

6. RECONSIDERING HARDSHIP ASSISTANCE FOR DOMESTIC KERBSIDE REFUSE DISPOSAL UNDER A WASTER PAYS REGIME

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The purpose of this report is to reconsider, at the Council's request, a previous proposal for hardship assistance under a waster pays regime.

BACKGROUND

The Council, in considering a move to waster pays for domestic kerbside refuse disposal, wanted to ensure assistance was provided to those in need. A report to the Sustainable Utilities and Transport Committee (12 September 2002) proposed a system for providing this assistance through the Mayors Welfare Fund. From that report the following resolutions were passed:

1. *That following confirmation of the Councils decision to move to waster pays for domestic refuse collection, Council support the inclusion of \$40,000 for consideration in the 2003/04 draft Solid Waste Budget, to address cases of hardship related to domestic refuse collection.*
2. *That the Council further investigates the process for hardship assistance.*
3. *That the process to deal with hardship issues to be reviewed after one years operation.*

This report specifically addresses resolution 2.

ISSUES WITH PROVIDING ASSISTANCE

This section discusses some issues related to providing assistance for domestic refuse collection.

- **Inciting negative reactions.** In administering the Mayors Welfare Fund negative reactions have occurred, at times in the past, when people are declined assistance. This is a particular concern, given the nature of the assistance under consideration (ie assistance for domestic refuse disposal to minimise the risk of illegal dumping). Establishing a fund that provides assistance for domestic refuse disposal (regardless of who provides it) creates the expectation that assistance will be granted. Declining assistance, for whatever reason, to an individual can lead to anti-social behaviour (eg illegal dumping) because it may give the individual 'just cause' to do so. This could be minimised by giving individuals support in other areas (eg electricity or telephone) that, in theory, allows them to afford refuse disposal and where negative reactions are internalised (the backlash of not paying a power bill mostly affects the individual, whereas illegal dumping impacts on society) or could be avoided by offering no waster pays assistance scheme at all.
- **Maintain a level playing field.** There are a considerable number of support organisations in Christchurch (eg City Mission, Age Concern, the Salvation Army, the Refuge and Migrant Centre, and Church related networks like the Methodist or Presbyterian support). Most of these organisations would welcome the opportunity to handout 'free' refuse bags to their members or customers. They may also feel disadvantaged if the Council was to provide support to only a few selected organisations. Therefore, the Council must maintain a consistent, even-handed approach when providing assistance to external support agencies and this would include offering bags to each of these organisations. This could be problematic and expensive (eg more bags would be required, distribution and storage of the bags could be complicated – some organisations have limited space, little assurance that assistance was provided to those in most need, and the other organisations may not be able to provide the waste minimisation advice that the Council could offer). Such issues would not be encountered or would be minimised if support were offered through the Mayors Welfare Fund.
- **Overloading support networks.** There is a risk to the supporting organisations that they may be overloaded with requests for refuse bags, which could detract from their core functions (eg the provision of food, shelter, personal support etc). This concern was raised by several of the organisations contacted, which saw it as a Council function to deal with the refuse bags. Using the Mayors Welfare Fund to provide refuse bags would align with this.

- **No refuse bags in rented accommodation.** Most, if not all the individuals that receive help from these support organisations are in rented accommodation. At the moment, in many cases individuals do not have rates funded refuse bags because, for example, they have been acquired by previous tenants or have not been passed on from the landlord. Consequently, many individuals experiencing hardship may already be paying for their domestic refuse disposal. A move to waster pays as experienced elsewhere, does not lead to significant increases in illegal dumping from this sector of the community. Further, many individuals experiencing hardship and supported by these organisations are transient or are of no fixed abode, so may not require ongoing refuse disposal.
- **Need to avoid black markets.** Refuse bags at around \$1.15 per bag and supported by a free bag handout, will be a tradable commodity. Most support organisations try to avoid handing out items that can be on-sold for ulterior motives. They generally either provide the service directly (eg give out prepared food) or make payment directly to the utility (eg to the power or telephone company) to minimise on-selling of the support given. The Mayors Welfare Fund is in a position to offer a range of support to an individual if on-selling was seen as a problem.

THE MAYORS WELFARE FUND

Advantages - Providing hardship support for refuse disposal through the Mayors Welfare Fund can avoid or minimise many difficulties associated with providing assistance to outside organisations. It will not unduly burden support organisations with what is basically a Council function (refuse disposal), it will avoid the need to distribute bags to a wide range of organisations and can minimise perverse reactions (a black market in bags or illegal dumping) by providing assistance tailored to suit the individuals needs. Moreover, it aligns with the other types of support provided by the Mayors Welfare Fund (eg financial support for power, telephone, rates, firewood, furniture and clothing) and will allow the Council to provide information on ways to reduce household waste.

Disadvantages - There are some disadvantages in providing this support through the Mayors Welfare Fund and these are that some sectors of the community may not approach the Fund, for whatever reason (an issue that may only be reduced by supplying bags to all of the support organisations in Christchurch including WINZ), that the support is only offered once (however, this aligns with the hand-up, not hand-out principle) and that the domestic refuse disposal support may overwhelm the other goals of the Fund (providing no assistance at all, like other centres in New Zealand, would avoid this issue).

In conclusion, the Mayors Welfare Fund is a suitable method of delivery, if domestic kerbside refuse disposal support is required. If concerns are raised about the Fund's performance and the level of support required, the process could be reconsidered after one year of operation, as previously agreed in resolution 3 (Sustainable Transport and Utilities Committee, 12 September 2002).

SUMMARY

Hardship assistance for domestic kerbside refuse disposal under a waster pays regime is best provided through the Mayors Welfare Fund. This would align with the other types of support provided by the Fund (eg financial support for power, telephone, rates, firewood, clothing, etc), it avoids complications related to distributing bags to other community support organisations and allows the Council to control the support provided, including giving advice for minimising waste (eg kerbside recycling and composting information). This support model can be reviewed after one year of operation (as stated in resolution 3, 12 September 2002) and the need for additional support can be monitored through the three-monthly meetings that representatives of the Mayors Welfare Fund have with other support organisations.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Mayors Welfare Fund is used to provide hardship support for domestic kerbside refuse disposal under waster pays regime and that this support should include information on ways to reduce household waste.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.