

# **BRIEFING REPORT**

Waste Disposal Service Changes



## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the ongoing modernisation and improvement of Street Scene and Waste services a number of waste disposal services and schemes have been reviewed. The resulting changes are designed to help offset the Council's costs, will bring the Council in line with the approaches taken by a number of other Local Authorities, and will help ensure the continuation of services that keep the city clean and tidy. The proposals are consistent and complementary to our objectives of balancing our economic recovery, safeguarding our environmental commitments and ensuring service changes align with our existing Transformation programme. The services, which are in scope for this business case, include the following:

1. The acceptance of certain materials which are classed as non-household, DIY or construction waste at the Chelson Meadow Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC).
2. Residents Rates Scheme which offers discounted rates, compared to the Commercial Weighbridge, for disposal of large quantities of materials arising from domestic construction work.
3. A commercial landlord scheme which offers an exemption of charges for materials arising from tenanted properties.
4. A commercial cardboard scheme which offers free disposal to customers.
5. A schools scheme which allows for the free disposal of household items from schools.

The first item is the main focus of the business case, whilst the others represent very niche historic schemes which are used by a minimal number of residents and commercial waste customers. Against a backdrop of the unprecedented financial pressures the Council are facing a proposal is made to follow the example of our neighbouring Local Authorities and charge for the disposal of certain types of waste at the Chelson Meadow HWRC. Items which arise from DIY, construction and demolition works to a home are not legally classed as domestic waste. Local Authorities are not obliged to accept them, and where they do accept them charges can be levied. The materials in scope are soil and rubble, plasterboard and asbestos. The Council already charges for very large volumes of certain materials<sup>1</sup> but for the vast majority of residents who dispose of non-household waste currently, they do so without charge.

The disposal of the waste materials in scope currently costs the Council £140k a year. Under the proposals set out in the business case it is forecast that this cost will be almost completely offset, through the application of charges and reduced disposal costs. Therefore, the proposal offers a sustainable opportunity to enable residents to continue to dispose of non household waste items whilst ensuring this is no longer subsidised by the Council, and therefore other Plymouth residents.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### Coronavirus pandemic

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the Street Services directorate has prioritised domestic waste collections and disposal, and in a way that keeps our residents and staff safe. Consequently, other services had to be either suspended or adjusted to meet the dynamic nature of Government advice and to focus resources on delivering essential services. This afforded time to analyse demand and consider how services could be delivered differently in line with our wider corporate Transformation journey, external policy changes and by learning from approaches other Local Authorities are taking. A key objective within the Council's Reset recovery plans<sup>2</sup>, for emerging from the pandemic and driving recovery, is to ensure *'Services and infrastructure are restored in such a way as to meet agreed future purposes as well as current needs and statutory responsibilities'* whilst also acknowledging that *'service change...will be integral to the reset*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/binsrecyclingandwaste/recyclingcentres>

<sup>2</sup>Adopted by Cabinet in May 2020

process.<sup>3</sup> There is a clear opportunity to make some bold changes to ensure that Council services in scope have sustainable models of operation for the future. That means greater efficiencies, improved and consistent customer experiences and ultimately that costs are offset.

## National Waste Policy

As we review local service provision, we should be considering the national direction. 'Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England'<sup>4</sup> sets out the importance of moving to a circular economy for waste management. Plymouth City Council can contribute to the national scheme, and address the local climate emergency through:

- Providing consumers with better information on the sustainability of their purchases;
- Address barriers to reuse;
- Encourage appropriate disposal of used products;
- Work with our partners and stakeholders to develop a shared vision and bold new approach to data on resources and waste.

## Climate Emergency

On 18th March 2019, Plymouth City Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency and pledged to make Plymouth carbon neutral by 2030. Delivering on this pledge is a significant challenge and the changes needed to our energy, transport and housing infrastructure and a wide range of other areas that impact on the climate challenge agenda are not underestimated. The package of changes to waste disposal services helps meet these goals in general terms by putting in measures which should encourage residents to adhere more closely to the waste hierarchy, reducing and reusing as far as possible. Plymouth's current policy of not charging for these materials does effectively incentivise unsustainable behaviours around waste disposal, indirectly encouraging residents to simply tip unwanted materials as opposed to re considering how that waste can be minimised.

After Devon County Council introduced charges in 2011 the author of a report for Scrutiny 6 months later observed the following:

*"The charging scheme does seem to have led to significant behaviour change amongst site users. Anecdotally, people are reporting more re-use of waste (e.g. patio slabs being re-used via Freecycle; sanitary ware sold on eBay), landscaping plans altered to avoid the costs involved in disposing of soil and excess soil being used to create raised flower beds in gardens. These examples indicate that the charges are causing people to think more about the waste they generate and promoting 'reduction' and 're-use' on the waste hierarchy, above recycling, which is a good thing. Data obtained from the Environment Agency suggests that skip hire companies are seeing an overall increase in tonnages handled across Devon, suggesting that more people are considering such alternatives to responsibly deal with their waste."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s102995/Plymouths%20COVID-19%20recovery%20and%20renewal%20framework.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Review of Fly-tipping in Relation to Policy Changes for Recycling Centres (Civic Amenity Sites) for the Financial Year 2011/12. Devon County Council, Place Scrutiny Committee, 4 Sept 2012.

## Modernising the Service

The Street Scene and Waste service has been undergoing a programme of modernisation, guided by the Way We Work design principles and a clear vision that sits at the heart of this modernisation:

*'To optimise the safe delivery of front line operational street scene and waste services to ensure they meet the expectations of our customers; are considered good value; and help the City become a cleaner, greener and more vibrant place to live.'* **Service vision**

The Programme is the latest phase in a series of improvements to Service over recent years to reach a level where it has all the tools, capacity and resources to consistently get the basics right. Starting with the investment in strategic assets such as the Material Recycling Facility and the Energy from Waste Plant followed by the major reconstruction of waste collection rounds through the Alternative Weekly Collections project. The Service is now on a course to ensure services are consistently good and provide a firm foundation from which further service improvements can be made.

## Corporate Charging Policy

The Council's Corporate Charging Policy<sup>6</sup> provides the opportunity for a range of approaches to charging for services, reflecting the various policy drivers the Council have and the individual considerations around a specific service area.

## Financial case

The Council is facing unprecedented financial pressures as it emerges from the coronavirus pandemic. It is now more essential than ever before to ensure that charges levied for Services are fair and as far as possible ensure the costs of providing those services are recovered. This is especially the case for services which are non statutory and are only used by a small proportion of residents.

## 3. SUMMARY OF SERVICE AREAS IN SCOPE

### 3.1 Non household / DIY / Construction waste at HWRCs

Plymouth City Council has a legal obligation to provide HWRC facilities to accept household waste. This type of waste is defined as waste which arises from the day to day running of a household, items which are unwanted contents of a house and are not part of the house itself. Waste materials and items which result from the repair and maintenance of homes and gardens are classified as construction waste, and there is no requirement for the Council to either provide a service for its disposal or accept it without charge. Construction waste also includes waste created from landscaping or garden alterations such as dismantling a rockery or digging up a patio/concrete hardstanding.

Therefore, acknowledging that the opportunity to easily dispose of small volumes offers an amenity to some residents it is proposed that these materials will continue to be accepted but charges will be levied. This follows the example of many other Local Authorities (LAs), including our neighbouring LA's, who apply charges for the acceptance of materials such as soil and rubble, plasterboard and bonded asbestos at HWRCs. Devon also apply charges for the acceptance of UPVC and synthetic composite items for

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<sup>6</sup><http://democracy.plymouth.gov.uk/documents/s75097/Fees%20and%20Charges%20Policy%20to%208%2011%2016%20Cabinet%20-%20V4.pdf>

example, windows and doors although this is less common elsewhere in the UK and is therefore not part of the Council's proposals at this stage. Residents undertaking large scale DIY projects that will generate significant volumes of waste will be encouraged to hire a skip or arrange for alternative private disposal using a suitable licensed company.

**Table 1: Charging comparison in Devon and Cornwall.**

Chargeable Waste	Devon Charges 2020 (charging policy first introduced in 2011)	Cornwall Charges 2020 (charging policy first introduced in 2014)
	Price (minimum charge)	Price (minimum charge)
Soil and rubble	£2.40 per bag	£1.90 per sack
Car tyres	£4 each	£4.60 each
Plasterboard	£4.70 per bag/sheet (some sites £4.90 ) Clean no other materials attached (Torrington only accept clean) £8.35 per bag/sheet with materials attached	£6 per bag Only accept Clean no other materials attached
PVC Windows	£4 each	N/A
PVC door/door frame	£4 each	N/A
Bath/shower tray (plastic, fiberglass or composite)	£4 each	N/A
Insulation materials	£4 per bag/sheet	N/A
Roofing felt	£4 per bag/roll	N/A
Plastic pipes, guttering, fascia	£3.80 for up to 5 lengths/pieces	N/A
Bonded asbestos	£11 per sheet/bag	£10.80 per sheet/bag
All DIY plastic (pipes, guttering, fascia, soffit, skirting, claddings, loose plastics)	£4.00 for up to 5 lengths/pieces	N/A
Water tanks, panels, roofing sheets, plastic sanitary ware	£4.00 each	N/A

In 2019/20 Plymouth residents disposed of 5,983 tonnes of the types of materials that are in scope for charging. This is broken down as soil and rubble (94%), plasterboard (5.5%) and bonded asbestos (0.5%). These materials led to direct charges of £140k throughout the year. This excludes further costs for staffing, processing, administration and transportation costs, which are not specifically apportioned in existing budgets, and therefore, the actual cost of handling and disposal will be significantly greater.

Plymouth's current policy of not charging for these materials does effectively incentivise unsustainable behaviours around waste disposal, indirectly encouraging residents to simply tip unwanted materials as opposed to re considering how that waste can be minimised.

### **3.2 Residents Rates Scheme**

This historic scheme was introduced to assist with residents disposing of large quantities of construction related waste, primarily soil and rubble, by providing a discount through the commercial weighbridge / Refuse Transfer Station. However, only 10 residents used the scheme in 2019 and it will become redundant as part delivering charges for these items in through the HWRC.

### **3.3 Landlord scheme**

A further historic scheme offering free disposal of waste for registered landlords for waste arising from their rental properties. Analysis from 2019/20 shows that the scheme resulted in the Council forgoing £6.8k worth of income over the period and was only used by a small number of users across only 238 visits.

### **3.4 Commercial Cardboard scheme**

A further historic scheme which offers the free disposal of cardboard and glass to commercial customers across the weighbridge / Refuse Transfer Station. 108 businesses are signed up for the scheme and in 19/20 47.2 tonnes was received from 38 customers.

### **3.5 Schools Scheme**

A further historic scheme which offer the free disposal offer for schools for items which are classed as household, which may include furniture for example. Only a very small number of schools are registered and use the service. The Council offer a specific commercial scheme directly to schools which the scheme in scope conflicts with.

## **4. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

### **4.1 Summary**

With regard to the five schemes detailed in the previous section it is proposed to undertake the following:

- Commence charging at Chelson Meadow HWRC for the disposal of soil, rubble, plasterboard and asbestos. Further detail is given below
- To cease the operation of the remaining four schemes with immediate effect. These include the Resident Rate, Landlord, Cardboard and Schools schemes.

### **4.2 Charging for non household / DIY / construction waste at HWRC**

The charges levied are proposed to be initially aligned to the highest offered by neighbouring Local Authorities to ensure that there is no incentive for non-Plymouth residents to attempt to visit Chelson Meadow to dispose of these items. The initial charges proposed are as follows:

- Soil & rubble £2.40 per bag or item
- Plasterboard £6 per bag or sheet
- Bonded Asbestos £11 per bag or sheet

It is further proposed that the chargeable materials will only be accepted at Chelson Meadow HWRC for the purposes of clarity, consistency, improving efficiency at Weston Mill and reducing infrastructure

requirements. Weston Mill HWRC is currently only open at Weekends due to the ongoing implications of the Coronavirus pandemic on staff availability and none of the materials in scope are currently accepted there. Pre-pandemic the site did accept soil and rubble but not plasterboard or asbestos. Soil and rubble is currently restricted due to size of the site which makes transferring this type of waste challenging.

#### 4.2.1 Site implications – operations and infrastructure

An initial solution will include card payments only and appropriate shelter for customers whilst making payments. A longer term solution is likely to require minor infrastructure changes such as fencing and site reconfiguration. A total allowance of £50k for these works has been factored into the proposal and the repayment of it is reflected in the forecast financial benefits. To avoid any impact on access to the site and queuing, customers with chargeable waste will be directed from the welcome station to a designated area of the site to undertake the transactions. A full communications plan will be devised to include very clear signage at the site and on the approach.

#### 4.2.2 Proposed detail of the scheme and outline terms and conditions

It is proposed to utilise as far as possible the approaches taken by our neighbouring Local Authorities. This includes using Cornwall Council's definition of Soil and Rubble to include: bricks, breeze blocks, concrete, drainage pipes (ceramic/porcelain), gravel, hardcore, paving slabs, rubble, sand, sanitary ware (ceramic/porcelain toilets, bidets, sinks, shower trays, pipes, etc), soil, slates (non-asbestos, testing may be required), slabs, stones, tarmac, tiles (ceramic, porcelain, floor, roof, wall) and turf. Whilst plasterboard will also include plaster and gypsum related products.

The following text in italics is taken from Devon County Council's website<sup>7</sup> and is indicative of the approach that Plymouth City Council propose to undertake:

*The charges payable will be based upon the quantity of material to be deposited using the rates given as an indicative guide.*

*Payment for bags/sheets will be whole multiples of 'bags' e.g. 3 x £2.40 not 2.75 x £2.40.*

*A "bag" is defined as "a small, plastic sand/aggregate bag from standard DIY stores that can be safely lifted by one person". A propriety rubble bag is not classed as a small bag and may incur an additional charge.*

*A 'sheet of asbestos' is a 'small domestic roofing sheet or similar'. For the avoidance of doubt; any item which the site staff deem to contain asbestos will be treated as asbestos (regardless of any analysis or certificates that may have been obtained to state the material is asbestos free) and restrictions/charges will apply. Please note that all asbestos must be double wrapped/bagged in strong plastic.*

*Items such as a toilet pan, toilet cistern; sink, sink pedestal, concrete block etc will be charged as single items and the relevant 'per bag' rate will apply. Loose waste/waste in trailers etc will be assessed by the site manager.*

*The site manager's decision on the actual charge to be made is final.*

*The charge payable will be based upon the quantity of the material to be deposited using the stated rates as an indicative guide. Charges, inclusive of VAT, are payable directly to the site contractor. Credit/debit card payments only. Receipts will be offered.*

#### 4.2.4 Legal basis

The key legislation relevant for this decision is the Environmental Protection Act (1990) and the Controlled Waste Regulations (England and Wales) 2012. The Environmental Protection Act (EPA) sets out the principle that for waste presented at civic amenity sites, such as the HWRC's, LA's are able to levy

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.devon.gov.uk/wasteandrecycling/recycling-centres/chargeable-waste/>

charges for types of waste which aren't classed as household. Whilst the Controlled Waste Regulations (CWR) classifies waste arising from 'construction or demolition works, including preparatory works'<sup>8</sup> as industrial waste.

### 4.3 Summary of other changes to schemes

The four schemes which are proposed to be removed completely, which are the Residents Rates Scheme, Landlord scheme, Commercial Cardboard scheme and Schools Scheme are primarily about removing anomalies in policies and offering greater fairness and consistency to other users. The business case expands on these schemes further.

## 5. FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### 5.1 Cost and Scenario overview

The financial benefits of the proposal are twofold, which together will help offset the cost of providing the service. Firstly, it is anticipated that the volume of waste presented will decrease, this is especially the case for soil and rubble, and therefore the Council's disposal costs will reduce accordingly. Secondly, for the waste that is presented the charges will generate a new income stream. Future increases will be aligned with the Council's existing Fees and Charging policy.

The disposal of the waste materials in scope currently costs the Council £140k a year, including haulage. Under the proposals set out in the Business Case the net cost will reduce to approximately £10k. When the £7k benefit forecasted from the removal of the Landlord Scheme is factored in this brings a total forecast financial improvement of £137k, from Year 3 when the full capital borrowing repayments will take effect.

Therefore the proposal set out in the business case offers a sustainable option to almost completely offset the costs of providing the service for the disposal of non household waste items.

The following factors were considered as part of calculations: increased Energy from Waste plant disposal costs from diverted waste streams; additional staffing costs; project costs including repayment of capital borrowing charges (which may include utilities, shelter provision, signage, fencing and road markings); payment transaction charges; VAT; income from charges including cessation of Landlord scheme and reduced waste disposal costs.

## 6. RISK

*RISK1: Increase in flytipping as a result of proposals within this decision.*

Charging for the disposal of certain materials will increase the risk that some people will avoid charges through flytipping. This could be residents or commercial businesses who may have previously encouraged clients to dispose of waste directly. Whilst it is unlikely that these charges will drive extensive criminal behaviour, with the associated risks of prosecution this entails, the Council must be prepared to act to do what it can to discourage such behaviour and respond robustly when it occurs. Incidents involving the materials in scope account for approximately 9% of all flytipping incidents observed within the city. Charging for these materials is well established across the Country and by our neighbouring Local Authorities. Devon County Council introduced HWRC charging for non-household waste in April 2011 along with a series of other changes including restrictions on vehicle types and a rationalisation of amenity sites, and Cornwall Council introduced HWRC charges in September 2014; whilst it is understood Torbay are about to introduce charges imminently also. Both Devon County Council and Cornwall Council

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/811/schedule/1/made>



observed subsequent increases in incidents of flytipping of the materials in scope for this business case, therefore reinforcing the need for Plymouth to take a firm stance.

The Public Protection service work closely with Street Services to secure evidence which enables them to enforce all forms of flytipping. There are measures which can be implemented to help reduce the likelihood and also tackle instances when they occur, including:

- Expansion of camera enforcement following successful trials.
- Increased education, communication and community involvement. Including continuing to publicise successful prosecutions as a deterrent.
- Better use of digital systems to help coordinate better management of fly tipping incident reporting across cross-functional teams.
- Review of operational resource and capacity to help with both prevention and prosecution.

*RISK 2: Potential that increased volumes of non household waste will be placed into domestic wheelie bins to avoid charges.*

There is risk this could occur which would increase weight based tipping charges levied at the Energy from Waste plant. However, ongoing communications with residents to clarify what can and can't be placed in domestic bins will continue, alongside existing provisions for waste crews to refuse containers which are too heavy.

*RISK 3: Risk of cars queuing back onto the Highway whilst awaiting access to the Chelson Meadow*

Operational plan devised to direct customers with chargeable waste away from reception point so as not to impact on general flow.

*RISK 4: Risk of aggression and violence towards staff from unhappy members of the public*

Staff training and briefings to be undertaken to help avoid and minimise conflict. Further mitigation may include bodycams.

## **7. DECISION SUMMARY**

It is recommended that Cllr Sue Dann, Cabinet Member for Environment & Street Scene:

- Approves the Business Case
- Allocates £0.050m for the project into the Capital Programme funded by Service borrowing
- Authorises the:
  - cessation of Landlord, Residents Rates, Cardboard and Schools schemes for the Commercial Weighbridge.
  - the implementation of a charging regime for the acceptance of non-household waste at Chelson Meadow Household Waste and Recycling Centre.