

# Garden waste permit scheme beats West Lothian Council target of £1.15m

The controversial garden waste permit scheme has raised far more than the £1.15m West Lothian Council expected, councillors heard this week.

More than 30,000 permits have been issued raking almost £200,000 extra for the waste management service.

SNP councillors urged the council to reconsider its refusal to collect waste from community gardens.

Broxburn councillor Diane Calder praised the work done by volunteers in community gardens and said the council had a “moral right” to support those who do so much for the wider community.

David Maule, the interim head of Waste Operations told a meeting of the Environment and Sustainability PDSP that the plan to charge for uplift garden waste had been modelled on 28,000 permits being issued- with an expected income from the £50 a time permits totalling £1.15m.

He said: “The permits purchased to date of 31,711 exceeds the target of 28,000 and will generate additional gross income of £185,550 for the period 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025.

Printing and postage costs deducted £4,000 from the additional income.

Of the 31,711 permits that have been ordered, 22,712 households have requested one permit, and 8,999 have requested two permits. Each household is permitted to request two permits for the charge of £50.

The charge was met with anger when first mooted ahead of the budget at the start of the year.

Many local authorities have had long established charges for lifting garden waste. The move was also supported by the GMB and other local authority unions because it would protect jobs and bring investment into a service which has seen years of continual cutbacks.

It is likely that garden waste uplift will become a statutory duty of councils meaning the Scottish Government will eventually cover the uplift costs, dispensing with the need to charge.

Conservative Councillor Alison Adamson referred to this when she asked Mr Maule if any decision had come from Holyrood. None has so far.

SNP councillors had pressed for community gardens to be exempt from uplift charges when they were brought in in June. Councillor Veronica Smith highlighted the time, effort and funds that many volunteers in community gardens put in and suggested that unexpected extra income could now see the exemption being introduced.

Mr Maule said the introduction of the scheme had brought more than 1,000 enquiries but only 199 complaints.

The majority of community gardens dealt with waste by composting. Mr Maule told the meeting that councillors had voted for the introduction of the charging policy in its present form. He added that he was happy to further engage with community gardens and offer advice.

Councillor Calder said: "These people work incredibly hard. I am overwhelmed by what the Strathbrock community garden has done in just two years. As a public authority it would be morally right for us to support these community gardeners in any way we can."

Councillor Smith said: "It is good that there's been a successful uptake; the SNP group supported an exemption when this was introduced. Now, given the extra income, I think the council could do more to support these groups."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter