



<u>Committee and date</u> Development Services Scrutiny Committee 5.00 pm
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<u>Item No</u> 9 Public
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Interim Report on Disruption of Waste Collections During Recent Bad Weather

Responsible Officer Larry Wolfe

Email: Larry.wolfe@shropshire.gov.uk

Telephone: 01743 255995

Summary

This report provides a summary of the key issues and decisions made during the disruption to waste collections during the recent extreme weather conditions. Many comments and suggestions have been received from residents and members during this period and they will be used to inform a more detailed discussion of this issue which will follow later in the year. This will include options for a contingency plan to deal with similar events in the future.

Recommendations

- A. That Scrutiny Committee note the information contained in the report, pending a more detailed review at a future committee.

Report

Background

1. The kerbside waste collection service in Shropshire has three separate streams, waste that is recycled (dry recycling), waste that is composted (green waste), and waste for disposal to landfill (residual waste). All three streams are collected fortnightly on an alternate weekly collection (AWC) basis. However, there are differences in the type of waste collected and the colour of bins and boxes used as a consequence of the previous waste collection authorities in Shropshire, before the creation of the unitary Shropshire Council.
2. In the former districts of Shrewsbury & Atcham, Oswestry and Bridgnorth the green waste collected includes only garden waste and cardboard, whereas in North Shropshire and South Shropshire food waste is also collected in the same bins. These differences had to be considered when making changes to collection days.

3. Also, in most areas, residual waste is collected in blue, black or grey wheeled bins, and green waste in green bins, but in the Oswestry area dark green bins are used for residual waste, and brown bins are used for garden waste and cardboard. This has made communicating any changes to collection schedules very difficult, as people often refer to bin colour to differentiate.

4. Weather Impact Summary

5. Please see Appendix 1 (attached) for a timeline of the events and their impact across Shropshire.
6. In week commencing 21st December, weather conditions prevented waste collections of household residual waste and green (garden/cardboard/food) waste from upland areas in South Shropshire. This included areas around Clee Hill, Clun, Bishops Castle, Worthen and Snailbeach. These weather conditions persisted through the first week of January and as at Tues Jan 5th the weather forecasts suggested this would continue at least to the next weekend and probably beyond, meaning continued disruption to services in these areas.
7. On Wednesday 6th January there was a heavy snowfall across most of the county, and waste collections of all types were disrupted. The level of missed collections was not consistent across the county, with North Shropshire experiencing fewer problems. The impact on collections also varied considerably between collection rounds and within each collection round as areas on or near main roads were more accessible than side roads and estate roads.
8. The freezing conditions continued until Wednesday 13th January when there was a further heavy snowfall across the county. Very few collections were made on that day. Weather conditions improved on Thursday 14th and Friday 15th although many streets remained dangerous and unsafe to collect until Saturday 16th January or later.
9. Despite the heavy snowfall at least 50% of residents experienced no disruption to collection services and of those that did the majority missed only one collection. The biggest impact was felt in the more remote parts of South Shropshire where it was not possible to make collections for up to four successive weeks. Most local authority waste collections across the country were affected in a similar way to Shropshire, with many having several days of no collection.

10. Decision Making

11. In response to the rapidly changing situation, Veolia Environmental Services (VES, the Council's waste contractor) and officers from the Council's Waste Management Unit, held a series of meetings, and conference calls daily at 10am and 3pm. These meetings and calls provided information with which to update Councillors, other Waste Management Unit staff and the Customer Service Centre. This facilitated the joint decision making approach which continued throughout the period of disruption.

12. These calls were particularly useful in allowing information and opinions to be gathered from a wide range of sources without the need to disrupt the work of front-line supervisors and managers by requiring their attendance at meetings. Typically the conference calls included Shropshire Council (SC) Managers up to Assistant Director level, VES senior managers (up to Managing Director level), VES depot managers, SC Waste Management Unit staff, SC Customer Service Centre representatives and VES communications staff.
13. The decision to finally suspend green waste collection was taken on Wednesday 13th January. The portfolio holder was kept informed of developments as the situation progressed.

14. Operational Impact

15. Collection Services

16. The spread of missed collections was not consistent. The principal reason for this being that the decision on whether it was possible to safely empty bins or boxes from a particular area was made by the driver of the collection vehicle. This person as the most senior member of the collection crew is required to carry out a dynamic risk assessment under the Health and Safety at Work Act. Drivers were supported by Veolia supervisors who also carried out inspections.
17. Both driver and supervisor consider conditions for the loaders as well as the vehicle. In many areas the roads had been gritted and were safe for vehicles, however, the footpaths or sides of the road on which the loaders walk to collect containers were not. The loaders walk on average 12 miles on a normal collection round and are therefore exposed to risk of injury for far longer than most pedestrians, they are also either carrying boxes or pulling bins which makes balance more difficult. These factors were exacerbated by constantly moving between clear and icy surfaces.
18. The criteria for the safe operation of the refuse vehicles themselves are also different to other similar sized vehicles. They stop and start more often and it is at these points that there is the greatest danger of losing control of the vehicle. They are also constantly in proximity to pedestrians, in particular the loaders themselves. As the vehicles weigh up to 26 tonnes the potential damage caused in an accident would be significantly greater than for a car or van. In addition some vehicles have an automatic rather than manual gearbox which has an impact on their ability to be driven safely over snow and ice. Contrary to some comments received, drivers were never advised to collect only from gritted roads, but made site specific judgements on the safety of making collections.
19. A significant number of complaints were received from residents in which they disagreed with the driver's assessment that a road was unsafe. However, the consistent response from both contractor and Council staff were that the collection vehicle driver has a legal responsibility for health and safety and in

this regard his judgement, based on risk assessment of conditions, must be respected and upheld.

20. Household Recycling Centres

21. The six Household Recycling Centres were open throughout this period, and VES staff given flexibility in the implementation of the permit scheme in order to accommodate residents who had missed a waste collection.

22. **Response to Collections Backlog**

23. The response to missed collections in South Shropshire had begun before the bad weather hit the rest of the county. On Tuesday 5th January VES and SC agreed to suspend green waste collections in the former South Shropshire District Council area for the week commencing Monday 11th January and replace this service with a collection of residual waste. As the weather forecast indicated no immediate thaw, it was also agreed to position refuse freighters at three affected areas on Saturday 9th January, to allow residents to bring any excess waste to the vehicles. Also, as any eventual thaw would progress at an uneven rate, residents were advised to leave their bins out until a vehicle could reach them. These changes were communicated via radio stations (BBC Shropshire, Sunshine Radio, and Beacon), newspapers (Ludlow Journal, South Shropshire Journal), the council's website, the Councils Customer Service Centre (which from Friday 8th also had a pre-recorded announcement); by email to all the relevant Town and Parish Councils, and on the Council's Twitter social networking page. A briefing note was also sent to all Shropshire Councillors (Appendix 2).

24. When the snow and freezing conditions spread to all parts of the county from Wednesday 6th January, the initial approach was to ask residents to:

- a) bring bins in
- b) present them again on the next scheduled collection day
- c) put any additional waste alongside the bin from where it would be taken (on this occasion only as this conflicts with our general operational policy).

25. The differences in approach to the South Shropshire situation were because this was the first missed collection for the majority of Shropshire. Making any changes to the collection schedule carries a high risk of confusion and this was not considered to be justified at this point.

26. This situation continued until Wednesday 13th January when the county was hit by a second wave of heavy snowfall. Although the impact of missed collections was still inconsistent, it had by this point been experienced widely and across two weeks. After reviewing the situation Veolia and Shropshire Council jointly agreed to suspend green waste collections across the county from Thursday 14th January to Saturday 23rd January. The Saturday was included to provide an option for further work to remove the backlog of collections if it became necessary. The revised advice to residents which was applied to the whole county included four key messages

- put out residual waste bin on scheduled collection day whether the calendar shows green or residual waste
- all side waste would be collected
- put out recycling boxes on scheduled day, but bring them in if unemptied (as large numbers of small recycling boxes left on footpaths present a bigger danger to pedestrians than wheeled bins)
- weather permitting, normal scheduled collections will resume from Monday 25th January

27. This message was put out through a variety of media:

- Radio – Shropshire, Beacon, Severn and Sunshine
- Newspapers – 3 full page adverts in the Shropshire Star Thursday 14th to Saturday 16th January, and Oswestry Advertiser
- Council Website
- Customer Service Centre (including amended message to all callers)
- Town and Parish Councils
- Twitter
- Briefing note to all Councillors (Appendix 3)

28. Other Operational Approaches Considered

29. Various alternative strategies were considered during the daily discussions between SC and Veolia. These are listed below and the relevant advantages and disadvantages of each will be examined further in a later report.

- Stick strictly to the collection calendar taking side waste when collections become possible
- Mix residual waste and green bins in one vehicle where necessary to clear backlog
- Ask residents to take their bins to the nearest gritted road
- An emergency collection schedule covering limited period of time
- Use of more refuse vehicles as temporary community skips in car parks and lay-bys.
- Operate additional days at weekends to catch up.

30. Communications

31. Residents

32. The following table shows the impact of various service changes and so provides a measure of the effectiveness of the communication to the general public.

Service Change	Impact
Additional community skips at Clun, Worthen & Clee Hill	Visitors Clun – 13 Clee Hill – 28 Worthen – 1
South Shropshire residual waste collections replacing green waste w/c 11 th Jan.	On average 75% of residents on green waste rounds still put out green waste
Remove bins from street and wait until next collection round	Majority of bins of all types left out
Whole county residual waste collections replacing green waste w/c 18 th Jan	Indications so far are of a hugely variable response from 80% residual waste on some green rounds down to 10% on others. Generally rural rounds saw less residual waste, but some urban rounds have also had less than 20% residual particularly in North Shropshire and central Shrewsbury. There have also been a number of complaints from North and South Shropshire on the suspension of green waste collections.
Remove boxes from street if uncollected	All collections made so far, in accordance with calendar and generally good participation

33. An initial conclusion that can be drawn from this information is that the existing media channels will not get the necessary information to the majority of residents. The collection calendar is still the main source of information for residents and moving away from it causes problems.

34. The decision to suspend green waste collections has a greater impact in North and South Shropshire than in the remainder of the county due to food waste being collected with garden waste and cardboard. The non-collection of this bin then potentially becomes a greater concern to residents than that associated with missing a residual waste collection.

35. **Members**

36. The changes to arrangements in South Shropshire were emailed to the members involved at 2.10pm on Wednesday 6th January. Following further discussions with Veolia, all members were updated on the position and current advice at 5.57pm also on 6th January.

37. The Council's Waste Management Unit staff also responded to queries from individual members throughout the period of disruption.

38. From Monday 11th January members received a daily update following the conference call at 3pm each day. The information consisted of a table showing the percentage of successful collections per area, a description of where problem areas were, and an indication of any expected problem areas due for collections the following day. Other more general information was added as necessary.

39. Other Communications Issues

40. These will also be considered in a future report.

- CSC advisors giving conflicting advice due to changes in the operational approach
- Veolia crews, with good intentions, making unscheduled collections from properties where bins were left out, leading to complaints from neighbours who had heard and complied with the request to take bins in from the street.
- Public disagreement with assessments on safety made by Veolia staff.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

There are no environmental issues arising from this report.

Risk Management Appraisal

There are no risks arising from this progress report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

There is no specific consultation associated with this progress report.

Cabinet Member:

Dave Roberts

Local Member

All

Appendix

Appendix 1: Timeline of Events of Ice and Heavy Snowfall in Shropshire

Appendix 2: Briefing Note to Members

Appendix 3: Briefing Note to Members

APPENDIX 1

Timeline of Events of Ice and Heavy Snowfall in Shropshire

Date	Area's Affected	Advice to Residents
W/c 21 st Dec 2009	High ground in South Shropshire including areas around Bishops Castle, Clun, Clee Hill and Snailbeach	Waste will be collected at next scheduled collection along with side waste, weather permitting
W/c 28 th Dec 2009	High ground in South Shropshire including areas around Bishops Castle, Clun, Clee Hill and Snailbeach	Waste will be collected at next scheduled collection along with side waste, weather permitting
Tues 5 th Jan	High ground in South Shropshire including areas around Bishops Castle, Clun, Clee Hill and Snailbeach	From w/c Monday Jan 11 th , green waste collections suspended, residual waste collections from all properties instead. Refuse Collection vehicles to operate as temporary community skips in Clun, Worthen and Clee Hill.
Weds 6 th Jan	Oswestry - lost whole day (green waste collections) Bridgnorth - lost whole day N Shropshire – 95% of collections completed Shrewsbury and Atcham – Only major routes serviced. S Shropshire – problems widened from high areas to towns, only major routes serviced lcy conditions forecast to continue to weekend at least	For areas outside South Shropshire waste will be collected at next scheduled collection along with side waste, weather permitting. Bring bins/boxes in if un-emptied in order to keep footpaths clear
Thurs 7 th Jan	Oswestry – mainly treated areas serviced Bridgnorth - mainly treated areas serviced –crews returning to previous days work if possible N Shropshire – no major problems Shrewsbury and Atcham – As Bridgnorth S Shropshire – As Bridgnorth	
Fri 8 th Jan	Oswestry – 60% of collections made Bridgnorth – 90% N Shropshire - 95% Shrewsbury and Atcham – 50% S Shropshire – 30%	

Sat 9 th Jan	Refuse Collection vehicles operate as temporary community skips in Clun, Worthen and Clee Hill.	
Date	Area's Affected	Advice to Residents
Mon 11 th Jan	Oswestry – 70% urban, 20% rural Bridgnorth – 80% urban, 55% rural N Shropshire - 75% Shrewsbury and Atcham – 95% urban, 40% rural S Shropshire – 90% Ludlow, 15% other	Same message as previous week Waste will be collected at next scheduled collection along with side waste, weather permitting. Bring bins/boxes in if un-emptied in order to keep footpaths clear
Tues 12 th Jan	Oswestry – 95% urban, 90% rural Bridgnorth – 98% N Shropshire - 96% Shrewsbury and Atcham – 95% urban, 40% rural S Shropshire – 100% urban, 60% rural	
Weds 13 th Jan	Whole county – 2% collections	From Weds evening all residents were advised of suspension of green waste collections until w/c 25 th Jan, side waste accepted, recycling collections would continue as normal weather permitting
Thurs 14 th Jan	Oswestry – 60% urban, 20% rural Bridgnorth – 95% urban, 60% rural N Shropshire - 98% Shrewsbury and Atcham – 90% S Shropshire – 100% urban, 30% rural	
Fri Jan 15 th	Oswestry – 100% urban, 25% rural Bridgnorth – 100% N Shropshire - 100% Shrewsbury and Atcham – 99% S Shropshire – 100% urban, 95% rural	
Sat 16 th Jan	4 vehicles out in Oswestry catching up.	
Mon 18 th Jan	100% completed across county	
Tues 19 th Jan	100% completed	

APPENDIX 2

Text of Briefing Email from Paul Beard, Waste Management, to All Members on 6 January 2010

As you will be aware there has been significant disruption to waste collections over the last two days due to snow and ice, with freezing conditions forecast to continue until the weekend at least. This disruption has not been evenly spread across the county, with some areas continuing to receive collections on the scheduled day, while others, particularly in parts of South Shropshire, have not had a waste collection service since before Christmas week. In response to this we, and our contractors Veolia Environmental Services, looked for a solution which could be easily explained to all residents and is consistent with the information that they already have. As such we have agreed the following approach:

For all areas other than South Shropshire - The backlog of waste will be picked up on their next scheduled collection day for that type of waste (i.e. in a fortnights' time) when any additional rubbish can be put out beside their bin i.e. a double collection. For this collection the normal rules on side waste will be suspended.

For those in South Shropshire - green bin waste collections will be suspended for the week commencing Monday 11th Jan 2010. The green waste vehicles will be used instead to help with the backlog of residual waste collections. In this regard all residents in the South Shropshire area will be asked to put out their general household waste bin or black bag on their scheduled collection day (irrespective of whether it would have been a green or black bin collection), and leave it out until it is emptied, which may be later in the week.

This message will be put out via radio, newspapers, the Customer Service Centre and the Council website.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

APPENDIX 3

TEXT OF BRIEFING FROM LARRY WOLFE, HEAD OF WASTE MANAGEMENT, SENT OUT ON 13 JANUARY 2010 TO ALL MEMBERS

Dear Councillors,

Weather conditions have today deteriorated compounding on the problems of waste not being collected last week due to the heavy snow. In light of current weather conditions, comments received directly from Shropshire residents and via Members, a decision has been taken to suspend all garden waste collections from tomorrow (Thursday 14th January) until Saturday 23rd January. This is to enable extra collections of residual, general household waste to be provided.

The message to give to residents should they enquire with you is to please put out your bin/sack of residual (non compostable) general household waste (in many areas this is referred to as black bin waste) on your next scheduled collection day this week and next week even if you were due a garden waste collection and please leave it out until it has been collected.

In addition for recycling box collections, residents should put out their recycling box on their normal collection day, however if not collected, they should bring it back in from the kerbside. The recycling box can only be presented again for collection on the next due date.

We are continuing with the recycling box collections because the vehicles used for this service are not suitable for bin collections. We are also asking for uncollected boxes to be brought back in as if left on pavements in the current weather conditions they pose a greater safety hazard to the public than for bins.

The suspension of the garden waste service allows us to make additional refuse collections but ensures that garden waste, when collected will be composted as normal.

From Monday 25th January, weather conditions permitting, residents should put their waste containers out for collection according to the information on their waste collection calendar.

We are doing everything we can to collect household waste, however in some areas this is not possible at this time due to road conditions.

We are using all available channels of communication to get this message across to the public as quickly as possible and I attach for your information a copy of the advertisement to be included in the Shropshire Star on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Monday.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

WASTE AND RECYCLING COLLECTIONS

Due to the continued extreme weather conditions across Shropshire, all garden waste collections will be replaced by household refuse collections from Thursday 14 January until Saturday 23rd January.

Household Refuse and Garden Waste

Please put out your household refuse on your next scheduled collection day (whether you are due a household refuse or garden waste collection-please refer to your collection calendar if unsure). We also will collect additional household refuse put out alongside your bin.

Recycling Boxes

Please put your recycling boxes out on the date shown on your calendar, but if we are unable to make a collection please take them back in for safety reasons. Weather permitting you will then receive a collection of your boxes on your next calendar date.

Weather permitting, your scheduled collection will revert to the normal service on your collection calendar from 25 January.

For the latest information please contact 0345 6789007 or check the Shropshire Council website www.shropshire.gov.uk