



SCRUTINY TASK GROUP UPDATE

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 18 February 2013

Suspension of refuse & recycling collections (18 January – 25 January)

The Ubico scrutiny task group agreed to hold an urgent meeting to better understand the rationale behind the decision to suspend refuse & recycling collections in Cheltenham between 18 January and 25 January 2013 due to the inclement weather. They felt that it was important to hold a timely meeting and report back to this committee so that members of the public and councillors could be assured that the council was concerned about the impact the service disruption had on individuals and communities. Some of the findings will be pertinent to the full report which will be presented to this committee at a later date but the task group felt it was important to brief the committee on this specific aspect of the review at this time.

During the meeting the task group heard from the managing director and waste and recycling manager of Ubico who both presented the issues relating to undertaking collections during snow and ice. The task group also heard from a driver whose lorry had skidded on the ice and one of his loaders' nearly crushed by a car which had lost control on the ice. The task group also questioned the director of commissioning and the cabinet member sustainability about the decision making process.

1. TASK GROUP CONCERNS

- 1.1 The task group on hearing the evidence from Ubico fully understood the decision to suspend services when there was snow on the ground. Their concern however was around the decision made on the Wednesday to suspend the service for the full week and on the catch up arrangements.
- 1.2 Members understood that the decision was based on evidence at the time and was done to provide a clear message to the public but it had the opposite effect and angered many residents who, in areas where roads were clear, could see no justification for the continued suspension of collections.
- 1.3 Members also felt that more could be done to catch up where collections had been missed and with fortnightly collections recognised that it creates difficulties for residents.
- 1.4 The main concern of the task group related to communication during the period. Members felt that there had been an over reliance on the use of the website and that it should be recognised that a large proportion of the elderly population of Cheltenham did not have a computer or access to the internet. They also felt that messages such as "double collections" were confusing and also that the lack

of clarity where catch up collections were taking place caused confusion with residents who may have taken their refuse back into their premises.

2. SUGGESTIONS OF THE TASK GROUP

- 2.1 Members were prepared to accept that a full review of the issue would be considered by the Cabinet Member Working Group which had been tasked with reviewing the decision making process and formulating 'lessons learnt' and as such did not feel it appropriate to make any recommendations at this stage. They did, however, decide to make the following suggestions for consideration of the Cabinet Member Working Group. The Cabinet Member Sustainability was happy for the working group to consider this and any other suggestions of the task group.
- 2.2 The Cabinet Member Working Group should collate their report and recommendations in a timely manner and this should be forwarded for consideration by the overview and scrutiny committee , following which we recommend that it should go to full council for debate before the end of April
- 2.3 As with School closures, information regarding the suspension of refuse and recycling collections should be communicated to the public via local radio. Officers assured members that local radio stations were advised of any such decisions as a matter of course but the council was somewhat powerless as to whether individual stations decided to run the story. The suggestion was that the Cabinet Member Working Group could re-evaluate the current procedure and to task the Communications Team with investigating whether it would be possible, in these circumstances, to pay for air time.
- 2.4 Members felt strongly that residents were less interested in getting a clear message from the council, especially if this was that all collections were suspended, than they were in seeing collections continue wherever possible. They accepted that either approach i.e. full suspension or part collections where possible, would result in some residents being frustrated but felt that it was more important for the council to be seen as doing something rather than nothing.

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| Appendices | A. Rationale behind the operational decisions B. Timeline of events and decisions taken C. Refuse & Recycling Operations in Snow/Icy Conditions D. Ubico Snow/Ice procedure E. Severe Weather Arrangements policy F. The relevant section of the SLA between Ubico and CBC |
| Background information | N/A |

Appendix A

RATIONALE BEHIND THE OPERATIONAL DECISIONS

- 1.1 The council and Ubico have a number of operational and policy documents that they refer to during periods of ice and snow,;
 - Refuse & Recycling Operations in Snow/Icy Conditions (Appendix C)
 - Ubico Snow/Ice procedure (Appendix D)
 - Severe Weather Arrangements policy (Appendix E)
 - The relevant section of the SLA between Ubico and CBC (Appendix F)
- 1.2 The SLA indicates that Ubico's Managing Director, or his nominee, must inform the Council's Strategic Client Officer immediately when they become aware of any serious problem affecting the Borough's waste and recycling collections service. The Strategic Client Officer and the Managing Director, or his nominee, will agree on how the Company should deal with the problem. This may be by attempting to make collections with all vehicles, making collections in limited areas or postponing the service. Once the decision is made, the Strategic Client Officer is responsible for informing the relevant council officers and members. Should the operational situation change, which it may do several times in a short period of time under such circumstances, the Managing Director or his nominee must inform the Strategic Client Officer immediately.
- 1.3 In the event of a single day's collections being missed, this must be caught up by the following Saturday. Should multiple days of disruption occur, the Managing Director, Strategic Client Officer, Director of Commissioning and Portfolio Holder will agree if emergency waste collection services are necessary and in which locations.
- 1.4 Ubico's policy, Refuse & Recycling Operations in Snow/Icy Conditions, gives guidance to help decide whether operations should be suspended, and who makes that decision.
- 1.5 The duty supervisor or officer will make a decision based on the best information available to them at the time. The Snow/Ice Procedure outlines nine actions steps to be taken in making this decision and step one outlines the information sources the supervisor should consider when making their decision.
- 1.6 Once a decision has been taken, the supervisor must inform the senior management of the decision and the current situation. The senior manager will then liaise with the Strategic Client Officer at the council and they will consider all the information available to them and agree whether service delivery should continue or be suspended in whole or part.

Appendix B

TIMELINE OF EVENTS AND DECISIONS TAKEN

- 1.1 Staff had been monitoring forecasts all week as snow was predicted any time from 3am on 18 January 2013. As a result of the predictions, a meeting was held on 17 January 2013 to ensure that the Ubico Waste and Recycling management team, which included the Strategic Client Officer from the council, were familiar with the snow and ice procedure and understood their role and the requirements of them should the inclement weather affect collection services.
- 1.2 On Friday 18 January 2013, after snow had started to settle and crews had begun to report hazardous conditions for loaders and vehicles, supervisors had undertaken on-site inspections to assess the situation. Conditions were found by the supervisors to be unsafe to operate in and crews were instructed to return to the depot and the Strategic Client Officer was informed of the situation. As snow clearance was not yet taking place and there were no other duties to which the staff could be safely diverted, the collection crews were sent home and told that their hours would be banked and used to catch up with missed collections on the Monday (21 January). Residents were advised that the days missed collections would be made on Monday 21 January if weather conditions had improved over the weekend. This was communicated to residents via the website.
- 1.3 Conditions did not improve over the weekend and on Monday 21 January supervisors and the Waste and Recycling Manager assessed conditions as being unsafe. Whilst main access roads were clear, the pavements of those roads remained in too poor condition for collections to be undertaken safely. The Strategic Client Officer was contacted and it was agreed that the service would be suspended in full for the day. Throughout the day Ubico had received calls from customer facing officers at the council asking for a clear message regarding when collections would resume and what catch-up plan would be implemented. It was not deemed possible to provide such a message at this time given that an update from the Met Office suggested that another weather system which would bring more snowfall was expected overnight and as a result an amber weather warning issued.
- 1.4 Inspections on Tuesday 22 January 2013 identified that conditions on pavements and side roads remained icy and too dangerous to undertake full collections. The Strategic Client Officer was consulted with a view to Ubico sending out crews to main roads only. Given that it would be impossible to service anything other than arterial roads, it was decided that this option would only serve to confuse residents and as such it was reported that there would be no waste or recycling collections that day in Cheltenham. Calls were again received from customer facing staff requesting that a clear decision be taken when collections would be resumed and again, it was not possible to do so given that an amber warning for more snowfall was in place from 13:45 on 22 January until 09:00 on 21 January. In addition to this it was forecast to be cold and icy throughout Wednesday and Thursday with a switch to milder conditions on Friday and rain over the weekend.
- 1.5 On Wednesday 23 January 2013, following snowfall over night and as a result of the continuing freezing weather and the requirement of the council to provide a

clear message to residents, Cheltenham Borough Council and Ubico decided to cancel all collections for the rest of the week. Residents were advised, via the website, that those that had missed collections from Friday 18 January to Friday 25 January would receive a 'double collection' a fortnight later on their scheduled collection date. On this date, a Q&A sheet was circulated to all Councillors by email which aimed to aid them in dealing with any residents' queries or concerns.

- 1.6 However, on Thursday 24 January 2013 it was clear to supervisors and managers that the predicted low temperatures of the night before had not materialised and in fact a thaw was underway. Side roads and some pavements looked significantly better and considered safely passable, with care and main roads and their pavements, where footfall was highest, had returned to normal conditions. However, outlying and higher areas were still found to be dangerous and impassable. Crews were brought in to begin catch-up collections. One refuse collection vehicle was able to collect from the main roads, whilst smaller, caged vehicles were utilised in other areas off the main highways as these were the only safe option. It was reported that work to clear some of the black bag side waste would start in areas of the borough where routes had improved.
- 1.7 Crews were asked to clear black bag waste from alongside bins, starting in areas where waste had potentially been at the kerbside for the longest. The Council asked that priority also be given to areas with high levels of HMO's, terraced properties (where large amounts of waste cannot be stored off the highway) and hotspot areas where problems with large amounts of excess black bag waste existed under normal circumstances. The RCV and caged vehicles continued to collect black bag waste throughout Thursday, Friday and Saturday.



Appendix C

Refuse & Recycling Operations in Snow / Icy Conditions

Following significant inclement winter weather, it may be necessary to consider suspending collection operations to ensure the safety of members of the public, employees and property.

To ensure a consistent approach by Ubico the following should be used as a guide to help decide whether operations should be suspended. Due to the different types of terrain encountered between urban and rural areas and operational differences (i.e. stop – start in urban areas, more people and traffic, manual handling considerations) the decision taken may be different for each area or contract; however the means of decision making will be consistent.

Conditions when it may be necessary to suspend operations.

If the road conditions across the district, or certain areas of the district, are such that to send out large collection vehicles would create an additional hazard and a threat to personal safety (e.g. in bad snow or ice on untreated roads or treated traffic routes with high volumes of traffic). If road conditions are passable, but snow or ice on footpaths etc. create an unacceptable hazard to loaders.

Who Decides

The duty supervisor / officer will make a decision based upon the best information available to them at the time. Consultation should take place with other supervisors, local health and safety reps and employees. The operators of the landfill sites, recycling facility and composting facility should also be consulted to confirm they are able to receive waste and materials collected. The decision to continue or suspend collections should be based on information gained through a combination of;

- Physical inspection of the local road networks
- Reports from Gloucestershire Highways or Police (note – collections should not be made from treated roads if when doing so they cause traffic congestion)
- Reports from employees who have travelled to work
- Reports from teams already working (e.g. street cleaning)
- Local weather forecasts
- Current weather conditions
- Visibility (natural light, fog, driving snow)

Depending upon the weather conditions and information received, it may be appropriate to initially delay the start of collections until more robust information is available to determine whether it is safe for vehicle to work. If a decision is made to suspend collections, refer to the Ubico Snow/Ice procedure.

If collections are to continue as scheduled each driver must be given clear instruction on how to proceed and regular contact must be maintained throughout the day to

continuously re-evaluate ground conditions. Where practical, management should conduct on site assessments of worst affected areas.

Resuming Collections

Prior to recommencing collections, it is essential to ensure that safe access is available to and on the landfill site, recycling and composting facilities. Appropriate media message should be released via the council's communications team, identifying when waste and recycling collections will be undertaken.



SNOW / ICE PROCEDURE

- Step 1** The Senior operations supervisor collates and records information and local knowledge on weather conditions. The information and will be gained through a combination of:
- Local weather forecasts
 - Current weather conditions
 - Reports from teams already working (e.g. street cleaning)
 - Physical inspection of the local road network
 - Visibility (natural light, fog, driving snow)
 - Reports from Gloucestershire Highways or Police
- Step 2** The senior operations supervisor consults with colleagues, local health and safety representatives and employees and records outcomes.
- Step 3** The senior operations supervisor makes a decision to continue or suspend the service, in whole or in part. All employees to remain at work.
- Step 4** The senior operations supervisor informs Ubico senior management of the decision and the current situation.
- Step 5** The senior manager informs the strategic client officer (or the service commissioner) of the current situation.
- Step 6** The senior manager and the strategic client officer will, having considered all the relevant information, agree on whether service delivery should continue or be suspended in whole or in part.
- Step 7** The strategic client officer will communicate the facts and agreed action to:
- Service commissioners
 - Customer services
 - Communications
 - Cabinet member
- Step 8** The senior manager will decide whether employees are to be redeployed to other duties (e.g. snow clearance) or stood down from all duties and sent home.
- Step 9** The senior manager and the strategic client officer to continuously review the situation until fair weather conditions return (refer to service contracts – section F or G).



Severe Weather Arrangements

If bad weather, flooding or disruption to the transport system makes travel to work impossible, difficult or dangerous, management will try to work with employees to agree ways in which they can work the time back or take the missed time as holiday.

If the conditions are considered so bad that a decision is made to suspend the service, in full or in part, management may;

- a. redeploy employees onto other work or onto emergency response (e.g. snow clearance or sand bag filling).

or

- b. stand employees down from their duties. In this instance the employee will continue to be paid but the hours are banked and deducted from any overtime required to clear the backlog and return the service to normal operations.



WASTE AND INCLEMENT WEATHER PROCEDURE AND POLICIES

This plan should be put into action during an emergency which causes the Council's waste and recycling collection service to be disrupted, such as heavy snowfall. The plan is set out in chronological order in terms of the steps which would need to be taken.

A. Establish the facts

1. The Company's Managing Director (or his nominee if the Company's Managing Director is unavailable) to immediately inform the Council's Strategic Client Officer (or the Council's Director of Commissioning if the Strategic Client Officer is unavailable) of any serious problem affecting the Borough's waste and recycling collection service. The Strategic Client Officer will then establish the exact nature of the problem, which areas of the Borough are affected and how it will impact on the normal operation of the waste service in the Borough.

B. Decide on course of action

1. The Strategic Client Officer and the Company's Managing Director to agree on how the Company should deal with the problem i.e. attempt to make collections with all vehicles, attempt to make collections in limited areas or postpone all collections.

C. Communicate the message

1. Strategic Client Officer to relay all the facts and the agreed action to the Director of Commissioning and the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability (or Council Leader if the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability is unavailable).
2. Strategic Client Officer contact Customer Services, Communications Officer and the Webmaster to relay all the facts and explain the agreed action.
3. Strategic Client Officer to prepare and send a media release to all the relevant local papers, radio and TV stations, ensuring information is accurate, unambiguous and in accordance with the message that has been agreed in C2 above (wording of media release to be agreed by relevant officers and Members as appropriate).

4. Communications Officer to email all Members, Parish/Town Councils and all staff with details of the media release (Parish clerks not on email should be sent a copy of the media release by post and also contacted by telephone if possible).
5. Webmaster to display details of the press release on the Council's website and intranet.
6. Customer Services to provide an automated telephone message

D. Update information

1. In an emergency, the situation regarding collections could change several times over a short period of time. The Company's Managing Director must inform the Strategic Client Officer immediately of any changes to the situation (and vice-versa). If the situation does change, the above procedure should be repeated so that an updated message can be displayed on the website, sent out to members, Town/Parish Councils and the media as quickly as possible.
2. Weather forecasts will be monitored to enable predicted conditions over the coming week to be incorporated in the service planning and contingency arrangements,

F. Follow-up once collections have resumed

1. Communications Officer to send out another press release to all the relevant local papers, radio and TV stations, members, Town/Parish councils once the collection service is back to normal.
2. Strategic Client Officer to send update information to Customer Services and Webmaster when the waste collection service is back up and running.

G. Waste Collection Catch-up

1. A singular days missed collections due to inclement weather will be caught up by the following Saturday at an extra cost to the Council.
2. During multiple days disruption the Company's Managing Director the Strategic Client Officer, the Director of Commissioning and Portfolio Holder will agree if the emergency waste collection service should be implemented and at which locations (subject to being able to safely gain access).