

Garden waste communications plan

INTRODUCTION

In January 2017 Lancaster City Council will bring in a new charge for the collection of garden waste.

The charge is being introduced in the context of needing to make savings following Government cuts to the council's budget.

Due to the time of year that the charge is being introduced (e.g. at the end of the typical gardening 'season' and just after Christmas) it is very likely that initial take-up will be low.

The initial subscription is for a 15 month period from 01 January 2017 to 31 March 2018 and costs £37.50.

As an incentive, anyone subscribing to the new service before 01 April 2017 will receive it until 31 March 2018 at the rate of £30. Anyone subscribing after 01 April 2017 will pay the full rate of £37.50.

This incentive has been designed to encourage customers to subscribe early and deliver some of the income that has been budgeted for 2016/17.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the communications plan will be twofold:

- Advertise the new collection service and encourage take-up by as many residents with gardens as possible.
- Manage the community's expectations in relation to the collection of garden waste and explain the reasons for the changes.

KEY MESSAGES

- Unless customers opt in to the new service and pay the appropriate charge they will have to make their own arrangements for the disposal of garden waste.
- The collection of garden waste is a discretionary service.
- The charge is being brought in due to reductions in funding from the Government.
- Residents don't have to pay – this is an 'opt in' service.
- If residents don't wish to use the service they can compost their waste at home or take it to the HWRC.
- If the council doesn't bring in the charge then it would have to look elsewhere to make savings – and these would likely effect a wider section of the community.

- Money raised from council tax does not pay for all the services the council provides. Government grants have always made up a large part of the budget and these are being cut.

AUDIENCES

- Residents
- Media
- Councillors

CAMPAIGN TOOLS

Internal (including councillors)

- In-House News

The council's intranet (In-House News) will be used to post details of the new service and alert staff to the reasons behind its introduction. This is to provide staff, who may be questioned by friends/family, with the knowledge they need to answer questions. Links will be posted to FAQs and media statements.

- Customer services

Customer services staff will receive the bulk of the calls relating to the introduction of the service. FAQs will be provided for staff to answer questions, and information will be shared on where this can be located on the council's website.

- Councillors

Briefing notes will be provided to councillors to explain the new charge will be implemented and how their constituents can sign up for the new service.

External

- Website

Provision of information on the website will be key to the success of the plan, particularly ensuring that the payment options are fully integrated.

Details outlining how the service will work, along with FAQs, will be posted to provide customers with all the information they require and reduce the number of calls to Customer Services.

- Media

A holding statement will be required (to be released if asked and to answer questions on social media/received by customer services) in case of enquiries relating to the Cabinet report on the increased charge.

Following the Cabinet decision a press release will be released to introduce the new service and interviews arranged with the responsible Cabinet member to 'sell' the service. A series of FAQs will be provided to the media to answer questions they may have on the issue.

Comments left on media websites and social media channels will be monitored for common questions that may not have been anticipated and also to gauge public reaction to the service.

- Social media

Social media will be key in the introduction of the service, especially in relation to answering comments from the public. Experience from other councils shows that people will take to social media to discuss the new service and ask questions.

The council's Facebook and Twitter accounts will be used to both promote the service proactively, while reactively responding to questions from the public. Links will be posted to the FAQs and news items to ensure consistency of message.

Community Facebook sites will also be actively monitored to gauge public reaction and also any common questions/comments which may require additional FAQs or statements.

- Marketing collateral

Leaflets will be delivered to every household currently receiving garden waste collections to explain the new service and how they can take advantage. Leaflets will include links to the website, FAQs and promote the 'discount'.

Posters, reflecting the branding used on the leaflets, will also be produced for use in public buildings (Customer Service Centres, libraries, community venues etc).

- Your District Council Matters

The next edition of YDCM is due for delivery in the spring of 2017 with the annual council tax bills. While this is too late for the initial launch of the service, it will be ideal to act as a reminder at a time when the volume of garden waste is likely to increase and before the discount period ends.

EVALUATION

- The primary measure will be the number of residents signing up to the scheme. Part of the booking process could include a 'how did you hear about us' section, to identify which communication method has been most successful. Google Analytics can also be used to track the customer journey from website/social media through to the booking form. Call volumes in customer services will also be monitored to determine any likely trends.

CAMPAIGN ACTION PLAN

Summary of activities and timescales

| Audience | Communication method | Timescale | Cost |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|------|
| Councillors | Briefing on proposals for service/charge. | September 2016 | 0 |
| Staff | In-House News. | September 2016 (pre Cabinet decision) and October (following the Cabinet decision) | 0 |
| Media/social media/customer services | Statement re Cabinet report. Produced in event of enquiries in relation to Cabinet report. To be release reactively. | October 2016. | 0 |
| General public | Social media. | Monitored pre Cabinet decision and holding statement used if any questions raised. | 0 |
| General public/media | Issued post expiry of call-in period explaining details of the scheme, links to website for more information and FAQs | October 2016 - following expiry of call-in period of Cabinet decision. | |
| General public/customer services | Website - information on how the scheme will work, FAQs, link to payment system. | October 2016 - Following the decision by Cabinet and call-in period. Payment system will not go live until November 1, so page to first include basic information. Customer services advised to refer general public to webpage for information, to ensure consistency of message. | 0 |
| General public | Information leaflet delivered to every household. Explore potential for leaflets to be included in information sent to new householders (via Revenues). | Leaflet to be drafted September, printed in October and for delivered November (dependant on Cabinet decision and subsequent potential call-in) | TBC |

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|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| General public | Posters to promote service in public buildings. | November 2016. | TBC |
| City and Parish Councillors | Information pack containing leaflet, press release and FAQ's to inform them of new service and materials produced in case of queries by residents. | October/November 2016. | TBC |
| General public | Social media - set of posts scheduled to promote subscription service, end of discount period etc at regular intervals. | November 2016 - April 2017. | 0 |
| General public | Agripa panels - advertisements of service on refuse/recycling vehicles. | November 2016. | TBC |
| General public | Your District Council Matters. | March 2017 | £0 – no additional cost as already budgeted for |
| Councillors | Briefing note on latest figures – number of people who signed up before March 31 deadline. | March 2017 | 0 |
| General public | Social media. | Monitored pre Cabinet decision and holding statement used if any questions raised. PR to be posted after Cabinet decision | 0 |
| General public | Press release – information on the number of people who have signed up to the service – reminder that discount period has ended. | April 2017 | 0 |

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| Media | Responses to media enquiries - likely to be generated as the system encounters teething problems (bins not being collected etc) | Ongoing | 0 |
| General public | Social media monitoring – corporate accounts to answer questions and ongoing monitoring of reaction on community sites. | Ongoing | 0 |