



Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

Scrutiny Board – Environment and Neighbourhoods

Date: 17th January 2011

Subject: Implementation of Redesigned Refuse and Recycling Collection Routes

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 This report provides an update to Scrutiny Board on the implementation of changes to refuse and recycling collection routes in the city. It describes progress since 25th October, the position at 10th January and describes future work to improve this the service.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 An initial review of Leeds' waste collection services was completed in 2008. It looked at waste collection services in terms of service quality, cost and other measures to gauge the efficiency and effectiveness of the service provided to the residents of Leeds.
- 2.2 One conclusion of this was that refuse and recycling collection routes had not been fundamentally reviewed for over ten years and as a result there were significant inequalities in terms of workload, with certain collection days having many fewer households than others, and some taking much longer than others to complete. Productivity levels for each contracted hour were also found to be lower than other Local Authority collection services.
- 2.3 The Directorate has been working together with the Trade Unions since the end of the industrial action in December 2009 to agree improvements to Streetscene Services and to deliver on the return to work agreement. The improvements to refuse and recycling services that we have agreed are likely to save Leeds £2 million a year.
- 2.4 Following the work with external advisers, with a successful track record of redesigning routes, and a process of quality checking involving managers and staff representative; we concluded that it was possible to reduce the number of rounds by 11.

2.5 Communications about the changes began with a press release and radio interviews on 1st October, and following this, a newsletter and new calendars were mailed to residents. The first collections using the new collection routes took place on Monday 25th October.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 *Communication of the Change*

3.1.1 The timing of the initial mail-out – to ensure that residents received information prior to their first collection, but not so far ahead that the information was forgotten – was important for the implementation of the routes. Whilst the vast majority of residents received this information ‘just in time’ as planned, a small minority received the information after the 25th October, which affected some collections in the first week.

3.1.2 However, the information received was, by and large, accurate. To date we have only found around 1,000 households (out of the approximately 330,000 in Leeds) where the wrong information was sent, and this was rectified within a few days of the error being noticed.

3.1.3 Officers decided to take a different approach to communications in the areas where student populations are high, i.e. Headingley, Hyde Park and Woodhouse and parts of Kirkstall. Instead of sending calendars in the mail to these areas, officers endeavoured to place stickers directly onto the bins. Residents were not directly sent calendars, just the newsletter and a notice asking them to contact us if they wanted a calendar.

3.1.4 A special hotline and email address was set up for Elected Members to escalate any problems as a priority. Collections and dates were available on Leeds.gov.uk website

3.2 *Collections*

3.2.1 Given the scale of the implementation, we expected that there would be at least a six week ‘bedding in’ period, to allow for familiarisation of the routes and to identify any anomalies. The section below breaks the period down into phases. These correspond broadly to:

- Weeks 1 to 3 – An initial 3 week bedding in period;
- Weeks 4 to 5 – a period of consolidation and stabilisation;
- Week 6 – a period of disruption due to severe weather;
- Weeks 7 to 8 – a period of further improvement and stabilisation up to Christmas;
- Week 9 – the Christmas period;
- Weeks 10 and 11 – Post-Christmas catch up.

3.3 *Weeks 1 to 3 (w/c 25th Oct to 8th Nov)*

3.3.1 The number of hours failing rose steadily across the first two weeks. This was in line with our expectations given the cycle of collections in the city. For example in the first few days, many residents had waited less than a week for a black bin collection (because of the change in day), and many residents with scheduled recycling collections had also recently had a collection. As we progressed through the first week, so the longer residents had waited for a collection, the heavier the loads, and therefore the more difficult the rounds. Because the green bin cycle is over a four

week period in most areas, this phenomena continued across the first three weeks of collections.

- 3.3.2 Whilst the level of failure rose initially, in week three the number of back-up vehicles was increased and collections stabilised. Localised collection issues were being resolved, such as the addition of a smaller vehicle into the Headingley area.
- 3.3.3 Prior to the implementation of the routes extra resources were draft into the contact centre to help with the expected increase in calls. This resource coped well in the first week, answering over 80% of calls offered. Contact from residents was significantly higher than usual from the outset, with around a third of calls from residents asking about their new collection date.
- 3.3.4 Weeks two and three saw call levels continue to rise which put additional strain on resources within Customer Services. Call answer rates fell to around 60% during this period, and extra staff were recruited to help with this increased demand.
- 3.3.5 By the end of week three, calls asking about collection days were falling, and calls reporting missed bins had reached a plateau. As with collections above, customer contact appeared to be stabilising.
- 3.3.6 However, challenges remained. The service was still experiencing some difficulties with high-rise collections and assisted collections, especially 'unofficial' ones which were not recorded on our central database, presented difficulties. Residents also began to report multiple misses of their collections, and measures were introduced to quickly escalate these where they were reported.
- 3.4 ***Weeks 4 to 5 (w/c 15th Nov to 22nd Nov)***
- 3.5 Week four showed a marked improvement on the previous week. The level of failure was falling and, with increased back up resource in place, a recovery plan to retrieve outstanding refuse collections more than 48 hours old was in place.
- 3.6 Customer contact continued to fall over this period, and answer rates improved to over 80%.
- 3.7 However, towards the end of this period the weather began to deteriorate. As early as the 27th November the severe weather was affecting collections, and the failure rate rose markedly.
- 3.8 ***Week 6 (w/c 29th Nov)***
- 3.9 Week 6 was characterised by the severe weather conditions. Whilst the service was affected in the early part of the week, weather conditions on the 2nd and 3rd December meant that the service was suspended.
- 3.10 The poor weather not only disrupted scheduled collections. They also significantly delayed our back-up plans, and curtailed our ability to deal with any issues that arose, e.g. households where collections had been missed for a number of weeks.
- 3.11 Given the severe weather the decision was taken to suspend garden waste collections, to allow this resource to be used to concentrate on black and green bin collections. A press release was issued to the media on Tuesday 30th November.
- 3.12 Very few customer contacts were received during this period reflecting customers understanding of the disruption caused by the weather.

3.13 ***Week 7 to 8 (w/c 6th Dec to 13th Dec)***

3.14 Snow and ice continued to affect the collection service into week seven. Whilst many of the major routes had thawed, many minor routes remained difficult to access and the level of failure stayed stubbornly high.

3.15 Weather conditions continued to be challenging across the period with the severe cold causing delays to the vehicles in the mornings, and icy pavements slowing productivity for the crews.

3.16 However, as the thaw continued, the level of failure fell significantly.

3.17 As the weather improved the number of calls to customer services increased markedly. This was due to the number of failures due to poor weather in the previous week, and customers being concerned that collections did not fail for two weeks in a row, given the proximity of Christmas.

3.18 ***Week 9 (w/c 19th Dec)***

3.19 The first collections to the amended Christmas schedule began on Sunday 19th December.

3.20 A letter to residents advising of Christmas collection schedule was distributed via Royal Mail in w/c 13th December. Unfortunately, even though all deadlines were met for Royal Mail distribution, some residents received the letter later than their first rescheduled collection day.

3.21 The non-arrival of letters meant that the service had to put in place contingency arrangements to back-up collections where possible. Crews were instructed to complete to the Christmas timetable and, if they finished early because of low presentation, to revert to the previous day's collections. Where possible collection crews also 'pulled out' bins from properties to ensure a collection was made.

3.22 As the week progressed, and letters arrived with customers so presentation increased.

3.23 Customer contact in week 9 was predictably very high, given the failure of Christmas collection letters to arrive on time, and increased anxiety over missed collections so close to Christmas.

3.24 ***Week 10 to 11 (w/c 26th Dec to 3rd Jan)***

3.25 The last two weeks have seen a period of recovery since Christmas. The failure of some letters to arrive meant that higher than normal levels of waste were presented in the week following Christmas. Poor weather on several days over the period also continued to have an impact with ice, and some further snow, causing some disruption.

3.26 Increased resources have been deployed to clear the backlog, including extra collection staff and a one-off collection on Sunday 9th January to recover known misses, primarily from Friday and Saturday collections on the 7th and 8th.

3.27 The level of customer contact has fallen over the last two weeks, reflecting an improving position in terms of recovery collections. The further resources in the contact centre continue to help to deal with calls, but also to make sure that emails are responded to in a timely manner.

4.0 Looking Ahead

4.1.1 Collections

- 4.2 A project team, including the Trade Unions and working with Crews, have completed a review of collection routes in the Central Region (13 rounds). This identified streets or sets of properties that need to be removed from the daily collection schedule onto an additional scheduled vehicle, with further additional scheduled support on a Monday and Friday. We implemented these revised rounds in week commencing 20th December. No collection schedules will change from the residents' point of view.
- 4.3 Where there are indications that crew performance may be an issue crews are being jointly questioned by the Trade Unions and senior managers through a dedicated 'performance team'. This is resulting in improvements, but will be closely monitored and further action taken if required.
- 4.4 A decision to stand down garden waste collections until January was made before Christmas. This allowed extra resource to ensure that collections were made in the run up to the Christmas period and the period following, and to deal with any weather related disruption. A press release was issued on 17th December.
- 4.5 Regular two-way communications with the crews throughout the process of implementation have taken place. These have flagged up several areas where improvements could be made, including improving the maps provided and providing A-Z lists of routes (rather than in 'run order'). We have taken these suggestions on board and implemented them fully.
- 4.6 The familiarisation of crews with the routes has obviously been one of the biggest challenges in implementation. The level of 'unofficial' wheel-outs and the number of properties where collection arrangements are not clear, or that are difficult to find, has been higher than expected.
- 4.7 The recovery of any long-standing collection issues and collections from vulnerable people ('wheel-outs') continue to be our priority. All reported missed wheel-outs are added as a task to the crews' sheets, and checked that they are recorded on our central database.
- 4.8 Two dedicated crews are in place to recover any collections that have had more than two scheduled collections missed. Any collections missed regularly are escalated to the manager and communicated to the crew to ensure that they are collected on the next scheduled collection day.
- 4.9 Garden Waste collections will restart in week commencing 17th January.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 The redesign of Leeds refuse and recycling collection routes is the largest change to refuse and recycling services in Leeds for at least 10 years. Whilst we fully expected some teething problems, caused by familiarity issues and anomalies in the routes, it is clear that these have not been resolved as quickly as we would have expected. However, the back-up arrangements now in place are resulting in most missed collections being recovered within 24 hours.
- 5.2 The report above shows that, prior to the onset of severe weather, the service was improving. We originally estimated that, because of shift patterns and cycles of collections, there would be a six week period of implementation and familiarisation. Unfortunately, the fifth and sixth weeks coincided with a period of severe weather which significantly affected collections, and had a knock-on effect on back-up arrangements.
- 5.3 The steps we are now taking, in terms of reviewing the routes, and dealing with any performance issues, will lead to an improvement in services as we continue into the year ahead.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 That Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) note the contents of this report.

7.0 Background Papers

- 7.1 None