amount of waste treated and disposed of by the County Council has decreased by more than 1,700 tonnes in the 5 months April to August compared to last year.

The County Council's contractors, AmeyCespa, have confirmed that the waste being dealt with by the household waste sites is being managed within their existing service standards and existing resource.

Whilst it is early in the project, and the county council will not know what if any budget impacts there are until next year, overall it appears that with the reduction in tonnage overall the costs of disposal and treatment will reduce.

Food waste has been communicated to us by our customers as an area of concern. As a result we will work with the County Council to see what potential there is for customers to use the bin for fruit and vegetable waste if they wish to.

#### 1.11 Service Design 2018/19

Following the template of last year, the reduced price annual direct debits will go on sale on 1 December. All other means of payment will be available in the new year as they were previously. The 3 stage payment DD option will also be available for December as it was last year.

Communications will follow a similar pattern to last year. This year's timeline includes:

- i. Existing customer communications **November 2017**
- ii. Christmas calendar, newspaper and social media **Mid-November 2017**
- iii. **1 December 2017** online direct debits 2018/19 on sale, including staged payment option
- iv. **4 January 2018** other payment options available
- v. Summer calendar **Mid-February 2018**
- vi. First subscription stickers dispatched **Mid-February 2018**
- vii. Council tax leaflet **March 2018**
- viii. New subscription year commences **2 April 2018**

#### 1.12 Budget forecast

	2017/18	2018/19
Service costs	£706,030	£705,000
Income	£769,560	£722,000
Repayment set-up costs	£17,217	£17,000
Additional costs incurred (refuse service)	£200,000	£200,000
Net income	£550,000	£522,000
No. subscriptions	19,600	19,000
Cost per subscription	£36.90	£38.01

The subscription levels and income are solid and reflect the levels of take up suggested by the 2016 public consultation. This has resulted in the council being able to provide a self-funding service, deliver the forecast £500,000 towards the savings target and pay back a proportion of the set-up costs to the management of change budget.

Based on an estimated take up of around 19,000 customers the budget forecast for next year allows us to maintain the current fee and the incentivized annual direct debit that proved popular with customers.

# Fenland Garden Waste Service - April 2018

The service is a subscription-based, two-weekly service collecting organic garden waste only. Collections only take place from brown bins presented on the advertised collection day as outlined and defined by these terms and conditions of use.

This service replaced the Brown Bin Service, offered to all properties prior to April 2017.

## Terms & Conditions

The brown wheeled bin remains the property of Fenland District Council. It could be reclaimed if you no longer pay for the garden waste collection service.

Not all properties are suitable for this service. This may be due to access restrictions for our collection vehicles or lack of space to either store the bin or place it out for collection.

You are responsible for the security of the wheeled bin. We will charge to replace lost, stolen or damaged bins.

If the refuse crew are responsible for damaging a bin or if it falls into the rear of the refuse vehicle, we will repair or replace it free of charge.

We will not empty the bin if it is moved to another property. However, subscriptions can be transferred to new properties within Fenland if customers move home.

[www.fenland.gov.uk/changesubscription](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/changesubscription)



Subscribe online at  
[www.fenland.gov.uk/gardenwaste](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/gardenwaste)



We will not provide refunds where customers move out of Fenland or for cancelled subscriptions.

Operational issues or poor weather could cause the service to be cancelled without return or refund. Details will be posted on the Council's website.

### **Please use your brown bins for the following Garden Waste:**

- Weeds
- Hedge trimmings
- Small twigs and branches less than 2.5cm (1") diameter
- Grass cuttings
- Flowers, plants, fruit and vegetable waste
- Leaves

### **Important:**

- Any bin containing plastics, textiles, soil, general waste or rubble will not be emptied
- Any bins which are considered by the collection team to be too heavy for safe handling will also not be emptied.

### **Please note:**

The information provided in 'Garden Waste Service FAQs' forms part of the terms and conditions for the garden waste collection service.

**Subscribe online at  
[www.fenland.gov.uk/gardenwaste](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/gardenwaste)**

# Frequently Asked Questions



## Fenland Garden Waste Frequently Asked Questions

The following information also forms part of the terms and conditions for the garden waste collection service.

**Q.** What can I put into my brown bin?

**A.** If you subscribe to the service, the following garden waste can go in the brown bin:

Yes please ✓

- Weeds
- Hedge trimmings
- Small twigs and branches (less than 2.5cm (1") in diameter)
- Grass cuttings
- Flowers, plants, fruit and vegetable waste
- Leaves

No thank you ✗

- Plastic bags or bin bags
- Cardboard and paper
- Flower pots and trays
- Soil
- Stones or rubble
- Branches or logs (larger than 2.5cm (1") in diameter)
- Any other household rubbish
- Textiles

### Remember

- Garden waste must be put into the bin loose - do not use bags.
- On collection day you will need to place the bin out for collection before 7am. Please make sure the handle faces the road and the subscription sticker is clearly visible.
- Your garden waste collection day may differ from your normal recycling and waste collection days. Please check at [www.fenland.gov.uk/bins](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/bins)
- Brown bins containing plastics, textiles, soil, general waste or rubble will not be emptied.
- All garden waste must be in the bin and the lid closed. Do not leave any waste outside your bin - it will not be collected, with the exception of real Christmas trees in season.
- The wheeled bin remains the property of Fenland District Council. If you have not paid for the garden waste collection service, we reserve the right to collect the bin.



## Top Tip

Garden waste left inside the bins can begin to break down, compacting and becoming very heavy if more is put on top. If this is a problem, you could try to delay filling the bin until a few days before your collection date. Try layering garden waste such as grass and leaves with dry twigs and small branches to help keep the waste fairly loose.

**Q.** How often will my brown bin be emptied?

**A.** Your garden waste will be collected once every two weeks throughout the year. Changes to collection days will occur as a result of bank holidays and Christmas.

**Q.** Can I have more than one brown bin?

**A.** Yes, you can have as many bins as you like. However, please be aware that you will need to pay an annual subscription for each bin to be collected and a delivery charge of £30 if you need another bin.

**Q.** What should I do if my garden waste collection is missed?

**A.** If your collection is missed, we will arrange to return to collect your brown bin the following working day wherever possible. To report the missed collection go to [www.fenland.gov.uk/reportit](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/reportit)

Our collection crews record which bins are collected. We will not be able to return if we have a record that the bin was collected, contained incorrect materials or was not out ready for collection by 7am on the appropriate day.

**Q.** How will your collection crews know I have paid for a collection each year?

**A.** When we receive your payment we will send you a unique addressed sticker to put on the rear of your brown bin. A new sticker will be issued each year upon payment of the subscription. If you subscribe to more than one bin, you will receive a sticker for each bin.

**Q.** How quickly after I pay can I expect the service to start?

**A.** Once payment has been received the council aims to deliver a letter of confirmation and subscription sticker to the relevant property within 10 working days. All subscriptions purchased in advance of April will be posted in bulk during February and early March each year.





**Q.** I don't currently have a bin. Can I still sign up for the service?

**A.** Yes, you can sign up and pay for the service at any time. Once you have paid for the service, the council will arrange for the delivery of a brown bin. The usual Council delivery charge of £30 for a bin will apply to new bins. A small number of customers will be offered the service using paper sacks rather than bins. This will be in defined locations where refuse vehicles cannot gain access.

**Q.** Can I share a brown bin with a neighbour?

**A.** Yes, we have no issue with customers sharing brown bins. If you have small gardens, this is a good solution. One household will need to be responsible for the subscription and the bin. The bin will only be collected from this property and the Council will communicate with this customer only. The agreement to share the bin is between the customers only.

**Q.** What can I do with my excess garden waste or if I don't join the scheme?

**A.** We can only collect garden waste contained within the brown bin.

- Home composting is the most environmentally friendly way of dealing with garden waste. To purchase a subsidised compost bin, visit [www.getcomposting.com](http://www.getcomposting.com) or call 0800 316 4454.
- Cambridgeshire County Council Household Recycling Centres in Wisbech, Whittlesey and March take household garden waste materials. See their website for details and opening times, [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/recycling\\_centres](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/recycling_centres)

**Q.** What if I decide not to use the service for a period? Will I get a refund?

**A.** No, we are unable to refund any payments for this service.

**Q.** Will the Council replace lost or stolen brown bins?

**A.** No, you are responsible for the security of your bin. We will not empty the bin if it is moved to another property.

**Q.** What happens if my brown bin is damaged?

**A.** If our collection crew record that they have been responsible for damaging your bin or it falls into the rear of the vehicle, we will repair it or replace it free of charge; otherwise the usual delivery charge will apply.



**Q.** Can I buy my own brown bin instead of the Fenland District Council ones?

**A.** No, we will not service brown bins that do not meet our specification (including make, model and logos), so cannot offer the service using other bins.

**Q.** Are all properties suitable for this service?

**A.** We will do our best to help customers access the service. However, some properties may not be suitable for this service due to lack of space to store the bin, or to put it out for collection. We reserve the right to decide whether or not we can provide the garden waste collection service via the brown bin.

**Q.** Why does the Council charge for garden waste bin collections?

**A.** The Council has no statutory duty to collect garden waste, but can make a reasonable charge where the service is offered. Some customers in Fenland do not have gardens and many householders compost at home. Therefore with the pressure on funding and services, the decision was made that those customers who use the service should fund the service.

**Q.** Can I pay by instalments?

**A.** Yes, the annual subscription can be paid in three installments if you sign up by direct debit between 1 December 2017 and 9 January 2018. The three payments will be collected in January, February and March in advance of the service starting in April.

**Q.** Can I put food waste in the brown bin?

**A.** Legislation sets out that only garden waste can be charged for. That means we can no longer ask customers to put their food waste in their brown bin. Food waste can be composted at home or customers can continue to use their green general waste bin.

**Q.** Will I still pay the full subscription if I sign up part way through the year?

**A.** Yes, you can sign up to receive the service at any point during the year. The annual subscription runs from 1 April until 31 March each year. If you sign up part way through the year you will be charged for the full year. The subscription will need renewing before the next April for the service to continue.



**Q.** Where can I buy a home composter?

**A.** We offer cost-price compost bins and food waste digesters. This is a good alternative to paying for a collection or taking garden waste to a household recycling centre. You will also create great compost to use at home. These are available at [www.getcomposting.com](http://www.getcomposting.com) or by phoning 0800 316 4454.



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[www.fenland.gov.uk/gardenwaste](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/gardenwaste)