

# West Suffolk Garden Waste Collection Service

## Frequently asked questions

10 February 2016

### 1. What changes are being proposed?

The universal brown bin service is stopping – the last collections of people’s brown bins will take place weeks commencing 21 and 28 March 2016.

We are introducing a new, optional paid-for garden waste collection service which residents can choose to use. The service costs £40 a year from 4 April 2016 – 31 March 2017. It uses the existing brown bin and collection will be on the same day as residents’ current two-weekly collection schedule.

In order to make sure residents don’t miss any collections they should sign up by the 22 March 2016.

### 2. Why is the brown bin scheme changing?

Faced with an additional £500,000 cost for collecting brown bins (a combination of less funding for recycling and higher waste processing costs), both councils had to take a hard decision. We could have put that cost on to every tax payer, or stopped the brown bin service completely, but we felt it was fairer to ask people to pay a small amount each year if they wanted the service. This way, only the people using the service pay for it.

### 3. What are the options and their merits?

The Suffolk Waste Partnership was tasked by the Leaders of Suffolk’s councils to find a way to reduce the £6 million annual cost of the organic waste service, from 2016. A host of options were considered but nearly all would have resulted in costs rising. The only option with the potential to offset rising costs was to introduce a charge for the collection of garden waste. This option will also ensure that garden waste can be disposed of free of charge at all eleven of Suffolk’s Household Waste Recycling Centres including the Mildenhall, Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds sites.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, as well as all the councils in Norfolk already charge for the collection of garden waste so this is not a new idea. In these areas, the cost to the public purse is significantly lower than in those council areas where there is no charge. However, even where a charge exists, services still cost the council money. The charge simply offsets part of these costs.

For further information on the costs and options that were considered see the cabinet report: "The Future of the organic waste service in West Suffolk"

[St Edmundsbury Cabinet 8 September 2015](#)

[Forest Heath Cabinet 15 September 2015](#)

**4. Are the councils no longer committed to recycling?**

West Suffolk has a strong track record on recycling and we will continue to support the waste management hierarchy of reduce, re-use, recycle.

We were early adopters of composting at a time when government funding made it easier to justify and invest in these collection schemes in order to divert the waste from landfill, and to meet council specific recycling targets. Whilst we are keen to maintain our high recycling rates. Reducing, collecting and treating less waste is always the best environmental option.

We will continue to support recycling but we will increase our focus on opportunities to reduce waste. The new service will encourage people to treat their garden waste in a different way through home composting or taking their garden waste to their local Household Waste Recycling Centre to be composted.

**5. Why aren't all councils in Suffolk taking the same approach?**

All councils have been asked to make the decision individually so that the costs of their services and the needs of their residents can be considered at a local level. In Suffolk, residents of Mid-Suffolk and Babergh have always had to pay for their garden waste collections and Waveney will be introducing charges from the end of February. In Norfolk, all councils charge for their garden waste collections with costs ranging from £39.50-£51.60.

**6. Can I put my garden waste in my black bin?**

Putting garden material into your black bin is the most expensive option for disposal. It is also the worst solution for the environment.

West Suffolk currently recycles over 50% of its waste so we know that local residents are very good at recycling and composting. We are therefore asking residents to consider other options such as home composting rather than placing garden waste in their black bin. In April, residents will be able to purchase low cost home composting equipment from our scheme. You can find out more here: <http://www.suffolk.getcomposting.com>

All of [Suffolk's recycling centres](#), including Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Mildenhall, will accept garden waste without charge.

**7. Don't we have targets to recycle organic waste?**

Historically, council targets and funding incentives were introduced by Government to stimulate recycling improvements and divert biodegradable waste from landfill. This created a positive boost to recycling, particularly in West Suffolk where our kerbside collection recycling rate is in excess of 50%.

West Suffolk met these targets and since then the Government has moved away from allocating targets to individual councils.

There continues to be an EU target for Member States to achieve 50% recycling of household waste by 2020, although this is a national target rather than an individual council target.

**8. What would happen if we don't make the change?**

Charging is the only option that allows a service to be provided, without impacting on other important council services.

**9. Won't this just impact those who can't afford to pay for a brown bin?**

The charge for this optional service has been set to allow as many people as possible to use it. The charge of £40 per year equates to £1.54 per collection.

We are encouraging neighbours to share bins if they want to continue the service, but don't want to pay for a full subscription every year.

There are other options for dealing with garden waste, such as home composting or taking material to the HWRC that are low cost or free to use.

**10. I already pay my council tax, so why do I need to pay more?**

Due to the changes in local government funding and increasing costs we can no longer continue to provide the current brown bin service. We are asking people to pay a small amount each year if they want a garden waste collection service. This way, only people using the service pay for it.

**11. Won't this decision just increase fly tipping?**

The vast majority of residents in West Suffolk are law-abiding, appreciate living in a clean environment and deal with their waste responsibly. Experience from other authorities who have introduced charges for their garden waste collections shows that fly tipping has not been an issue.

Anyone caught fly-tipping will be prosecuted which can result in unlimited fines and even a prison sentence.

**12. Doesn't the council make money from the recycling and composting of my household waste?**

Collecting, transporting and processing waste is a very expensive service. Our contractors have to provide infrastructure, expensive machinery and staff. They make a charge for every tonne of waste we deliver to help cover these costs. Once they have treated the material on their site, a process which takes around six weeks, they can sell the compost.

**13. Will I get a refund on my council tax if I choose not to pay for the brown bin?**

No. The councils balance their budgets against the needs and priorities of residents and the costs of providing services.

**14. Why is there no charge for the blue or black bins?**

Councils are required to collect household waste. We are unable to directly charge for these services and the cost is covered through the council tax.

Councils are able to charge for the collection of garden waste in the same way charge for bulky waste collections and this is why it can be offered as an optional service.

**15. Is the cost likely to increase in the future?**

Any decision on the charge would be made after fully reviewing how this new service is running.

**16. What if I don't put my bin out for every collection or it is not full – do I still have to pay the same amount?**

Yes.

The charge is based on an annual arrangement to collect your bin every two weeks. The administration of the service has been designed to be as simple and cost effective. If your bin is not full or if you miss a collection, you will not receive any discount or refund.

**17. Will there be a change to current arrangements such as the collection day or the time of collection?**

No changes to collection days are currently planned, but it is highly likely that the time your bin is collected will change, so please make sure it is out for collection by 6.30am.

**18. Will my waste continue to be composted or will it be sent to the energy from waste facility?**

Any garden waste collected in the brown bin will continue to be composted through our contractor.

**19. What can I do with my food waste?**

Food waste can no longer be put in the garden waste collection, due to legislation about how this waste must be treated.

Lots of hints and tips to help residents reduce their food waste are available from the [www.lovefoodhatewaste.com](http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com) website.

Food waste can be home composted and subsidised rates for composting equipment will be offered in April. Other offers are [already available](#).

**20. How will you know who has paid and who has not – won't those who haven't paid just continue to put their bin out for collection?**

Our vehicles are equipped with in-cab technology which identifies all properties with a subscription so our crews know which bins to collect.

Residents are required to make sure their bin is clearly numbered so crews can identify their bin.

**21. How do I stop other people using my bin?**

Please keep your bin on your own property and return it as soon as you can after it has been emptied. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the household to manage their household rubbish bins.

**22. Will you start charging me automatically?**

No. Only residents who sign up to the service will be charged. In order to sign up to the service please visit our website [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/gardenwaste](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/gardenwaste) or call 01638 719119 or 01284 776119.

**23. Will I be able to put extra waste beside my black bin or have a larger black bin?**

No. Larger rubbish bins will not be available for garden waste and any waste put out beside or on top of your rubbish bin will not be collected. Rubbish bin lids must also be closed.

**24. Can I pay someone to take my garden waste away, such as a local handyman?**

Yes, although it is likely that this will be more expensive than the kerbside collection service offered. Residents must ensure that anyone removing waste from their property is a registered waste carrier and receive documentation to show where the waste has been disposed of.

Householders are liable if the waste they have given to another person or business is subsequently flytipped and the householder has not made sufficient checks about the person taking the waste.