

Slough Borough Council

Report to:	Council
Date:	28 th September 2023
Subject:	Petition for Review and Reversion of the Bi-Weekly Bin Collection Policy in Slough
Chief Officer:	Pat Hayes, Executive Director, Property and Housing
Contact Officer:	Kunwar Khan, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	Nil

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the details of a Petition titled 'Review and Reversion of the Bi-Weekly Bin Collection Policy in Slough,' which has been received under the Council's Petitions Scheme.
- 1.2 The Council is invited to review and agree its future course of action in relation to the petition.

Recommendations:

Following the debate, the Council is asked to resolve what action it wishes to take with regard to the Petition, noting the service officer's recommendation:

The officer recommendation is as follows:

- that fortnightly collections continue as currently scheduled;
- that the council roll out further educational programmes to better inform residents on recycling and general waste;
- that the Executive Director for Property and Housing Council will report to Cabinet on options for residents to improve the recycling rates.
- That the council works with members for reducing food waste and hence reducing disposal costs and that the Lead member for Transport, Housing, The Environment and Environmental Services be briefed and updated on the collection service.

Commissioner Review

Many councils have moved to a fortnightly refuse collection system. It can help improve recycling rates and have beneficial financial consequences. As the report acknowledges, making changes to this type of service usually throws up operational weaknesses that can take some time to resolve. It also requires residents to change their behaviours, which takes time and can be unpopular. The national experience is that most people adapt to the new arrangements though a significant minority will always wish to maintain a full weekly collection regime.

2. Report

- 2.1 This report advises the Council of a Petition – Review and Reversion of the Bi-Weekly Bin Collection Policy in Slough – that has been received under the Council’s Petitions Scheme.
- 2.2 Council’s Petition Scheme, inter alia, states that if a petition has, or acquires 1500 valid signatures the issues will be debated at a Full Council meeting (i.e. a meeting to which all elected Members are invited).
- 2.3 The Petition has surpassed the threshold of triggering a debate at full council and contains more than 2000 signatures at the time of writing this report, all of which were submitted online via the e-petition facility on the Council’s website.
- 2.4 The Petition text reads as follows:

‘We the undersigned petition the council to Reversion of the Bi-Weekly Bin Collection Policy in Slough.

Dear Slough Borough Council and all concerned parties,

We, the undersigned residents of Slough, are reaching out with a serious concern regarding the recent alterations to our local waste management services. The newly implemented policy, which dictates an alternating fortnightly collection schedule for red and black bins, rather than our former weekly collection system, has become a point of significant distress for our community. This change has brought about numerous challenges and raised crucial health and environmental concerns that we believe require your immediate attention.

The new policy inadvertently allows waste to accumulate for twice as long as before, leading to a multitude of issues. Residents are increasingly troubled by the unpleasant odours emanating from the piled-up waste, the heightened potential for vermin infestation, and an unmanageable overflow of waste, especially in larger households. These problems, apart from being mere inconveniences, pose a serious threat to public health, while also disrupting the cleanliness and tranquillity of our community.

Moreover, it is worth noting that this new policy could inadvertently incentivize littering and illegal waste disposal due to the lack of capacity to hold two weeks' worth of waste. This not only tarnishes the aesthetic appeal of our beloved town but also poses an escalating threat to local wildlife and the broader environment.

In our plea for you to reassess this policy change, we would like to draw your attention to the recently published guidance on weekly bin collections by the UK

Government. Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles, in this guidance, debunks several misconceptions that have been used to rationalize the reduction in waste collection services' frequency. He further argues that weekly rubbish collections are among the most tangible services that residents receive in return for their Council Tax and that they rightfully deserve a thorough weekly service.

Mr. Pickles also emphasises that several local authorities, such as Bournemouth Borough Council, Lewes District Council, and Ribble Valley Council, have innovatively maintained weekly collections while also improving their recycling rates. This clearly indicates that it is possible to harmonize effective waste management with eco-conscious practices.

Given this context, we strongly believe that reverting to the weekly bin collection service is not only feasible but also in the best interest of our community. A weekly collection schedule ensures a higher standard of hygiene, aids in maintaining the cleanliness of our streets, provides a more manageable waste disposal system for households, and aligns with the governmental guidance and examples set by other local authorities.

We fully understand the complexities and pressures that the council faces, especially during these challenging times. However, ensuring a clean, safe, and healthy environment is a commitment that must not be compromised. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Slough Borough Council seriously revisit this policy change and consider reinstating the weekly bin collection service.

By signing this e-petition, we collectively lend our voices to this crucial matter. We wholeheartedly thank you for your attention and sincerely look forward to a positive response. Together, let us work towards ensuring a cleaner, healthier, and more environmentally friendly Slough for all residents.'

Supporting Information for debate

- 2.5 The Petition Organiser has been/will be invited to the council meeting to speak on the Petition (up to five minutes) and the Petition will then be discussed by Members of the Council for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Mayor has discretion to extend this time taking account of the degree of public interest in the issue, the level of support given to the petition and the number of elected members wishing to express their views on the subject.
- 2.6 Following this discussion, the Council will need to decide what action to take with regard to the Petition. Where the issue is one on which the Cabinet is required to make the final decision, the Council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.
- 2.7 The Scheme indicates that the Council's response to a Petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it but may include one or more of the following;
 - Taking the action requested in the Petition;
 - considering the Petition at a Council Meeting;
 - Holding an Inquiry;
 - Commissioning relevant research;
 - Organising a public meeting;
 - Mounting a wider public consultation;

- Meeting with the Petition Organiser or representatives of signatories;
- Providing a written response outlining the Council's views on the subject;
- Referring the issue to the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee **OR**
- Referring the issue to the relevant Committee/Cabinet;
- Consulting statutory partners and local service providers;
- Instigating discussions with the voluntary and community sectors; and
- Making representations to Commercial or other Interests.

2.8 **Service Information and Background**

- 2.8.1 The Environment Act 2021 gives government new powers to set targets for waste reduction. As a result, local authorities responsible for waste collection have to encourage greater recycling. Targets have not yet been set but authorities are expected to reduce waste and in particular residual waste. Moving to fortnightly collection of residual waste is seen as a way of encouraging recycling.
- 2.8.2 Slough has one of the lowest recycling rates in the country at around 26-27% and its waste is simply incinerated rather than being used to generate electricity.
- 2.8.3 It is challenging introducing bi-weekly residual collection without maintaining a weekly recycling collection and the borough has not been helped by the incinerator operator taking a particularly hard line on contaminated loads despite recyclates going to a MRF.
- 2.8.4 Residents have generally responded well to what is a significant change but there have been issues which the service is addressing particularly around the rejection of bins and the non-collection of side waste.
- 2.8.5 The council is working on further options to help increase recycling and improve the operation of the service particularly by bringing in a pilot food waste collection. which is normally done when introducing a reduced collection regime and increasing the products which the MRF operator will accept at the gate.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

- 3.1 Financial implications
- 3.1.1 Cabinet on 23rd September 2022 approved the adoption of fortnightly bin collections from 26th June 2023. This service change proposed a £705k saving (pro-rata £424k) within Environmental Services.
- 3.1.2 The saving of £705k has been included within the Council's MTFS to support the recovery of the Council. A decision to reverse the fortnightly collection service would result in the saving not being made, additional costs for recruitment of staff, continued increase in waste disposal charges and costs associated with a new communication plan.
- 3.1.3 The Council generates approximately 1,500 tons of waste per week which is directly delivered for incineration. This cost is in the region of £6m per annum and needs to be brought down to help deliver future savings in the MTFS.

3.2 Legal implications

3.2.1 Slough Borough Council adopted a new petition scheme in July 2010. This Petition meets the criteria listed in the [Council's Petition Scheme](#).

3.2.2 Under the Council's published Petitions Scheme a Petition that contains 1500 signatures triggers a debate at Council.

3.2.3 The decision to move to fortnightly collection was made by Cabinet as an executive function. Full Council has no power to overturn a cabinet decision, therefore if members are minded to make a recommendation in response to the petition this should be referred to Cabinet or an officer to consider. Any decision to change the fortnightly collection arrangements would be made by Cabinet, taking account of all relevant information, including the financial impact of such a decision and the legislative framework for waste collection services.

3.3 Risk management implications

3.3.1 The service has to make the new system work in a way that delivers the required savings which requires a reduction in the number of rounds.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 Slough is currently in the bottom quartile for recycling. The expectation of the service is that the recycling percentage will increase steadily from around 25% to closer to 38-40%.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was prepared as part of the September 2022 Cabinet decision. The EqIA identified key groups that could be impacted as a result of the service change. This impact has been borne out and the service has been providing the necessary support. This specifically has been around larger families and those with medical needs resulting in greater waste. Further reviews will be undertaken at 3 and 6 month intervals to assess if the intervention and support is helping to address the need from our residents.

4. Background Papers and information

- Link to the [Petition](#).