

Officer Decision

22nd April 2020

Revised Collection Arrangements for Garden Waste Operations due to Coronavirus



Ordinary Decision/Key Decision No.

Report of Corporate Management Team

**Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and
Climate Change**

**Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships.**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To seek approval to operate a garden waste collection service with days of collection changed to either a Saturday or a Monday for customers.
- 2 To note that it is proposed to review this service in four months' time, when the peak growing season collections would be complete, and the position regarding the current pandemic may be clearer.

Executive summary

- 3 The Councils garden waste collection service to over 55,000 customers was due to start 31st March 2020 and was delayed by a month to 28th April 2020 to allow the 10 vehicles and 30 staff involved to support the refuse and recycling services to maintain social distancing requirements, minimising personnel travelling in a cab together.
- 4 The requirements for social distancing continue, and Cabinet has previously received a report (6th April 2020) which considered and determined that a full cessation of service may be required, in the interests of continuing to safeguard the wellbeing of staff. Of course this was a difficult decision as with a large number of customers it impacts on the service reputation, at a time when more residents are spending time in their gardens, and also has a significant cost (up to £2.4 million).

- 5 The service has therefore considered ways it may achieve the garden waste collections, whilst keeping to the fundamental requirement of safeguarding the welfare of staff. Under the revised arrangements:
- All core refuse and recycling services which operate Tuesday to Friday will continue to be supported by the garden waste crews and vehicles which in turn support social distancing requirements.
 - All customers due to receive their garden waste collection on a Tuesday or Wednesday would be moved to a Saturday. All those that were to receive collections on a Thursday or Friday would be moved to a Monday. Under these arrangements the vehicles will not be required by core services. Staff who work these days, if part of the core refuse and recycling service will do so on a voluntary overtime basis, with a rota in place to help limit hours any individual works.
- 6 Staff and Trade Unions have been briefed and are supportive. It is proposed to commence this from Saturday 2nd May (for customers expecting collections on 28th April and 29th April), and the first weekend is over-subscribed with staff volunteers. A communications plan has been prepared and all customers will be directly advised of their new collection arrangements by either e-mail or post, as well as general communication measures. The new arrangements also allow the in-house composting of the newly renovated facilities at Joint Stocks, Coxhoe to be utilised.
- 7 Given the change in collection arrangements, it is proposed to allow customers to register for a refund, although the numbers are expected to be low given the service is continuing. Another risk relates to staffing, and measures are in place through a rota to ensure that staff are not working excessive hours, furthermore the service continues to monitor absences linked to coronavirus which are at present manageable. Greatest demand for this service is during the peak growing season, and it is proposed to review provision in four months' time.

Recommendation(s)

- 8 Cabinet is recommended to:
- (a) Approve the continuance of the garden waste collection service, albeit under changed arrangements of Saturday and Monday collections.
 - (b) Approve the implementation of a communication plan to ensure all customers are informed of these revised arrangements.

- (c) Note that the performance of the service will be continually monitored and a formal review will be undertaken and reported in four months' time.

Background

- 9 The Councils garden waste collection service to over 55,000 customers was due to start 31st March 2020 and was delayed a month to 28th April 2020 to allow the 10 vehicles and 30 staff involved to support the main refuse and recycling services to maintain social distancing requirements, minimising personnel travelling in a cab together.
- 10 The requirements for social distancing continue, and Cabinet has previously received a report (6th April 2020) which considered and determined that a full cessation of service may be required, in the interests of continuing to safeguard the wellbeing of staff. Of course this was a difficult decision as with a large number of customers it impacts on the service reputation, at a time when more residents are spending time in their gardens, and also has a significant cost (up to £2.4 million).
- 11 The service has therefore considered ways it may achieve the garden waste collections, whilst keeping to the fundamental requirement of safeguarding the welfare of staff.
- 12 The option of running a garden waste service as originally planned on a Tuesday to Friday basis has been considered and discounted, as the loss of this additional operation support would adversely impact the social distancing requirements on the core refuse and recycling.
- 13 The operation of garden waste collection is however considered viable if operated on a Saturday and Monday. In effect these would be double rounds with Tuesday and Wednesday collected on a Saturday and Thursday and Friday collected on a Monday.
- 14 Three elements of resource are required to achieve this:
 - **Fleet.** For the first collections 30 collection vehicles would be utilised (from a fleet of 45 suitable vehicles). This is a deliberate over provision (anticipated requirement 16-20), but will not only allow social distancing to be adequately met, but also reflects the experience that loads are heavier at the beginning of the season. In addition spare vehicles will also be utilised for loaders where needed. All vehicles are fitted with ICT technology which displays routes between customers.
 - **Staffing.** For the first collections 90 staff would be required on each day. This is from a pool of drivers and loaders of over 250, and in addition, especially for the Monday collections there are volunteers potentially available to assist, with 70 trained and of these 15 who have already been regularly assisting the core rounds.

- **Waste transfer stations and composting site.** Arrangements have been put in place for these facilities to be open. Approximately 70% collected will be direct delivered to our compost pad at Joint Stocks landfill site, Coxhoe and 30% delivered to Waste Transfer Stations for onward movement to Joint Stocks using our current Haulage contractor, Hargreaves. This is the first year we have brought composting operations back in house having previously used local on farm compost facilities. Subject to the compost meeting the required Environment Agency standards (PAS100) it can in due course returned to customers or sold.

Communications

- 15 A communications plan has been prepared which will involve informing all customers individually by letter (c.20,000) or by e-mail (c.35,000) of their revised collection days, and the reasons for this. In addition all Elected Members will be informed, as well as media releases.
- 16 In recognition of the revised collection days it is proposed to allow for refunds. These are not expected to be high however, as the service is still continuing. It is possible that this may not be processed until after first collections are complete, however it still removes this from the waste stream and is a minor recompense in service for inconvenience.
- 17 The peak of the growing season, and associated garden waste tonnages will be over the next four months. It is proposed to review the service at this time, with consideration given to remaining collections, days of operation, staffing impact due to coronavirus and customer utilisation.

Conclusion

- 18 Operating the garden waste collection on a Saturday and Monday allows the main service of refuse and recycling to be safeguarded. Customers will of course need to be fully aware of these changed arrangements.
- 19 It will need to be monitored as the season progresses, and further reports will be provided if further changes to the service are required,

Background papers

- List any papers required by law / None

Other useful documents

- 6th April 2020 Cabinet Garden Waste Collections

Author(s)

Oliver Sherratt

Tel: 03000 269259

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

This is a non-statutory service

Finance

Compared to full cessation of the service and associated refunds, this would reduce the financial impact to the Council from an estimated £2.5 million to £976,000, a reflection of the fact that the garden waste crews are supporting the refuse and recycling, rather than their costs being met from garden waste income alone.

Consultation

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Text.

Climate Change

Garden waste collection has been recognised nationally as favourable to landfill as it avoids methane production. It also provides a growing medium through natural composting which avoids depleting other resources.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

Detailed in the report

Accommodation

None

Risk

Text.

Procurement

None