

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Date - 13 December 2018

Report to Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee

Reason for report

The Committee has requested information on:-

The Communications Plan for the Council's chargeable garden waste service and changes to the recycling service.

Officer Response

Introduction

At its meeting on 19 September 2018, Cabinet agreed significant changes which will impact on the Council's recycling and waste service. As well as changes to the way recycling and general waste materials are collected, the meeting agreed that a chargeable garden waste service would be introduced.

Charges for garden waste collections will come into effect in February 2019 with a new recycling and waste collections system brought in at a later date.

A Communications Plan for these changes was drafted by the Council's Communications Service in conjunction with officers from Recycling and Waste.

This plan has subsequently been considered – and signed-off - by the Recycling and Waste Steering Group which is an officer/member group that meets on a fortnightly basis to consider a range of plans drafted to support implementation of the service changes.

The initial focus of the plan has been to promote awareness of the chargeable garden waste service changes and encourage resident support and engagement.

The Communications Plan is a "living document" which will evolve and develop as the Council moves forward towards implementation of both of these significant projects for its recycling and waste services.

The plan contains some agreed key messages for both elements of the service changes. These messages will be repeated as often as possible in communications to enhance understanding of why decisions have been made and their potential impact on households.

Key messages – chargeable garden waste

Staffordshire County Council – as Waste Disposal Authority – is to phase out paying for recycling credits which means the Borough Council and the seven other county districts will be worse off. This decision will result in a £270,000 funding gap for the Borough Council.

The £36 annual subscription for the garden waste service is equivalent to around 69 pence per week for 12 months.

Chargeable garden waste systems are now operated by more than 60 per cent of waste collection authorities in England.

Residents have a choice over whether they pay for the new chargeable service. If they don't they could:-

- (i) Compost at home – this is a great alternative that is low cost and also good for the environment.
- (ii) Dispose of garden waste at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre at Leycett.
- (iii) Use their residual waste bin for small amounts of garden waste.

Key messages – changes to recycling and waste services

The Council needs to have a consistent approach to describing the changes which are to be introduced.

A decision is still to be made on whether the Council will collect paper separately or paper and card. Once this decision is made this will form part of any key messages to increase awareness and understanding amongst our households.

For the time being, the key messages we can use are:-

- Recycling materials will be collected fortnightly.
- On the weeks when we don't collect recycling materials, residents will put their wheelie bin containing their normal household waste out for collection.
- Food waste will still be collected every week.

When discussions first began on changing the service, a public consultation exercise was organised. Around 1,300 people took part in the consultation and many voiced their dissatisfaction with the current service. The Council listened to what residents had to say and as a result brought forward proposals for change.

Among the findings from the survey was the fact that almost six out of 10 people were dissatisfied with the service.

Promoting the changes

The Council is using a number of communication channels to promote the chargeable garden waste service. By the end of November around 6,000 households had completed an online form which allows them to express an interest in taking part in the new chargeable service.

In December, the Council began the process of starting to collect payments from households.

Promoting the other recycling and waste service changes will be done at a later date once the Council moves closer to implementing this part of the revised service. All of the work which is currently going on to promote changes is being done within existing budgets.

Work which has gone on to promote the changes and encourage households to complete the “expressions of interest” form and to then subscribe have included:-

The Council’s website – www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

- Garden waste content has been reviewed and revised.
- Use of the revolving banner on the home page to promote key messages, milestones, actions.
- Publication of “Frequently Asked Questions” about the service changes.

Social media

- Regular promotional messages on the Council’s corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- Responding to household enquiries via social media channels and signposting residents to further information on the Council’s website.
- Use social media to promote YouTube information.

Working with the media - press releases

Media releases have been produced on:-

- a) Last free collection of garden waste under way and launch of online expression of interest form.
- b) First 2,000 households express an interest.
- c) Council begins the process of taking subscriptions from households – planned for December.

(As well as being made available to local media channels, these releases are also placed on NewsNBC which is the news section of the Council’s website.)

Several radio interviews have also been organised involving the Cabinet portfolio holder for environment and recycling.

Internal messaging

Team talk – the Council’s internal monthly briefing mechanism for staff – has contained regular updates on the project.

On The Agenda – the Council’s internal monthly briefing mechanism for councillors – has contained regular updates on the project.

Bin tags

These have been used by the recycling and waste service for a number of years and are also utilised by many other councils as a means of communicating directly with households.

Bin tags were put on to bins that were presented by residents for collection during November.

These advised households of the fact that the Council wished to continue offering the service and from 2019 this would be £36 per year. The web address for registering an expression of interest in the service was included on the tag.

There was also a QR code contained which took users to the web page for expressions of interest. The cost for printing the tags was around £4,350.

Christmas information

Each year the Council contacts every household to inform them of the Christmas and New Year collections.

Information this year will be posted out to all households in an envelope clearly marked to show it is from the Council and that it contains important information. Inside will be:-

- A flyer giving information about festive collections.
- A flyer giving information about the chargeable garden waste service.

Videos

Short promotional videos are planned to highlight key messages around the chargeable garden waste service initially and then the wider service changes at a later date.

These will be used on the plasma screens at council buildings such as Castle House. They will also be promoted on YouTube.

Filming has been delayed for a short-time due to sickness absence issues.

Sentinel quarter page adverts

The Council has an agreement in place with the publishers of The Sentinel which involves the payment of an agreed monthly fee for statutory public notices, digital promotions and a number of quarter page adverts each calendar year.

Two of the quarter page adverts will be used to promote the chargeable garden waste service.

Marketing

As mentioned earlier, activities in the Communications Plan which have either taken place or are planned for the coming weeks, can be achieved within existing budgets.

Whilst they have achieved a good degree of success, the Council may also wish to take additional measures which actively market the service to encourage greater take-up levels.

If these are over and above the activities outlined earlier in this report, they are likely to incur costs. At this moment in time there is no specific budget allocated for these activities.

Some of the channels which could be used – and a broad outline of costs - are outlined below.

Digital marketing

Discussions have taken place with a local provider of a new and innovative arm of digital engagement called “Programmatic Marketing.”

This is described as the ability to put marketing material in front of the right people at the right time.

The provider has the ability to show adverts across the web and optimise engagement towards an agreed outcome – in this case it would be sign-ups or payments for the chargeable garden waste service. This is different to other forms of digital engagement which can often measure views or shares rather than agreed outcomes.

The provider would use our data to target people who are homeowners or live within certain postcodes (provided by the Council). They are sent to a specific landing page encouraging them to sign-up. This has the potential to generate a huge response rate as very specific targeting and a direct link to sign up, unlike many traditional awareness only campaigns.

The company would then re-market to the users more likely to sign-up if they haven't already done so. This means, in effect, they are followed around the internet and regularly prompted about signing-up. These prompts are where the definite outcomes are achieved as they are proactive rather than passive digital marketing.

For £10,000, the Council would get a minimum of two million impressions to use over an eight-week campaign period.

The company would also provide a dashboard which illustrates how the campaign is performing on a day-to-day basis so the Council can monitor effectiveness.

Leaflets

Direct contact with households using a leaflet is an option.

Quotes received from local suppliers suggest it would cost around £420 to print off double sided, full colour A5 leaflets.

A Solus distribution – where the leaflet goes out on its own without other material – would cost around £6,200.

This quote is based on initial estimates and is likely to rise once a more detailed price request was submitted. The quote was based using only one level of a mapping software and more detailed work would need to be done to produce a final price showing all rural areas and “difficult to reach” properties.

In addition, staff time would be taken on the design of any promotional leaflet.

Advertising hoardings

Discussions have taken place with one provider and an offer of £800 for one hoarding per month at some more prominent sites has been made. For sites which do not have as much passing traffic or footfall a price has been offered of between £650-700. This would include paste-up costs.

Once again, staff time would have to be added in for design work for the advertisements on the hoardings.

Waste vehicles

Vinyl promotional panels have previously been used on the side of the Council's waste vehicles.

These are fitted to the freighters used for residual household collections rather than the specialised recycling vehicles.

These cost around £400 per vehicle and staff time also has to be factored into changing and replacing these.

Phil Jones
Head of Communications
December 2018