

## 6. 26 RUBBISH BAGS – ONE YEAR ON

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### PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Council on the first year under a 26 rubbish bag regime.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. In April 2004 the number of rate-funded rubbish bags allocated via a coupon system to each fully rateable property was reduced from 52 to 26 bags per year. Encouraging waste minimisation and reducing the annual rates demand were the main drivers for the reduction in rubbish bags.

The impact of this decision over the last 12 months has been:

- (a) The cost of providing 26 rubbish bags per year to each property has come off the rates, meaning that the rates are now 1.2% lower than they would have been with a 52 rubbish bag allocation.
  - (b) A 16% increase in the amount recycled at the kerbside.
  - (c) A 10% reduction in the amount collected in black rubbish bags.
  - (d) A 34% reduction in the number of rubbish bags acquired by residents from the Council (i.e. both purchased and allocated via the coupon system).
  - (e) A 10% increase in the number of households using private waste collection services.
  - (f) No increase in illegal dumping, but the amount of household rubbish collected in roadside litter bins increased by 15% above the long-term average.
  - (g) An average of 1.4% of households were initially using non-Council bags to dispose of their household rubbish. This has now fallen to below 0.3%.
  - (h) Education and enforcement programmes have been commenced to encourage waste minimisation and to reduce the inappropriate disposal of waste.
3. The move to 26 rubbish bags has been an important step towards meeting the Council's waste reduction targets. Initial and short-term problems related to the changes are being managed. However, it is evident from the recent 12% increase in total waste going to landfill that the Council, residents and businesses all need to do more to minimise waste.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council receive this information.

## BACKGROUND ON 26 RUBBISH BAGS – ONE YEAR ON

4. Through its deliberations of the 2003/04 Annual Plan in June 2003, the Council decided to lower the number of rate-funded rubbish bags from 52 to 26 bags per property per year. The Council made this decision after a special consultative process that included two separate letters to all ratepayers (via the quarterly rates demand), a media campaign and wide-ranging public feedback (via telephone surveys and the Annual Plan consultation process). Initially, the proposal was to provide no rate-funded bags, but the Council decided to go halfway and provide 26 bags per property per year.
5. In April 2004 the first allocation of 26 rate-funded bags occurred via a coupon for each fully rateable property. The availability of rubbish bags, for about \$1.00 per bag at supermarkets and Council service centres, for those households that required more bags, remained unchanged with the decision (*note: the price charged for official Council rubbish bags includes the cost of providing, collecting and disposing of the bags*).
6. It would be premature to judge the effectiveness of the 26 rubbish bag decision on the first year of the scheme. The full effect of the bag reduction has yet to occur for the following reasons:
  - People need time to adjust to the new system and to find their own solutions to minimise waste.
  - Many households are still using bags left over from previous allocations.
  - Further improvements are planned for the kerbside recycling services as outlined in the Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan (e.g. increasing the range of materials able to be recycled at the kerbside).
  - An anticipated shift to private waste collection services occurred as a result of the providers carrying out aggressive promotion campaigns and owing to public uncertainty about the changes. National and international experience would suggest that many of these households will revert back to the Council rubbish bag system once things settle down and as the price for these private services increases with the disposal of waste to Kate Valley.
7. Despite these constraints the following observations can be made about the last 12 months (from 1 May 2004 to 30 April 2005):
  - (a) The cost of providing 26 rubbish bags per year to each property has come off the rates, meaning that the rates are now 1.2% lower than they would have been with a 52 rubbish bag allocation.
  - (b) A 16% (3,800 tonne) increase in the total amount collected in green recycling crates (Figure 1 below), with contamination remaining at previous background levels (below 2% by weight).
  - (d) A 10% (3,360 tonne) reduction in the total amount of waste collected in black rubbish bags (Figure 1 below). This waste reduction equates to a saving for the community of nearly \$500,000 (at \$148 per tonne to collect and dispose of the rubbish bags). The weight of individual rubbish bags rose from an average of 4.6 kg to 5.5 kg per bag. Therefore, people are fitting more into each bag, but throwing out less household rubbish overall. It is important to place this achievement in context, because over the last year the total amount of waste landfilled increased by 12%, largely due to the buoyant economy. The amount collected in rubbish bags could have increased accordingly. The fact that it fell, and that kerbside recycling increased, indicates the success of the scheme.
  - (e) A 34% reduction in the number of rubbish bags acquired by residents from the Council compared to the same period in the previous year (i.e. 2,900,000 fewer bags were either purchased or allocated to residents by the coupon system in 2004/05 than in 2003/04) indicating, that people are making do with fewer bags or are using bags left over from previous allocations.

- (f) A 10% increase in the use of private waste collection services, as a result of waste companies undertaking aggressive promotional campaigns and public uncertainty around the decision. Prior to the change Council officers expected an initial 20% shift to private services. Experience elsewhere would suggest that households will revert back to Council services in time.
  - (g) Illegal dumping in the city has remained at background levels (e.g. 12 reported cases via Requests for Service per week including dumping in parks, waterways and other areas), but the amount of household rubbish collected in roadside litter bins has increased 15% above long-term trends (Figure 2 below). A programme to manage this issue was implemented during the year, including placing stickers on the roadside litter bins and ongoing enforcement.
  - (h) An average of 1.4% of households were initially using non-Council bags to dispose of their household rubbish. An initial situation arose where some residents mistakenly purchased and used non-Council rubbish bags. These bags were not collected and marked with rejection stickers, in line with normal practices. Where this mistake was made consistently, notices were placed in letterboxes to inform residents of the correct way to dispose of household refuse and this issue has now returned to background levels (below 0.3% of households). The Council has taken a firm line on the use of non-Council rubbish bags and on average only 13 telephone calls per week asking for the Council to remove non-Council bags have been received. *Note: only official Council bags, those clearly marked with the Council logo, are collected because the bag price includes the cost of collecting and disposing of the rubbish.*
  - (i) Education and enforcement programmes have been commenced to encourage waste minimisation and to reduce the inappropriate disposal of waste (e.g. illegal dumping, use of non-Council rubbish bags and contamination in recycling crates).
8. In spite of an initial reluctance from the public, Council staff have received very few complaints and in some instances letters in support of the decision have been received. Anecdotally, public opinion remains polarised on the issue. Experience from elsewhere indicates that after an initial resistance, people accept direct charging for refuse disposal ("pay as you throw" systems) and see them as a fair way to pay for waste disposal services and to minimise waste.
9. Moving to 26 rubbish bags has been an important step toward meeting the Council's waste reduction targets. The initial and short-term problems related to the changes are being managed. Proposed improvements to the kerbside collection services and increasing waste disposal costs related to Kate Valley, will further encourage waste diversion. However, the recent 12% increase in total waste going to landfill, clearly indicates that the Council, residents and businesses, all need to do more to minimise waste.

