



# APSE Waste, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing Services remobilisation report



## About this report

The restrictions implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are being lifted, and local government services are now looking to remobilise, to ensure that they are able to safely welcome back and serve local residents. It is also critical that services ensure the safety of all council personnel, as well as other users. A key service area within local authorities is waste, refuse collection and street cleansing services.

To facilitate this report, APSE established a waste, refuse collection and street cleansing services remobilisation working group to highlight the plans that councils are implementing to remobilise the services over the coming months.

The remobilisation group attended various scoping sessions, in which the challenges and opportunities for remobilisation were identified.

The remobilisation groups met in various sessions, focusing on four key areas; Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity, operational activity, regrouping the workforce and technical considerations. The last of the groups met in the week commencing 4 May 2020, which was prior to the Prime Ministers announcement regarding the revision in restrictions. Therefore, the plans councils have put in place are only in draft and could be subject to further change but the group felt that the information provided could assist other authorities in considering remobilisation and a range of potential mitigations and solutions to the challenges. In addition to the information highlighted in the sessions, this report also provides details regarding guidance that has been published and written submissions from the group.

This report, therefore, details the plans for the service and focuses on those four key areas:

- Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity.
- Operational activity
- Regrouping the workforce
- Technical Considerations

Whilst these reports may only provide a snapshot of the remobilisation issues at any given point in time it will support our member councils to ensure that what they are doing is comparative with the actions of others, within their specific service sector.

This report was facilitated by Abi Ademiluyi, APSE Principal Advisor, working with APSE member councils, and was written by Abi Ademiluyi following the remobilisation working groups.

**Published June 2020**

# Introduction

APSE has convened various remobilisation meetings with the aim of the meetings being to discover how officers, managers and all those responsible for the delivery of waste services, are dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 on their services, as well as provide a platform for them to share their plans for remobilisation as well as their views on the future of waste, refuse collection and street cleansing services once restrictions have been eased.

The remobilisation group was made up of over 45 representatives from councils across the UK. A series of scoping sessions were held, which focused on the challenges and opportunities that needed to be taken into consideration for remobilising the services. These sessions were followed by a series of meetings that highlighted the plans that councils are implementing to remobilise the service over the coming months. All additional services which had also been introduced by APSE due to the impacts of COVID-19 were outlined. These included the COVID-19 WhatsApp service groups, rapid response network queries, service resilience surveys, COVID-19 related briefings and guidance notes. These additional sources of information were also considered in remobilisation meetings and are covered within this report.

Attendees were also informed about the ongoing discussion with Government and other agencies such as WISH, DEFRA and the HSE, to highlight problems local authorities are facing, ensuring all guidance and information being put out to authorities is practical and deliverable.

To gain an understanding of the position that services were looking to when considering remobilisation, the group highlighted how the services were operating in their local authority area.

# The current position

Following the imposition of restrictions, local authority services have been required to adapt and implement alternative approaches to service delivery to respond to the restrictions implemented in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Most of these plans had to be implemented in a relatively short period of time to ensure the continued delivery of waste and street cleansing services. To gain an understanding of the position that services were looking to remobilise from the group highlighted how the services were operating in their local authority area. Although it was clear that different approaches had been adopted in response to local need, commonalities were also highlighted, and there are key aspects to how each service area is currently operating.

# Operational activity

Operational activity was the area where the greatest number of challenges were identified, and this was to be expected as remobilisation focuses on how the service will be operating in the short and longer-term. Initially, there was a massive impact on waste collection services when lockdown measures were introduced, alongside social distancing. Several authorities had to either suspend or amend services and, even now, with remobilisation of services, not all collections have resumed fully or gone back to normal. Most authorities were, however, able to maintain household waste refuse collections without disruptions as this service was prioritised. However, some suspensions and disruptions were experienced with recycling collections, bulky waste, clinical collections, garden waste and the closing of HRWC's. There were also issues with food waste collections with some collections being suspended altogether or in some instances food waste collected in the refuse bins. Most authorities have had to scale back or suspend street cleaning services and divert resources to refuse and recycling collections, which were prioritised. In terms of remobilising the collections services, several changes had to be put in place to ensure waste and street cleaning services could be carried out in some form, these included:

**Social distancing:** It was clear from comments made at the remobilisation groups, that the social distancing element posed a big problem, in term of numbers of operatives who could travel together in vehicles, with lots of guidance being sort from WISH, DEFRA and the HSE to clarify safe working practices and several versions of guidance being produced and amended, with different interpretations sometimes being made by various authorities, that being said, a commonality began to emerge with different approaches being taken which included:-

- Some authorities still operating a 2 or 3 man crew still in the same cab.
- Some authorities moved to one person per vehicle
- Moving to lone working

- Minimising the number of people coming into depots at any one time
- Keeping vehicle windows down to improve ventilation within the cab
- Keeping the same crews together as much as possible
- Staggering start times
- Driver only going into the depot to pick up the vehicle
- Pick up crew at designated locations
- Finishing off-site (there were some issues here with some staff members not wanting to walk to designated areas)
- The crew being allowed to operate under the task and finish model during these times
- Introduction of COVID check sheets.
- Reopening HWRC's with new measures being introduced such as booking systems, permit systems, restrictions on waste streams which can be taken into site and restrictions on numbers on-site at any given time, traffic management. Lots of work has been done around communication to ensure problem-free reopening.
- Providing the new risk assessments in the cabs.
- Arranging for staff with COVID 19 symptoms to go for testing and where they test negative returning to work.

# Hygiene/Safety

Another issue which was highlighted by the group were issues around hygiene and health and safety. To ensure good hygiene and good health and safety practices were maintained, several steps were put in place; these included:

- Ensuring staff could practice good hygiene, providing handwashing stations, masks if requested, hand gel and gloves
- Installing screens in vehicles
- Deep cleaning vehicles
- Providing driver cleaning kits at the beginning and end of the day
- Additional toilet facilities
- Washing stations
- Face masks: Concerns were raised on the use of face masks, or face coverings, issues with the safety of these items, particularly for drivers. Examples raised were around fit with those who wear glasses, or could glasses steam up when driving or create any other safety issues. Further guidance is being sorted on this.



# Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity

From the evidence provided by the group, it is clear that the full impact on the budget is not currently known as there are going to be ongoing costs. However, the impacts of COVID-19 are going to be substantial for the short and long term. Therefore, many of the remobilisation plans relating to budget and finance are limited to consolidating the services' current position. Some of the areas where additional costs have been so far incurred include the provision of additional fleet to aid with collections due to increased tonnages, also extra vehicles being brought in to aid with collections where support vehicles have had to be brought in for loaders travelling separately to the collection vehicles to reduce the number of operatives in vehicles. Another area where additional costs have been incurred has been in relation to getting extra staff, in certain instances, this has been to cover staff who have been off sick with COVID 19 or those shielding due to being classed as vulnerable. The full impact in terms of loss of revenue is yet to be established, however with the loss of revenue, from suspended trade waste collections, bulky and garden waste collections or reduced collections, there will be an impact on finances further down the line. In some instances, some local authorities have been able to recharge corporately any costs relating to COVID-19, many have also assigned COVID-19 related expenditure to a central cost code that sits outside of their budget area as the spend will be reported corporately. It is envisaged that this will continue or alternatively, individual services will be allocated a COVID-19 cost code allowing the service to track specific COVID-19 spend.

The group has however mentioned that, in terms of remobilisation, most of the services are now being brought back online with bulky collections and garden waste being restarted and, with further easing of restrictions, the ability to gently restart trade waste collections and the ongoing reopening of HWRCs. It was also noted that UK administrations have lifted restrictions with different timescales.

The issue of tonnages was also raised, there has been an increase in tonnages, attributable to more people working from home during lockdown and thus increasing household waste, and concerns that end processors would not be able to handle the extra tonnage. This issue did not materialise across the board, although one local authority reported that they were restricted to 80% of normal weight as collection levels were at 130%.

# Regrouping the workforce

In terms of regrouping the workforce, there was a mixed picture across the board with most authorities experiencing a reduction in numbers of staff available for work at the start of the restrictions, with one local authority reporting 50% of COVID related absences at one time. However, in the vast majority of cases, initial absences peaked at 20% and were quickly reduced to near normal levels as clarity on shielding measures, including those with family members shielding, came into place. Most authorities put systems in place to ensure services could still be run and moving towards remobilisation those techniques used to keep services running will still play a part in the immediate future.

Redeployment from other services has also played a part in waste, refuse collection and street cleansing services, utilising staff from other areas where services have been temporarily suspended or reduced, for example, highways, leisure and parks services. A lot of staff were also drafted in from street cleansing and garden waste services to help with higher volumes of household waste and recycling due to more people working from home.

At the point where restrictions were put in place, several authorities recruited temporary agency staff to fill in any gaps that they anticipated would be created by existing staff being off with COVID related absences. With the remobilisation of services and most councils now expecting to have their full staff complement over the coming weeks, many are still keeping on temporary staff, as a lot of holiday leave has been cancelled and as systems begin to settle, demand for holiday leave will naturally increase, therefore keeping agency staff for a while longer will assist with reinstating holiday leave, collection of the additional tonnages in household waste and bringing other services back up to near normal service levels. It was also noted some staff who may have been classed as being at higher risk from COVID-19 were deployed to areas of less risk.

The group also mentioned working with trade unions and stakeholders to ensure the workforce could be remobilised safely with any changes that needed to be brought in. This has included provision for unions, staff and other stakeholders to have a platform to input into plans and agree on approaches moving forward. These measures have included crew 'welfare kits' at the start of shifts, and in one authority they are providing packed lunches for the crews to stop the crews having to stop and queue to buy lunch.

# Technical considerations

The main technical consideration for the group was around risk assessments, and there was great emphasis placed on reviewing processes with a great deal of this around social distancing, hygiene and health and safety. With many councils reviewing their existing process for producing and reviewing risk assessments to ensure that it is still practical and robust, discussions with the group highlighted the fact that a variety of different approaches are being used, and for many of them the central Health and Safety team taking the lead while working with managers. The groups were either writing and using new risk assessments for each service or using them in conjunction with old ones already in use.

Further technical issues have been discussed at length including:

- The feasibility of plastic screening within cabs and issues of safe access and egress from vehicles, particularly given the risks presented by an RTA incident
- The wearing of face coverings by drivers and any risk assessments particularly for those wearing spectacles
- Lone drivers and the operation of safety switches
- Meeting points on collection routes and ensuring safety wear such as boots and high visibility uniform is adhered to
- Access to toilets and handwashing facilities on routes
- Appropriate use of PPE such as 'double gloving' and laundering of crew uniforms/provision of additional uniform in some cases
- In the case of street cleansing, a specific issue of concern is the public disposing of their own masks and face coverings, as well as disposable gloves often without using litter bins, and throwing these items on to the streets.
- There remains some waste streams within HWRCs that are reliant on onward reprocessors and capacity to allow these items to be left at HWRCs is still below normal levels with discussions ongoing with reprocessors to enable these collections streams to be re-established

Whilst these issues have all been debated at length essentially each authority is conducting their own risk assessments in line with the latest industry guidance and sharing best practice through APSE's WhatsApp COVID support groups for frontline services. They are also utilising guidance from the HSE, and the WISH forum guidance, alongside the public health agencies in the different UK administrative areas.

# APSE Comment

APSE would like to thank all the authorities that participated in the remobilisation group for waste collection and street cleansing services and contributed to the information contained in this report. APSE has a range of services that are designed to support member authorities through this challenging time.

[APSE COVID – 19 Information Hub and WhatsApp groups](#) – The hub has been set up to deal with frontline service issues as they arise; ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time.

[APSE Online Training](#) – APSE Training is designed to help local authorities invest in their greatest asset – their staff. With staff working at home, or remotely, APSE Training can assist staff with developing new skills during this time to help maximise opportunities.

[APSE Performance Networks](#) – The Performance Network teams have developed a variety of ways to support councils with data collection. This includes a new suite of indicators which will explore the impact of COVID-19 on service cost, quality and productivity. The reports will be produced in June, but APSE strongly recommends ensuring the collection of data is ongoing, so changes in service performance are explicable during budget setting processes or when revising business plans.

[APSE Solutions](#) – Providing in-house consultancy and interim management services, available to both APSE members and non-member authorities and organisations.

[APSE Energy](#) – Working on greening frontline councils' services, including energy management issues, which may be critical to saving money in services where budgets have been impacted by COVID-19.

[APSE membership resources](#) remains committed to supporting our member local councils with the ongoing briefings service, network queries, access to Principal Advisor advice and online meetings, advisory groups and events.

There are opportunities for councils to share best practice and learning through virtual advisory groups and thematic sessions. Details of these sessions will be communicated to APSE members as the sessions are arranged.

For further information on the services that are available, please contact

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