

Changes to the Garden Waste Service

Summary

Whilst the council is pleased with how successful the garden waste service has been since it was launched in 2006, the service does need to be updated.

Concerns were raised with us by residents and contractors about the safety of using a bag collection system and we have a duty to ensure that we design a service that is safe for the future. In addition, given the financial challenges facing local authorities, it is vital that the new waste and recycling contract is as efficient and cost effective as possible.

It is unfortunate that we have had to change a service that is so popular with residents, but the council would have been behaving irresponsibly if it had not taken the opportunity to address these concerns when awarding the new contract.

Using bins to collect garden waste not only solves the issues that have been brought to our attention, but is also a more cost effective way of operating the service. The majority of local authorities who provide a garden waste service do so using wheeled bins.

By introducing bins, the council is making sure that the future garden waste service is safe, sustainable and provides better value for money for our council taxpayers.

In addition, as part of the changes to the collection service, we will supply compost bins at a subsidised cost and help local communities and parish councils to develop community composting solutions.

Headline rationale and impact mitigation

There are two main reasons that the council has decided to change the method of collecting household garden waste from bags to bins:

- To reduce the health and safety risks to operators, users and members of the public and to future proof the contract from changes to health and safety legislation
- To make the service more environmentally and financially efficient, enabling us to protect other valued services

Whilst the introduction of bins is essential, we understand that some residents may not be able to have a bin. New, smaller garden waste bags are available by exception only and restricted to those properties that are currently on the grey sacks refuse service. It is also worth noting that we will provide smaller 140 litre bins on request, which many residents may find easier to use. The exception-based bag service will have smaller bags and weight restrictions, a limit on the number of bags and a need for registration.

Health and Safety

Where the council uses a contractor to provide services, it has a duty to ensure that the activities of that contractor do not adversely affect the health and safety of anyone who may be impacted by those activities

The council's ability to fulfil that duty is restricted by the current bag service. This is because there are a number of significant and inherent risks which it cannot mitigate:

- Manual handling risks for the waste operatives: the bag system increases the risk of injury as it involves frequent and repetitive carrying, and lifting above elbow height of heavy, non-rigid, bulky containers containing irregular and sharp protruding items in varying environments, including when it is wet, windy or dark.
- Risks to pedestrians and road users where bags blow around onto the highway, increasing the likelihood of accidents: this risk is particularly high where collections are made on busy main roads and in inclement weather
- Handling risks to residents when using the bags many of which are similar to those identified above for waste operatives

The council has awarded the new recycling and waste contract to Biffa, this will commence on the 1st of March 2017. Health and safety legislation requires the council to design out risks and hazards when specifying the details of a new contract. If the council had not taken this opportunity to change the garden waste service, it was likely that the council would have been found in breach of health and safety regulations. As a result we had no choice but to design the new service in a way that minimises health and safety risks.

The new contract will be for a term of seven years, with an option to extend it for up to a maximum of 20 years. It is likely that a bag method of collection would have become obsolete during the course of the new contract. If the council had not made the change now there was a substantial risk that the new bin system would have been imposed on us at a later date. This would have caused significant additional costs to the council such as the purchase of alternative vehicles, and would cause frustration and confusion for residents.

Officers discussed these issues with Biffa who indicated that the current bag service presented a substantial health and safety risk. Biffa advised that the current bag collection system would be a significant barrier to their willingness to participate in the procurement process and their proposal for the service was based on a bin collection system.

In summary it would be irresponsible, both financially and from a safety point of view, if we did not redesign the service now as part of the new recycling and waste contract.

Efficiency

Under the current garden waste service, residents can put out an unlimited number of bags for collection and the contractor has a limited knowledge of which households are likely to present garden waste.

A garden waste service that requires registration means that the contractor will have better knowledge of the number and locations of properties from which they are required to collect, as well as the maximum number of bins. This allows the contractor to plan better the collection routes and resources required, resulting in a more efficient and cost effective service. Initial estimates are that this could save in excess of £700,000 over the initial term of the contract.

The new system will minimise opportunities for abuse of the service by commercial gardeners.

Limiting how much garden waste can be put out for collection (in the same way as we do for residual waste), together with positive promotion of home and community composting, will encourage residents to think about alternative solutions for their garden waste.

Each year it costs around £1m to provide the garden waste service, of which around £300,000 is spent on processing garden waste collected at the kerbside. Reducing the amount we spend on collecting and processing garden waste will allow the council to focus more resources on other important services

We need to adhere to our principles of “reduce, reuse and recycle” for garden waste in the same way as we do for other household waste

What will the service look like?

- From 1 March 2017 North Somerset's garden waste service will be changing from bags to bins.
- Collection frequency will remain the same: every two weeks throughout the year, except during winter (Dec-Feb) when it is collected monthly.
- There is a one-off fee of £20 for each bin registered to your property by 18 December 2016, thereafter it will be £25.
- There are three sizes of bin available; 140 litre, 180 litre and 240 litre. A 180 litre bin is the same size as a standard black wheeled refuse bin. The registration fee is the same for all bin sizes.
- Each property can have a maximum of two bins registered to it. If you produce more garden waste than will fit in two bins you can take any excess to one of our three HWRCs, free of charge.
- If you wish to exchange a bin for a different size there will be a £10 administration fee to re-register for the new size.
- The existing 120l reusable bags will no longer be collected. You can still buy and keep your 120l bags for other uses but garden waste will not be collected from them. If they are left out on the highway after 1 March 2017 this may be considered as fly tipping or an obstruction of the highway.
- New, smaller garden waste bags are available by exception only and restricted to those properties that are currently on the grey sacks refuse service. All other properties will receive bins. It will not be possible to have a combination of bins and bags.
- There is a one-off registration fee of £20 for the bag service if registered by 18 December 2016, thereafter it will be £25. Each registration covers three garden waste bags, which is equivalent to one bin. In line with the bin service you may make up to two registrations, which would give you an entitlement for up to six bags. Your first bags will be provided as part of your registration, but you will have to purchase any future replacements.
- Registration is for the property, not for the individual. Therefore, the registration and the bin(s) stay with the registered property. Bins will not be collected from un-registered properties. If you move house you will need to check if your new property is registered and register that property if not. New occupants can use the service if the property is already registered.
- Bins will remain the property of North Somerset Council. However, residents have a duty of care to look after the bin, place it out for collection and return it from the highway to their property after collection.
- Registration for the new garden waste service will start on 3 October 2016. Residents will be able to register online or over the phone. You must register by the 18 December 2016 or we cannot guarantee delivery of containers by 1 March 2017, when the new service starts. Garden waste will not be collected from the existing 120l bags after this point and it will be up to you to arrange alternative methods of disposal for any garden waste that you produce if you do not have a bin.
- Delivery of bins will take place by 1 March 2017 for those who register before 18 December 2016. After this there will be a service standard of 28 days from registration to delivery.

FAQs

Q. I've heard that my waste and recycling collections will be changing, what's going on?

A. The council's current waste and recycling contract will end in 2017 and the new contract, commencing on 1 March 2017, will be run by Biffa. This is an opportunity for the council to improve the service. One area of the service being improved is the garden waste collections, where we will be introducing wheeled bins instead of the current 120l bags and residents will be asked to register for the service.

Q. Will I have to pay for a bin, why can't the council provide me with one?

A. Residents will need to pay a registration fee but the collections themselves will be free of charge. There will be three different sizes of bin and the registration fee will be £20 per bin registered, including delivery. Whilst registering for the garden waste service might cost more initially, it should save residents money over time when compared to the cost of replacing multiple bags.

Q. How many bins can I have and what size are they?

A. Residents will be able to have up to two bins and the council will be offering three different sizes of bin. The standard size will be 180 litres (the same size as the standard black refuse bin) which will be able to hold the equivalent amount of garden waste as two to three bags. A larger 240 litre bin will be available which will hold the equivalent of three to four bags as well as a smaller 140 litre bin, which will hold the equivalent of one to two bags. If residents produce more garden waste than will fit into two bins they will be able to take any excess garden waste to one of our three HWRCs, free of charge.

Q. I think I'll have more garden waste than I can fit in a bin, what am I supposed to do?

A. The council understands the concerns residents have about having too much garden waste to put in the new bins which is why there will be three different sizes of bin available. Information from the current garden waste service suggest that the majority of residents who use the current service put out three or less bags for collection – that's the equivalent of a single 240 litre bin. The council will also be encouraging residents to try home composting (by supplying compost bins at a subsidised cost) which not only reduces the amount of garden waste but also produces a soil conditioner that they can use on their garden. Residents will still be able to take garden waste to any of the council's three recycling centres free of charge.

Q. I don't have a car to take any extra garden waste to the recycling centre, what do you suggest?

A. The council will encourage residents to try home composting which will reduce the amount of garden waste that needs to be collected. Residents who register for the bin service may offer to share their bin(s) with a near neighbour.

Q. You say you're being flexible so why not just give people the choice to have a bin or keep their bags?

A. The types of vehicles that are used to collect garden waste are different depending on whether crews are collecting bags or bins. There are differences in the machinery and heights that crews have to lift the containers which means that the same vehicle cannot be used to collect waste from both bins and the current bags, so it isn't possible for the council to offer both options. In addition, it must be remembered that the primary reason for changing the current system of collection is that it does not meet health and safety standards. The bags that will be available under the new system will be exception-based, where no other option is possible, rather than the norm.

Q. Why not just limit the number of bags that people can put out for collection rather than introducing bins?

A. The council has considered this as an option, but this wouldn't address the health and safety issues as described above.

Q. Will collections remain free or will a charge be introduced?

A. Collections will remain free. Residents will simply be required to pay a one-off registration fee for the new service.

Q. If bins are introduced will the collection still be fortnightly in the summer and every four weeks in the winter?

A. Yes, the frequency of the collections will remain the same.

Q. I can't have a black wheeled bin so how am I supposed to be able to have a garden waste bin?

A. New, smaller garden waste bags are available by exception only and restricted to those properties that are currently on the grey sacks refuse service. All other properties will receive bins. Each registration covers three garden waste bags, which is equivalent to one bin. In line with the bin service you may make up to two registrations, which would give you an entitlement for up to six bags. Your first bags will be provided as part of your registration, but you will have to purchase any future replacements.

Q. Will I be allowed to have a combination of bags and bins?

A. The new 70l bags will only be available where there is a genuine need for them. Therefore each property will be designated as either bins or bags. There is no situation in which a property would require both bins and bags.

Q. Where am I supposed to put another bin?

A. It is anticipated that bins will be stored somewhere in the garden where the garden waste is being produced. Where there are access issues at a property, for example if the only way to get into a garden is through the house, the bin can be kept at the front of the property and garden waste transported to the bin.

Q. How will you help me if I can't manage to put my bin out for collection?

A. As is currently the case for residual waste bins, we will assess your needs and arrange an assisted collection where appropriate. Smaller bins are also available, which some residents may find easier to use

Q. Will I still be able to use my bags for you to collect garden waste?

A. No, the current 120l bags will no longer be collected when the bin service is introduced from 1 March 2017. Residents may wish to reuse the bags but the bags will no longer be collected or provided by the council once the bin service starts.

Q. The council says it consulted with people on this change, I wasn't consulted – who did you ask?

A. A public consultation was carried out in autumn 2012 when the council's waste strategy was being prepared. Residents were asked their opinions on the garden waste service. Whilst a slight majority of residents responded in favour of keeping the garden waste service unchanged, significant numbers also favoured limiting the amount of garden waste put out for collection which is what we are now proposing through the introduction of bins. The council does not believe that the change from bags to bins represents a significant enough change to the service to warrant a further, wide-scale public consultation. In broad terms, the service itself is staying largely the same and arrangements have been put in place to deal with circumstances where a bin is not practical. In addition, whilst residents' views are extremely important, in these circumstances we believe that health and safety requirements must dictate our actions.

Q. When will the garden waste service change?

A. The new waste and recycling contract will start on 1 March 2017 and this is when the new bin service will come into effect. The council will do everything it can to make sure that the change to bins is as easy as possible for residents and will keep them informed of how the service is changing, including making sure that residents have the new bins in time for the start of the service.