

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STREET SCENE and ENVIRONMENT SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

31 August 2021

**Joint Report of the Cabinet Member for Technical and Waste Services and the
Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services**

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 SATURDAY FREIGHTER SERVICE

This report outlines a range of issues relating to the Saturday Freighter Service and highlights that due to current national issues impacting on the delivery of the waste services contract the reintroduction of the service should not be progressed at the present time. The report highlights that the decision to reintroduce the Service will be taken by the Cabinet Member once these issues have been satisfactorily resolved by the contractor.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will be aware of the Saturday Freighter Service provided by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. During the re-tender of the Waste Contract in 2018, this Service did not form part of the main tender but was included as an optional extra, alongside other service areas including High Speed Road Cleansing. Following receipt of the tenders and selection of the successful contractor, Members of the Street Scene and Environment Advisory Board on the 4 September 2018 considered and approved the retention of the Saturday Freighter Service (excluding garden waste).
- 1.1.2 Members will be aware that the service has been suspended since 28 March 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, primarily relating to health and safety concerns and government guidance on social distancing. More recently contract performance has been impacted by the national HGV shortage that has led to the suspension of the Garden Waste collection service in Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells alongside other service suspensions elsewhere across the country.
- 1.1.3 At the meeting of Cabinet on 6th July 2021 it was resolved that a timetable for the reinstatement of the Saturday freighter service be presented to this meeting of this Board.

1.2 Current Service Provision

- 1.2.1 The Saturday Freighter Service is provided for the primary disposal of bulky household waste that may be difficult to dispose of through kerbside collections. The Service provides for the provision of a single freighter for mixed waste and a caged vehicle for electrical items. The Service runs on a four-week cycle visiting 55 separate locations across the borough each month.
- 1.2.2 Due to the extent of the Service, the staffing resource required to deliver it totals 10 personnel (5 HGV drivers and 5 drivers for the caged WEEE vehicle).
- 1.2.3 The Service has been in place for many years and was established to compensate for the non-provision of a Household Waste Recycling Centre within the boundary of Tonbridge and Malling. Kent County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority financially supports the provision of this service with a payment of £9,000 per annum.
- 1.2.4 This type of Service is not provided by any other Local Authority in Kent outside of this Council's Partnership contract.
- 1.2.5 With the exception of the WEEE, none of the items collected through the service are separated for recycling.

1.3 Alternative Disposal opportunities

- 1.3.1 Alternative opportunities are currently open to residents for the disposal of bulky waste that cannot be collected kerbside. These are highlighted below;
- **Kent County Council Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's)** – Whilst no HWRC's are located within the boundary of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council a number are located in close proximity. These are shown on the map at **Annex 1**. These HWRC facilities (including Cuxton) provide opportunities for residents to dispose of household waste free of charge with the exception of a number of items that are chargeable including asbestos and rubble. None of the HWRC chargeable items are accepted at the Council's Saturday Freighter Service. These HWRC's also allow residents to fully separate and recycle their waste.
 - In considering the provision of HWRC's in the borough it should also be noted that KCC are currently progressing provision of a new site at Allington and, therefore, it is anticipated that a new HWRC facility within the borough boundary will be operational in the next 12 months.
 - **Bookable Bulky Collection** – For large items the Council does offer a collection service for up to 6 items including fridges and freezers. This service is a doorstep collection with a charge of £56, for up to 6 items and a reduced fee of £34 for just a fridge/freezer. If residents are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction benefit the Council also offers a reduced rate of £16. There are

some restrictions on what can be taken through this service that includes toxic materials and builders waste and rubble, such waste is also not accepted at the Saturday Freighter Service. On average, the Council receives around 3,000 requests for this service each year, generating income of over £100,000 per annum.

- **Donation and Sales** – for goods in a reasonable condition, opportunities exist for residents to donate to charities or sell through multiple on-line sales platforms.

1.4 Environmental Considerations

- 1.4.1 The Council's Climate Change Strategy Action Plan 20/21 identified the target to *"Increase our recycling rate from 43% to 50%"*. Progress with the action has been very positive with the One Year Progress Update commenting that "Unaudited data for the first nine months of 2020/21 indicates a recycling rate of 53% for that period". The 21/22 Action Plan looks to build on this progress committing to *"Continue to reduce waste arisings and increase recycling/composting levels in line with the Kent Resource Partnership Business Plan."* In addition to the above the Governments Resources and Waste Strategy committed to achieving a recycling rate of 65% of municipal waste being recycled by 2035.
- 1.4.2 As highlighted above the Saturday Freighter Service does not accommodate recycling as all waste collected (with the exception of WEEE) is mixed and is processed and incinerated for energy. This waste stream does not, therefore, contribute to the Council's recycling rate and, indeed, negatively impacts on this target as it increases overall waste, thus reducing the recycling percentage. The service also results in recyclable materials not being recycled. As such the service does not promote or incentivise residents to recycle and potentially redirects recyclable waste away from the other Alternative Service Provision options highlighted above that do.

1.5 Fly tipping

- 1.5.1 As previously reported to Members, Tonbridge and Malling has one of the lowest incidents of fly tipping in the county, however, it has been acknowledged that incidents have risen significantly during Covid. This is a trend seen across the county and please find attached at **Annex 2** data on fly tipping incidents within Kent for 2019/20 and 2020/21. It is noted that Tunbridge Wells is the only authority that has recorded a reduction in incidents and as the equivalent weekend freighter service has also been suspended in Tunbridge Wells, and still remains suspended, it suggests no direct correlation between the non-provision of such a service and increases in fly tipping incidents.
- 1.5.2 Also attached at **Annex 2** is data on the size of fly tips taking place in Tonbridge and Malling for the same period. Whilst smaller loads (single items/single bags) have seen a slight increase, the most significant increases have been in larger loads. Given the size of load and location of the fly tips it is rational to conclude

that these have been tipped by vehicles and it must then be queried why these vehicles are not transporting this waste to the KCC HWRC's. It is concluded that the fly tips are being made to avoid charges at the HWRC's due to them either containing chargeable waste streams (rubble etc) or are from a commercial operator. Neither KCC's chargeable waste items or commercial waste can be taken by the Council's Saturday Freighter Service, therefore, the re-introduction of the Saturday Freighter Service will not provide a legitimate alternative for these fly tippers.

1.6 Customer Feedback

1.6.1 It is recognised that historically the Saturday freighter service has been popular amongst residents as it provides a local and convenient way of disposing of bulky items of waste. During Covid there appears to have been an acceptance by residents that the service would not be appropriate, and the level of complaints has been low. As Covid measures have been relaxed there has been an increase in requests to the Council from residents and local Members for the service to be reinstated. The service is also popular amongst Parish Council's and Wouldham Parish Council has recently formally written to the Council outlining its support for the reinstatement of the service.

1.7 Legal Implications

1.7.1 The Council is not legally required to provide the service.

1.8 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.8.1 As outlined in the report the service is financially supported by KCC and this funding will be removed once the new household waste facility opens in Allington. The loss of this funding will add to the council's Savings target.

1.9 Risk Assessment

1.9.1 The current national shortage of drivers and the ongoing impact of Covid represents a genuine risk that if the service was reintroduced at the present time, it would not be able to be provided due to a lack of staff resource. Crews available on a Saturday are already being used to provide a catch-up service for missed rounds in the week and the approved pilot roll out to flats in Tonbridge will also take place on a Saturday.

1.10 Summary

1.10.1 In summary, Members will note that whilst this service is popular amongst residents due to the convenience it offers, the service does not meet the Council's policy of promoting recycling and that alternatives for disposing of items are available to residents.

1.10.2 With regards to a timescale for the reintroduction of the service it is felt that due in particular to the issues outlined in sub section 1.9.1 of the report impacting on the contractor's staff resources, the time is not right to consider this at the present time. A reintroduction at the present time would impact further on the operational performance of the contract due to the existing need for the contractor to catch up on Saturdays. The Council would need to be confident that the contractor would be able to fully resource the service when reintroduced and this will be dependent on the ability of the contractor to recruit and retain adequate HGV drivers. As soon as Urbaser advise that they have adequate staff to successfully reintroduce the service a decision will be taken in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Technical and Waste Services and reported to this Board.

Background papers:

contact: Darren Lanes

Nil

Robert Styles
Director of Street Scene Leisure and Technical Services

Piers Montague
Cabinet Member for Technical and Waste Services