

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Garden Waste Subscription Service

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### Why is the Council introducing a garden waste subscription service?

#### 1. Why is the council introducing a garden waste subscription service?

Like many councils across the country, we are facing financial challenges. Over the next four years we need to find ways to save money or generate income as rising costs and inflation, combined with cuts in government grants, mean there is a threat that the council could be in a potential deficit of £9.7m. As a result, we face a balance between maintaining services we are legally required to deliver, so called statutory services, with those that we know are highly valued but do not come with legal duties. We want to protect against service cuts in all areas, but we must make some difficult decisions to ensure our finances are sustainable for future years.

Unlike household waste and recycling, there's no legal requirement to collect garden waste so councils can charge for collections. Rather than remove the service we want to keep the service for those that need and value it.

Around 65% of authorities across England and half of the waste collection authorities in the Eastern Region have already opted to charge for household garden waste.

Not all properties in Huntingdonshire require a garden waste collection service as they do not have a garden. Introducing a subscription means the service will only be paid for by those households that choose to use it. This is similar to bulky waste collections where only households requesting the service have to pay.

#### 2. Is charging for garden waste legal?

Charging for garden waste collection is legal. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, councils can charge for the collection of garden waste.

Unlike household waste and recycling, there's no legal requirement to collect garden waste and councils can charge for collections. The income from charging for garden waste collections would

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make the service self-financing. Well over half of all councils in England charge for this service and have done for many years.

### 3. Why can't the charge be added to Council Tax?

There is no legal requirement to collect garden waste so many local authorities charge for this service in order to continue to be able to offer collections. Councillors agreed that it was important to continue to offer a garden waste collection service for residents who wish to use it rather than stop it so we will act in line with the majority of other councils and introduce a subscription service.

Council tax itself is a mandatory payment which covers a variety of services such as fire, police, adult social care, and children's services including education. You may not use all these services, but you still have to pay council tax. This change brings the garden waste collection in-line with other not legally required, pay for services, such as bulky waste collections, which is a service only paid for by people who use it.

We collect council tax on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, The Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Cambridgeshire Fire Authority, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as well as Town and Parish councils across the district.

We keep just 7p of every £1 of council tax collected as the other elements are determined by the other organisations. The council tax we retain is significantly lower than our neighbours, and the national average for Shire Districts.

Regarding the potential increase in council tax to cover the cost of garden waste, it is important to acknowledge that the decision to implement the service was made in alignment with the current UK legislations and regulations so there is a limit on how much a District Council can increase the Council tax without causing a referendum. Therefore, increasing council tax may not be a feasible option due to the constraints imposed by the legislation and the need to adhere to prescribed limits.

### 4. Were other alternatives considered?

Other options, such as pausing collections in the winter or collecting every three weeks, were considered. However, by introducing a subscription service that is provided all year round, we will be able to protect our frontline services and maintain a balanced budget and set a sustainable Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Currently the cost of garden waste collection is distributed among all taxpayers, through funding diverted from other services, regardless of their usage or benefit. By directly charging for this service, we establish a system where those who actively utilise the service contribute to its funding.

### 5. Has seasonal usage been considered i.e., winter months bins could be largely empty?

This was one of the options that was considered when different ways to fund garden waste collection were looked at. Unfortunately, a pause over the winter months would not cover the financial shortfall needed in HDC as we would still have to keep the same number of staff and vehicles on contract even if the service was not offered over a few months.

### 6. Can the Council share the cost of garden waste over all services?

The district council has its financial strategy over a 5-year period presented to full council on an annual basis. This sets out the costs for our services and the budget papers are published for all residents to access. The budget approval process is at the Feb meeting. [Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 22 February 2023, 7:00 pm - Huntingdonshire.gov.uk](https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/agenda)

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### 7. Why have the public not been consulted on the proposals?

At a Full Council meeting in December 2022, Councillors agreed a set of budget principles. These principles included the need to protect frontline services and those non-statutory services, such as garden waste collections, or those that compete in a commercial environment should not be a burden on taxpayers who cannot take advantage of them.

Councils sometimes have a statutory requirement to consult their residents, and this is especially true for issues such as planning, or redevelopments. Statutory consultations are bound by legal requirements and can have strict rules surrounding how they should be conducted.

Guidance from the Local Government Association also states that there are a number of situations where a consultation would not be required. This includes where a council's room for manoeuvre is limited (for example by statutory or budgetary restrictions) and as a result any consultation would not change the final decision.

Legally, the council is required to set a balanced budget and given some of the financial challenges we are facing, introducing a garden waste subscription service has been identified as one of the ways we can protect our frontline services and protect against service cuts.

### 8. What will be done to support residents in lower income households in the district and/or those on lower Council Tax bands?

Not all households with a garden bin use the service - out of the 83% of properties that can access the service, 30% don't regularly use it.

For households on lower incomes, we will support residents through the Council Tax Support Scheme, that calculates the contribution required based on the benefits they are in receipt of. A review of this scheme in 2023 will ensure the most financial vulnerable residents are offered the greatest level of Council Tax Support award.

Residents in our district who need additional information, advice and guidance can contact the Residents Advice and Information team, who take time to assess the person's personal circumstances and work with them to suggest suitable and sustainable changes and routes to small funding pots that can help to achieve their goals. We will continue to encourage residents on lower incomes to contact the Residents Advice and Information team to explore the ways they may be able to reduce their household expenditure and/or apply for funding if the retention of a garden waste collection service is important in their household to maintain positive physical and mental health.

In addition, households on lower incomes will be welcome to share bins under their own informal arrangements but only one household will be responsible for the subscription and adherence to the T&Cs of the scheme.

### 9. What impact will this have on the environment and CO2e reductions?

Not all properties in Huntingdonshire require the service and only those residents who have a need for the service will subscribe. This approach will reduce vehicle movement numbers and positively reduce the CO2 emissions of the waste collection service.

The forecasted CO2e emissions for a chargeable garden waste service in Huntingdonshire is 802.79 tonnes. This is a 369.17 tonne reduction from our current garden waste service. These are based on the Carbon Warm factors calculations from DEFRA.

Garden waste can also be composted or used for mulch - these approaches are much better for the environment than our current collection methods.

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### 10. Will this lead to an increase in fly-tipping?

About 65% of English Waste Collection Authorities have introduced a charge for collecting garden waste and they have not reported an increase in fly-tipping. Officers have been investigating the likelihood of increased fly-tipping based on data from authorities that already charge for garden waste collections. This data shows that the majority have not seen any increase in instances of garden waste fly-tipping, with only a handful reporting a marginal increase in the first year of implementation.

We do have existing effective methods for clearing waste and prosecuting offenders and can issue anyone caught fly tipping with a fixed penalty notice of £400. Serious offences of fly tipping are punishable by an unlimited fine or up to five years in prison.

In addition, we invested in new technology such as improved CCTV cameras as well as supporting national campaigns to tackle fly tipping.

### 11. Will this put pressure on the district's Recycling Centres?

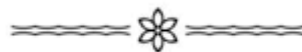
We have a close working relationship with Cambridgeshire County Council and with them will monitor to see if there is any increased pressure on Household Recycling Centres.

### 12. Does the Council make money on processing the green waste it collects from residents?

We want to assure that HDC is a collection authority, and the disposal element sits with Cambridge County Council who process the waste we collect. Therefore, we do not operate the garden waste collection service to generate profit; rather, our focus is on facilitating the proper collection and disposal of green waste material in an efficient and eco-friendly manner.

### 13. What will the Council do with green bins that are returned from households?

The collected bins will be placed back in stock and used when residents need replacements or take out a new subscription. Those bins that are too worn for reuse will be recycled as our old bins currently are.



## What will the new garden waste subscription service include?

### 1. What can I put into my green bin?

If you subscribe to the service, the following garden waste can go in the green bin:

Yes please

- ✓ Weeds
- ✓ Hedge trimmings
- ✓ Small twigs and branches (less than 2.5cm (1") in diameter)
- ✓ Grass cuttings
- ✓ Flowers, plants, and wind fall fruit
- ✓ Leaves
- ✓ Shredded paper
- ✓ Small animal bedding (vegetarian only)

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### No thank you

- ✗ Plastic bags or bin bags
- ✗ Flowerpots and trays
- ✗ Soil
- ✗ Stones or rubble
- ✗ Branches or logs (larger than 2.5cm (1") in diameter)
- ✗ Any other household rubbish
- ✗ Textiles
- ✗ Food waste

### 2. What will happen if residents put garden waste or food waste in the grey bin?

Currently 42% of the waste we collect in the grey bin is organic waste. HDC want to work with our local community to find better ways to reduce, recycle, reuse and collect all waste.

Approximately 70% of the food waste from UK households that enters the residual waste stream is edible. By cutting food waste the average UK household can save £500 each year. Evidence from The Strategic Waste Systems Review 2020 undertaken by Local Partnerships also identified that once a chargeable garden waste service is implemented 31% of garden waste disappears due to behaviour change. A significant increase in this percentage is not expected based on the analysis of other councils that charge for garden waste collections.

We can't legally charge for food waste collections but if environmentally, financially or otherwise we are better off with food waste continuing to go into green bins then we need to find a way to communicate this.

### 3. Can I share a bin with my neighbour? If so, how will this be managed?

People will be able to make a personal arrangement with a neighbour to share the cost of the additional garden bin service. We would allocate the bin to the property that pays for it and will withdraw it if payment is not received.

If people share their garden waste bin with a neighbour, the householder which pays the annual charge will have overall responsibility for the bin as a bin can only be allocated to one address. It would be the responsibility of the named householder if the bin is contaminated, misused, or needs replacing.

### 4. If a resident moves into the district, will they be charged for a full year, regardless of when the annual subscription starts?

Yes, this is the current service offering as the upfront cost is required for the administration overhead, scheduling and fulfilment of the service ie: number of staff and vehicles needed to cover all the collections. We would not be able to operate a rolling on/off subscription scheme from the date a resident paid an annual fee for the reason stated before; planning for crews, vehicles, routes.

### 5. If a resident moves out of the district, will they be offered a refund on any unused period of the collection/disposal service?

No, there would be no refund as the annual charge ensures we can plan the right number of staff and vehicles to provide the service across the district for the year. This is the same as our current scheme for subscribing for an additional bin.

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### 6. Can an annual subscription be transferable from a previous resident to new one when a property changes hands?

The current service offering is that if the subscription is already paid for, the household would not be contacted for an additional payment from HDC until the next renewal period, when they would be asked for the next annual payment ie: if there is a paid for bin at the property when you move in it will be collected. There is no way of knowing if the homeowner has changed.

### 7. If a collection is missed, will a refund be offered?

There are multiple reasons why a collection may not take place, however, in short, our standard collection policy will still apply and there would be no refund. If HDC was in error then the missed collection would be rectified, however, if conditions beyond our control (adverse weather, roads closed etc), the resident did not present the bin for collection or the bin was contaminated then the bin would only be collected on the next scheduled collection, as long as any contamination is removed from the bin.

### 8. How will the collection crews know I have paid for a collection each year?

When we receive your payment, we will send you a unique addressed sticker to put on the rear of your green bin. A new sticker will be issued each year upon payment of the subscription. If you subscribe to more than one bin, you will receive a sticker for each bin.

On collection day you will need to place the bin out for collection before 6:30am. Please make sure the handle faces the road and the subscription sticker is clearly visible. The collection vehicles also have 'in-cab' technology to see which households have subscribed to the service.

### 9. As the bins belong to HDC what measures will be in place to stop neighbours putting garden waste in someone else's bin.

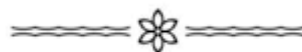
Residents can share bins as a way to reduce costs. As with the current system there is no 'policing' of who puts waste in which bins and HDC do not have the resource to do this.

### 10. Can I buy my own green bin instead of the Huntingdonshire District Council ones?

No, we will not empty green bins that do not meet our specification (including make, model and logos), so cannot offer the service using other bins.

### 11. Why is the cost of the second bin lower in comparison to the first?

The cost of the service covers the staff, vehicles, and fuel to cover the district, therefore there is a much-reduced cost for additional bins as the staff and vehicles will already be providing a collection for the first bin. The charging for a second (and subsequent) bins is being considered as a way to potentially offer subsidised bins to those in greatest need.



## What do I need to do when the change comes into effect?

### 1. I don't currently have a bin. Can I still sign up for the service?

Yes, you can sign up and pay for the service at any time. Once you have paid for the

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service, the council will arrange for the delivery of a green bin. You will also receive a subscription sticker in the post.

### 2. Can I have more than one green bin?

Yes, you can have up to a max of 4 garden bins per property. However, please be aware that you will need to pay an annual subscription for each bin to be collected.

### 3. How often will my green bin be emptied?

Your garden waste will be collected once every two weeks throughout the year.

### 4. What should I do if my garden waste collection is missed?

We will only return for missed collections in the following circumstances.

- The bin was placed out before 6.30am on the day of collection.
- The right collection point was used.
- In the case of assisted collections there was access to get the bin e.g. gate unlocked
- The sticker indicating the bin has been paid for is clearly displayed on the rear of the bin, under the handle.
- A rejected hanger has not been put on the bin.
- A crew report has not been received regarding the bin e.g. heavy, excessive waste
- The missed bin has been reported within 3 days of your normal day of collection.
- Refunds will not be given for missed collections, they should be reported to the Council and we will arrange recollection if the circumstances above have been complied with.
- To report the missed collection, go to [www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/missedbin](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/missedbin) .

### 5. What do I do if I don't want to subscribe to the garden waste service?

Anyone with a current garden bin that doesn't want to subscribe to the service will retain their bin for 2-3 months as we want to minimise the impact on resident and the environment of collecting in unwanted bins and then re-issuing if people change their minds. We will include this in our messages when we are ready to launch the scheme.

We will make arrangements to remove green bins from those who no longer want them once the new service has been introduced in April 2024. Please note that only empty green bins will be collected and removed so do not fill them. Check back in early 2024 for further details of how to request a green bin removal. Please also be aware that should you decide to join garden waste scheme after your bin is removed you will need to pay the subscription price to have another delivered to you.

### 6. What can I do with my garden waste if I don't join the scheme or if I have excess?

We can only collect garden waste contained loose within a paid for green bin.

Home composting is the most environmentally friendly way of dealing with garden waste. To purchase a subsidised compost bin, visit [www.getcomposting.com](http://www.getcomposting.com) or call 0800 316 4454. Cambridgeshire County Council Household Recycling Centres in Bluntisham, Alconbury and St Neots take household garden waste materials. See their website for details and opening times. [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/waste-and-recycling/household-recycling-centres](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/waste-and-recycling/household-recycling-centres)

### 7. Will I get a refund if I decide not to use the service for a period of time or want to stop part way through the year?

No, we are unable to refund any payments for this service.



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### 8. Will the council replace lost or stolen green garden bins?

You are responsible for the security of the wheeled bin. If your bin is lost, stolen, or damaged you can request a replacement however a delivery fee will apply.

If the collection crew are responsible for damaging a bin or if it falls into the rear of the collection vehicle, we will replace it free of charge.

### 9. What happens if my green garden bin is damaged?

If our collection crew record that they have been responsible for damaging your bin or it falls into the rear of the vehicle, we will replace it free of charge; otherwise, the usual delivery charge will apply.

### 10. Are all properties suitable for this service?

No, we will do our best to help customers access the service. However, some properties may not be suitable for this service due to lack of space to store the bin, or to put it out for collection.

We reserve the right to decide whether or not we can provide the garden waste collection service via the green bin.

### 11. How quickly after I pay can I expect the service to start?

Once payment has been received the council will arrange for a letter of confirmation and subscription sticker to the relevant property. All subscriptions purchased in advance will be posted in bulk during early March each year.

### 12. How will your collection crews know I have paid for a collection each year?

When we receive your payment, we will send you a unique addressed sticker to put on the rear of your green bin. A new sticker will be issued each year upon payment of the subscription. If you subscribe to more than one bin, you will receive a sticker for each bin.

### 13. Can I pay by direct debit?

Yes, there will be the option for an annual DD to be set up.

### 14. Can I pay by instalments?

No, there is not an option to pay by instalments.

### 15. Will I still pay the full subscription if I sign up part way through the year?

Yes, you can sign up to receive the service at any point during the year. The annual subscription runs from 1 April until 31 March each year. If you sign up part way through the year you will be charged for the full year. The subscription will need renewing before the next April for the service to continue. Subscribe online at [www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/gardenwaste](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/gardenwaste)

### 16. Will my Christmas trees be collected?

The current service offering is that Christmas trees are collected from those with a garden waste bin ie: 80k households. From the 1st of April it is expected that collections will be made in the same way ie: for those with a garden waste bin as the schedule, crews and vehicles to scale from subscriptions to all households for a period of time just after Christmas would be administratively prohibitive. A community collection point as suggested is something we would want to investigate for residents who do not subscribe.