

CM14.1. Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program

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Purpose of Report

To provide Council with an update on the progress of the implementation of the Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program due to be rolled out as an on-demand program in a digital format from 1 July 2021.

Background

The current voucher program has an entitlement of four vouchers per property and permits the user to dispose of up to 500kgs per voucher of general household waste. Paper vouchers are distributed in July each year as part of the rates notices and are issued on an ad hoc basis throughout the year to newly constructed properties, sold properties, and upon request in special circumstances.

To reduce our environmental footprint and provide a more efficient voucher system for the whole community, it is timely to move towards an on-demand digital program whereby all property owners and tenants can be provided the same service for household waste removal.

In April 2020, a report was provided to Council on the implementation of an automated Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program along with a workshop presentation.

The recommendations from the April 2020 Council meeting were as follows:

That Council:

- a. *endorse the transition to an on-demand automated voucher system effective 1 July 2021;*
- b. *allow up to a maximum of four vouchers per residential property being issued to the residents only; and*
- c. *support the acceptance of vouchers for Wodonga Transfer Station effective 1 July 2021.*

This report will provide a status on the above recommendations and rollout of the on-demand digital program.

Issues

Project Communications Plan Brief

The key objectives of a Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program are to maintain a high service level and meet community expectations, raise awareness and understanding of the system, and how it will improve interactions for the community and Council. Transitioning to the on-demand digital online program will require clear guidelines and positive communications.

A comprehensive communications plan has been developed for the roll out of the new on-demand digital application.

Communications as part of the plan include:

- flyer and fact sheet as part of the rates notices;
- social media content;
- website content;
- news from AlburyCity;
- messages on hold; and
- general media channels.

These forms of media will all be used to promote the transition from a paper-based voucher program to an on-demand digital program via an online application through Council's website platform. It is acknowledged that a portion of our community will be unable to access the digital vouchers so alternative options will be maintained to allow access for all sectors of the community.

Campaigns have been developed to communicate the program changes. The initial campaign will be three months duration commencing June 2021 with the aim of increased webpage views and validation of properties. A longer-term campaign will follow the initial rollout over a twelve-month term with the aim to reach above 35% annual voucher usage.

Maintain Four Vouchers per Residential Property

The recommendation is to continue to provide four vouchers per residential property. As part of the report to Council in April 2020, it highlighted the need to seek feedback from multiple property owners as the new process provides vouchers to residents and tenants only.

At present, owners of multiple properties receive the full allocation of vouchers for their home residence and for the other properties they own. Due to the planned changes around the way the vouchers will be distributed from 1 July 2021, a consultation process was carried out with multiple property owners. A survey was developed in conjunction with the Communications team and distributed during October 2020.

The survey was provided to all owners with multiple properties and all Albury Real Estate Agents, this was done through Survey Monkey with hard copies made available on request.

The survey expressed the key aims of the resident voucher program moving forward, these being:

- to provide a more efficient system than the current hard copy voucher system by moving to a digital online on-demand platform;
- to ensure that four vouchers are available to the residents of each property; and
- to make AlburyCity consistent with other NSW Councils and legislation.

The results of this engagement were as follows:

- 1,446 multiple property owners received the survey information, mailed to individuals and communicated via Council's media channels;
- 47 survey responses were received by owners of multiple properties;
- two responses were received from Albury Real Estate Agents; and
- 97% of multiple property owners did not make any comment on the planned changes.

The survey responses included the following comments:

- some owners do provide vouchers for tenants on request;
- not all owners have access to computer systems to go online to obtain vouchers;
- owners wanted access to unused vouchers if tenants didn't use them;
- owners didn't think tenants would use vouchers if they were provided;
- owner is responsible for investment property maintenance and would like to continue to use the vouchers for this purpose;
- booking vouchers online takes planning, often trips to the AWMC are last minute decisions; and
- concerns on selling waste vouchers.

In response to the issues raised, the on-demand digital program will provide an improved access point for both tenants and property owners, thus eliminating the need to provide vouchers to Real Estate Agents and other authorities such as Department of Housing for issuing purposes. The alternative is available for owners to access vouchers by visiting or contacting Council's customer service centres for assistance. On a case by case basis, a multiple property owner may seek access to unused tenant vouchers; this will be based on the circumstance. The opportunity will be available for instant access to vouchers once a tenant or owner has set up the profile for their property.

Multiple property owners do feel that they are entitled to the vouchers as typically vouchers are used for maintenance of tenanted properties, that is, cleaning up of garden areas, covering costs associated with lawn clippings, excess rubbish from tenants and furniture as left by departed tenants. A small proportion of those surveyed have expressed the need to retain vouchers for the use of maintaining their rental properties. Considering the limited responses to the survey, overall, the issues of moving to an online digital platform, changing the distribution of vouchers to be more accessible for the whole community impacts a small percentage of property owners. As detailed above, these concerns can be managed on a case by case basis, depending on circumstances.

Attachment 1 provides a full list of questions and responses from Multiple Property Owners.

Information was sought from Albury based Real Estate Agents as a component of the survey. Minimal information was received with only two Real Estate Agent recipients responding. With very little response from this sector, we are unable to draw any conclusions.

Attachment 2 provide a full list of questions and responses from Real Estate Agents.

Cross Border Transitioning of Vouchers

As part of the Two Cities One Community initiative, Resident Resource Recovery vouchers will be able to be utilised at either the Albury Waste Management Centre or Wodonga Transfer Station by Albury and Wodonga residents. Wodonga has recently purchased software to enable vouchers to be scanned using a QR code system, both Councils are now using the same software.

The Councils are working together to develop processes that will enable the financial aspects and recording capabilities of the vouchers to be managed efficiently from 1 July 2021.

Software Component

Fortnightly meetings have been held with Mandalay since May 2020 on the development of the on-demand digital platform. The technology is not an off the shelf option, meaning the development of the software has been customised for AlburyCity. A trial of the on-demand digital platform is being carried out during March 2021 in preparation for the rollout in July 2021.

The initial application process for property owners will be as follows:

1. access a link from Council's website to an online application;
2. request a voucher;
3. property identification (current information as supplied by rates notice);
4. accepting terms and conditions;
5. voucher approval (authentication process);
6. voucher access;
7. trip to the facility; and
8. present voucher.

Tenants will continue to use the online version via Council's website as an interim measure until the next phase is developed. The on-demand digital program for tenants is due to be implemented within the next financial year.

Legislation

As per the Local Government Act, a Domestic Waste Management Charge (DWMC) is levied against each residential property. The Domestic Charge levy is for the provision of services against a particular property, irrespective of ownership and who is paying this charge. Council's DWMC includes a provision for vouchers.

To enable a fairer system across the whole of the municipality, vouchers will be accessible to all householders and limit owners of multiple properties' access to additional vouchers. Like other Councils, additional vouchers are not generally issued to owners of multiple properties.

Albury 2030

As part of Albury 2030, this initiative addresses the following Strategic Outcomes.

An Enhanced Natural Environment:

- 2.1 to facilitate and promote effective waste management practices; and
- 2.3 increased awareness in sustainability and environmental issues.

Two Cities One Community

As part of the Two Cities One Community Strategic Plan, this initiative aligns with the Strategic Goals:

- Goal 2.1 *We have a high level of awareness of sustainability and environmental issues.*
 - 2.1.2 *Continue to collaborate on waste management and Halve Waste Program marketing and education.*
- Goal 4.3 *Our Councils continue to provide strong leadership and governance.*
 - 4.3.1 *explore additional opportunities for shared services and joint purchasing/procurement*

Risk

- **Business Risk** – The risk is minimal. Based on the available services that Albury offers at the Albury Waste Management Centre it is likely that an increase in transactions may occur from Wodonga. This will be monitored regularly to determine the impact of vouchers at the waste management facility.
- **Corporate Risk** – The Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program will be property based and not owner or individual based and will be promoted via a comprehensive communications program set to rollout during the months of June, July and August 2021. The decision to alter the existing system from an owner voucher system to a resident voucher system will provide its challenges. With the implementation of a comprehensive communications campaign, this should provide the necessary information to support the adjustment to an on-demand digital platform. Council's aim is to provide and recognise an improved waste management practice, adopting a fairer system for all residents in the municipality.
- **WHS and Public Risk** – There is limited risk in regard to WHS and Public Risk.
- **Environmental Risk** – An on-demand Resident Resource Recovery Voucher system can further reduce Council's environmental impact by not providing in excess of 94,000 paper copies to our residents annually. A voucher program provides high environmental outcomes. These include prevention of environmental harm, reduced fire and hazard risks, reduced land contamination and pollution, reduced litter impacts and promoting an appealing local amenity.

- **Delivery Program Risk** – This program is a staged process and relies on Council testing and trialling the individual processes to progress to the next stage. Stage one was implemented in July 2020, this was the change to a QR code system for vouchers. Stage two is underway with the development of an on-demand resident program due for implementation from 1 July 2021. The final stage will see all residents and tenants be supplied with a digital method to access vouchers.

Conclusion

A project communications brief has been fully developed for the implementation of the Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program with community communications due to commence from June 2021. The transition to an on-demand automated voucher service is well underway with our software partner Mandalay – trials of the software commence shortly in preparation for a July 2021 implementation. Work has progressed with Wodonga City Council in enabling the cross-border use of vouchers for both Albury and Wodonga residents. With recent upgrades to software by Wodonga, the process from 1 July 2021 should be quite seamless.

Recommendation

That Council receives and notes the progress of the implementation of the Resident Resource Recovery Voucher Program.

Attachments

1. Table 1 - provides the questions and responses from Multiple Property Owners (DOC21/64720).
2. Table 2 - provides the questions and responses from Real Estate Agents (DOC21/64718).