

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet Member Decision
New Inclement Weather Procedure for
Cheltenham Borough Council

Accountable member	Councillor Roger Whyborn Cabinet Member for Sustainability
Accountable officer	Scott Williams Strategic Client Officer – Joint Waste Team 01285 623123 / 01242 262626 scott.williams@cotswold.gov.uk scott.williams@cheltenham.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected	All
Key Decision	No
Executive summary	<p>On 28 March 2013 a Cabinet Member Working Group reviewed the way in which waste and recycling collection services in Cheltenham were managed during the spell of inclement weather in January 2013 and particularly the way in which messages were communicated to residents and the media by the Council. The working group also considered the findings from the overview and scrutiny Ubico task group which held a meeting shortly after the period of bad weather. As part of the review the Cabinet Member Working Group made a number of recommended improvements, which were captured in a lessons learnt report the findings of which are outlined in section 1 below.</p> <p>Using the report a policy and procedure has been created (appendix 2) which provides a structured plan of the way in which the waste and recycling services and the associated messages provided to residents and the media, during an emergency which affects normal operations, should be managed.</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to present the new policy and procedure to Councillor Roger Whyborn, Cabinet Member for Sustainability for formal review, with a recommendation that it be approved for adoption as a Council policy.</p>
Recommendations	For Cllr Roger Whyborn, Cabinet Member for Sustainability to approve the proposal to adopt the new inclement weather policy and procedure as a Council policy.

Financial implications	<p>The formal adoption of this policy will not have a direct financial impact on the Council.</p> <p>However the identified outputs contained within the inclement weather policy and procedure may result in a cost to the Council, but this is dependant on the nature of the emergency and the decisions made to manage the waste and recycling collections and communications activities before, during and after the emergency.</p> <p>Contact officer: Des Knight – Finance Business Partner</p> <p>Tel: 01242 264124 Email. des.knight@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>
Legal implications	<p>None directly flowing from the recommendation.</p> <p>Contact officer: Peter Lewis - Onelegal</p> <p>Tel: 01684 272012 Email: peter.lewis@tewkesbury.gov.uk</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>The formal adoption of this policy has no direct HR implications, however consideration should be given to additional pressure placed on those employees undertaking and managing waste collections in inclement weather situations and support provided as required.</p> <p>Contact officer: Donna Sheffield – HR Business Partner</p> <p>Tel: 01242 774972 Email: donna.sheffield@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>
Key risks	<p>There are no foreseen risks in adopting the inclement weather policy and procedure.</p> <p>However there is a risk that if the policy and procedure is not adopted, then officers of the Council and those of Ubico Ltd will not have an agreed plan to follow when managing emergency situations which affect the way in which normal waste and recycling collections are operated in Cheltenham. This could lead to operational mistakes being made which might result in additional cost to the Council and have a knock-on detrimental affect to the Council's reputation.</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>Adoption of the policy and procedure helps to deliver the council's objectives for a clean environment</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>The chances of severe weather is likely to increase with climate change and therefore the adoption of a policy which enables the service to adapt during such weather events is part of the councils processes to ensure we have adequate mitigation and adaptation plans.</p>
Property/Asset Implications	<p>Use of the depot and the council car parks (as emergency locations) should be risk assessed during periods of severe weather as outlined in the policy and procedure.</p> <p>Contact officer: David Roberts, head of property services</p> <p>Tel: 01242 264151 Email: david.roberts@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

Background

In January 2013, Cheltenham experienced significant snowfall which affected the ability of Ubico Ltd (on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council) to be able to collect waste and recycling from residents. A cabinet member working group reviewed the experience of service disruption and considered what lessons were to be learnt from this, what the policy arrangements were at the time and what more the Council and Ubico could do in future to ensure that disruption is limited during severe weather.

1. Lessons learnt improvements

- 1.1 It was noted that if a collection is missed and there are inadequate catch up arrangements in place then the alternate weekly collection method can mean that someone may wait for a full month before their residual waste or recycling is collected which can cause frustration and lead to a backlog and overflowing bins. It was recognised however that kitchen waste is collected on a weekly basis and should be the priority for any catch up collections because of the health implications. It was agreed that the council should require Ubico to maintain services wherever it is safe to do so even if this is a very limited collection service.
- 1.2 It was acknowledged that the decision to suspend a service is usually taken first thing in the morning and the situation can change during the day. On any given day when the service has been suspended the road conditions should be reassessed by Ubico supervisors during the day to ascertain whether partial collections can be instigated (as far as possible) if this can be done safely from gritted roads or where assessed as safe by the collection vehicle driver.
- 1.3 There should be daily service continuity meetings (either face to face or via conference call) between the cabinet member, director of commissioning, strategic client officer (from the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Team - JWT), customer services manager, an officer from communications team and the managing director (or representative) from Ubico to assess the situation and agree what action needs to be taken or key messages need to be given out.
- 1.4 As part of service continuity arrangements named deputies should be identified. In most circumstance there is usually warning for adverse weather and where officers will be unavailable on the next working day then arrangements need to be made to ensure that appropriate officers will be available to participate in service continuity meetings.
- 1.5 Such service continuity meetings will enable all parties to be heard, so that the practicalities, risks and consequences of each decision are understood before taking it. However principally under the contract agreement with Ubico decisions are the responsibility of the "The Director of Commissioning in consultation with the Cabinet member", but it is important to achieve an action plan, which can be 'bought into' by all, but especially the service provider (Ubico) and which can and will be communicated very clearly and in a timely way. An important caveat is that Ubico cannot be expected to undertake collections where it believes it would endanger its employees or members of the public, nor to produce resources which are in practice unobtainable, or beyond what the Council will finance. Although the council has delegated responsibility for contract management to the JWT acting on behalf of the Gloucestershire Joint Waste Committee, members are clear that these service continuity decisions are firmly in the area of local decisions being taken locally, though the Strategic Client Officer's role in co-ordination, resource management and communication is an important key.
- 1.6 The resulting communications will normally go through the Cheltenham Borough Council Communications team, under the name of the Director of Commissioning, who will need to use discretion in balancing the desirability for consensus about the communication against the need for urgency, where key individuals (Cabinet Member, Ubico director, Strategic Client officer) cannot be reached in a timely fashion. All such communications should be checked before release for clarity and absence of jargon.

- 1.7** As soon as it is evident that services will be disrupted the radio stations should be contacted with the information along with the specifics as to which collection areas are affected. The members felt that the emails which had been sent to them along with FAQs etc were useful and that this should continue but sent to other stakeholders and that an email contact list of residents groups, parish councils and other contacts should be set up in advance so that in the event of a service disruption they can be sent the information easily for cascading within their communities and networks. Further communications can be achieved through CBH and other registered housing providers. The working group recognised the value of social media as this was a dynamic communication channel but felt that websites had limited use and should be updated and used but not seen as the key communication channel during the first few hours of a service disruption. It has also been agreed that press releases issued in such situations should be reviewed by non technical officers to ensure that the messages are clear and do not contain jargon. It was recognised that the radio stations are at their most helpful and proactive during the initial phase of a service disruption due to bad weather.
- 1.8** The working group were aware that during the recent service disruption the customer services team took a significant increase in telephone call and consideration was given to having a message on the telephone line during such situations which would enable callers to get an answer to their query without waiting in a queue. It was also recognised that the overnight recorded message system might be enhanced if a range of clear messages could be provided, rather than a single message. The council does still have the waste line 264244 which was operational when the call centre was in the depot and consideration should be given to using this for a more detailed recorded message. A systems thinking team is currently examining how best to optimise communications and consideration will be given as to how such message facilities can be deployed to ensure effective communications for the public. The current telephone system is not as flexible as hoped with regards to automated messaging and officers are reviewing as to how improvements to the system could be made.
- 1.9** Prior to the establishment of Ubico complex queries or complaints from members and indeed the public would have been referred to an operational or customer services manager. During the service disruption members of the public were referred to the customer relations team, which is appropriate in some circumstances as there have been complaints but may not be that helpful if they are more complex enquiries. It is agreed that such calls in the first instance should be referred to a manager who is part of the daily service continuity meeting and have a good understanding of the issues, and that Director of Commissioning can be a point of contact for CBC members and act as an officer of last resort for the public to speak to, should they be unhappy with the responses they have received.
- 1.10** The working group recognised that the process of “banking hours” is fundamental as it enables the council to restore catch up collections without resorting to overtime payments. It was noted that the employees in Ubico will work flexibly to ensure that services are maintained or restored as soon as practicable. However it was agreed that there are practical aspects of undertaking catch up collections on the back of a normal scheduled round; there is a statutory limit on the hours that drivers can drive their vehicles and the waste disposal tips opening hours both act as limiting factors. There is also a limited capacity to the vehicles which means that the crews may have to go to the disposal facility at least twice during the day which reduces the collection time available.
- 1.11** It was agreed that where collections are missed then the principle of using the Saturdays to catch up will be the approach adopted and the service continuity meeting would agree, given the specific circumstances at the time, how this additional day would be used to undertake the catch up.
- 1.12** Once there is a general thaw and it is safe to collect, the catch up priorities should be agreed and clear messages should be given to those who have missed their collections as to how long they may have to wait. It was recognised that each situation is likely to be different depending on whether partial collections have been made so it will be inevitable that there will be complaints.

Responding in an unplanned way to complaints is not appropriate although there should be some flexibility to priority areas where there may be a build up with black bags or residents have difficulty storing their residual waste. Whilst no-one should attempt to pre-plan the catch up process, there would be certain expected priorities which would be followed for collection of waste. In terms of location they would be

- ◆ where collections can be safely made (e.g. only on passable roads)
- ◆ getting black bags off the streets
- ◆ known 'hotspot locations' for waste collection
- ◆ which householders have waited longest.

and for which products are of highest collection priority it would be

- 1) Food
- 2) Refuse
- 3) Dry Recyclate
- 4) Garden Waste,

though in practice the availability of resources will limit the ability to prioritise to this list. It is recognised as important that the 'catch-up' plans may change due to unexpected circumstances, so choice of message needs to be carefully considered. For example we should only be telling people to take their bins back when we are 100% sure that there is no prospect of them being collected.

- 1.13** If there has been disruption for more than one day then garden waste services should be suspended until the waste collection service has caught up. It is recognised that this is a paid for service but the working group felt that during a service disruption due to snow and ice it is unlikely that many residents will have garden waste and the priority should be to collect food waste and residual waste. However the option of co-mingling garden waste or food with refuse would be retained to optimise resources. The council should also invoke a suspension of the no side waste policy and allow the collection of black bags for residual waste or additional containers for recycling.
- 1.14** The access to the civic amenity site and to bring sites should be cleared wherever possible and safe to do so. If it is evident that the service disruption will last several days then the council should consider emergency provisions and allow vans to access the recycling site if they are presenting domestic waste. Messages should be communicated to the effect that anyone found presenting trade waste during such a period would be prosecuted. Ubico are currently considering the implications of this approach and whether they would prefer a measure of general relaxation. The working groups view was that a general relaxation is fraught with greater difficulties such as enforcement and would need to be considered within the wider waste and recycling context.
- 1.15** It was agreed that the Council and Ubico should identify a number of designated places where a supervised refuse vehicle could be placed. These facilities would be invoked in the most serious of severe weather arrangements i.e. where waste and recycling has not been collected for several days and it is unlikely that we would be in a position to collect waste in the near future. The decision to invoke such arrangements whilst refuse and recycling services were suspended would be taken following an assessment of the potential additional costs and an assessment of the health and safety risks for residents using such a facility. The decision to open or close such facilities would be taken at the daily service continuity meetings.
- 1.16** The working group considered service level expectations during and after a period of service disruption. Investigation of the recent events is pointing to the working assumption that, given alternate weekly collections, the challenges for recovery become significantly greater after several days of service suspension. If the Saturday is used to catch up and crews use their banked hours to work additional hours beyond their normal shift subject to the limitations set out in 1.10 above, then all things being equal a service provider can catch up without cancelling

collections in an incident lasting up to five days of stoppage including Saturdays. However if the service is disrupted for a longer period of time emergency measures may well have been instigated as outlined above but the Council would need to consider what messages it gave out to the public with regards to the catch up.

- 1.17 Following a stoppage lasting more than this period of time, the catch-up operation is likely to stretch to a full fortnightly cycle, with a result that even with prioritisation of collecting where we can, collecting black bags, known hotspots and those who have waited longest, the effective catch-up for a lot of people is 4 weeks after the previous missed refuse or recycling collection. It is recognised that this will impact on residents but it is important to be honest about what can and cannot be achieved so that expectations are managed. In the unlikely event that the town was faced with severe snow and ice for a long period of time stretching over several weeks then the council would need to consider what emergency measures over and above listed in this report could be instigated.
- 1.18 One of the major complaints during the bad weather was from households who have children in nappies. Some of the measures outlined above will go towards mitigating the impact and as more households are encouraged to recycle then this might assist. The council also has a policy to allow those with two or more children under two in nappies to have a larger bin and it may be that some residents are not aware of this policy.

As a result of the comments made by the Cabinet Member Working Group an inclement weather emergency waste collection policy and procedure (Appendix 2) has been created and should be put into action during an emergency which causes Cheltenham Borough Council's waste and recycling collection service to be disrupted, such as heavy snowfall.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1 To ensure that the Council has an agreed plan in place which its officers and those of Ubico Ltd can use in an emergency, to manage disruptions to the waste and recycling collection services and the associated messages given out to residents and the media.

3. Performance management –monitoring and review

- 3.1 Following the next emergency which calls for the new policy and procedure to be used, a post project evaluation (PPE) will be conducted to appraise the way in which the emergency was managed. As part of the evaluation, any suggested improvements which are agreed as being beneficial in fine tuning the policy/procedure, will be presented before the Cabinet Member for Sustainability and if approved, will be formally included as an amendment to the policy.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The adoption of the inclement weather emergency waste collection policy and procedure for Cheltenham, will equip officers and members of the Council, Ubico Ltd and the Joint Waste Team, with a clear and agreed plan which will enable the effective management of waste and recycling services and the associated communications, prior, during and after the emergency.

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Appendices	Appendix 2 – Cheltenham Borough Council Inclement Weather Emergency Waste Collection Policy and Procedure

Background information	Cabinet member Working Group – Lessons Learnt Report 28 march 2013 Overview and scrutiny committee – Ubico task group 18 February 2013
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The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk					
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register	
	If the council does not have adequate plans in place for dealing with service disruption then there is a risk that communications are not clear to the public which impacts on reputation	Jane Griffiths	August 2013	3	2	6	R	Policy and procedure needs to be reviewed on an annual basis with the contractor ahead of the winter to ensure that it is still up to date	October 2014	Scott Williams Client officer	Commissioning risk register	
	If the council does not have adequate plans in place for dealing with service disruption then there is a risk that the council could expend more money by making ad-hoc decisions with regards to how it will deal with the event	Jane Griffiths	August 2013	3	2	6	R	Policy and procedure needs to be reviewed on an annual basis with the contractor ahead of the winter to ensure that it is still up to date	October 2014	Scott Williams Client officer	Commissioning risk register	
Explanatory notes												
<p>Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)</p> <p>Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6 (1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)</p> <p>Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close</p>												

Guidance

Types of risks could include the following:

- Potential reputation risks from the decision in terms of bad publicity, impact on the community or on partners;
- Financial risks associated with the decision;
- Political risks that the decision might not have cross-party support;
- Environmental risks associated with the decision;
- Potential adverse equality impacts from the decision;
- Capacity risks in terms of the ability of the organisation to ensure the effective delivery of the decision
- Legal risks arising from the decision

Remember to highlight risks which may impact on the strategy and actions which are being followed to deliver the objectives, so that members can identify the need to review objectives, options and decisions on a timely basis should these risks arise.

Risk ref

If the risk is already recorded, note either the corporate risk register or TEN reference

Risk Description

Please use “If xx happens then xx will be the consequence” (cause and effect). For example “If the council’s business continuity planning does not deliver effective responses to the predicted flu pandemic then council services will be significantly impacted.”

Risk owner

Please identify the lead officer who has identified the risk and will be responsible for it.

Risk score

Impact on a scale from 1 to 5 multiplied by likelihood on a scale from 1 to 6. Please see risk [scorecard](#) for more information on how to score a risk

Control

Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close

Action

There are usually things the council can do to reduce either the likelihood or impact of the risk. Controls may already be in place, such as budget monitoring or new controls or actions may also be needed.

Responsible officer

Please identify the lead officer who will be responsible for the action to control the risk.

For further guidance, please refer to the [risk management policy](#)

Transferred to risk register

Please ensure that the risk is transferred to a live risk register. This could be a team, divisional or corporate risk register depending on the nature of the risk and what level of objective it is impacting on