

Briefing Note – Council Meeting

27 September 2023

In February 2023, Council agreed the budget strategy savings which included £100k savings from the charging for replacement bins. This had previously been taken to Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee and Corporate Services PAC in January and to the Executive in early February.

In April 2023, charges for replacement refuse and recycling bins were introduced in line with our Mid Kent Partners. In the previous 4 years, the Council spent £1.1 million on replacement containers. The proposed charges were intended to decrease the demand for unnecessary replacement bins and reduce the cost to the Council.

The policy was reviewed quarterly to determine its impact, both positive and negative and at each stage, improvements were considered to ensure the policy was clearly communicated. This included an update to all Councillors and improving the information on the website. After 24 weeks of operation, the policy had reduced the number of replacement bin requests by 40%. However, 9% of requests resulted in a complaint. Two complaints were taken to the Ombudsman, however they declined to investigate on both occasions. Over 1,100 replacement bins have been purchased since April and 60 bins replaced by the contractor at their cost.

The main concern identified was that most bins break at the point of emptying, however not due to the fault of the collector or the resident. It was not possible to review the vehicle CCTV for every broken or missing bin, so this was carried out where other evidence or resident statement suggested it would be useful.

The policy has therefore been amended to consider the feedback and all bins that are no longer serviceable i.e. cannot be emptied by the vehicle, will be replaced for free. In most cases these will have structural damage to the body or front lip. Lost or stolen bins will remain the responsibility of the resident or landlord and residents are encouraged to number or name their bins and ensure they are returned to their property as soon as possible after collection. This is in line with the Council's existing policy for new builds or new occupiers which requires new bins to be purchased if there are none at the property.

To continue to minimise the unnecessary replacement of bins, such as for superficial damage or dirt, only bins which cannot be emptied and are reported by the collection crew will be replaced free of charge. This will usually be due to damage to the front lifting lip of the bin or to the wheels. Missing lids will not be replaced free of charge as they do not affect their use and are usually the result of the bin being overloaded and the lid not being closed when emptied. Lids are not essential to the storage and operation of the bin, as refuse should be bagged, and recycling is collected in open boxes from some properties in the borough without issue. Unfortunately, replacement lids cannot be provided as there are over 9 different makes of bin in circulation, so maintaining stocks would be impractical.

The revised policy went live from Monday 25 September, the website has been updated and the online forms are being adapted. The policy will be reviewed at the end of Quarter 3 to identify any impacts and review the budget position.