



Briefing 18-48 December 2018

Bulky Household Waste Services

Key Issues

This briefing explores the results of a short survey of APSE members through our Network Query Service. It considers how the service is financed, numbers of items collected, the use of welfare pricing policies and operational information such as the types of vehicles used to collect household bulky waste items.

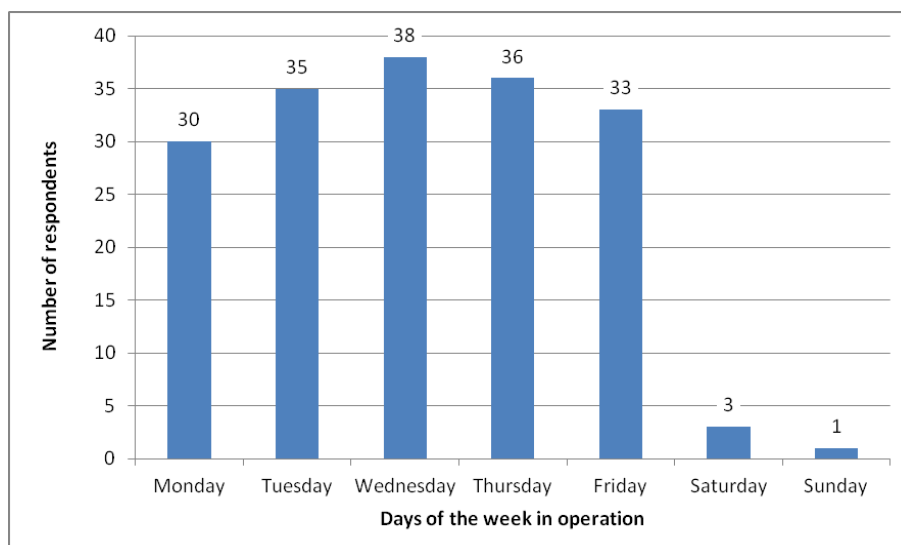
Introduction

In Autumn 2018, APSE disseminated a Network Query to colleagues involved in delivering Waste, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing services to ascertain the approach taken to managing Bulky Household Waste Collections within local authorities across the UK.

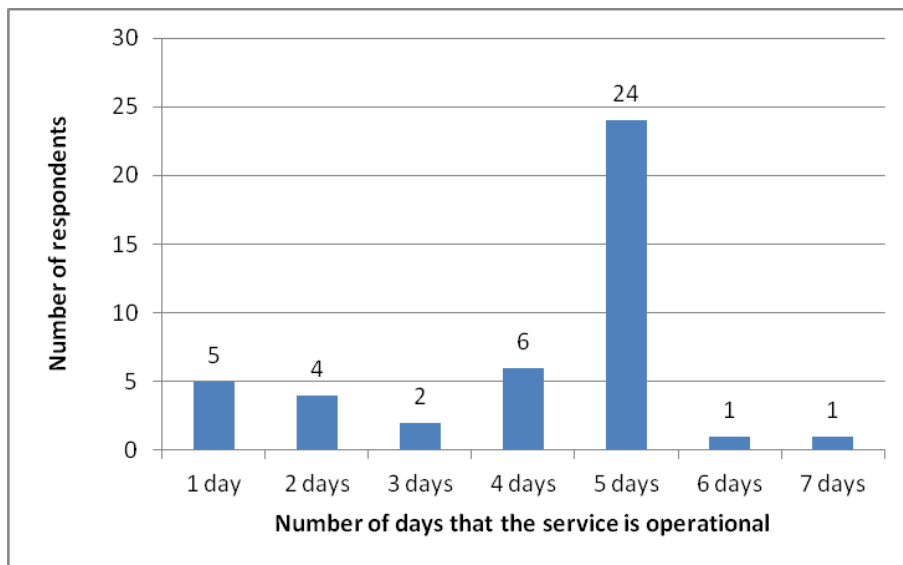
Representatives of 43 local authorities responded to the survey, which included questions related to the operational set-up and delivery model of the service and sought feedback on what innovative approaches have been embedded to deliver a cost effective service.

In what follows, we outline the responses to the survey.

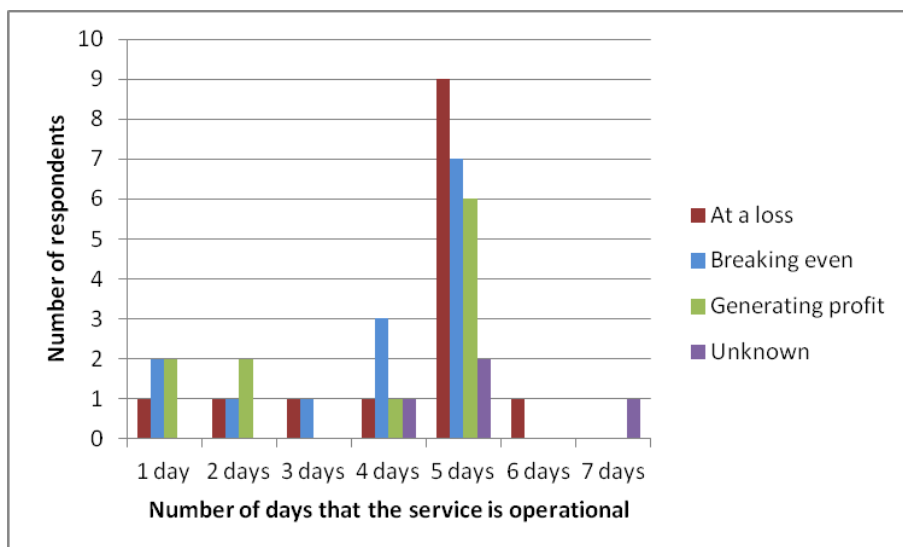
1) On which days of the week is the service operational?



When examining how many days per week the service is operational, we see that the majority of local authorities run a Bulky Household Waste Collection service five days a week.

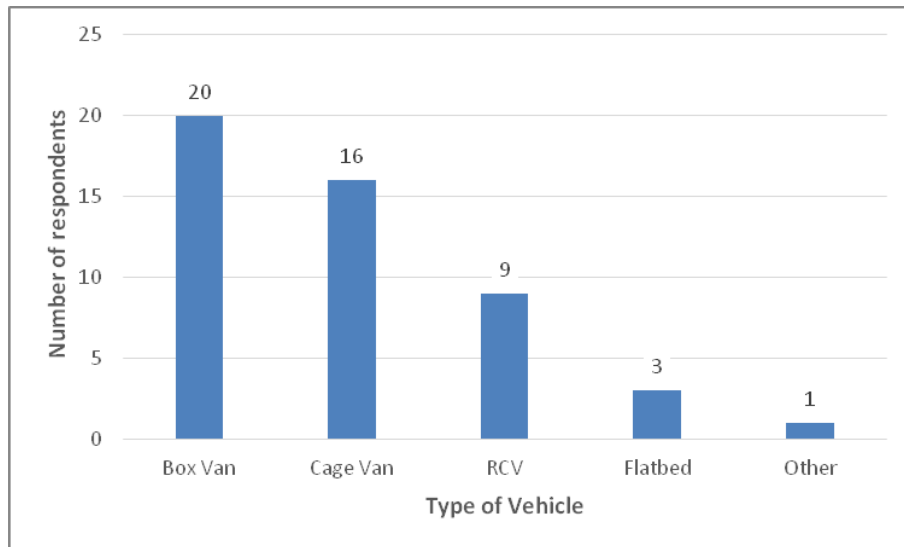


Breaking these responses down by the responses to question 13 (see below) into the categories of 'at a loss', 'breaking even' or 'generating profit' (a working surplus for reinvestment) we see that on the whole, authorities who break even or generate a profit provide their service for fewer days per week. This reflects that services can be provided more cheaply but equally could limit the service availability. Again this is a matter of local determination in policy terms.

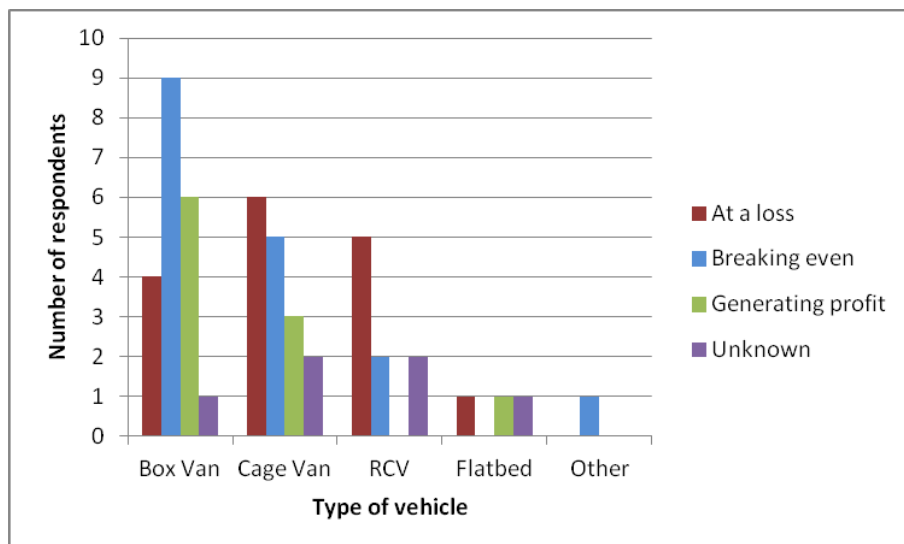


2) What type of vehicle do you use?

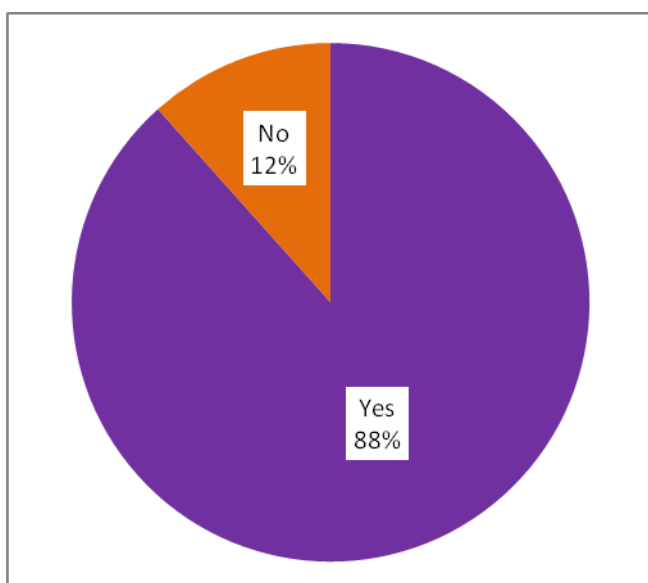
There are a wide variety of vehicles in use in delivering Bulky Waste Collection services, the most popular of which is the Box Van.



When breaking these responses down by the responses to question 13 we see that the Box Van is also the vehicle of choice for those authorities who are fully cost recovering / generating a surplus. Also that there is a notably higher proportion of those operating at a loss that use Refuse Collection Vehicles as part of their collection fleet which suggests a more expensive means of delivery.



3. Do you charge for the service?



Yes – 38 respondents
 No – 5 respondents
 Total no. of respondents: 43

4. If yes, please briefly outline the schedule of rates charged by the authority for this service, including any eligibility criteria for discounts and/or free collections

The responses to this question varied greatly between local authorities.

Appendix 1 presents a full picture of the indicated charging structures, for 1-12 items broken down by responses to question 13 (How is your service running financially? At a loss, breaking even or generating profit/working surplus).

The following table provides a snapshot of the analysis in Appendix 1:

	1 item collection	3 item collection	5 item collection
Average charge – all responses	£24.55	£28.58	£38.43
Average charge– ‘at a loss’	£19.79	£20.83	£25.31
Average charge – ‘breaking even’	£24.34	£29.45	£37.62
Average charge – ‘generating profit / working surplus’	£31.40	£37.90	£51.17

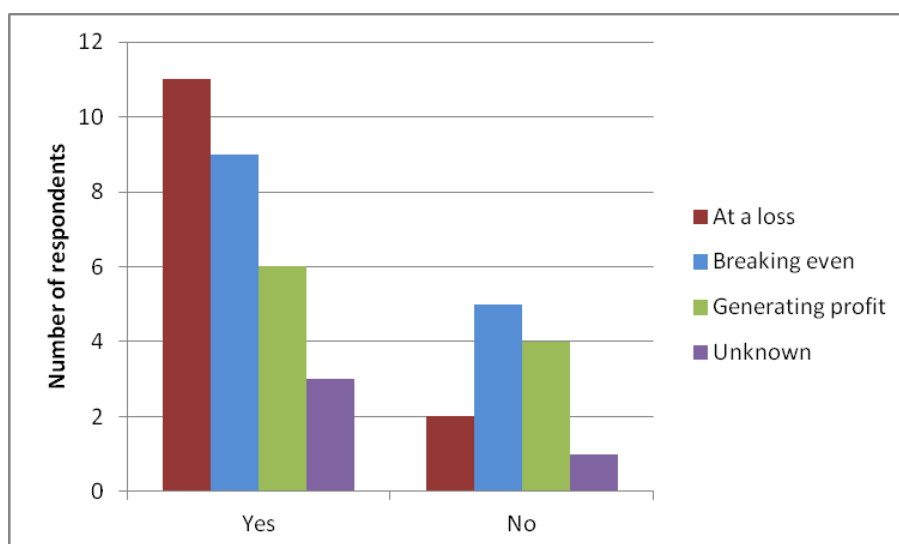
The minimum collection charge for a single item varied from £10 to £75. Of the 38 authorities who indicated a charging structure, 13 were 'flat rates' for 'up to' a certain number of items, 21 had a scale of rates increasing with the number of items, three simply had a minimum charge with pricing arranged for each individual collection and a further authority had a charging structure in place for landlords only.

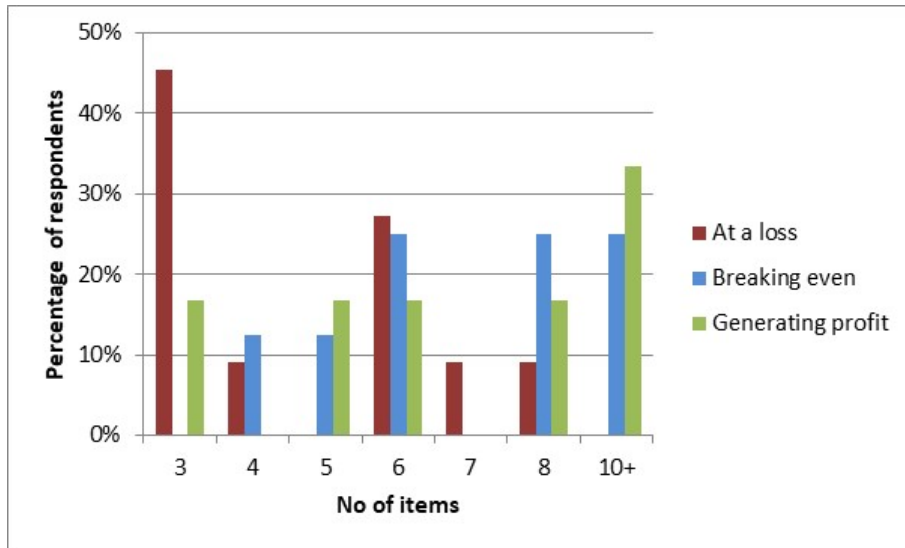
Perhaps unsurprising, those authorities who are generating profit/working surplus have higher charges on average than those authorities who are breaking even, who again on average have higher charges in place than those authorities who are running the service at a loss. This perhaps indicates the complexity of calculating and reflecting the true service costs, including service set-up costs that can often be overlooked. Equally we should consider that pricing structures, will rightly take into consideration the views of elected members and corporate pricing structures in what is considered to be acceptable charges alongside welfare pricing policies.

Looking across the results in Appendix 1 we see that most authorities who are making a loss have a flat rate charging structure in place and most authorities who are making a profit/working surplus have a scale of rates in place.

5. Do you restrict the number of items a resident can have collected?

Of the authorities who responded to this question, 71% answered Yes and 29% answered No. Restrictions on the number of items being collected were far more common among Authorities that are running the service at a loss. 85% (11 of 13) of those operating at a loss limit the number of items they collect compared to only 64% (9 of 14) of those breaking even and 60% (6 of 10) of those generating a profit/working surplus.



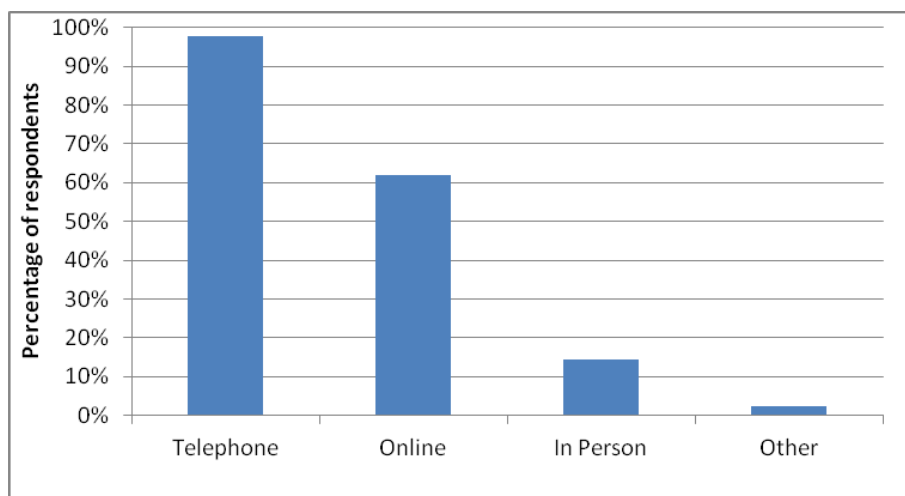


6. If yes, what restrictions apply?

Similarly, it was more common for those services running at a loss to take fewer items per collection. Of those who are running the service at a loss, 55% take 5 items or less. There is a correlation between those breaking even or making an operating surplus and the removal of a higher proportion of items per collection.

7. How do customers place a booking for a collection?

Of the 42 authorities who responded to this question, 98% of Councils enable customers to request collections by phone, 62% provide an online collection booking service and 14% of Councils enable jobs to be requested in person at a Council office. Additionally, 2% of Councils reported that collections could be booked through an internal department (such as a housing department).



8. How many collection slots are available per day?

The below table summarises the responses received to this question. The numbers stated in the cells, indicate the number of respondents who indicated a daily number of collection slots in that range. For example, the highlighted cell indicates that 3 authorities who are running the service at a loss have between 10 & 19 collection slots a day.

	At a loss	Breaking Even	Generating Profit	Unknown	Totals
10-19	3	3	3		9
20-29	2	2	2		6
30-39	2	2	1	1	6
40-49	1	2	2		5
50-59					0
60-69	2			2	2
70 or more	1	1			4
Estimated Average*	37	32	27	59	

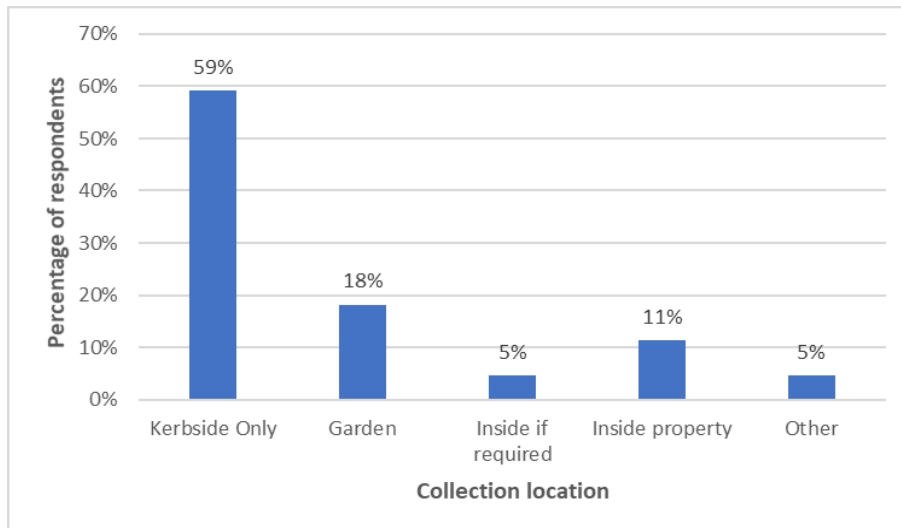
*Calculated using the mid-point of each interval and 70 for the final interval

An estimated average of the number of collection slots per day within those authorities who are generating a profit/working surplus is 27, which compares to 32 for those who are breaking even and 37 for those who are running the service at a loss. Overall, taking all the data together, the average number of collection slots is 35.

A further 2 authorities indicated that they do not set a daily limit on the number of collection slots and 7 indicated that the number of slots varies, with one explaining that the booking system manages the number of slots, closing down bookings for a day when the vehicle is full, based on an indication of the size of the items to be collected.

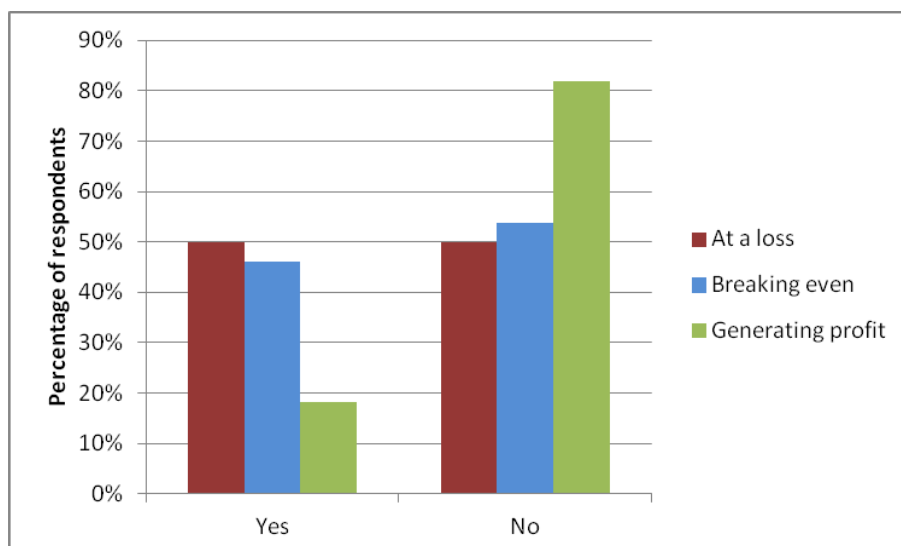
9. Where do crews collect from?

The majority of respondents reported that they only collected bulky waste from the kerbside outside properties (59%). A further 18% also collect from gardens and 11% inside the property. 5% will collect from inside the property *if required*, for example, if the resident is unable to move the items to the kerbside.



10. Is the service extended to landlords of properties within the local authority area?

It was more common for those authorities who are making a loss or breaking even to offer their service to landlords of properties within the local authority area than those who are generating a profit/working surplus. 82% of those authorities generating a profit/working surplus responded 'No' compared to 62% of the whole cohort.

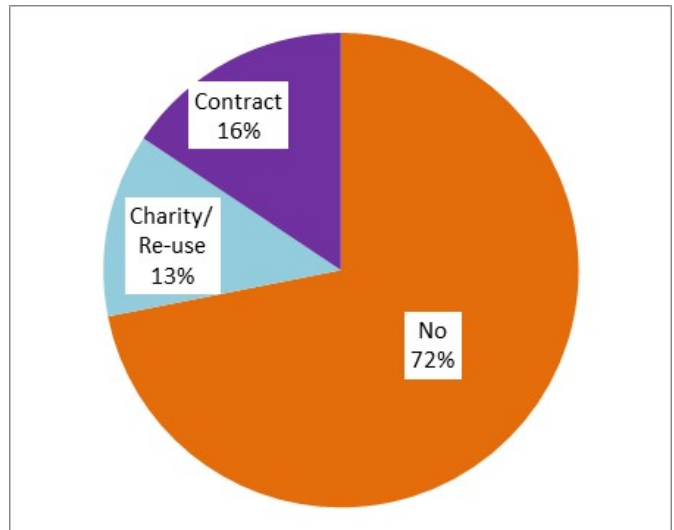


11. Is the service extended to customers based outside the local authority boundaries and/or to collections outside the local authority boundaries?

All 43 respondents gave a clear 'No' to this question. However, two authorities who operate with the same administrative team (as independent services) collect from within their combined authority boundaries.

12. Is there any third party involvement in delivering the service?

Of the 32 respondents, 72% (23 authorities) do not have any involvement in the delivery of their service by charities or contractors. Among these, many stated that charity involvement and re-use initiatives are currently being investigated.

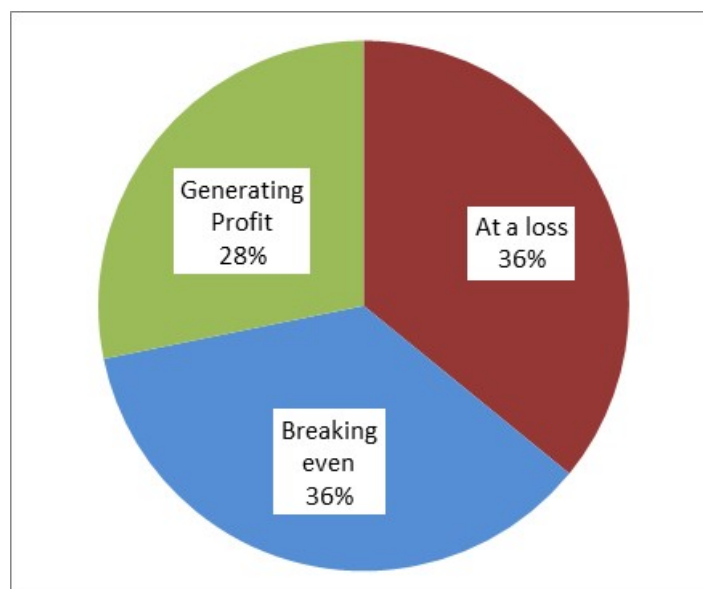


When breaking these responses down by the responses to question 13 a higher proportion of authorities generating a profit/working surplus stated that they have third party involvement than those who are breaking even or running the service at a loss. Again this appears to be

reflective of the pricing arrangements for reuse and resale of goods, for example with charities, and onward sale of refurbished goods and is highly dependent on the arrangements in place in individual cases. What is also clear is the vast majority of respondents (72%) are continuing to provide the service directly.

13. How is your service running financially?

Of the 39 authorities who were able to respond to this question, approximately a third (11 authorities) run a service at a profit/working surplus, a third at a loss (14 authorities) and approximately a third break even (14 authorities).



Responses to the question of 'profit' should however be treated with caution. Clearly the use of 'generating profit' mostly likely describes where authorities are fully recovering the cost of the service with any surplus re-invested in the service. In addition as there are different categories of 'bulky waste' with some destined for immediate or future reuse this can have an impact on the calculation of service costs and how these might be described alongside more detailed methods of the determining the cost; for example where taking account of initial set-up costs including fleet, which may not always be considered as part of that calculation or the elected members wishes or corporate approach to charges, such as welfare pricing policies.

14. What ideas have you implemented to help improve waste outcomes from bulky waste collection services or increase income/ reduce costs?

Responses have been organised by categories below. Where an idea was mentioned by more than one authority, this is noted in brackets.

Marketing

- Regular promotional activity
- Marketed as a re-use service rather than as a bulky waste collection service
- Special offers

Charging structure

- Introducing a restriction on the number of items (2)
- Free collections to meet wider Council priorities i.e. targeted intervention areas/ demographics
- Free collections to encourage recycling
- Free collections to help improve equality of access for services for those unable to visit a Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Keeping charges low as a means of mitigating against fly-tipping - we noticed an increase in fly-tipping when we introduced a charging structure.
- Free collections to reduce fly-tipping (however, this was not achieved)
- A review of service charges
- Seeking to increase income by introducing a fairer pricing regime, with no free collections.
- We are proposing a £2 increase in charges this year after no changes in the charging structure for 4 years.
- Increased charge from £15 to £20
- Benchmarked prices with neighbouring authorities
- Recent price increases have led to a drop in number of collections and we will be shortly reducing the number of vehicles assigned to the work from 1-2.

Operational model

- Organising collection rounds by localities – i.e. each ward allocated a day, split by postcode route, undertaken on same days as residual/recycling collections (5)
- Online booking (4)
- Improved options for payment methods
- Weekend collections (facilitated by shift working)
- Crews undertake other activities on rounds to offset costs
- The service is provided alongside bin deliveries and sharps collections by the same crews to increase efficiency
- The service is combined with other charged for services such as house clearances & garden tidies and other activities are undertaken between collections such as bin deliveries
- Moving to a separate collection that is routed and booked in advance over a fortnight window.
- We have externalised the service
- Reduced crews from 2 to 1, now collecting over a two week period.
- “Calculated average demand, provided dedicated resource to meet demand, optimised routing, measured vehicles performance, measured staff performance, introduced standardised working patterns, staff sign up to average performance requirements, separated waste streams, increased working times.”

Waste management

- Exploring/Utilising reuse options (6) i.e. donations to charity shops and local families
- Recycling collected items (5)
- Promoting re-use, local charity shops and online exchange networks
- Encouraging re-use before collection is arranged
- Mattress recycling

APSE Comment

Bulky Household Waste Collection Services present an opportunity to improve waste flow, assist in the removal of unwanted goods for those who either cannot or would struggle to dispose of these goods any other way, and reduce waste through re-use options. Optimising service provision involves crafting an operational set-up that enables each of these aims.

Helpfully, this survey has identified some measures which seem to be characteristic of a cost effective service including a high upper limit on the number of items allowed per

collection (or no limits at all), a scale of rates increasing with number of items collected and fewer collection slots on fewer days of the week. Interestingly, the survey also found that councils are continuing to provide the service directly in the majority of cases (72%)and where some third party involvement have in the delivery of the service, such as a charity shop or re-use initiatives, this enables costs to be further considered. Similarly there does not appear to be any particular commercial opportunities in offering services to landlords. Finally, on average, those authorities making a working surplus charge approximately 30% more than average of the whole cohort taken together for a collection of 1-5 items.

Innovative approaches commonly reported to help improve waste outcomes from bulky waste collection services or increase income/ reduce costs include delivering associated services within the same round – i.e. bin deliveries, sharps collections etc. locality based working, online booking and working with local partners to encourage re-use.

APSE would strongly encourage the careful management of waste collected through Bulky Waste services in to appropriate waste streams, seeking in the first instance to maximise re-use and then to recycle as much collected material as possible. An authority's charging structure would ideally be balanced to incentivise use of the service, assist in the removal of unwanted items for vulnerable residents where needed and improve waste flow and waste reduction across the local authority area as well as ensuring the service is able, so far as possible to break-even or ideally generate a working surplus for reinvestment to sustain reuse and recycling of Bulky Household Waste items. Careful assessment and analysis is required to help discern an operational fit for the local area conducive to these aims.

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With assistance from James Courtney, Business and Administration Apprentice