

# Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 16 May 2019

## Festive Waste and Recycling Collections

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| Executive/routine<br>Wards<br>Council Commitments | Executive<br>All |
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### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

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## Festive Waste and Recycling Collections

### 2. Executive Summary

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2.1 This report provides an update on the issues around waste and recycling collections over the festive period. It also responds to the motion by Councillor Corbett, approved by Full Council on 7 February 2019 which asked Council to:

2.1.1 Note significant public concern regarding waste service collections over the festive period 2018/19, the backlog which arose, and how these issues came on top of the problems which followed the introduction of the new waste collection system in October.

2.1.2 Recognise the twin pressures of increased volumes during the festive period and ensuring staffing capacity at the same time.

2.1.3 Therefore, calls for a report to the May 2019 Transport and Environment Committee:

- Reviewing key lessons from the festive period 2018/19 - highlighting changes in volumes in each collection stream over that period;
- Setting out recommendations for festive period 2019-20 and beyond; and
- Specifically, assessing options for dealing with Christmas trees post festive period.

### 3. Background

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3.1 Due to the nature of the festive period, the Council has traditionally operated a number of special services, including revised collection services to accommodate the public holidays, closure of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) on certain public holidays, dedicated Christmas tree collections and working with contractors to increase collection frequencies at recycling points.

3.2 In the festive season 2018/19 there were delays to collections, which led to an increase in collection complaints for the period to 11 January 2019, after which they fell sharply. Appendix 1 outlines the pattern of complaints.

3.3 The main factor leading to issues was staff shortages during the festive period, particularly between Christmas and New Year. The delays caused by this,

combined with further holidays and weekend working created a backlog.

- 3.4 These delays gave rise to particular concern as they followed soon after an unrelated increase in complaints following the introduction of new collection routes, as a result of the four-day collection week for some services.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 The disruption associated with the holidays over the festive period, combined with fluctuations in the normal tonnages being collected and external factors such as full or partial closure of contractors and (on occasions) severe weather mean that managing services at this time of year is particularly challenging. A number of measures are taken each year to ameliorate these issues (such as replacement collection days to offset the Christmas and New Year's Day holidays).

### **Measures for 2018/19 Festive Period**

- 4.2 For the 2018/19 festive period the following measures in particular were taken:
- 4.2.1 Kerbside recycling and waste collections on Christmas Day and New Year's Day were re-arranged for the prior Saturdays. Agreement was reached with staff to cover the Boxing Day and 2 January collections which are all public holidays and operate normal collections to minimise disruption to residents as far as possible.
- 4.2.2 All three HWRCs were closed on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. However, the two larger sites (Sighthill and Seafield) were open on 26 December, 2 and 3 January which are contractual holidays for the staff working there.
- 4.2.3 Dedicated Christmas tree collections were operated throughout January, as is the norm in Edinburgh. Each household was given three dedicated collection days to present Christmas trees for recycling. This was in addition to the ability to take trees to HWRCs, use the garden waste bins (service users only) and use the bookable Special Uplift service. The Christmas tree collections were operated by a combination of staff from Waste Operations, including Special Uplift Crews using box vans and other staff using refuse collection compaction vehicles, as well as street cleansing crews. (The Special Uplift service itself is suspended annually for a two-week period to support the uplift of Christmas trees).
- 4.3 Communication of changes for residents used a range of traditional and digital media such as the website and social media, as well as advertising (for example at cash dispensers). Households who experienced a change to collection days received a dedicated letter. Lamp-post signs were used as a high-profile way to publicise that there were special arrangements in place, and where to find out more. Additionally, these were used to publicise the specific collection days for Christmas trees in each area.

## **Outcomes – Tonnages, Volumes**

- 4.4 Appendix 2 shows examples of the tonnages for November 2017 - January 2018 and the same period in 2018/19 allowing the festive period to be compared with a typical month, over a two-year period.
- 4.5 In reality the tonnages collected do not vary overall as much as is often perceived on a monthly basis, however what this does not fully demonstrate is the changes to waste volumes which can take place or the weekly variations within each month. Larger amounts of packaging after Christmas for example mean that bins fill up more quickly but may not weigh significantly more. This nevertheless puts further pressure on collection systems and is one of the key elements of the communal bin project.
- 4.6 Two collection streams are however of particular note - there is traditionally a higher tonnage of food collected in January following a dip in December. Glass tonnages (both kerbside and communal) increase significantly in December, and the impact on the kerbside service in January is particularly striking with tonnages up around 70% on a typical month.
- 4.7 It should further be noted that kerbside collections now operate a four day week, which means that the volumes and tonnages on a 'standard' collection day will be greater, and the impact of any disruption magnified.

## **Successes and Lessons Learned**

- 4.8 Kerbside collection crews reported high levels of bin presentation on the Saturdays which would suggest that this aspect of the communications was successful.
- 4.9 The delivery of the services on public holidays (or on weekends) is reliant on staff good will, and the timeline to plan and organise festive collections requires staff to agree to work several months in advance. However, staff are not contractually obliged to work on these days meaning the service is vulnerable to changed personal circumstances. This is true not only for the replacement weekend collections but services operating on other Public Holidays such as Boxing Day and 1, 2, and 3 January.
- 4.10 There were significant shortfalls in staff attendance on some days as shown in Appendix 3. This combined with the shorter working weeks during the period to create backlogs across a number of services, and led to an increase in complaints of missed bins. Those were primarily related to the kerbside collections, but there were also complaints in relation to the externally delivered services, in particular glass recycling points.
- 4.11 The impact of any staff short-fall can be magnified particularly with HGV drivers. The lack of a driver can mean a route is not able to run, whereas the lack of an operative can be managed to a degree.
- 4.12 HWRCs were busy during the festive period, but coped well with the volumes of waste and generated few complaints. Staff reported a significant reduction in out of hours fly-tipping at the site gates, which tends to occur when sites are closed and was certainly evident last year.

- 4.13 Communal recycling points broadly coped well however there were issues at individual larger sites (e.g. some supermarkets) and in some tenemental areas. In particular, there was an increase in complaints relating to overflowing glass banks which are operated on the Council's behalf by Viridor.
- 4.14 Generally, most Councils have reduced their Christmas tree collection offer (if they provided one) to save money, with many Councils providing services via garden waste collections, HWRCs and sometimes with dedicated collections in parks.
- 4.15 In Edinburgh a dedicated tree collection service across the city has been maintained. This represents a non-core service that it delivered using within existing resources, primarily staff from special uplifts and Street Cleansing, at a particularly busy time of the year. The service provided is primarily to deal with the particular challenges of tenemental properties where trees are simply discarded anonymously. The collection service does not prevent this, but does at least help to manage it.
- 4.16 While there were reports of trees not being collected on the correct days, the greater problem appeared to be that in fact residents in some areas did not follow the calendar, and within days of collection it was not clear that the collections had taken place. This then led to complaints that trees had not been collected.

## **5. Next Steps**

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### **Proposals for Future Years**

- 5.1 Appendix 4 summarises the main issues arising and the service's planned responses. Planning for festive collections normally takes place in the late summer, however in view of the problems this year, the service is taking an earlier and more proactive approach.
- 5.2 The primary factor in terms of the service's ability to deliver the service was the levels of staffing at various times during the festive period which then caused ongoing delays in subsequent days and weeks.
- 5.3 Addressing this issue is key to minimising disruption going forward at this and other leave periods such as Easter, when collections would normally be due but staff are not contractually required to work according to their terms and conditions. The service is currently considering the options available for this.
- 5.4 During the summer festival the Cleansing Service receives additional funding in recognition of the particular pressures at this time of year. There is no equivalent funding in place to recognise the additional waste collection pressures during the festive period.
- 5.5 Changes to the garden waste service are proposed in a separate report to Committee, which would see the collection cease for four weeks (two collections) in line with other Councils (Appendix 5) so that the resources can be used to provide greater resilience across the collection services as required.

- 5.6 Managing Christmas trees is a particular challenge mainly due to the city's housing stock and lack of storage space in homes. Greater working across the Council may be one way to resolve this, coupled with the other steps outlined to build resilience into all collections.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 Any additional funding to deal with festive collections would need to be considered as part of the budget setting process.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 The measures outlined in this report are designed to strengthen the resilience of the collection service over the Christmas and New Year periods, and the subsequent weeks. This is beneficial to all stakeholders, and to the Council's reputation.
- 7.2 While there is no direct impact on sustainable development arising from this report, a generally high performing service is likely to support the diversion of waste from energy recovery or landfill, and prevent waste escaping into the environment.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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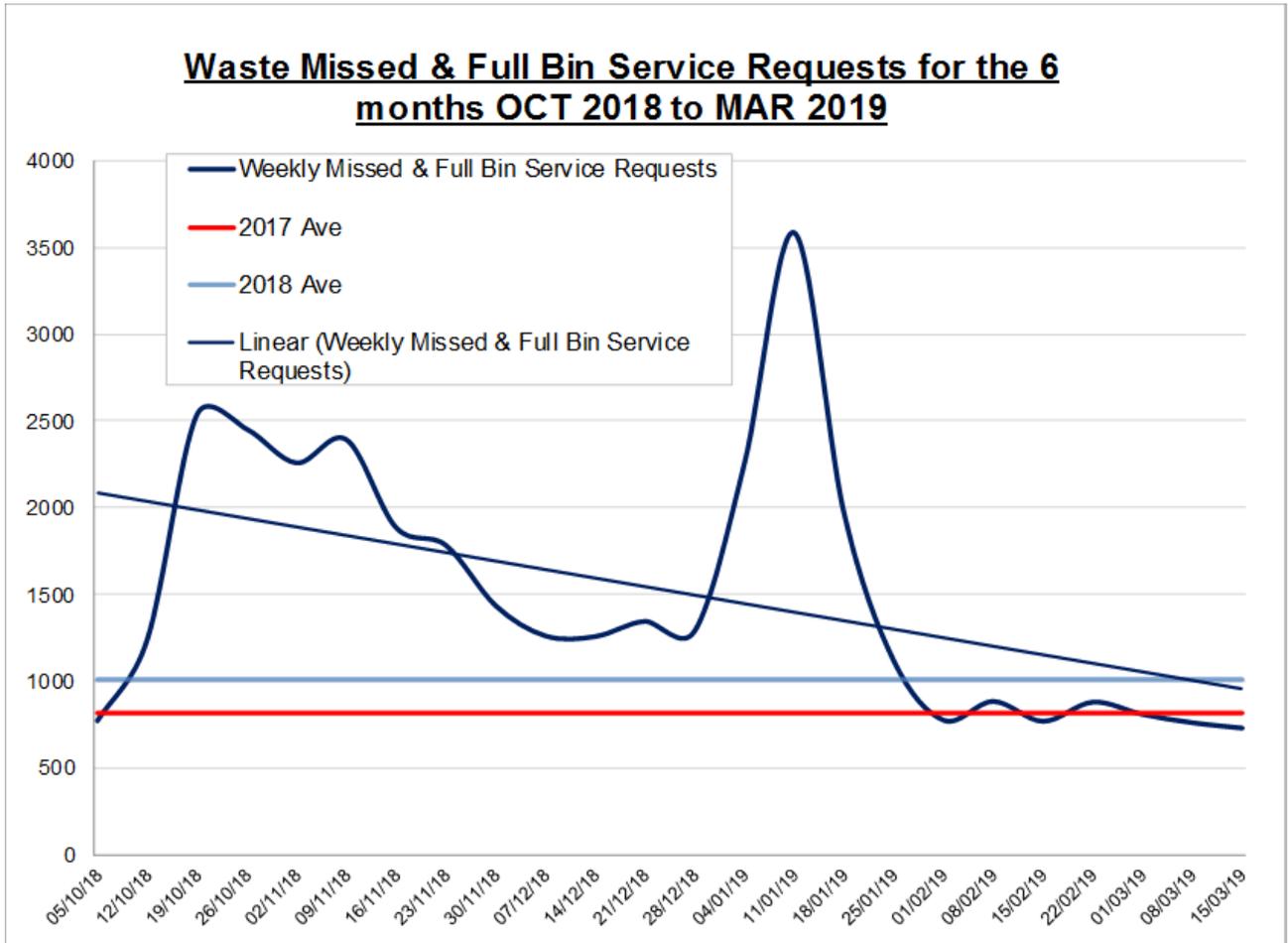
- 8.1 None.

## **9. Appendices**

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- Appendix 1 Missed or Full Bin Complaint Levels Prior to 15 March 2019.
- Appendix 2 Waste Tonnage Comparisons After the Festive Period.
- Appendix 3 Staffing Levels and Absence During Festive Period.
- Appendix 4 Summary of Issues arising and proposed responses.
- Appendix 5 Chargeable Garden Waste Collections (Scottish Council areas).

**Appendix 1 - Missed or Full Bin Complaint Levels prior to 15 March 2019**



## Appendix 2 - Waste Tonnage Comparisons After the Festive Period

| Key Waste Stream  | Dec-17        | Dec-18        | Jan-18        | Jan-19        |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Food combined communal and kerbside   | 763           | 738           | 967           | 868           |
| Dry mixed recyclate kerbside  | 1,194         | 1,308         | 1,321         | 1,232         |
| Total non recyclable waste, all sources.                                      | 9,168         | 9,300         | 10,891        | 10,908        |
| Glass kerbside  | 483           | 476           | 718           | 722           |
| Glass communal  | 357           | 348           | 366           | 369           |
| <b>Total waste tonnages (all sources, including but not only those above)</b> | <b>14,828</b> | <b>14,610</b> | <b>17,675</b> | <b>17,290</b> |

### Appendix 3 - Staffing Levels and Absence during the Festive Period

| DAY       | DATE         | TOTAL ON ROTA | ABSENT | %      |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|--------|--------|
| MONDAY    | 17/12/2018   | 61            | 5      | 8      |
| TUESDAY   | 18/12/2018   | 227           | 20     | 9      |
| WEDNESDAY | 19/12/2018   | 232           | 19     | 8      |
| THURSDAY  | 20/12/2018   | 220           | 16     | 7      |
| FRIDAY    | 21/12/2018   | 220           | 17     | 7      |
| SATURDAY  | 22/12/2018   | 135           | 2      | 1      |
| SUNDAY    | 23/12/2018   | 73            | 2      | 3      |
| MONDAY    | 24/12/2018   | 68            | 2      | 3      |
| TUESDAY   | 25/12/2018   | 0             | 0      | 0      |
| WEDNESDAY | 26/12/2018   | 126           | 11     | 9      |
| THURSDAY  | 27/12/2018   | 210           | 21     | 10     |
| FRIDAY    | 28/12/2018   | 215           | 26     | 12     |
| SATURDAY  | 29/12/2018   | 120           | 5      | 4      |
| SUNDAY    | 30/12/2018   | 78            | 3      | 4      |
| MONDAY    | 31/12/2018   | 87            | 4      | 5      |
| TUESDAY   | 01/01/2019   | 0             | 0      | 0      |
| WEDNESDAY | 02/01/2019   | 146           | 1      | 0.7    |
| THURSDAY  | 03/01/2019   | 170           | 6      | 4      |
| FRIDAY    | 04/01/2019   | 225           | 21     | 9      |
| SATURDAY  | 05/01/2019   | 124           | 3      | 2      |
| SUNDAY    | 06/01/2019   | 67            | 4      | 6      |
| MONDAY    | 07/01/2019   | 67            | 0      | 0      |
| TUESDAY   | 08/01/2019   | 220           | 15     | 7      |
| WEDNESDAY | 09/01/2019   | 223           | 22     | 10     |
| THURSDAY  | 10/01/2019   | 224           | 19     | 8      |
| FRIDAY    | 11/01/2019   | 224           | 15     | 7      |
| SATURDAY  | 12/01/2019   | 134           | 1      | 0.7    |
| SUNDAY    | 13/01/2019   | 68            | 1      | 1      |
|           |              |               |        |        |
|           | Average 6.6% | 3,964         | 261    | 145.40 |

## Appendix 4 - Summary of Key Issues and Service Proposals

| Issues Arising  | Description   | Proposed Solution   |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Staffing        | Significant and unpredictable staff shortages   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve staff groups/Unions at early stage</li> <li>• Review whether practicable to reschedule collections to avoid Public Holiday working where possible</li> <li>• Consider whether we change Saturday collections- communicate that we will collect “over the weekend” in line with other Councils to provide more resilience/ flexibility in case of delay</li> <li>• Work with HR colleagues to assess options to increase staff availability</li> <li>• Availability of additional staff resulting from revision to garden waste collection schedules (subject to Committee approval)</li> </ul> |
| Communications  | External communications worked well overall.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue proactive use of range of communications channels to update customers on collection progress</li> <li>• Possibly build flexibility into weekend collections (e.g. say “over weekend”, rather than Saturday)</li> </ul>  |
| Christmas Trees | <p>Customers ignore rota<br/>Collection delays</p> <p>Delays to scheduled collections</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued communication</li> <li>• Ensure robust routes are designed and are allocated appropriate additional resources</li> </ul>   |

|                            |                                   |   |
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|                            |                                   | <p>from other Place services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate potential to work with third party to allow Council to focus on core service provision</li> </ul> |
| Communal glass collections | Increase in glass bank complaints | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Viridor contractual arrangements to ensure sufficient service provision is in place to cope with festive demands</li> </ul>             |

## Appendix 5 - Chargeable Garden Waste Collections (Scottish Council areas)

| Council                        | Annual Charge  | Service Design  |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Midlothian                     | £35 per bin    | Fortnightly, mid March- mid November only   |
| Perth and Kinross              | £30 per bin    | Fortnightly, all year<br>*same bin also provides food waste collection so service needs to operate all year |
| Angus Council                  | £27.50 per bin | Fortnightly, no collections December or January   |
| Highland Council               | £35            | Fortnightly, end February to end November only  |
| The City of Edinburgh current  | £25            | Fortnightly, all year   |
| The City of Edinburgh Proposed | £25            | Fortnightly, <b>no collections for 4 weeks (2 collection cycles)</b>  |