



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Mark Rogers

Chief Executive
Birmingham City Council
Council House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B1 1BB

4 December 2014

Dear Mr Rogers,

Green Waste Charge

You will no doubt be aware that Birmingham's Labour MPs have been raising concerns about the Council's Green Waste charge for some time now. A number of us have been making representations on this from the early part of the year, and many of our concerns were summarised in the enclosed evidence that I submitted to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry – which we understand will be reporting shortly.

Reflecting what residents have told us, we are concerned about the following elements of the city's experience during the first year of the charge:

1. Delays in the delivery of green bins running into several weeks.
2. Issues with residents not being able to pay for the bins unless they had a debt or credit card.
3. Residents who had ordered the wrong item (bins or bags) effectively being told "tough, you have made your choice."
4. Generally off hand and poor customer service – including when dealing with vulnerable residents.
5. Additional congestion and traffic management problems in and around waste recycling sites.
6. An increase in the amount of fly tipping, both of green waste itself but also of other items, particularly on areas which became hotspots for green waste fly-tipping and/or have relied on bulk waste collections in the past.

We know that these and other concerns of residents are widespread from surveys we have convened, concerns raised on the doorstep, and through emails, letters and phone calls to our offices. As a broad indication of the level of discontent, Steve McCabe MP surveyed over 2000 residents in the Selly Oak area – 62% of whom said the charge had been a problem for them and their families. Put together, all this has contributed to a much more general concern that Birmingham is simply not keeping streets clean in the way our constituents have a right to expect.

We are, of course, acutely aware of the severe impact governments cuts are having on Birmingham City Council. We have no time for the shallow posturing of those who use this matter as a political photo opportunity, whilst defending the fiscal policies that have put Birmingham in this position in the first place. Such positions are seriously undermined by the

reality of waste funding and collection under the current Government – which, as you will see from the enclosed article, have become clear this week.

As the Chief Executive, we would not expect you to respond to the last point, but we do ask you to let us have your full report on which of the problems outlined above you are confident the City Council will be able to resolve before the 2015 “gardening season”, and how you plan to do so.

In addition, we would be grateful for your report on:

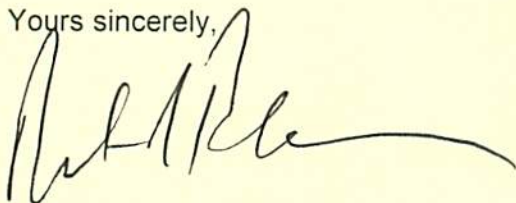
7. What the final take up for green bins / bags is for 2014/15.
8. Whether you expect that figure to go up or down before the start of the 2015 gardening season, and what methodology this assumption is based on.
9. What assessment you have made of the numbers of people who consider themselves to have now “bought” a bin or bag delivery and do not expect to be charged again.
10. What you intend to do about the green bins that were paid for in 2014 but are not paid for in 2015.
11. How you will be able to distinguish between green bins which have been paid for and those which have not during collection rounds in 2015, particularly in areas where houses are close together.
12. What projections of take up are built into your financial modelling of costs/savings in 2015/16 from the green waste collection charge, and what will occur if those projections are incorrect.
13. What changes to the organisation of the green waste collection service you intend to introduce by the start of the 2015/16 financial year.
14. What changes to the green waste collection service you intend to introduce by the start of the 2016/17 financial year.

Time is moving on and the fact that we have seen no clarity from the Council about what can in practice be done on the above points by the start of the 2015/16 financial year leads us to believe that the council should suspend the charge pending a full review. This would enable measured decisions to be taken for 2016/2017.

We recognise that the decision on whether or not to suspend the charge is not a matter for you as Chief Executive, but we would be grateful for your early response on the points raised above to provide us with clarity on whether or not there is any realistic alternative to suspension.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Burden MP
Birmingham Northfield

On behalf of Birmingham's Labour MPs