Chargeable Bulky Waste – Income and Impact Considerations

It has been proposed to move the current free bulky waste collection service to a chargeable footing. The exact mechanics of this are still to be confirmed. It is however estimated that this service change could result in significant benefits for the authority, generating revenue and reducing service and waste disposal costs.

Accurately anticipating and modelling the impact of waste service changes is extremely challenging. This paper aims to explore in greater detail the potential impact of the shift to a chargeable bulky waste service on demand and resident behaviour. It draws on current available information from London Boroughs as well as information from other metropolitan areas within the UK that have introduced charging for their bulky waste collection service. These experiences will help in the detailed planning for this service change and bring greater confidence to decision makers.

Hackney: Current State of Play

At present, Hackney offers all households across the borough up to four collections of five items annually. The service is currently free of charge to all households with around 24,000 collections being made annually.

In addition to this service the Council works in partnership with QSA Homestore, a furniture reuse charity, which provides collections of reusable furniture for resale to people on low incomes. This service is free of charge to households in the borough. The intention is to retain this service in its current guise.

Impact on service demand and income

Assessing service demand is key to accurately calculating projected revenue. The available information clearly indicates that when the service moves from a free of charge to a chargeable footing the level of demand decreases.

Oldham Council in greater Manchester moved from a free of charge to a chargeable service in April 2013. Costs were set at £15 for the collection of 3 items and £7.50 for each additional item. Prior to this service change around 25,000 collections were made annually. The authority represents a good case study for comparison due to the similar number of annual collections and the cost of the service being in line with that currently proposed.

In February 2014 the Oldham Council compiled a review of the impact of the service change 10 months post implementation.

Table 1 below shows the impact on the number of requests per month following the service change compared to the previous year. The mean average reduction in the number of requests was 76%, a reduction of 14,417 collections.

Table 1. Oldham Council bulky waste collection request comparison 2012/13 – 2013/14

	2012/13	2013/14	Reduction
April	1,815	617	-67%
May	2,112	404	-80%
June	1,795	443	-75%
July	2,071	431	-80%
August	2,118	404	-81%
September	1,846	428	-77%
October	2,065	371	-79%
November	1,968	424	-78%
December	1,306	347	-73%
January	1,617	427	-73%

This reduction in service was also observed by Calderdale Council, Halifax, West Yorkshire. The authority introduced a chargeable bulky waste service from 2006 to 2008. Table 2 below shows the impact this had on number of requests for the service. In 2005/6 following the introduction of charging requests fell by 76%, a reduction of 14,376 collections.

Table 2: Calderdale Council bulky waste collections 2004/05 – 2011/12

Year	Number of Collections
2004/05	18,708
2005/06	4,330
2006/07	5,454
2010/11	22,657
2011/12	24,308

Further evidence of the impact on demand of introducing a chargeable service is being sought from London Boroughs. The information currently available does however suggest that the drop of in service demand is significant and sustained.

It can be assumed that within Hackney factors such as distances to adjoining borough HWRCs operated via North London Waste Authority and comparatively low levels of car ownership may necessitate use of the service. Drop off may be less than the percentages recorded within these example authorities. In addition the number of households eligible for continued free collections due to receipt of benefits would be larger within Hackney. Further information on the use of the service by this demographic would be needed, however, uptake recorded by Oldham Council of residents in their 'protected characteristic groups' entitled to free collections was low.

From available information it is reasonable to base revenue projections from the introduction of a chargeable service within a 25 – 35% of current service demand. At

the time of compiling this paper it has not been possible to obtain actual revenue figures from authorities.

What happens to the waste?

A key concern for authorities when moving to a chargeable bulky waste service is what will happen to waste that would have been collected through the service when demand reduces. The fear is that this will lead to an increase in the number of flytipping incidents by those unwilling to pay for a collection, negatively impacting local environmental quality and increasing investigation and clearance costs.

Hackney has experience of removing services that provided free, and largely unmonitored, service for the disposal of residual and bulky waste. The community skip service was withdrawn in 2013. A schedule of monitoring former sites was put in place to monitor the on street impact of this. Known flytipping hotspots were also monitored to determine if an increase in the frequency of flytipping occurred. To date, negative impacts of this service change have been minimal with no meaningful increase in flytipping that can be directly attributed to the removal of the service.

The available data for authorities that have moved to a chargeable service suggest that concerns around increased flytipping are largely unfounded. Oldham Council saw an average increase of 46 flytips per month in the 10 months following introduction of charging compared to the previous year. In the same period there was a decrease in demand of around 1,500 collections per month.

Tonnage information was obtained from a number of local authorities that had in recent years moved from a free to a chargeable bulky waste service. These included the London Boroughs of Enfield, Barking and Dagenham and Tower Hamlets.

Waste tonnages attributable to the bulky waste, flytip and street cleansing waste streams were outlined covering pre and post introduction of charging. An initial review of these indicates that while waste within the bulky category reduces post introduction of charging, in line with reduced demand, there is no strong consistent pattern to suggest that this shifts to either the flytipping or street cleansing waste streams.

It can be assumed that alternative routes for waste that would have potentially been collected through the service are utilised such as furniture reuse, charity and HWRCs. These typically result in the waste being elevated up the waste hierarchy to reuse and recycling end uses. The signposting of these routes through high quality communications undoubtedly plays a key role in ensuring this.

Flytipping information in this area must be viewed with caution. This relates to the definition of what constitutes a flytip and the reporting and recording of these. Within the available information there is no practical way of distinguishing the number of flytips by scale. It is flytips that consist of a car boot load of waste and above which would be the key category one would anticipate would spike following the introduction of charging.

Solely in terms of increase in number of incidents the experience of the service change in Oldham can be considered minimal. An examination of available tonnage information from other authorities suggests similar.