

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR
TO THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12TH FEBRUARY 2009

Review of the Brown Bins Scheme administrative arrangements

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 The Council introduced a garden waste collection ('Brown Bins') scheme four years ago. It is an 'opt-in' subscription scheme, open to all residents. For an annual subscription of £33 (2008/09) the Council provides a brown wheelie bin which is emptied by the Council's waste collection contractor on a fortnightly basis throughout the year. The scheme has been an operational success, steadily growing as more residents join, and currently contributes 3,850 tonnes in recyclable/compostable material, diverting it from landfill.
- 1.2 The administrative arrangements for maintaining customer records and processing subscription income have been problematic. The action plan attached to this report sets out the main problems and the actions required to address them. The Committee is invited to query any aspect and assess whether the actions proposed to rectify the problems are adequate.
- 1.3 The contact officer for this report is Steve Bishop, Strategic Director , telephone (01235 540332). **Email address steve.bishop@whitehorsedc.gov.uk**.

2.0 Recommendation

That the Committee reviews the action plan for rectifying the problems in the Brown Bins administrative arrangements.

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

This report relates to the Council's Vision in that it supports the objective for providing and supporting high quality public services which are effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of people in the Vale. The Brown Bins scheme also promotes higher recycling and composting levels which is a key aspect of the Oxfordshire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.

4.0 Need for an Action Plan

- 4.1 The accompanying action plan sets out the problems and remedial actions which have been identified by officers.
- 4.2 There are financial and budget implications. Some of the problems affect the accuracy of customer records which are used to generate invoices and direct debit instructions to customers. Errors and ambiguities in the customer records have led to delays in recovering debts due to the Council. An estimate of any potential under-recovered income was being calculated at the time of writing this report and this will be provided at the Committee meeting. The inaccuracies in customer records also impact the inventory

of brown bin assets. There is a risk that some brown bins could be misappropriated without the Council being able to trace them or recover them.

- 4.2 In addition to the financial risks there are reputational risks. Errors in the customer records have led to some customers not being invoiced, whilst others have been invoiced incorrectly. These errors have dented some residents' confidence in the scheme and in the Council, which has also resulted in an increase in the level of complaints.
- 4.3 Officers at the Council are working with colleagues at South Oxfordshire District Council and Capita to achieve the action plan, which will rectify the problems and manage the risks.

STEVE BISHOP
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

ACTION PLAN – to rectify problems with the administrative arrangements of the Brown Bins Scheme

Controller: Steve Bishop

Plan last updated: 4/2/09

No	Problem	Remedial action	Task owner	Deadline	Achieved/comment
1.	The customer records database (CRM) and financial management system (Agresso) are not synchronised, preventing adequate reconciliation. Consequential risk of inconsistencies, errors and under-recovery of income.	<p>Establish a common identifier field - by inserting the Agresso CustID reference into CRM.</p> <p>1a assess whether this can be done automatically for the 13,170 records which have been manually matched.</p> <p>1b Provide estimate of time needed to synchronise the systems & complete the reconciliation to SB</p> <p>1c 'Freeze' updates to systems during which record matching is completed and adjustments are made to synchronise the systems.</p> <p>1d Perform full reconciliation to demonstrate to SB that the two systems are perfectly synchronised.</p>	<p>Jeremy Beach (JB)</p> <p>JB & Grant Bennett (GB)</p> <p>JB</p> <p>JB</p> <p>JB</p>	<p>6/2/09</p> <p>6/2/09</p> <p>To be determined – see 1b</p> <p>To be determined – see 1b</p>	
2.	Need to quantify any under-recovered income.	<p>2a Estimate the number of payments received (£000s income/annual subscription) and compare to numbers of brown bins issued for each year since scheme introduced.</p> <p>2b Assess the magnitude of any unidentified receipts in the suspense accounts.</p>	<p>Dave Wilson (DW) and accountant</p> <p>Dave Wilson (DW) and accountant</p>	<p>11/2/09</p> <p>11/2/09</p>	
3.	Customers in arrears	3a Liaise with Clare Kingston (SODC) to agree a	DW	6/2/09	

No	Problem	Remedial action	Task owner	Deadline	Achieved/comment
	have not been chased for payment.	<p>common 'stage 2' recovery letter, informing resident of arrears and threatening to remove brown bin unless arrears are paid.</p> <p>3b Agree removal procedure with waste contractor.</p> <p>3c Liaise with Local Services Point to send out all outstanding 'stage 2' letters (LSP to handle resulting customer contacts.)</p>	<p>DW</p> <p>DW</p>	<p>28/2/09</p> <p>16/2/09</p>	
4.	The procedures are not adequately documented, which could lead to further misunderstandings and errors after the two databases are brought into sync.	<p>4a Fully document the new 'steadystate' procedures needed to maintain the accuracy & completeness of customer records, keep the two databases in sync and provide monthly reconciliations to SB.</p> <p>4b Each officer to sign off the procedure as being accurate and will be fully complied with. (NB For Capita this will be incorporated into the contract Service Level Agreement)</p>	<p>JB, DW & James Rainsborough (JB - Capita)</p> <p>SB, DW, JB & Craig Richmond (CR – Capita)</p>	<p>28/2/09</p> <p>7/3/09</p>	