

# INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLD BULKY WASTE CHARGES

Street Services



PLYMOUTH  
CITY COUNCIL

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends an increase in the household bulky waste collection charge to enable the service to return to a 5 days week operation. The change is necessary to address growing waiting times currently experienced by residents, now averaging around 7 weeks and to ensure the service remains financially sustainable.

The proposed fee increase reflects the financial pressures on staffing, vehicle operation and administrative costs as well as significant growth of the Commercial Waste Service, which has absorbed capacity previously available for the household bulky waste. By re-establishing a five day a week service, residents will benefit from faster access to collections and reduced risk of fly-tipping linked to long waiting periods.

Although the service will continue to be subsidised, the proposed uplift moves charges closer to the full cost recovery for collection activities (excluding disposal) and aligns the Council with Regional and APSE member benchmarks. The increase is therefore both operationally justified and financially responsible.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Household Bulky Waste has been managed by the Commercial Waste Service since July 2021. Initially it operated five days a week (Monday – Thursday 30 collections and Friday's 15 collections), using a caged vehicle. The arrangement provided operational benefits by allowing the Commercial Waste team to use the same vehicle for commercial bulky collection and bin deliveries, rather than relying on the Domestic Waste team. This operational flexibility supported the wider commercial waste business, which has grown significantly and now generates higher margin income streams.

As commercial activity has grown, the service has prioritised commercially viable work, resulting in a reduction of days allocated to household bulky waste collections. The household service currently operates two days per week, with the crew deployed on other days to support commercial collections, bins deliveries or major City event such as Summer Sessions on the Hoe, which demand additional support and resource.

This reduction has caused longer waiting times for residents, currently averaging seven weeks. There is concern that these delays could discourage residents from using the formal service and increase the risk of fly-tipping or other inappropriate disposal methods.

The current charge for household bulky waste is £30 for up to four items with an additional £11 per extra item. Residents receiving Council Tax Support receive a 50% concession on the initial £30 charge and may use this concession twice within a 12-month period. Approximately 30% of households who use the bulky waste service qualify for this concession.

In 2024/25 household bulky waste income totalled £74k, supplemented by £36k from commercial bulky waste work. The operational cost of running the household bulky waste service is approximately £150k per annum, covering labour, vehicle and administration costs. Disposal costs of £32k per year are excluded, in line with Section 45 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which prohibits charging residents for disposal.

### 3. PROPOSED CHANGES AND REASONS

It is proposed to increase the charge for household bulky waste charge to help offset operational costs and enable the service to return to a five day a week schedule. This will improve accessibility and service quality for residents.

After modelling a range of pricing scenarios, the following is recommended:

- **Current Charge:** £30 for up to four items (£15 concession)
- **Proposed Charge:** £34.50 for up to three items (£17.25 concession)
- **Additional items:** Increase from £11 to £12.50 per item.

This adjustment is designed to:

- Support cost recovery of the collection service, including labour, vehicle and administrative overheads
- Allow sufficient resourcing to operate five days per week, reducing waiting times
- Maintain concessionary discounts for low-income households
- Align with neighboring authority pricing levels

#### Alternative Options Considered and rejected

1. **Adopt a per-item charging structure** – rejected as this could discourage residents from consolidating items, potentially increasing collection trips and reducing efficiency.
2. **Maintain current pricing** – rejected as the existing charge does not cover operational costs.
3. **Apply a higher increase immediately** – rejected as an incremental approach is preferred to minimise the impact on residents and allow time for monitoring of service demand and income.

### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISK

- Between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025 household bulky waste income was £67k, based on the service only operating two to three days per week.
- Operational running costs total £150k, which includes labour, fleet, fuel and administration. This excludes disposal costs of approximately £32k, which cannot be recovered from householders under Section 45 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.
- The proposed increase the charge from £30 for up to 4 items to £34.50 for up to 3 items, and from £11 to £12.50 for each additional item is expected to raise approximately £52k of additional annual income if the service returns to a five day a week operation. This £52k will contribute to the cost of an additional crew to carry out the 5 day a week bulky waste service.

The additional operational capacity will also enable the Commercial Waste team to proactively secure commercial bulky jobs, which generate a financial surplus that historically has helped to offset the losses from household bulky waste activity.

## Risks and Mitigations

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation/Management
<b>Income shortfall</b> – demand does not increase as projected or price elasticity reduces take-up	Reduced cost recovery, ongoing subsidy required	Medium	A 20% margin has been applied to the predicted income to cover.
<b>Public Perception</b> – increase seen as disproportionate or discouraging responsible disposal	Negative publicity	Medium	Clear messaging that the fee covers only collection operational costs and supports more frequent service to reduce waiting times and fly-tipping
<b>Fly Tipping risk</b> – if charges are perceived as too high	Environmental impact, clean-up cost pressure	Low – Medium	Balance pricing against Local Authority comparators, maintaining concession for Council tax support households.

## 5. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change approve the proposed increase in household bulky waste collection charges, as detailed in this report, with immediate effect. This will enable the Council to:

- Restore a five-day a-week collection service for residents
- Improve service accessibility and reduce waiting times
- Move the service closer to cost recovery for collection activities
- Support wider environmental and waste management objectives by discouraging fly-tipping and promoting responsible disposal.