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Agenda



Listening Learning Leading



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A meeting of the **Joint Scrutiny Committee**

**will be held on Monday, 29 January 2024 at 6.30 pm
Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon OX14 3JE.**

This meeting will be live streamed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@SouthandValeCommitteeMeetings/streams>

Members of the Committee:

Councillors

South

Stefan Gawrysiak (co chair)

Alexandrine Kantor

Jo Robb

Leigh Rawlins

Ed Sadler

Vale

Katherine Foxhall (co chair)

Andy Cooke

Ron Batstone

Judy Roberts

Andrew Skinner

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Vivien Williams,
Head of Legal and Democratic (Interim)

Agenda

Open to the Public including the Press

1. Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence and the attendance of substitute members.

2. Urgent business and chair's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chair.

3. Declaration of interests

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Minutes

(Pages 4 - 11)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Joint Scrutiny Committee minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023.

5. Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

6. Work schedule and dates for Joint scrutiny meetings

(Pages 12 - 16)

To review the attached scrutiny work schedule. Please note, although the dates are confirmed, the items under consideration are subject to being withdrawn, added to or rearranged without further notice.

**REPORTS AND OTHER ITEMS BROUGHT BEFORE THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
FOR ITS CONSIDERATION**

7. Garden waste permit

(Pages 17 - 28)

Joint Scrutiny Committee is asked to review and provide comments to Cabinets on the proposal to implement a garden waste permit model from 1 April 2025.



Minutes

of a meeting of the

Joint Scrutiny Committee

held on Thursday, 7 December 2023 at 6.30 pm
at Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon OX14 3JE

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Committee Members:

South Oxfordshire District Councillors: Stefan Gawrysiak (co-chair), Leigh Rawlins and Tony Worgan

Vale of White Horse District Councillors: Katherine Foxhall (co-chair), Andy Cooke, Ron Batstone and Judy Roberts.

Officers: Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Andrew Lane (Planning Policy Team Leader), Lucy Murfett (Policy Manager), Louise Brown (Environmental Services Technical Team Leader), Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Also present: Cabinet members for South and Vale: Councillor Helen Pighills (Vale, Community Health and Wellbeing), Councillor Andy Foulsham (Vale, Corporate Services and Policy and Programmes), Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson (South, Planning), Councillor Mark Coleman (Vale, Environment and Waste Services) and Councillor Sue Cooper (South, Environment)

Guests: Francis Drew (Biffa)

Number of members of the public: four online, one in person

Online participants

Committee Members: Councillor Jo Robb (South Oxfordshire)

Officers: Paul Fielding (Head of Housing and Environment), Scott Williams (Environmental Services Manager), Diane Foster (Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Vivien Williams (Interim Head of Legal and Democratic, Tom Rice (Principal Planning Policy Officer) and Karen Brown (Community Safety Team Leader)

Cabinet members: Council Leader, Councillor David Rouane

Guests: Chief Inspector Rachel Patterson, Deputy Commander for South and Vale (Thames Valley Police)

Sc.16 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Ed Sadler, who was substituted in the meeting by Councillor Tony Worgan.

South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council – Joint Scrutiny Committee minutes

Apologies were also received from Councillors Alexandrine Kantor and Andrew Skinner. Councillor Jo Robb would join later online.

Sc.17 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None.

Sc.18 Declaration of interests

None.

Sc.19 Minutes

Two references to 'RPI' in the minutes needed to be amended to CPI. It was also raised that the reference to Leisure Centre at the bottom of page 7 in the pack, related to Wantage not Faringdon.

Resolved:

Based on these amends being made, the minutes were agreed as a correct record.

Sc.20 Public participation

Public speakers spoke to the Joint Local Plan consultation document.

Councillor James Barlow (South Oxfordshire District Council) spoke to committee, welcoming the new variations to enable people to access the consultation and provided comments on the "Joint Local Plan in a nutshell" consultation document ("in a nutshell" for short).

Sue Roberts spoke about the different ways of getting the housing numbers down being shown in the "in a nutshell" document. She also spoke about housing subdivision to reduce need to build and retrofitting as benefitting the environment and wildlife.

David Marsh from Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE, for Vale) spoke about the consultation documents and how they align with the Plan and whether the right policies were covered in the "in a nutshell" document, as it covered a selection of the policies. He also mentioned ways to encourage groups to send combined consultations / single response documents, and ways to make the documents more user friendly.

Andrew Wilkins, Chief Executive of Lonestar Land, spoke to committee spoke about the Bayswater Farm allocation site. In response to the question on Cabinet approving the consultation document ahead of Scrutiny Committee, it was responded to Mr. Wilkins that the scrutiny meeting was rearranged but chair had been given assurance that comments from Scrutiny would be fed into Cabinet and amends considered before the consultation went live.

John Salmons spoke to committee about local green space allocations and asked about how such delegations would be covered in the Joint Local Plan. He felt that the councils should ask residents what they would like to see protected.

Sc.21 Work schedule and dates for Joint scrutiny meetings

Committee noted the work programme.

A discussion was had regarding the size of agendas and the balance needed for effective scrutiny.

Sc.22 Community Safety Partnership annual report 2022-23

Cabinet member for Community Health and Wellbeing (Vale) introduced the paper. Also attending virtually was the South Leader, who had responsibility for Community Safety.

Also present to answer any questions was Chief Inspector Rachel Patterson from Thames Valley Police, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager, and the Community Safety Team Leader.

The purpose of this report was to update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress that the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was making to reduce crime and the fear of crime, focusing on the benefits it generated for residents, businesses, and partner agencies in the two districts.

CSP was formed in April 2011, bringing together the two existing district CSPs that were created in accordance with the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This was done so that the partnership corresponded with the local police area and mirrored the shared working across the district councils. Under the umbrella of the CSP, a wide variety of local agencies work together to maintain low levels of crime and protect vulnerable people in both districts to ensure residents feel safe and stay safe.

Committee were asked to consider the performance of the CSP for 2022-23 and to comment on the four key areas of focus proposed for the CSP.

Committee were informed by officers that they had secured £201k funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner towards a rural crime project with West Oxfordshire, running until March 2025. There will be further promotion and communication about this in due course.

Comments were as follows:

- Members discussed early interventions and were informed of work going on in schools and youth groups.
- Environmental visual audits were commented on as a good way of assessing issues and could we have more of them.
- Further promotion of safe places was raised.
- Diversionary projects to deter criminality – how do we measure the effects? Officer responded that after establishing need, we will look at the impact, but it was hard to measure.
- Modern Slavery rising figures and funding – how are we responding to this and also in light of new legislative changes. Officer responded that there was a resource through County Council – there was an Anti-Slavery Co-ordinator, and we work closely on cases reported to us. This was outside the CSP expenditure. Officer also noted higher figures as people are more trusting and aware of support services, and able to come forward as a result. It was noted by Council Leader that an increase can be a good thing as a sign of crimes being reported where they weren't before.
- Chief Crime Commissioner presentation was well received. Increased investment in Community Officers. How will the CSP monitor the delivery and effectiveness of this? Chief Inspector responded that there were Neighbourhood Officers in place to support existing neighbourhood teams. We were having an uplift of officers rather than Police and Community Support Officer (PCSO's).
- Discussed percentages being misleading if the numbers were low.
- Under 18's alcohol admissions to hospital. A member felt this was being diminished so questioned why the same numbers were showing on page 103 of the pack. It was explained by Chief Inspector that regular meetings were held (weekly for night-time economy) and also officer presence in Market Towns at night and working closely with Licensing officers and license holders. It was not necessarily a problem within licensed premises as it could be related to other ways of obtaining alcohol.
- Can we have heat maps of where crimes were happening and share them. Look for patterns in behaviour.

Chair asked for recommendations from members followed by a vote on the recommendation. Committee were asked “(a) To note the progress that the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) made in 2022-23 in delivering its priorities and statutory functions, and (b) To support the CSP’s view that the 2022-25 plan will deliver core priorities and statutory functions and focus on these four key priorities:

- domestic abuse
- modern slavery/exploitation
- serious violence
- rural crime

Resolved:

Committee agreed to note recommendation (a) and to support recommendation (b). Committee’s main comment was that that they supported the direction of the CSP of “looking for patterns” to enable crime prevention. Committee added thanks for a very good report and for the hard work and professionalism of those involved.

Sc.23 Biffa contract performance 2022

Cabinet members for Environment and Waste Services (Vale) and Environment (South) presented the report. Also in support were the Environmental Services Technical Team Leader, Head of Housing and Environment, and the Environmental Services Manager. Biffa representative Francis Drew was in attendance.

This contract was of great importance and affected all residents. There were three key areas of performance measured within the report. The overall rating was considered ‘good’, but there were weaknesses that shall be monitored, such as street cleansing. The report was an assessment of performance, and contractual developments and purchase of waste vehicles was not a subject of this particular report.

Discussion was as follows:

- Street cleansing was discussed by members as being of significance and they discussed what the challenges were. For example, road edges – road sweepers can’t get around parked cars. Also, verges tend to be the issue. How do we prevent people from littering, for example, throwing rubbish from their car. There were complexities to cleaning A roads (A34). When the summer comes, longer grass hides some of the litter and it becomes more apparent in the colder months. Cabinet member for South explained that due to driver shortages, resources would be given to priority tasks – household bins. Biffa representative explained that there were more workers after a pay increase for staff, and at the end of 2022 they were in a better position and were currently nearly at full deployment.
- A member asked about communications and the role this played – for example, do the public know who to contact for various issues. Cited example of flytipping and the clear communications that mean these issues were reported correctly. Multi agency issues for example, it is either County, District, Thames Water - who is responsible for the infrastructure?
- A4130 issues over spring. Lots of complaints received. A member asked about the independent assessors and what their criteria was, noting that resident’s feedback was likely to differ from the inspector’s report. It was explained that Keep Britain Tidy assessed roads every three months and took photos.
- Can we tie in Christmas waste collection timetable changes communications with other waste contacts. Officer considered that we could tie in with the Keep Britain Tidy litter pick.
- Discussed the two complaints over the year, and an officer added that this was a very low complaint rate comparatively.
- Members discussed use of ‘Fix My Street’, which was independent. Head of Corporate Services added that this was being looked at with the environment team, and what was the best customer experience.

- Can we liaise with OCC timetable for cutting back vegetation?
- Discussed the reasons behind missed bins, and how this was rectified.
- Discussed blocked drains and flooding and who was responsible (confirmed to be OCC) – noting issues after grass cutting, which blocks drains.
- Can CCTV on roads help catch littering?
- A member thanked Biffa for excellent responsiveness. Biffa representative added there would be a comms piece on litter picking on the A34 – and they had been working with OCC, and it was considered that working together will bring improvements and more opportunity to get out onto the road for cleaning.

Committee were asked to “consider Biffa Municipal Ltd (Biffa) performance in delivering the household waste collection, street cleansing and ancillary services contract for the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022 (2022 calendar year) and make any comments before a final assessment on performance is made”.

Resolved:

Committee considered the performance report and provided their comments. Biffa and officers were thanked for their work and the report was well received. The main comment from committee was that they supported strong communication with residents to improve resolving of reported issues. Members discussed the need to identify responsible parties which can be complex for residents to navigate (for example, County Council, Thames Water, District Council) for different provisions (such as street cleansing, drain emptying, public bins, roads). Committee acknowledged that work was ongoing for this and supported this continuing. Street cleansing was a highlighted concern, but members recognised that work was progressing in this area.

Sc.24 Joint Local Plan Regulation 18 Part 2 - preferred options for consultation

Cabinet members for Corporate Services, Policy and Programmes (Vale) and Planning (South) were present to introduce the report. Officers present were Head of Policy and Programmes, Policy Manager, Principal Planning Policy Officer and the Planning Policy Team Leader.

Cabinet member for South explained that the consultation showed policy topics and the preferred options so far. Policy options had been tested and developed with shaping via Councillor roundtables and cross-party steering group meetings. Technical studies had been undertaken and others were in progress and officers will add the details of those and refine approaches as they emerge ahead of consultation stage Regulation 19 (draft plan stage) in Autumn 2024. This stage was to seek public views via consultation documents set out in the agenda pack.

Cabinet member for Vale explained that Corporate Plan ambitions were mirrored in the new Joint Local Plan and it was innovative. This plan pushes the envelope on climate and biodiversity. The consultation was interactive with maps and infographics, and the “Joint Local Plan in a nutshell” consultation document (“in a nutshell” for short), which helps the public to get to grips with the plan without needing to go through all the documentation if they don’t want to.

Comments from Scrutiny Committee would be considered ahead of publication of the consultation. Both Cabinets had set a meeting in the diary to discuss the outcome of this meeting.

Committee’s comments:

- IN1 – 7 policies: a member suggested that some of his residents were interested in infrastructure. IN3 – there was a long list of safeguarded transport schemes that some residents would be very keen to comment on. Was there a route to getting resident’s views on infrastructure? Cabinet member for South explained that the ‘in a nutshell’ document would help more people to engage and give their views. Section nine deals with community infrastructure, and they were also able to swap to the full document. Chair added that

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officers should ensure full communications to explain how the documents were intended to be used.

- Wording of the questions – please double check the wording to ensure no confusion. Officer did add that questions had been checked by other officers, but they would take this comment into consideration.
- Officers were thanked on the work done, as well as the Cabinet Members. Praised for the ambition in the document.
- Can we add heat transfer – noting the data centres we were expecting.
- Given the large proportion of AONB and green belt land in the districts - was there justification for going below the standard method as we had historic housing supply baked into our current plans. Cabinet member for South explained that standard method was recommended for housing need, no local exceptions justified going lower. These policies can be reviewed in full and such responses can be put into the consultation and taken into consideration.
- Bigger font size for the 'in a nutshell' document. Streamline the links to the main documents. Officer confirmed it will be an interactive webpage and you can adjust size as you wish.
- In response to Sue Roberts comment in public participation – can we take a constrained approach to housing numbers? Cabinet member for South replied that this would be something to look at in the Regulation 19 consultation stage.
- Member supported encouraging various response methods from groups as per David Marsh's suggestion in public participation. It was noted by Cabinet member for Vale that Town and Parish Councils were already being encouraged and signposted with planned events coming up for councils and seldom heard groups. Options will be available but online preferable. Chair suggested a hybrid option, by keeping to the layout of the online consultation, say, if a group plans on submitting a paper document.
- Suggest avoiding jargon – ask a non-professional to check the wording.
- The difference in the summary of the 'in a nutshell' document to the main document – officers explained that the 'in a nutshell' document was intended as a summary. We will analyse the responses to both documents separately, so essentially running two consultations. The 'in a nutshell' responses are allowed to be anonymous.
- Felt that the 'in a nutshell' document lost some of the vision and excitement of the full consultation document. For example, we need to challenge the perception that green technology was expensive, and that there were great benefits to gain from it. Cabinet member for Vale explained that the communications messages that will come out will contain the enthusiasm and vision to go with the documents.
- A member stated that they were glad to see the changes made since the last iteration of the Plans and that comments had been taken onboard about climate, renewables etc, and it was great to see the difference.
- Density per hectare was discussed and that it was felt to be too rigid – this question can be submitted in the consultation.
- Graphics related to allocations – it looked like a big difference between South and Vale. Concern of perceived imbalance. Officer explained that the diagrams were carefully considered to show spread of allocated sites, but we can take this point away.

Resolved:

As the meeting was close to reaching two and a half hours long, Committee voted on a 30-minute extension of the meeting to conclude business, which was agreed.

- Committee considered John Salmon's comment in public participation, about residents suggesting green spaces. It was confirmed there was space to make suggestions in the consultation under HP4 or the final question box at the end, and through the Neighbourhood Plan process also. There was a high level of protection in HP4 for green spaces.
- A suggestion was made that the tiers could be confusing – it was confirmed that an explanatory document would be provided – the settlement assessment.

- Consider the potential confusion of the aforementioned tiers and the retail tiers in different parts of the document.
- “Biodiversity was expensive”, members questioned this wording. Officer explained that we’d need to test the viability of the policies. If it were too expensive it would not be viable. The wording was an indication that we must test the policies. Cabinet member for South added that we were being ambitious, so pushing the boundaries with the hope that the policies test well.
- A box could be added to ask consultees whether they have any other suggestions that weren’t included in the documents.
- IN5, parking standards. Cycling facilities – can we use another word other than “internal”, it’s too wide. Was secure lockable parking structures meant? Member was asked to feed this into the consultation.
- It was confirmed by officers that a sewage map couldn’t be included as it was Thames Water documentation.
- Regarding James Barlow’s queries in public participation – was there opportunity to talk about carbon footprint of building? If we create tonnes of carbon, was there renewable energy offsetting? Cabinet member for South explained that the climate emergency was high priority, but we also had to work to get through examination and find a balance. Policy CE2 was quoted by Cabinet member for Vale, as covering this detail. Officer added that higher standard of building should be net zero carbon, therefore tackling the issue of carbon footprint.
- A member thanked Councillor Sarah James for providing a statement as she could not attend the meeting.

The Committee was asked to “review this report and share any comments or suggestions with the Head of Policy and Programmes, South Cabinet Member for Planning and the Vale Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Policy and Programmes, for consideration prior to the commencement of the consultation period”.

Resolved:

Committee were impressed by the ambition of the consultation document, and praised those involved for all the work and consideration that went into its development.

Comments were provided, and the main points highlighted for recommendation were:

1. Committee felt that there needed to be a way of capturing infrastructure concerns within the consultation (reservoirs, community facilities, roads etc)
2. Communications: Committee suggested that members of the public need to be made aware that you can dip in and out of the “Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell” consultation document – officers did explain that further guidance was planned ahead of publication.
3. Members recommended that the wording of questions should be double checked for the public’s understanding, for example, avoid use of double negatives. They recommended a final check with an independent officer/3rd party.
4. Committee commented on small fonts but were assured by officers that the digital outputs would be changeable to the reader’s requirements.
5. Committee agreed that the public should be able to submit responses in other formats, such as joint responses (where organisations respond together, such as Parishes), but did stress that such responses should follow the headings of the main consultation document for ease of reference.
6. Committee discussed putting the enthusiasm and excitement of the main document into the start of the “Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell” document – noting that the introduction to this document did not currently have the same impact. However, officers confirmed that the planned communications and guidance around the “in a Nutshell” document would add that enthusiasm, however this was the necessary downfall of creating a slim-lined document. However, the public have a choice of two documents which gives the public the benefit of choice.

7. Committee discussed the options available for people to identify areas they wish to designate as Local Green Spaces. It was confirmed that many communities do this through Neighbourhood Plans but the public could add suggestions in their consultation responses.
8. It was suggested that the final box of the consultation could be reworded to encourage more direct answers, for example “ Is there anything else you would like to see in the Joint Local Plan that hasn’t been covered already?” alongside the question “Is there anything else you’d like to say?”
9. Praise was given to the officers and Cabinet members involved in this work on the consultation, and that the plan was generating excitement from members.

The meeting closed at 8.27 pm

Scrutiny work programme

15 January 2024



Listening Learning Leading

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Joint Scrutiny Committee 29 Jan 2024	Garden waste permit approach		Sue Cooper and Andrea Powell	Mark Minion mark.minion@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2024	Budget setting		Pieter-Paul Barker	Simon Hewings simon.hewings@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2024	Cornerstone		Pieter-Paul Barker and Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Andrew Busby andrew.busby@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 6 Feb 2024	Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 approach		Andrea Powell	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Scrutiny Committee 13 May 2024	Corporate plan quarterly performance report	When quarterly performance management reports are reported to Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee members will be asked to review the report and confirm to the Scrutiny Chair if there are any elements of the report they wish to discuss at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting. The relevant Cabinet lead and contact officer will be notified.	Andrea Powell	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 20 May 2024	Didcot Garden Town strategies	Scrutiny will review a report that will update on the DGT Delivery Plan and seek specific approvals from Cabinet for relevant strategies or plans	Robin Bennett	Jayne Bolton jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 20 May 2024	Transformation programme update		Andrea Powell	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk
Items for future meetings (dates to be determined)				
Joint Scrutiny Committee 25 Mar 2024	Future items for Joint Scrutiny to be confirmed			

Scrutiny work programme

15 January 2024



MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Joint Scrutiny Committee 29 Jan 2024	Garden waste permit approach		Councillors Mark Coleman and Andy Foulsham	Mark Minion mark.minion@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 5 Feb 2024	Budget setting		Councillor Andy Crawford	Simon Hewings simon.hewings@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 5 Feb 2024	The Beacon	Appraisal on future service delivery for The Beacon, Wantage	Councillor Andy Crawford	Andrew Busby andrew.busby@southandvale.gov.uk
Scrutiny Committee 5 Feb 2024	Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 approach		Councillor Andy Foulsham	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Scrutiny Committee 6 May 2024	Corporate plan quarterly performance report	When quarterly performance management reports are reported to Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee members will be asked to review the report and confirm to the Scrutiny Chair if there are any elements of the report they wish to discuss at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting. The relevant Cabinet lead and contact officer will be notified.		Tim Oruye Tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 20 May 2024	Didcot Garden Town strategies	Scrutiny will review a report that will update on the DGT Delivery Plan and seek specific approvals from Cabinet for relevant strategies or plans	Councillor Sue Caul	Jayne Bolton jayne.bolton@southandvale.gov.uk
Joint Scrutiny Committee 20 May 2024	Transformation programme update		Councillor Andy Foulsham	Tim Oruye tim.oruye@southandvale.gov.uk
Items for future meetings (dates to be determined)				
Scrutiny Committee	Leasing of vehicles for grounds maintenance		Councillor Mark Coleman	John Backley john.backley@southandvale.gov.uk

MEETING	AGENDA ITEM	PURPOSE	CABINET MEMBER	CONTACT OFFICER
Joint Scrutiny Committee 25 Mar 2024	Future joint scrutiny items to be confirmed			

Joint Scrutiny



Report of Head of Corporate Services and
Head of Housing and Environment
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Wards affected: All

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To: JOINT SCRUTINY

Date: 29 January 2024

Introduction of a garden waste permit scheme

Recommendation

Joint Scrutiny is asked to review and provide comments for Cabinets on the proposal to implement a garden waste permit model from 1 April 2025.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Signing off officer	Simon Hewings	Pat Connell	Climate Team	Mark Minion

Purpose of report

1. This paper outlines a proposal to improve the way the councils’ garden waste service is paid for, in essence moving from the heavily manual process relying on payment by direct debit to a more automated and customer friendly permit-based approach.

Corporate objectives

2. The proposal seeks to introduce a more efficient way for customers to pay for their garden waste service, increasing self-service and online take-up, and providing customers with a simplified and improved customer experience. It, therefore, contributes to the following corporate objectives:

South

- Action on the Climate Emergency
- Openness and accountability
- Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability.

Vale

- Tackling the Climate Emergency
- Building stable finances
- Working in an open and inclusive way

Background

3. The councils have a statutory duty to collect household waste and recycling at no charge. However, currently garden waste is a discretionary service that local authorities can provide, either free of charge or at a charge to cover the cost of collection. Under the Environment Act 2021 and clarified by the Government, all local authorities will be required to offer a garden waste collection service from 31 March 2026, and a reasonable charge for collection can continue to be levied from this point.
4. Currently both councils provide a chargeable household collection service for garden waste. The service is provided on behalf of the councils by Biffa and is currently charged (based on fees for 2023/24) to residents at a cost of £60 per year for each bin. Further details on the scheme can be found here ([South](#) and [Vale](#))

5. The councils insourced the customer service handling of our garden waste service from Capita in April 2021. Provision of the current service is delivered through the close working of three service teams. The customer service centre (CSC) manages all interaction with customers including chasing non-payment and liaising with Biffa on new/cancelled accounts, bin deliveries etc., Exchequer Services manage the ongoing direct debit (DD) payment process, and the Waste team manage the operational elements of the service carried out as part of the Biffa contract. As this is a paid for service it should be operated on a full cost recovery model, where the cost of the collection service can be offset by the income generated through DD subscriptions.
6. As at November 2023 there were circa 59,300 live accounts (31,500 South and 27,800 Vale). Some properties pay for more than one bin, so this equates to circa 66,300 bins (South 36,000 Vale 30,300).
7. To ensure that the customer is getting the most appropriate and efficient service possible, the operation of the service has been reviewed by the service teams referenced above with a particular focus on the way that customers contact the councils, payments are handled, and how we ensure that everyone gets a fair and reasonable service. This review has taken place with consideration of the councils' customer transformation and IT strategies, and in particular the implementation of the councils' CRM platform.

Our current service

8. Findings from the review show that there is considerable scope to improve the customer experience by changing the payment model, as the current process is complex and confusing for customers. In summary:
 - each customer's subscription runs from the date they first commenced the service, so it could be at any time through the year, and customers with more than one bin can have several payment dates to remember.
 - those moving into the districts are not always aware of the details of the service, and therefore do not contact us to set up payment. However, if the property has a bin, it may still get a collection as there is not currently a simple way for the collection crews to identify if a property has a live subscription. This often comes to light when a customer contacts us for a different reason related to the service e.g., for a replacement bin.
 - if a DD fails, or 'bounces', customers are often not aware until the CSC contacts them, and the councils are often requested to reinstate a customer account that has been cancelled meaning the customer has to complete a further DD mandate form.
 - customers are currently required to proactively provide the councils with new bank account or contact details. If this doesn't happen invoices or other communication often go to old email addresses.
 - all customers who have provided an email address as a contact are sent invoices or other communication on this service by email. This can go to junk

folders, so the customer is unaware that payment is due to be taken. This means the first they know of a problem with their account is when their bin isn't emptied as part of our regular enforcement activity; and this can cause considerable frustration and in turn creates customer contact which neither the customer nor the councils want to happen.

- as part of the back-office processing, a complicated manual upload process is required between the Bottomline (DD) system and the Unit4 finance system, this means a delay of up to a week between the customer signing up for an account and it showing as 'live' on our system which in turn enables Biffa to empty the customer's paid for bin.
9. The main internal issue for management of the garden waste service is that of non-payment for service which under the current model requires significant manual intervention to resolve.
10. To understand the extent of non-payment, Biffa have periodically carried out 'pink hanger' exercises where they place a hanger on a bin where it is believed that the subscription is not live. This is only partially successful because it's not always possible to identify which bin belongs to which property. This is especially difficult for instance where several properties place bins in the same location.
11. Biffa carried out its last full 'pink hanger' exercise across all rounds and both districts between March and July 2023 – this resulted in more than 10,000 hangers being placed on bins (some were 'repeats' on subsequent collection rounds). This exercise generated circa 1,700 calls to the customer service centre and over the period circa 2,000 new subscriptions were generated. A comparison with the same period in 2022 showed a net increase of 369 subscriptions during the same five-month period. Whilst not all the additional subscriptions can be attributed to this pink hanger exercise – for example housing growth and new customers will play a part – it does show a significant 'hidden demand', which in pure monetary terms generated additional income of circa £100,000.
12. Other issues which affect management of the service are:
- duplicate accounts must be manually chased and regularised. This happens when customers set up new accounts online when they only require additional bins, or where a previous occupant at a property hasn't cancelled their account and the new owner sets up an account online.
 - all cancellations and address changes must also be processed manually, including any unpaid invoices being reversed off the account.
 - where DD payments are not able to be collected; the CSC attempt to contact the customers to obtain payment or close the account. This is a further complex manual process.
 - as the councils do not have e-mail or contact details for all customers, it is costly to advise them of service changes/difficulties by post.

- payment by DD also provides challenges when, despite CSC staff contacting the customer if a DD collection fails, payment cannot be collected.
13. For all the above reasons officers have investigated alternative ways to manage the service that would provide benefits for the customer and the councils. The project team have completed an initial analysis of alternative approaches to garden waste, including introducing an annual permit system. This is an approach used by many other councils, some of whom provide this through the same Goss CRM platform that the councils procured in 2023.

A Garden Waste Permit Scheme

14. The officers' view is that to meet the goals of the transformation programme and improve the customer experience, the councils should revise the way the customer contact element and accompanying payment process is structured. Many other local authorities operate a permit system where a one-off credit or debit card payment is made once a year, generally online, for a permit that the customer then places on their bin. This identifies to the waste collection crew that the service has been paid for and the bin can be emptied.
15. A permit-based process is envisaged as working as follows:
- The customer would continue to find information about the service, and place an order for a subscription, through the various communication channels. For the customers benefit, and to maintain efficiency, the councils will look to encourage as many customers as possible to use the existing online self-serve methods of ordering a service. During this process payment would be taken via the online system.
 - At the point of payment, the customer's name and address is captured within the CRM and this information is passed to the permit company who will mail out a permit, usually within 3-5 working days. This permit will be an identifying sticker that customers will place in a prominent position on their bin(s). For requests that require a bin to be delivered, the system will send a request to Biffa to deliver a bin to the property.
 - Customer Services staff would be able to interrogate the CRM and/or the garden waste permit database to see how many permits are registered at each property to assist in any queries received.
 - This more simplified process would be able to be automated so it would cut out the manual steps required to manage the service currently.
16. This approach also has the benefit of clearly identifying for customers and the waste crews where the service has been paid for, resolving the non-payment enforcement issues outlined above. Additional benefits include having more accurate, real-time data on live permits (and customer information) that could enable more targeted campaigns about the garden waste collection service and potentially improve future route mapping for collection crews.

17. Replacing DDs with a direct online payment would increase self-service and pass control for payment to the customer, who can actively manage their account online including changes of contact details, thus improving two-way communication with customers.
18. There will be the opportunity to actively encourage customers to set up a 'My Account' through the CRM to complete the transaction, this would mean that any correspondence could be sent directly by email (e.g., when the next year's permit 'window' is open), thereby reducing postal costs, carbon footprint, and ensuring the customer can be kept informed proactively of any service issues.
19. If a bin placed out for collection doesn't have a permit, Biffa can more easily do a periodic sweep to collect any bins without a live permit sticker. This would remove unwanted street furniture and produce a small saving as fewer new bins would be required.

Moving to a single payment date

20. As part of this new system, it is proposed to move all customers to the same renewal date of 1 April i.e., payment to be made in February-March for the service to be provided from 1 April to 31 March (municipal year). Moving to a single payment date would be less confusing for customers, particularly those who have multiple bins on different accounts.
21. Many councils have a simplified payment structure where the same fee is charged at any point during the year. Officers are proposing the introduction of a simplified payment structure where the full fee is charged to cover 1 April to 30 September, and a half-fee is charged from 1 October to 31 March for any customer joining part way through the year.
22. The councils would look to contact existing customers early in each calendar year to remind them to purchase permits for the forthcoming year.

The Transition Plan

23. Introducing a single payment date would require a clear transition plan to ensure that customers whose current subscription end date is part way through the financial year are not disadvantaged. This would mean a sliding scale of DD payments in the last year of the existing scheme reflecting the number of weeks left on the subscription before the move to the new model on 1 April 2025. For example, for the current annual fee of £60 a customer whose DD is taken in the first week of April would pay £60, those renewing in the second week £58.85, on a sliding scale to the last week in March when the DD collected would be £1.15.
24. A communications campaign would be run to make all customers aware of the move to the new model and what they need to do differently to continue to receive the service, and of arrangements for the transition year. In summary this would be achieved through:

- in March 2024, letters/email to all current subscribers to explain the changes.
- inserts with customer invoices throughout the 2024/25 transition period.
- in March 2025, bin hangers on all bins reminding customers of the changeover and to remember to buy a permit.
- web content including FAQs, social media and local press to keep the messaging 'live' throughout transition.
- inserts within the Council Tax bills for 2025/26 sent out in February/March 2025 including information on the new scheme.

25. Any unintended confusion caused for those customers whose DD payments will be taken in the last few weeks of the old model will need to be managed, whilst at the same time being invited to purchase a permit for 2025/26.

New customers

26. Clearly as the end of the current model is approached, it would cease to be cost effective to continue to set up new accounts for such a short period before the switchover. To enable any work to implement the new model to take place it is proposed that the garden waste scheme would be closed to new customers from 1 to 28 February 2025. A comparison with new subscribers in the same period last year shows that the number of new subscribers in this period is relatively low. A February 'pause' will enable those wishing to use the new permit approach to dispose of Christmas trees.

Costs

27. There are several elements to consider in relation to the cost - positive and negative - of introducing a garden waste permit scheme. For example, there will be the cost of implementation which would include software development of our CRM, providing customer notifications and reminders (both digital and hard copy). The cost of the permits will also need to be considered – however as noted above the provision of this service should be cost neutral.
28. There will be, on the positive side a reduction in costs due to a likely increase in the number of bins being paid for, and the need to no longer provide invoices for payment.
29. For clarity, as this proposal is for the way in which the service is paid for by customers it will not change the cost of collection as set out in the contract and included as part of the garden waste base budget.

At a high level these costs are currently understood to be as follows:

Total additional costs	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Transition costs (funded from transformation budget) (i)	30,000	29,000	0	0
Gov.notify (funded from CRM budget) (ii)	0	2,000	2,000	2,000
Permits (70% purchasing permits before 1 April) (iii)	0	57,000	84,000	86,000
Annual reminder (iv)	0	9,000	7,000	5,000
Reduction in costs (v)	0	0	-64,000	-64,000
Additional budget	30,000	97,000	29,000	29,000
Cost per Council (vi)				
South	15,900	51,410	15,370	15,370
Vale	14,100	45,590	13,630	13,630

Notes:

- i. Transition costs: this is the predicted cost of mail outs to existing customers, promotion of the changes through exercises such as ‘bin hangers’ and development of the councils’ CRM system.
- ii. Gov.notify: this is the annual licence cost for this system which allows bulk emails to be sent to customers who have subscribed to the service.
- iii. Permits: this is the expected cost of production and mailing out of the permits, with an estimate that circa 70% of customers will apply prior to the 1 April start date of the service (i.e., during an application window starting from 1 March each year).
- iv. Annual reminder: this is mail out of reminders to existing customers, which is expected to reduce year-on-year as more customers sign up online.
- v. Reduction in costs: this is expected to comprise of additional income i.e., bins that are not currently paid for, unused bins being returned, the requirement to no longer send out invoices, and no longer being required to carry out regular ‘pink hanger’ exercise.
- vi. Cost per council: this is based on the split of current customer numbers of 53% South and 47% Vale.

Policy changes and changes to terms and conditions

30. In addition to the policy changes outlined above, a permit model would enable the councils to simplify the terms and conditions of the service significantly. The key changes proposed and outlined in this paper are summarised below:

Proposed change	Rationale and Benefits
A single payment date for all customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarity for the customer, particularly those with multiple bins. • easy identification for crews of paid for bins (through a differently coloured permit each year). • easier budget planning as subscriptions don’t run over multiple years with different prices.

A one-off online payment per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less complex payment mechanism for the customer. • significantly reduces manual effort required to manage the DD process and eliminates aged debt
No in-district moves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the permit must be affixed to the bin and will have the address of the property the bin relates to and therefore must stay with the bin. • many customers moving in-district or between districts will move to a property which already has a permit.
Part-year permits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new customers joining the scheme will be able to either join between 1 April – 30 September for the full annual cost or buy a six-month permit if after 30 September.
No refunds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this forms part of our existing terms and conditions but needs to be reinforced. • refunds are costly to process increasing the cost of the service and refunds for relatively short periods of time are disproportionate to the cost of processing.
No minimum number of collections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we need flexibility to manage the service around any disruptions that are out of our control (weather/staff shortages etc) including flexibility to prioritise statutory services when necessary, so committing to a minimum number of collections is impractical. • refunds for a small number of ‘missed’ collections would be disproportionate to the cost of processing. N.B refunds would still be considered on a case-by-case basis for serious failure of service.
Encourage all customers to set up an account with an email address/SMS capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in the number of customers receiving communication by email rather than post in line with our transformation aims. • customers will be able to use their account to proactively keep up to date with other council transactions as more services are migrated to the CRM. • begins to build a 360-degree view of the customer in line with our transformation strategy.

Other options considered

31. One other option was considered, that is to continue with the status quo. As outlined above it is a highly complex and manual process which is confusing to customers and to manage and doesn't therefore meet the councils' transformation goals of 'customer first' and 'digital by default'.

Financial Implications

32. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the councils' overarching financial position. For South, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full

Council in February 2023 showed that it is due to receive £640,000 less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2023/24, with this budget gap expected continue in future years. For Vale, a balanced budget was set in 2023/24 but there is expected to be a budget gap in future years. However, there is great uncertainty over this caused by a lack of clarity from government.

33. The funding gap at both councils is predicted to increase to over £7.8 million by 2027/28, based on current cautious officer estimates of future funding levels. Whilst it is anticipated that overall funding for the councils will remain relatively unchanged in 2024/25, the lack of certainty on future local government funding from 2025/26 onwards meaning the level of funding, and the resulting estimated funding gap, could be significantly different from current officer estimates in either a positive or negative way. Every financial decision, particularly those involving long-term funding commitments (i.e. those beyond 2024/25), needs to be cognisant of the potential for significant funding gaps in future years.
34. As a discretionary paid-for service the councils seek to recover the costs of the garden waste service through the annual charge, and the cost of each permit would form part of that calculation, as would the costs of annual reminders to customers.
35. Current understanding of the costs of implementing a garden waste permit system are included above in paragraph 29. In summary the costs of implementation will be covered from the councils' transformation budget. The currently unbudgeted one-off transition costs of £68,000 (circa £36,000 - South and £32,000 - Vale), expected to be incurred in 2024/25, are subject to agreement by Full Councils at their budget meetings in February 2024. Costs from 2025/26 onwards will be covered through the fees levied and will be cost neutral.

Legal Implications

36. The councils have a statutory duty to collect household waste and recycling at no charge. However, currently garden waste is a discretionary service that local authorities can provide, either free of charge or at a charge to cover the cost of collection. Under the Environment Act 2021 and clarified by the Government, all local authorities will be required to offer a garden waste collection service from 31 March 2026, and a reasonable charge for collection can continue to be levied from this point. Should this proposal proceed the procurement of a permit provider will be undertaken as an open tender due to the cost of the contract, led by the Procurement team and with input throughout from the Legal team as set out in the procurement management plan.
37. Legal Services are currently reviewing proposed terms and conditions for both the transition period and the service from 1 April 2025 onwards.
38. To comply with data protection legislation, a data protection impact assessment will be completed following the procurement of a permit supplier, and relevant privacy notices and data-sharing agreements will be put in place to allow lawful sharing of address data as required.

Climate and ecological impact implications

39. Through encouraging customers to sign up for a MyAccount and opting for email correspondence this proposal will help to reduce the use of paper and postage and is in line with the principles of the customer transformation strategy to be efficient and environmentally positive.

Equalities implications

40. This proposal is in accordance with the principles of the customer transformation strategy and will put in place safeguards for our most vulnerable residents. The council is only proposing to change the method by which customers make payment for the garden waste service, and those not able to set up an account or make payment online will be signposted to our customer service centre where customer service advisors will support them to do this. Customers will still receive the same assisted collections where needed. A full equality impact assessment will be completed prior to the commencement of this new approach.

Risks

41. The key risk associated with this proposal is reputational risk due to customer perceptions of the change and several actual changes being proposed to the terms and conditions of the service as outlined above. There is a detailed transition plan in place supported by a communications plan to ensure that all stakeholders are fully informed throughout the transition period, of the changes and the benefits to the customer. If the proposal is agreed a full risk log will be developed and monitored.

Conclusion

42. This report recommends changing the way in which customers pay for their garden waste service, moving from the existing heavily manual direct debit process to a permit-based approach. Customers will be required to purchase a permit for 1 April each year which is affixed to the bin and identifies it as being paid for and to be emptied. The proposal is seeking to improve the customer experience, address non-payment issues and to automate the process as far as possible, saving a significant amount of staff time over the current model. Several changes are proposed to the existing terms and conditions of the service which is in line with many other local authorities. No changes are proposed to the way in which the collection service operates.
43. This report outlines the transition plan to move from the current model to a permit-based, single payment date model, this will be supported by a detailed communications plan to support the move. Whilst additional funding will be required to implement this approach, the change will be cost neutral from 2025/26 onwards, as this is a discretionary paid for service, with all costs covered by the annual permit charge.

Background Papers

None.