

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

07 September 2022

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

#### Part 1- Public

#### Executive Non-Key Decision

#### 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, the discretionary Saturday Freighter 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 in September 2018 considered and approved the retention of the Saturday Freighter Service (excluding garden waste).

1.1.2 Cabinet 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.

1.1.3 Most recently, on 20 July 2022, Members of the Communities & Environment Scrutiny Select Committee (CESSC) considered the ongoing suspension of the Saturday Freighter Service and proposed that “**Cabinet be asked to remove the Saturday Freighter Service and to consider a sliding scale of charges for the bulky waste collection to include two free collections per annum for residents on benefits.**”

1.1.4 This report deals with the first part of the CESSC proposal to Cabinet regarding the future of the Saturday Freighter service. A separate report to Cabinet covering the proposal for changes to charges for the Bulky Waste Collection Service is included later in these papers in Part 2.

## 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 Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment items (WEEE). 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 set up to compensate for the non-provision of a Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) within the boundary of Tonbridge and Malling. Kent County Council (KCC) 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 opening of Allington HWRC this year (see details below) this payment will now cease.
- 1.2.4 This type of Freighter Service is not provided by any other Local Authority in Kent outside of this Council's Partnership contract with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC).
- 1.2.5 Except for WEEE 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

- 1.2.6 The mixed waste from the main freighter vehicles can be comprised of many types of waste, such as furniture, black bin-type waste, household DIY waste (as opposed to builders' & construction waste), non-compostable garden waste, smaller household items, such as toys, etc. As such, having been mixed & crushed in the one vehicle, this waste cannot be separated for reuse or recycling. Instead, it is taken to one of KCC's Transfer Stations, bulked up and then sent for reprocessing into Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF). This fuel is produced from combustible components that the waste industry calls Municipal Solid Waste (MSW). This MSW, usually taken from industrial or commercial sites, is shredded,

dried, baled and then finally burned to produce electricity, although not at the Allington facility. This means that KCC as the Waste Disposal Authority, incur multiple costs of disposal, including the gate fee at the Transfer Station; haulage costs to the processing site; and gate fee at the RDF plant.

- 1.2.7 It is not practicable to sort the waste at source, that is when residents bring it to the vehicle, due to several factors. The mix of types of waste would be impossible to plan for on any given Saturday, so vehicles with separate compartments would not be feasible, as one compartment (for furniture, for example) could fill up much quicker than the other compartments and would need to be emptied before the other compartments were full. This would lead to inefficient operation through increased tipping time, increased driving time, reduced times at each location and no doubt significant dissatisfaction of residents trying to use the service. Multiple vehicles would also have similar issues, with increased staffing required, increased fuel costs and increased emissions, as well as many current sites not having sufficient capacity for multiple vehicles at the same time.
- 1.2.8 There are currently also no facilities at the KCC sites for sorting the waste collected when tipped, as the vehicles need to crush & mix items in order to maximise the volume of waste they can collect. Subsequently sorting them at the tip would be extremely difficult & labour-intensive and the resulting materials may not be fit for reuse or 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)** – 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, Dunbrik, Cuxton and Tovil. All these facilities provide opportunities for residents to dispose of household waste free of charge except for 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 bulky 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 current 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, the Council also offers a reduced rate of just £17, with a maximum limit of four collections per year. 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.

- **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 (except for 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 overall 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 nor 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 compared to the previous year. Yearly figures are highlighted below.

2019/20 – 581

2020/21 – 1017

2021/22 – 819

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 experienced a reduction in 2021/22. This reduction is comparable with the national data for fly tips over the same periods:

2019/20 – 1,013,268

2020/21 – 1,179,418

2021/22 – 1,105,580

## 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.

- Data suggests no correlation between increased fly tipping and the suspension of the service.
- The non-reinstatement of the service will deliver a saving compared to the current budget provision (see section 1.9).

1.7.2 Cabinet 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 TWBC; and the service is discretionary.

## 1.8 Legal Implications

1.8.1 The Council is not legally required to supply 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 is being removed following the opening of the new HWRC at Allington. The Director of Finance & Transformation has advised that the loss of this funding is reflected in the 2022/23 budget and that were the service to be withdrawn would deliver a saving of £10,000 compared to the current budget provision.

1.9.2 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, as well as on the recycling Performance Payments received from KCC, although the impact of either of these elements is difficult to estimate.

1.9.3 The recycling Performance Payments process forms part of the legally binding Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) between TMBC and KCC. The key aim of the IAA was to encourage increased levels of recycling by providing this Council with an incentive to maximise kerbside recycling, directly reducing the waste disposal costs for KCC and indirectly the TMBC Council Taxpayer. Given that most methods of disposal costs for waste are more expensive than those for recycling & reprocessing it, where higher levels of recycling are achieved KCC's disposal costs are generally reduced. This is especially the case where materials can be delivered direct to the reprocessors or disposal sites as this avoids additional costs of delivery to transfer stations and the associated haulage costs.

1.9.4 Under the IAA the Council receives a recycling Performance Payment from KCC based on its recycling performance. At the latest meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, Members requested an informal briefing note on the IAA and associated Performance Payment arrangements. That briefing note is attached at **Annex 2** and sets out in detail how the payments are calculated. Put very basically, this payment is equal to 50% of the disposal cost saving achieved.

1.9.5 The tonnage of non-recycled waste collected by the Saturday Service in 2019/20 would have had a “gate fee” liability to KCC of around £138K to cover disposal costs. It is important to stress that this is a KCC cost and not a TMBC one. However, there would be a knock-on impact to the recycling Performance Payments TMBC receive from KCC. Unfortunately, it is not possible to say what that knock on impact is with any accuracy as the Performance Payment formula is extremely complex and there is certainly not a 1:1 relationship. Some of the waste that would normally have been collected via the Saturday service could have made its way to a number of alternative disposal points, such as KCC’s HWRCs; charity shops; into the black bin waste stream or the recycling waste stream; into the Bulky Collection Service; etc. The potential impact of that tonnage on the Performance Payments TMBC would have received were the service not suspended could be anywhere between zero and 50% of that £138K. As such it could be next to nothing or absolute worst case £69K in reduced Performance Payments.

## **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. Due to the limitations in the regulations relating to drivers’ working hours in each week, the drivers who work throughout the week on frontline collection services have limited capacity to work extra hours on Saturdays to staff the service. As such, it is likely that additional staff would be required, which it would be difficult to recruit for on part-time hours on a consistent basis to maintain the Saturday Service. Although Urbaser have achieved a significant reduction in their previous level of dependence on agency staff over the last few months, there remain ongoing challenges with recruitment & retention of staff in this industry. Members will also be aware that recently there have been times when catch up work is required on Saturdays to complete that week’s frontline collection services to prevent a knock-on effect into the following week. Should the service recommence the impact on frontline service provision and the potential for weekend catchup work is likely, but the level of impact is unknown.

## **1.11 Equality Impact Assessment**

1.11.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been developed for the service to assess the impact of the discontinuation of this service should this be considered by Members. The EQIA can be found at **Annex 3** 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 Cabinet is requested to consider the proposal made by the Communities & Environment Scrutiny Select Committee, as highlighted at 1.1.3 and make a decision on the future provision of the Saturday Freighter Service.

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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