



Local authority responses to COVID-19 in relation to Waste services and street cleansing services.

This briefing is provided to all APSE member authorities but will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for waste collection, waste recycling collections and street cleansing services.

Key Issues:

With the onset of ever more stringent measures to control the spread of the coronavirus, local authorities are having to implement pre-prepared business continuity plans and prioritise the level of services they provide.

This short briefing provides the most up-to-date information as to how these plans are being implemented and service priorities decided with regards to refuse collection recycling and street cleansing services.

- The key decisions in relation to which service elements will be provided with regards to waste services, clearly shows there are priority ratings being allocated to the different service elements. General waste collections are clearly being given the highest priority, followed by dry recycling collections, food waste and clinical collections. Ancillary services such as green waste collections and bulky waste collections have already been ceased by some local authorities.
- Arrangements for the safety of staff as well as covering staff absence, are also contained within the briefing.
- Service continuity planning involving the redeployment and training of staff are areas which have received much attention with details contained within the briefing.
- There are several innovative approaches such as providing mobile waste collection facilities which are being considered should high level of staff absences be experienced.

Background

APSE sent out a survey which asked how local authority waste and street cleaning services are being affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The survey asked member authorities for information as to how they plan to deliver services in light of the impact of the virus.

From the responses APSE has received to date, It is apparent that the majority are referring to pre-prepared Business Continuity Plans (BCP's) and there is a good deal of commonality across the UK with regards to the changes to delivery either implemented or ready to be implemented should the need arise.

Generally authorities appear to be prioritising their services based on resident needs, one such example received is a good example of this (services relevant to waste and street cleansing are highlighted):

PRIMARY SERVICES:

(essential services – all staff redeployed to ensure service delivery)

Meals at Home (including shopping service).

Waste Collection (agreed collections priorities to focus on noxious wastes).

Cemetery – grave provision.

Transport administration, compliance and contract delivery.

Day Centre kitchen.

SECONDARY SERVICES:

(medium priority – redeploy staff in phase 2 to ensure primary service delivery)

Street Cleansing -scheduled cleansing.

Playground checks.

Street Cleaning - reactive cleansing.

Accessible minibuses for elderly and disabled.

Telecare services and social prescribing.

Day Centre – non kitchen use.

TERTIARY SERVICES:

(non-essential – redeploy staff in phase 1 to ensure primary and secondary service delivery)

Road/pavement sweeping.

Locking parks and general parks duties.

Grounds Maintenance.

Bin deliveries.

Allotments.

Abandoned cars.

Market management.

Countryside .

Sports centre and bookings

Waste collection is seen by all local authorities as a priority service and what follows is a brief summary of the approaches taken.

OPERATIONAL CHANGES

Waste Collection and Recycling Services

General waste collection has been given the main priority followed by dry recyclable collections, food waste and clinical waste.

Garden waste collections have been suspended by some local authorities. One authority is offering free compostable bags to store the waste in until collections resume.

Where green waste and food waste are collected in the same bin people are being asked to put their food waste in the general waste bin. It may be worth contacting your waste treatment contractor to see if they have any issues with this decision

Bulky waste collections have been halted by many respondents to the survey. None have raised concerns about the potential for increased fly-tipping, although even in times of self-isolation this needs to be considered if this decision is made.

In relation to members of the public who have contracted the corona virus or are awaiting test results, some local authorities are insisting any tissues or associated waste are double bagged and placed in the general waste bin. One respondent has said his service requires the waste to be held for 72 hours before it is placed in the general waste bin.

Many respondents have stated they will not collect any waste which is not placed in the residual waste bin.

Regarding staff absence levels, many authorities are training street cleansing and grounds maintenance staff on how to load bins. Many authorities have already made sure all their HGV drivers have been trained to drive refuse collection vehicles for such an event such as this.

One authority is considering providing mobile waste collection points should staffing levels become seriously depleted. Proposals include:

- Parking recycling vehicles at bring sites to increase capacity
- Parking recycling vehicles at other locations to provide temporary bring sites; possibly also on Saturdays.
- Putting recyclables into residual waste in remote locations (absolute last resort).

Most respondents stated recycling centres would remain open.

All the responses received stated that the level of services changes would be very much dependent on the levels of sickness they were experiencing.

Respondents who had external contracts reported that similar agreements were being put in place as those previously highlighted.

Street Cleansing Services

Unsurprisingly most respondents said that if staffing levels fell they would prioritise town centres, areas of high footfall and litter bin emptying as highest priorities.

Services which would be reduced would be ancillary services such as back alleyway cleaning, sweeping of rural roads and reduction in large mechanical sweeping to free staff up for other duties.

PROTECTION OF STAFF

Some of the considerations being made included:

Staggering clocking on time for crews, i.e. 15 minute spaces between when drivers collected keys in order to reduce the number of crews congregating in depots.

One authority reported it had implemented a rule of only two operatives in a cab at any one time (driver and loader) where three operatives were required they were being given a van to follow the RCV in order to assist with the loading.

Most support staff and non-essential managers/supervisors were now working from home.

It is felt that social distancing is a key requirement, not only to ensure the health of staff but also to take into account the number of staff who may have underlying health conditions. One respondent stated that 30% of their waste staff had underlying health problems.

APSE Comment

The country and local authority services are certainly facing difficult times. Not only are local authorities dealing with austerity measures and changing public demands, but we now face the biggest challenge since the Second World War in relation to meeting public need.

From the responses received it is apparent that local authorities have been planning for such an incident such as this but perhaps the sheer speed and scale of the pandemic has taken many by surprise. Nevertheless local authorities are clearly implementing their business continuity plans and have in place services which will continue to meet public need even in these strange times.

APSE will continue to support its members through daily monitoring and disseminating information as it becomes available.

APSE's network query service will still be operational and advice will be forthcoming as and when it is received.

Members should look out for regular updates either via the APSE website or through short briefings such as these. You access up-to-date information through the [APSE COVID 19 web hub](#). You can also sign up to the [APSE Covid 19 support networks](#) for rapid information through our dedicated WhatsApp Groups and email services.

Undoubtedly there will be significant changes and demands being placed on local authorities but through the sharing of information and experiences we will undoubtedly rise to the challenge and meet the needs of our public and customers.

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