

Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 11 November 2019

PRESENT:

Councillor Kelly, in the Chair.
Councillor Winter, Vice Chair.
Councillors Corvid, Deacon (substituting for Councillor Ms Watkin), Derrick, Hendy, Mrs Johnson, Vincent and Wigens.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Ms Watkin (Councillor Deacon substituting).

Also in attendance: Councillor Sue Dann (Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Scene), Philip Robinson (Service Lead for Street Scene and waste) and Faye Hambleton (Service Director for Customer Services and Service Centre), Andy Ralph (Service Director for Customer and Corporate Services) and Jamie Sheldon (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 09:30 and finished at 11:10.

Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

80. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made by Members in accordance with the code of conduct.

81. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

82. Call in: Decision Reference - ESO 119/20 - Garden Waste Kerbside Collection - Online Registration

Presentation of case for call-in

Councillor Mrs Beer, Councillor Carson and Councillor Mrs Bridgeman, presented their case and explained the reasons why they considered the decision needed to be reviewed –

- (a) Residents had not had to previously register online for garden waste collection and would alienate residents who didn't have access to computers or who have difficulties using one;

- (b) It was not clear when garden waste was being collected and would cause confusion among residents as days for collection had changed several times over the years with no clear communication;
- (c) Heard good things about in cab technology and question why data for registration had not been collected by this technology instead of placing the burden on the homeowner;
- (d) Had residents who require assisted collection i.e. elderly and people with disabilities been considered;
- (e) How would the crews keep up with the ever changing data, people moving houses or people passing away; this would potentially lead to unregistered bags being left;
- (f) Thought the Labour pledge was to improve collection of waste which was below the national average but this new registration process could lead to more people using their brown bin for garden waste and fly tipping;
- (g) Whether residents had registered or not crews will have to travel down every street to collect one or two bags. This defeated the object of saving fuel;
- (h) Would there be a costly postal exercise to update residents who didn't have access to emails;
- (i) The length of time it could take a resident to be added to a collection round once registered on time, it was stated it could take up to one month;
- (j) Every household would need to register every year else the data would not be up to date, this would mean the data would be ever changing for the crews;
- (k) This would place additional pressure on the customer service teams who would have to deal with calls regarding missed garden waste collections, placing more stress on staff;

Councillor Hendy joined the meeting part way through this item

- (l) Disappointed that the data for the report was based on the 2011 census which is eight years out of date;
- (m) Contacted the Electoral Services team to see how residents communicate with the Council and was told less than a third of residents use online; this would mean using online registration would preclude two thirds of the population.

- (n) This shift to online registration doesn't sit well with the Corporate Plan areas Fairness and Democracy;
- (o) Will be many weeks where residents don't put waste out and the lorry's will be driving down streets still looking for bags
- (p) What would be the policy for members of the public who left out garden waste for collection and had not previously registered;

Decision-maker response

Councillor Dann, Philip Robinson (Service Lead for Street Scene and waste) and Faye Hambleton (Service Director for Customer Services and Service Centre) explained the reasons why the decision was taken and gave their response to the call-in –

- (a) Started to look at garden waste as it was a service not everyone across city used. there was some areas with high uses for example Plympton and Plymstock but Sutton and Mount Gould were really low;
- (b) There was issues of understanding where people put out their garden waste. We had current street lists that collectors go down however we'd often miss collections because occasionally residents would put rubbish out in the street that's was not on the list and the Service Centre would get a call to say we had missed garden waste and this was because it was not a registered service;
- (c) Domestic waste (recycling and brown waste) Sims had been introduced which means in every cab there was a list of all the people who present their bins (how and why) and we have a really efficient domestic waste collection service;
- (d) Since Sims had been introduced the numbers of missed bins had fallen significantly, people understand and we know it works. This had not yet been introduced to garden waste;
- (e) The rational for having people register for garden waste was that we would know exactly who wanted to have their waste collected and will have more efficient rounds;
- (f) In terms of registration we would do an online social media campaign, once decision made will advertise through Chelson Meadow and Weston Mill during the winter and will put out notice after Christmas;
- (g) Next year if people had not registered for garden waste they will get a tag which will say can you please register;

- (h) Will not stop anyone from getting garden waste, would make the service more efficient and effective;
- (i) There would be an advocacy service which was coming online in December, so that people who do not have direct access to email/online, and for people who can't access the First Stop or Library, or have no family to help etc can still register;
- (j) This was an end to end process on how we can connect with customers. From the beginning of service to when you come through and collect your service, to requesting, complaints and how you connect with the customer service centre.
- (k) This decision was not about streets, or not about customer service, it was about how can we offer a better service to all of our residents in Plymouth;
- (l) Not everyone uses this service and many already go to Chelson Meadow and Weston Mill. Only allow residents to have 4 bags. Not changing anything;
- (m) This was important to keep our recycling high and make sure the service we offer was effective and efficient;
- (n) We had tried standard collection days but it was really difficult because of different seasons and measures of waste at different times of year. Sometimes the crews can collect all bags on one day, some days it could take a couple of days.
- (o) Whenever a change a change to a service was made there would always be an increase to the service centre and they were aware of this. That is why it's an end to end service.

Clarification questions -

- Why do residents have to register online if it's a free service?
- Why had parts of the decision information not included in the decision pack?

Debate

Members questioned -

- (a) The lack of figures contained within the briefing pack relating to service savings predicted due to this decision;
- (b) The importance of clearly communicating the benefits of this change of service to residents and the impact this will have on their council tax;

- (c) Questioned the rationale for having to register for a service that was currently free unless there was an intention to roll out charging for garden waste;
- (d) why households are being asked to register when Plymouth City Council had heavily invested in cab technology that was supposed to capture this data automatically when the crews were out doing their collections;
- (e) the savings this approach would have as crews would still need to drive down every street regardless if one household had registered or the whole street did;
- (f) Raised concerns about the amount of cross referencing and data validation that would need to take place on a monthly basis to confirm whether a resident had registered for garden waste collection online, this would change regularly with people moving home and could become confusing for crews;
- (g) The impact the amnesty period would have on the call centre with residents calling to understand why their waste had not been collected and the process for registering online. This would cause confusion for residents, the Service Centre and the crews;
- (h) how the Council would have no control over the amount of bags that would be left out by residents and online registration would not help predict the demand, as not every household would use this service regularly;
- (i) why in cab technology had not been used to plan routes and register residents instead of placing the burden on the homeowner;
- (j) whether there would be any fuel saving benefits to having this system in place;
- (k) why a trial had not been undertaken with residents to see whether the sign up procedure would work and give confidence to members before rolling it out to all;
- (l) the impact this would have on residents who did not have access to a computer or had difficulty using one and how this would alienate many residents from a service that they pay Council Tax for;
- (m) the total cost implications of the change to this service and how much budget had been allocated to this campaign, as it was not stated in the briefing pack;
- (n) raised concerns over the validity of information provided in the original decision and how it didn't state that you would register by phone;
- (o) wanted clarity on the policy for members of the public who left out garden waste for collection and had not previously registered;

- (p) discussed whether there would be long term climate benefits as part of this decision;
- (q) the importance of bridging the digital divide and making this service accessible for all residents;
- (r) Councillor Kelly suggested if registration was required, he I didn't want it to be mandatory and proposed PCC should offer this option on all Council Tax statements which would make it easier for non-computer users to tick a box and return. This would also be cost effective for the council. This option had not been thought of and despite being proposed was ruled out.

Councillor Dann summed up the reasons why the decision was taken and gave the response to the call-in -

- (s) Will not stop anyone from getting garden waste, would make the service more efficient and effective;
- (t) The rational for having people register for garden waste was that we would know exactly who wanted to have their waste collected and will have more efficient rounds;
- (u) In terms of registration we would do an online social media campaign, once decision made will advertise through Chelson Meadow and Weston Mill during the winter and will put out notice after Christmas.

Councillor Bridgeman summed up the reasons why they considered the decision needed to be reviewed -

- (v) The information provided was severely flawed and did not provide the cost and the benefits to the customer;
- (w) would alienate residents who didn't have access to computers or who have difficulties using one;
- (x) How would the crews keep up with the ever changing data, people moving houses or people passing away; this would potentially lead to unregistered bags being left;

The Committee voted for the decision to be implemented immediately.