

ALONE enquiries to Greyhound Waste confirm that Dublin City Council bin charge waivers will not be honoured next year

Charity calls on all parties involved to act urgently to ensure continuation of bin charge waivers for older people and highlights potentially crippling effect of additional taxes including household charge

Dublin, February 17, 2012 ALONE, the charity which provides supports to older people in need of assistance, as a result of calls from concerned older people, has received confirmation from Greyhound Waste that those on a Dublin City Council waiver for bin charges will not have their waiver honoured in 2013. A company representative informed ALONE that those in receipt of a Dublin City Council waiver will have waivers honoured for 2012 only. A further query by ALONE in relation to provision of waivers to older people or social housing bodies in the future revealed that Greyhound will not provide such waivers as they are a “private company”. Communication with the City Manager has also confirmed this fact, with the City Manager citing that Dublin City Council has called on government to introduce a National Waiver System through the social welfare system.

ALONE considers this situation grossly unfair, is yet another tax on those who are least able to pay additional costs, and draws attention to the fact that there is little awareness of this among the general public. ALONE urges clearer communication with those who are affected by such issues, as a number of the charity’s service users have expressed concern that this information has not been provided to them officially.

Loss of the bin charge waiver will result in 33,000 people, many of whom are older and in need, liable for further charges in the future. The waiver scheme allows certain householders the right to have bins collected free of charge by the local authority. A household qualifies for this waiver if the household’s total earnings are tax exempt and less than €600 per week.

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE called on all parties involved, including government, Dublin City Council, and Greyhound to address this issue immediately. “We urge all parties to resolve this issue as a matter of urgency. This is a major policy change which will have significant financial implications for many older people. We simply cannot have a situation where additional charges are levied on those who are already struggling to make ends meet.”

Stephen aged 66 and living in Dublin, contacted ALONE to express his

anger and dismay at this development. He commented "Dublin City Council didn't have the right to sell the collection to a private contractor when we older citizens have been paying taxes all our lives and now we are paying for this. It is just another tax on those who are least able to pay."

ALONE notes that a discontinuation of bin charge waivers will result in an additional levy on top of the household charge, which has caused confusion and distress for many older people who avail of the services of the charity. Numerous calls have been received by ALONE from older people who are unsure of how to pay the household charge as they've received no information in relation to the charge, with many also commenting that they are not in a financial position to pay the charge. ALONE's Community Response service works with up to 30 crisis situations each month. Many of the older people in these situations own their own homes, but the charity receives calls for assistance as a result of financial crisis or a need for urgent repairs to homes that have health and welfare implications. Calls to ALONE requesting assistance increased by 50% in 2011, with the previous year showing a significant increase of 125%.

Commenting on poor communication to the public, and in particular to older people, Moynihan commented that "The bin charge waiver issue highlights the poor communication to the public, and in particular older people, on additional charges and taxes. We have had numerous queries from concerned older people about the impending deadline for the household charge, as no information has been made available aside from directions to a website. Many older people who use our services do not have access to the internet, and are therefore unaware of the implications of the household charge, how to pay it, or when it's due."

He continued, "We understand that printed information is to be distributed to households in the coming weeks, however the charge is due to be paid between January 1st and March 31st, and we're now almost at the end of February. The charge can be paid in 4 installments throughout the year by setting up a direct debit by February 29th – this deadline is less than two weeks away and no household has received any information in writing. Are we facing a situation whereby older people will receive fines and be open to prosecution at the end of March if they haven't paid as a result of lack of information or delayed information? We're extremely concerned about this becoming a major issue for older people."

Speaking in relation to the impact of additional charges and taxes on those who use ALONE's services, Moynihan concluded "These charges are the

unforeseen expenses that may cause someone who is just about surviving to fall in to poverty. We know from the increasing calls to ALONE that these payments present a very real threat to the people who we are already helping but that they may lead to many more of the 'hidden poor' being tipped into a situation whereby they must come to a voluntary service such as ALONE. We are operating at maximum capacity but are committed to being there for anyone in need of help.”

Older people who are concerned about these issues or in need of assistance can contact ALONE on (01) 679 1032. The charity has a small, dedicated staff, and over 120 volunteers working with older people in need of assistance on a daily basis.

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For further information or comment from ALONE, please contact Glenn Hogarty, Limelight Communications, on 087 790 9670 or (01) 668 0600