



Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Forum, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Tuesday 14 December 2021 at 6.00 pm.

- Present Councillor Dermot Bambridge (Chair)
 Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice-Chair)
 Councillor Rufia Ashraf
 Councillor William Barter
 Councillor Pinder Chauhan
 Councillor Julie Davenport
 Councillor Charles Morton
 Councillor Kevin Parker
 Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms
- Substitute
Members: Councillor Ken Pritchard
- Call-In
Originators: Councillor Ian McCord
 Councillor Jonathan Harris
 Councillor Emma Roberts
 Councillor Sue Sharps
- Also
Present: Councillor Sally Beardsworth
 Councillor Danielle Stone
- Apologies: Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb
 Councillor Janice Duffy
 Councillor Louisa Fowler
- Officers: Stuart Timmiss, Director of Place and Economy
 Fiona Unett, Assistant Director of Highways and Waste
 Tracy Tiff, Deputy Democratic Services Manager
 Maisie McInnes, Democratic Services Officer

26. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

27. Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 November 2021 were agreed and signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

28. Chairman's Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that Councillor Stone had requested the Place Overview & Scrutiny committee to consider adding the Northampton Station car park to the work programme and this would be added to the agenda for the meeting in January for consideration by the Committee.

29. **Call in of Cabinet Decision on 9 November 2021: Item 8: Harmonisation of the Garden Waste Collection Service Across West Northamptonshire**

The Chair introduced the Call-In request and explained that upon the advice of the Monitoring Officer, the Call-In request had been through the appropriate channels and it was confirmed that procedure had been followed. The Chair explained the procedure for the call in, as the Call-In Originator, Councillor McCord would be invited to expand upon their reasons for concern, followed by speakers - Councillor Beardsworth, Councillor Harris, Councillor Stone and finally Councillor E Roberts. After the speakers had finished their address to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the committee would pose any questions to the Call-In Originator and speakers.

At the Chair's invitation Councillor McCord, Call-In Originator addressed Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and expanded on their reasons for the Call-In. The Call-In Originator felt that the green waste charge was a controversial issue and believed that this charge was already covered in council tax, and a new charge could only be justified if a new service was being provided to residents. Councillor McCord explained that he understood the need to introduce a charge in South Northants to harmonise the collection of garden waste across West Northamptonshire, but felt the cost was too high as South Northants residents would begin paying for garden waste collection and he felt that as more individuals signed up to the service, the overall cost of the charge should be reduced for residents across West Northamptonshire. The projected revenue of £800,000, which he felt would be closer to £1m, from South Northants residents signing up for their garden waste to be collected, should incite the Council to offer the lower payment option of £30 to encourage more residents to sign up to the service. Councillor McCord raised that Cabinet also needed to consider instalment payment plans and affordability options for residents and consider reinvesting the revenue raised into opening household waste recycling centres 7 days a week. He concluded his address to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and pleaded that the committee should refer the decision back to Cabinet to improve the decision.

Councillor Beardsworth addressed the committee and summarised that the harmonisation of the garden waste collection service across West Northamptonshire needed to be implemented in a sympathetic way in order to encourage recycling. She praised Brixworth recycling centre as a great example and shared how she felt that charging residents for recycling was counterproductive and lowering the cost of the charge would enable more residents to sign up to the service. Councillor Beardsworth explained that education and promotion of recycling was important and there was a need for a payment scheme to support residents on low income.

Councillor Stone addressed the committee and expressed her concern that there was no evidence in this decision that residents would not be getting value for money. She felt that the current proposal did not help those in financial difficulty and a waiver should be introduced to help those who maintained their gardens and we should be incentivising those who recycled their garden waste and not disincentivising residents.

Councillor Harris addressed the committee and explained that he believed in the principle of harmonisation but felt there were inconsistencies as Daventry waste collection was on a three-week cycle, whereas the rest of West Northamptonshire remained on a biweekly schedule, and harmonisation should include the same standards of service for all residents. Councillor Harris felt the Cabinet proposal did not include any clear timeframes and felt the detailed cost of the service was not clear in the report. He felt that the proposal contradicted the UK 100 Pledge made by Cabinet, which went beyond carbon neutral and felt that the decision was an example of unjoined and misaligned thinking and decision making.

Councillor E Roberts addressed the committee and summarised that she felt the current decision posed as an obstruction to prevent those committed to recycling. She felt there was a lack of detail on improvements to the waste collection service and the increase in charges to residents contradicted the Council's stance on anti-poverty, and there was no discussion on affordability options. Councillor E Roberts alluded to the current DEFRA consultation and explained that the report did not include any option to return payments to residents if the legislation changed, as well as any risk assessment on the impact of residents.

The Committee had no questions of the Call-In Originators.

The Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee heard a comprehensive presentation by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Climate Change, Transport, Highways and Waste Services, together with the Assistant Director for Highways & Waste.

The Committee then asked questions of the Cabinet Member and Assistant Director:

- Members felt that the collection of waste was already accounted for in Council tax and questioned the need for the charge. The Cabinet Member clarified that historically the charge was included in Council tax, but this had changed some time ago as residents who do not have access to a garden, i.e. live in a flat, used to pay for the service within their council tax but this was unfair and green waste collection had become a separate charge.
- Members asked why the charge of £42 was proposed and if the lower option of £30 could be considered and the Assistant Director stated that £42 was the current charge in Daventry and Northampton, and it was in line with the national average cost of the charge. The Assistant Director confirmed that a £30 charge would create a deficit of £1m in the budget.
- Members asked what participation rate the projected income of £800,000 was calculated on and the Assistant Director for Highways and Waste responded that it was based on the 62% participation rate for current residents that were signed up in Daventry.
- Members questioned the notion of harmonisation and felt that Daventry three-week cycle collections compared to the biweekly collections in Northampton and South Northants should be brought in line as the service should be harmonised as well as the cost. The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste confirmed that a Waste Strategy for West Northamptonshire Council would be developed which would look at other differences in the waste collection systems.

- Members expressed concern for residents who could not afford the additional charge for green waste collection as a single payment, and who would pay if instalments were an option. The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste responded that currently there was no technical solution for this, and a system was being investigated by the finance department so that payment plans could be offered. West Northamptonshire Council was taking the management and payment systems back in-house, and direct debit payments would not be available for the first year. However, there were alternative options for all residents, as residents could utilise household recycling centres which were free to take garden waste to. Alternatively, residents could split the cost by sharing a bin with a neighbour or reduce waste collected by home composting with a one-off cost of £10 for a compost bin.
- Members questioned if the revenue raised from garden waste collection would be reinvested. The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste responded that waste services cost West Northamptonshire £30m a year, and the £2.169m currently raised from garden waste collection helps sustain the cost for the collection service. The additional revenue would also be used to help fund waste services.
- Members queried where the £800,000 projected funding would be accounted for in the budget and believed that this cost may increase if more residents signed up in South Northants. The Assistant Director clarified that although this income was not ring fenced to waste, it would be used to help support waste services and noted that there were budget proposals for highways and waste in the draft budget.
- Members felt that if the household recycling waste centres were open 7 days a week, or with later hours on the days they were open, residents would have greater opportunity to recycle waste and this could be an option for Cabinet to consider with the revenue raised through the collection charge. The Assistant Director noted that the estimated cost of opening household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) to seven days a week would be £960,000 per year. All six HWRCs are open at the weekend with each site open five days a week on a rota basis. Current opening hours are tailored to residents' use, which ensures the cost effective and efficient delivery of the service.
- Members were unclear if the Christmas tree collection service would still be available at no cost to residents across West Northamptonshire as this was not contained in the Cabinet report. The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste confirmed that the service would still be available for residents, irrespective if they were paying for the charge for the collection of garden waste or not.
- Member expressed concern for elderly residents and asked if printed calendars for waste collection were still being provided. The Assistant Director for Highways and Waste confirmed that calendars were not being provided to everyone, but residents could access the calendar online, or request a printed copy on demand.

Findings and Conclusions

During the deliberation session, Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee concluded that there is a need for the decision to be referred back to Cabinet and that the

alternative course of action/recommendations as proposed by the call-in originators be investigated.

Therefore, following the submission of the all the evidence, it was proposed and seconded that Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee upheld the call-in.

Upon a vote, it was:

RESOLVED that:

(1) That after all the evidence had been heard, the call-in be accepted on the grounds the following alternative courses of action are considered:

- **To allow for a lower cost than the £42 proposed whilst being cost neutral overall**
- **To await the outcome of the DEFRA consultation before placing reliance on the income stream proposed**
- **To clarify if the Christmas Tree Collection service is open to all residents or just those signed up to the garden waste collection scheme**
- **To open the Household Waste and recycling centres 7 days a week to allow residents not in the scheme to dispose of their garden waste**
- **To amend any proposed scheme to allow for payment by instalments**
- **To amend any proposed scheme to allow for those in receipt of Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme support to have a lower cost or nil cost**

30. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 19:50

Chair: _____

Date: _____

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