

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE**

**20 July 2022**

**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 Recommendation to Cabinet/Cabinet Member**

**1 SATURDAY FREIGHTER SERVICE**

**Summary**

**Following its temporary suspension this report considers the future of the Saturday Freighter Service.**

**1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 During the re-tender of the Waste Contract in 2018, this Service did not form part of the main tender or core service provision 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 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 primarily due to the Covid pandemic. More recently however this has been related to the national HGV driver shortage and the prioritisation of resources on the delivery of frontline collection services.

**1.2 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).

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- 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 (HWRC) within the boundary of Tonbridge and Malling. Kent County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority has financially supported the provision of this service with a payment of £9,000 per annum due to the non-provision of a HWRC in the borough. With the commissioning of Allington this year (see details below) this payment will now cease.
- 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 electrical items (collected using separate vehicles) none of the items collected through the service are separated for recycling. This table shows the tonnages collected over the last few years prior to the suspension of the service:

	Not recycled (tonnes)	Recycled (tonnes)
2016/17	1,641	156
2017/18	1,505	112
2018/19	1,692	79
2019/20	1,153	72
2020/21	n/a	n/a
2021/22	n/a	n/a

### 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) –**  
 Residents within the borough do now have access to a new HWRC with the facility at Allington opening to the public in May 2022. This facility is supported by other HWRC's in close proximity at North Farm, Cuxton and Tovil. All these facilities 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.
- 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 £58 for up to 6 items and a reduced fee of £35.50 for just a fridge/freezer. If residents are in receipt of Council Tax Reduction benefit the Council also offers a reduced rate of just £17. 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 over 3,000 requests for this service each year, generating income of over £130K 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 2020/21 identified the target to *"Increase our recycling rate from 43% to 50%"*. Progress with audited data for 2020/21 performance achieving a recycling/composting rate of 54%. The 2021/22 Action Plan looked 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 (see **Annex 1**), however, it has been acknowledged that incidents have risen significantly during Covid. This is a trend seen across the county and nationally and, therefore, does not suggest any direct correlation with the current suspension of the Saturday Freighter Service in TMBC.
- 1.5.2 Also attached at **Annex 1** is data on the size of fly tips taking place in Tonbridge and Malling and whilst smaller loads (single items/single bags) have seen a slight increase, the more 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.

1.5.3 It is also encouraging to note that incidents have fallen in 2021/22. Yearly figures are highlighted below.

2019/20 – 581

2020/21 – 1017

2021/22 – 819

1.5.4 As highlighted at **Annex 1** all Authorities in Kent experienced a peak in fly-tipping that coincided with the Covid pandemic though the vast majority, including Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, have experience a reduction in 2021/22.

## 1.6 Customer Feedback

1.6.1 Requests to reinstate the service have been received from some Members and Parish Councils. 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 enquiries about the service, and complaints about its suspension, over the last two years has been low.

## 1.7 Summary

1.7.1 Taking the above into consideration the following is noted:

- The service does not allow materials (excluding WEEE) to be recycled.
- The service diverts potentially recyclable materials away from being recycled.
- Alternative opportunities exist for the disposal of bulky items.
- The service does not support targets outlined in the Council's Climate Change Strategy.
- The service increases the tonnage of waste sent for incineration and negatively impacts on recycling rates.
- The service does not promote or incentivise residents to recycle.

- The service will increase the Council's saving target (see section 1.9).
- Data suggests no correlation between increased fly tipping and the suspension of the service.

1.7.2 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; alternatives for disposing of items are available to residents; the service is not provided by other local authorities in Kent with the exception of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council; and the service is discretionary.

1.7.3 Members of this Select Committee may also wish to consider the charges for the bookable bulky collections especially regarding the Concessionary Charge currently applied. It is also important to remember that the service is discretionary and this needs to be taken into account in light of the Council's overall financial position.

## **1.8 Legal Implications**

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

## **1.9 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.9.1 As outlined in the report the service was previously financially supported by KCC though this funding has been removed following the opening of the new HWRC at Allington. The Director of Finance & Transformation has advised that the loss of this funding has already been included the council's Savings target. It is also recognised that the reinstatement of the service will impact on the income received by the Council from the bookable bulky collection service, although the impact is difficult to estimate.

## **1.10 Risk Assessment**

1.10.1 As outlined in the report it is perceived that the reintroduction of the service will have a negative impact on the Council's recycling rate target and contradicts the aims of the Council's Climate Change Strategy & associated Action Plans.

1.10.2 The reinstatement of the service will require 10 additional drivers and vehicles to be deployed on Saturdays. Should the service recommence the impact on frontline service provision and the potential for weekend catchup work is unknown.

## **1.11 Equality Impact Assessment**

1.11.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been developed for the service in order to assess the impact of the discontinuation of this service should this be considered by Members. The EQIA can be found at **Annex 2** and identifies no

significant detrimental impacts of the removal of the service on the identified Equality Groups.

1.11.2 Maidstone Borough Council reviewed the provision of their similar weekend bulky service in 2016. Their EQIA identified that due to the nature of the service it was providing disproportionate benefit to those living immediately close by the freighter locations at a cost to all taxpayers. Their EQIA highlighted the removal of the service would address an inequality already present and the service was discontinued. With only 55 locations serviced in Tonbridge and Malling compared to 99 in Maidstone this observation could also be applied to this Council's current service.

## **1.12 Policy Considerations**

1.12.1 Climate Change, Community and Equalities/Diversity.

## **1.13 Recommendations**

1.13.1 Members of the Select Committee are requested to consider the report and make any recommendations to either Cabinet or the Cabinet Member for Technical and Waste Services to consider.

The Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

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Nil