

# **Report to Safer, Cleaner, Greener Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 1 July 2010**

**Subject: Review of waste and recycling Collection  
services during Christmas and New Year 2009/10**



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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**(1) The first phase of review of the waste and recycling arrangements during Christmas and New Year 2009/10 has been completed and the following areas of improvements identified to be pursued further;**

**a) feasibility of operation of Customer Contact Centre during Christmas and New Year holiday period;**

**b) provision of information updates during holiday period via telephone message and the Council web site;**

**c) suspension of less disrupted collection services to divert resources to more critical areas.**

## **Report:**

Alterations to normal collection days have to be made every year at Christmas and New Year. This is due to closure of waste processing facilities on bank holidays. The longest collection delay intended is no more than a few days. Appendix-1 lists the planned revised collection dates during the Christmas holiday period in 2009.

## Events in December 2009 and January 2010:

Waste and recycling collections were disrupted during this period due to snow fall and icy road conditions. Separate snow events caused disruption before Christmas and in early January 2010. The levels of service disruption varied across the district. Appendix-2 lists estimated percentage of roads affected.

The following is a list of some of the reasons for delay in collections:

- a) Icy road conditions prevented safe handling of containers by collection crews and/or safe driving of refuse freighters on the road.
- b) Landfill sites and waste processing plants were either not operating or closed early due to dangerous operating conditions. This meant that the refuse freighters could not be emptied.
- c) Higher levels of vehicle breakdowns were being experienced due to electrical problems caused by freezing temperatures.
- d) Hire of additional vehicles from the private market was not possible as companies were not operating in the Christmas holidays.
- e) The tonnages being collected were very high. Being the first collection after the Christmas holidays larger than normal quantities of waste and recycling materials were being presented for collection.

- f) The collections missed before Christmas 2009 were due to be collected early in the New Year. However the second snow event in January 2010 caused further disruption and delay.

Collection services were disrupted to varying degrees. Weekly food and garden collection was less disrupted with the average longest delay being two weeks. The residual and dry recycling collections were missed for longer, with the longest delay in some cases of were one month. Glass recycling collection service suffered similar high levels of disruption. However fewer numbers of complaints were received about this service.

#### Actions undertaken to counter the weather disruption:

Weather disruption started with snow on 22nd December 2009 and most collections were back on normal footing by Monday the week commencing 17 January 2010. Unlike some neighbouring Authorities, who had suspended collection services for a number of days, the Council suspended collections for one day on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

It is an officer view that Sita contract staff and operatives managed the snow disruption event very well. There was good communication and close working between the Council's client managers and Sita supervisors.

The following are some of the main highlights of actions undertaken to avoid longer delays and get collection services back to normal as soon as possible:

- a) Suspend Special Collections (bulky waste item collection) to divert resources to help catch up refuse and recycling collections.
- b) Suspend street cleansing service, divert some crews to grit high streets/main roads and pavements to assist residents.
- c) Divert remaining street cleansing crews to work alongside refuse and recycling crews.
- d) Suspend normal 'side waste' policy and collect any waste placed next to normal collection container until service back to normal.
- e) Street cleansing crews to pile up recycling and residual sacks at easy to access road junctions or the nearest point that a freighter could safely access.
- f) Hire additional refuse freighters and crews in January 2010 to help clear the backlog.

The residents contacted Customer Contact Centre of the Environment and Street Scene Directorate via telephone (01992 564608). Total number of weekly calls received is listed in Appendix-3.

Members were provided email updates by the waste and recycling team on the status of service disruption and initiatives being taken to catch up waste and recycling collections. Email updates were issued to all District Members on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010.

#### District Council Website

The council website was one of the key methods of communicating with residents. Twenty weather related updates were published online during December and January. Of these, 15 focused exclusively on or included refuse and recycling information. Others provided advice on preparing and coping with severe weather, taking precautions when driving, keeping a friendly eye on elderly neighbours and notification of cancelled events.

Within limitations, it is also possible to update the website remotely from home or other location. However systems need to be put in place to ensure approval and vetting of information before publication.

From the first update issued on 18 December to the final update on 19 January, these pages on the website received 18,397 hits, providing a source of information available 24 hours a day and valuable support to the Environment and Street Scene telephone contact centre.

Among others, information posted on the council website was also circulated by Public Relations via the 'Contact Us' e-mail address to local media, councillors, town and parish councils.

While many updates were issued, the situation was changing from day to day. The Council was concerned to ensure that information was carefully checked at a senior level before publication. While ensuring the highest levels of accuracy, this did delay the publication process. It led to discussions among officers concerning the trade off or balance between speed of information release and detailed accuracy in rapidly changing environment.

The Society of IT Managers (SOCITM) rated the Epping Forest District Council website as one of the top nine borough and district sites in the country. Among the reason given by SOCITM was the use of the website to keep residents up to date with severe weather related information during December and January. Specifically, the council's use of small vehicles to transfer recycling to collection points as publicised on the website on 15 January was held up as an example of best practice.

#### Assessment of performance during the disruption period:

The primary responsibility for health and safety of it's staff and third parties rests with Sita. As a result any decision to not collect from a road has to be taken by Sita .

The other reason for suspension or delays in collections is closure of landfill and waste processing plants. The Council does not have a choice in this matter. The Waste Disposal Authority, Essex County Council in this case, determines which landfill the waste goes to. If a landfill site is closed then the collection services have to be suspended.

The Customer Contact Centre is based in the Civic Office in Epping and was shut down during the Christmas Holidays from the afternoon of 24<sup>th</sup> December until the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2010. The telephone message or the Website were not updated during the holiday period.

The contact centre was not open due to the closure of the Civic Office in Epping. The residents inability to speak to the contact centre over the holiday period led to the criticism that the Council was shut down over the Christmas holidays. This despite the fact that the technical officers of the Waste and Recycling Team work on a rota basis out of the Langston Road Depot.

There was a delay in responding to the emails received over the shut down period. This was due to the backlog of work created over the holiday period as well as the large number of phone calls being received once the offices opened in January.

The residents could not understand why the phone message was not updated during the holiday period. This is because the message can only be updated at the equipment within the Civic Offices. There are technological limitations which limit the ability to update phone messages remotely.

The other criticism by residents was that some collections were caught up sooner than others. For example they could not understand why there were longer delays in collecting general refuse and recycling collections while food and garden recycling was back to normal sooner.

#### Conclusions drawn so far and changes proposed or introduced already:

As a result of the review some changes have already been introduced such as closer liaison and communication between front line managers and customer contact centre staff. Actions

plans will be prepared to implement some of the changes identified. Officers have also been tasked with carrying out further work to finalise procedures and prepare protocols in relation to some of the changes proposed.

Although the glass collection was impacted by weather as much as the other services the level of complaints from residents were far less. This service will be monitored for possibility of diverting resources in a future service disruption of this or similar nature.

What further work is required:

Technical officers of the Waste and Recycling team were working during the Christmas holiday period from their offices in Langston Road Depot in Loughton. The same is not possible for the customer contact centre based in Epping. The Civic Office in Epping is shut during the holiday period. It is proposed that the feasibility of a limited Customer Call Centre being operational during the Christmas holiday period be further explored (**recommendation 1 (a)**)

The systems associated with updating the Council's web site, telephony systems or issuing press releases are based in the Civic Office in Epping. There are approval/security protocols and technology issues which restrict message updating from a remote location. The approval and vetting of information before publication is also time consuming. It is proposed that further investigation be carried out to explore the possibility of regular updates of the external messages (**recommendation 1 (b)**)

Longer delays were experienced in the fortnightly collections of residual and dry recycling. It is assessed that this may be avoided in future if for example less disrupted weekly food and garden collections are suspended and resources diverted to fortnightly missed collections. This requires further investigation as there could be reputational issues with disruption of a weekly service (**recommendation 1 (c)**)

**Reason for decision:**

There is an opportunity to review performance of the waste and recycling collection arrangements and identify areas of improvement. This will assist in preparations for any future event and increase resilience.

**Options considered and rejected:**

Not to conduct a review of the issues faced due to severe weather. However the Council will miss an opportunity to prepare for such events in future. The Council would also be criticised for not addressing customers' concerns. An opportunity for learning lessons and identifying areas for improvements will also be lost.

**Consultation undertaken:**

Sita: in respect of service performance during the severe weather disruption and consideration of service review for future. A valuable suggestion by Sita is around the suspension of the food and garden service to divert resources to catch up longer awaiting residual collections. This has been incorporated in this review.

Officers: the Waste and Recycling team, Customer Contact Centre, Public Relations.

Elected Members: consulted via the Members Bulletin.

Residents: comments received directly by officers.

Resource implications: There are no resource implications for changes already introduced however there may be a financial impact of some of the tasks identified for further investigation. These will be presented in a future report.

Budget provision: No additional required at this stage, however there may be additional funding requirement as a result of this review.

Personnel: The officers of the Environment and Street Scene will carry out all tasks identified

in this report.

Land: No change.

Community Plan/BVPP reference:

Relevant statutory powers:

Background papers: nil

Cabinet Reports: nil

O & S Reports: nil

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: Collecting waste and recycling and maintaining street cleansing standards is an essential function of the Council. Any prolonged failure of service can have a detrimental impact on street scene which can result in litter and hygiene issues.

Key Decision reference: (if required)

### Appendix-1

Table of planned revised collection days for Christmas 2009 and New Year 2010:

Normal collection date	Revised collection date
Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	Tuesday 29 <sup>th</sup> December 2009
Monday 28 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	Wednesday 30 <sup>th</sup> December 2009
Tuesday 29 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	Thursday 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2009
Wednesday 30 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	Saturday 2 <sup>nd</sup> January 2010
Thursday 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2009	Monday 4 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Friday 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2010	Tuesday 5 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Monday 4 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Wednesday 6 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Tuesday 5 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Thursday 7 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Wednesday 6 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Friday 8 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Thursday 7 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Friday 8 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Monday 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Monday 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Tuesday 12 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Tuesday 12 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Wednesday 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Wednesday 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Friday 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2010
Friday 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	Saturday 16 <sup>th</sup> January 2010

### Appendix-2

The below tables give the approximate percentages of roads left uncollected for each collection service on the snow affected days.

Collection date	Approximate % of refuse collections disrupted	Approximate % of recycling collections disrupted	% of food and garden missed
Tues 22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec	30%	50%	40%
Wed 23 <sup>rd</sup> Dec	50%	60%	50%
Thurs 24 <sup>th</sup> Dec	30%	40%	40%
Wed 6 <sup>th</sup> Jan (Mon 4 <sup>th</sup> Jan)	70%	75%	75%
Thurs 7 <sup>th</sup> Jan (Tue 5 <sup>th</sup> Jan)	100%	100%	100%
Fri 8 <sup>th</sup> Jan (Wed 6 <sup>th</sup> Jan)	60%	70%	60%
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> Jan (Thurs 7 <sup>th</sup> Jan)	20%	25%	20%
Mon 11 <sup>th</sup> Jan (Fri 8 <sup>th</sup> Jan)	10%	10%	10%
Tue 12 <sup>th</sup> Jan (Mon 11 <sup>th</sup> Jan)	5%	5%	5%

### Appendix-3

Week commencing	No of weekly phone calls received
14 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	644
21 <sup>st</sup> December 2009	570
4 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	1723
10 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	1794
17 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	1271
24 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	774

