

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

1 February 2022

Garden Waste Service

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Stevens, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Following a Motion raised at Full Council on 8 December 2021, this report outlines the disruption experienced to the garden waste service during the Autumn and the actions taken that have now stabilised the service.

Purpose of Report

Noting

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the current performance of the garden waste service and actions taken to mitigate the HGV driver shortages are noted.

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	1 February 2022

Garden Waste Service

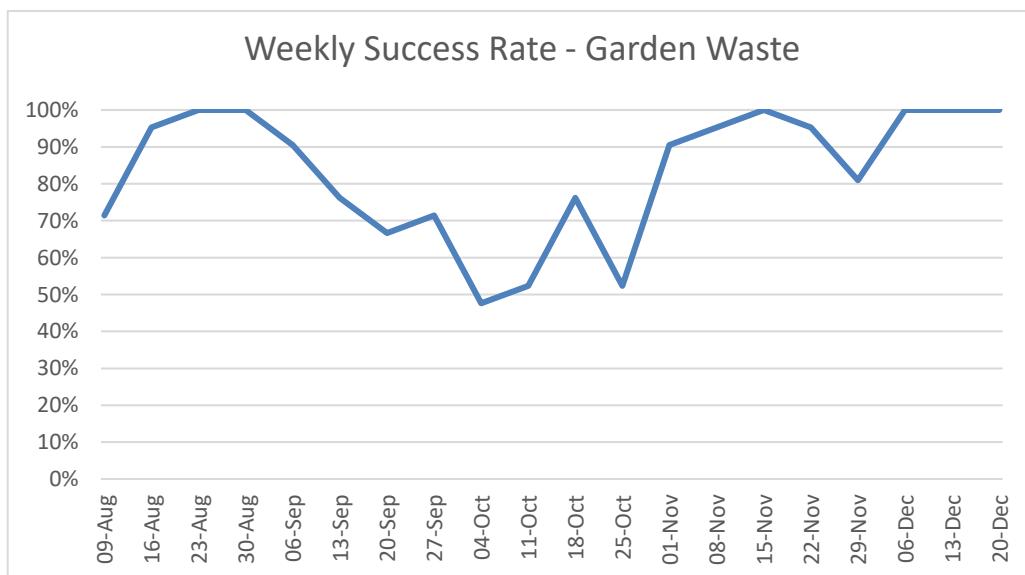
1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>The garden waste service contributes to the Council's objective of a <i>Safe, Clean and Green Borough</i> for our residents and visitors. This is a valuable service that enables residents to compost their garden waste. The report notes that the disruption to the garden waste service did not impact the tonnage of garden waste collected and therefore did not impact delivery of the objectives.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report does not impact the achievement of these cross-cutting objectives.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	<p>The report outlines the risks associated with the national HGV driver shortage on Maidstone's waste and recycling collections. The service's business continuity plan (BCP) was enacted to ensure that the disruption was limited to the garden waste service to protect the refuse and mixed recycling collections. The report also identifies that actions taken to alleviate the impact the national crisis had on Maidstone's services.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm

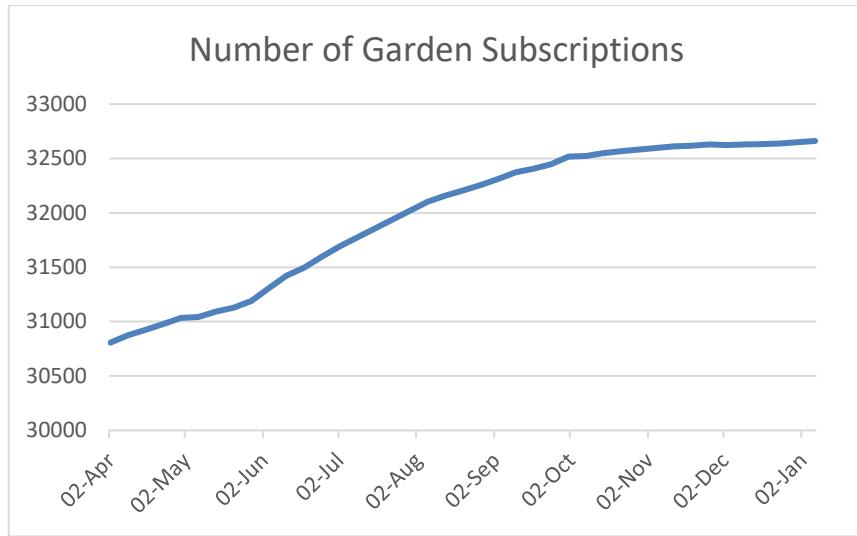
Financial	The report is for noting.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The management of the waste collection contract has been delivered with existing staff resources. However the impact of the challenges has been felt within the Customer Services Team who have experienced staffing vacancies.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	The report is for noting only.	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Privacy and Data Protection	The report is for noting only.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	The report is for noting only.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	Prioritisation of the refuse and food waste collections is to prevent waste accumulations that could pose a public health risk if left uncollected.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	No implications	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	No implications	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Biodiversity and Climate Change	<p>The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and one minor implication has been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With loss, reduction, or sporadic garden waste collection services, residents may use cars to transport garden waste to local tips and marginally increase Boroughwide CO2e from car use. However tonnages have remained consistent suggesting the majority of garden waste is still being captured through the service. 	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The garden waste collection service is provided to over 32,500 residents in the Borough on a fortnightly basis. There is a £45 annual charge for the service which includes the provision of a bin and collection of the waste. The terms and conditions of the service specifically advise customers that we are unable to guarantee the number of collections per year as the service may be suspended in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.2 Since August 2021, the Council's waste collection contractor has experienced difficulties recruiting and retaining HGV drivers due to a national shortage of over 100,000 drivers in the UK. The shortage has been attributed to EU drivers returning home during lockdown, uncertainty of the EU exit and loss of over 30,000 HGV test slots during the pandemic. During September and October, the contractor had 11 HGV driver vacancies and was only able to fill 5 of these with agency staff. With the added pressures of staff sickness and annual leave, this meant on some days there were not enough drivers to provide all services.
- 2.3 Whilst it is recognised that the garden waste service is important to many residents, it is considered a lower priority than the refuse and recycling services. This is because less than half of Maidstone households subscribe to the service and there are alternative options to dispose of the waste including home composting. Therefore, in line with the Council's business continuity plan, daily decisions have been taken to partially suspend the garden waste service to protect the other services. At no point since August has the whole garden waste service been suspended.
- 2.4 The graph below shows the weekly success rate for delivering the garden waste service. The service has stabilized since the end of October 2021, with 92% of garden collections in November and 100% in December completed successfully. The service was suspended over Christmas for 2 weeks as normal to enable the resources to be focused on collecting the additional refuse and recycling.



- 2.5 The Waste Contractor has already invested considerably in their contract with Maidstone Borough Council to maintain services this year including retention bonuses, enhanced agency pay rates and training packages. Corporately, Biffa have also invested in accelerated driver training programs, including professional apprenticeships, and have developed more attractive recruitment packages and policies, including flexible working, and promoting "Women in Waste".
- 2.6 The current improvements in service delivery are largely due to a new 2-year pay agreement, increased reliability with agency employees, reduced sickness levels and fewer staff on annual leave. There are now 10 vacancies covered by 9 temporary staff and two further agency staff have been inducted. Five employees are also due to start HGV driver training once they receive their provisional licences from the DVLA.
- 2.7 Residents have been encouraged to sign up to the Council's text alert system which enables them to receive specific updates about their collection. This is proving particularly popular with over 32,000 residents signed up. Registration is available through the daily update page on the Council's website which also provides specific information about services: <https://maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/bins-and-recycling/primary-areas/bin-collection-updates>
- 2.8 Where residents have experienced severe disruption to their service and remain dissatisfied, the waste team are working with the customers directly to address their concerns and where appropriate have extended the subscription period by one month, this has only been applied on 70 occasions. However, official complaints have remained relatively low considering the number of customers affected by service suspensions, less than 0.5% of garden waste customers. In addition, email and telephone calls to the customer services team, as well as reported missed collections, remain lower than the previous year.
- 2.9 Alternative options to manage the disruption have been considered including implementing a monthly garden waste service. Whilst this provides greater predictability of collections, it is evident that more residents would be impacted. On average customers have experienced 1.75 suspended collections in the past 4 months, with 33% of customers only missing one collection during that time.
- 2.10 The number of garden waste subscriptions has continued to grow throughout the period of disruption to collections as shown in the graph below.



2.11 The stability of the service continues to be monitored daily and the team are working closely with the contractor at all levels to ensure every effort is made to limit disruption to services. However, the longer-term impacts of the national HGV driver shortage remain unknown and so whilst the service has stabilised, the crisis continues within the industry.

2.12 The Council is also supporting six direct employees to complete their HGV training to provide additional resilience to the commercial waste and street cleansing services as well as offer support to the waste collection contractor.

Conclusion

2.13 The Notice of Motion to Full Council resolved to:

- Make it clear to residents that the service is sporadic at the moment and the frequency will most likely be monthly
- Receive a full report on what actions can be done to get the service back to the fortnightly collection which the Council contracts to deliver

2.14 As shown in this report the service has operated on a regular fortnightly basis since the end of November. Information has been provided to residents through the text alert system, the Council's website and social media. It is not proposed that any further communication is carried out at the time being as the service is operating well and fortnightly services are being maintained.

2.15 This report is provided to the Committee to outline the actions that have been taken by the Council and its contractor to help mitigate the impact of the national shortages. These actions have stabilised the service and enabled fortnightly collections to be delivered consistently since end of November. No further actions have been identified at this time; however, the team continue to monitor the situation to enable risks to be identified early.

2.16 Previous concerns regarding further staff reductions due to Covid-19 have not materialised as yet, however the contractor's management team continue to monitor staff sickness and currently have sufficient staff to cover those who are isolating or are unwell.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 There are no matters for decision in this report. The Committee is asked to note the contents but may choose to take further action depending on the matters reported here.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Committee is requested to note the content of the report as no further actions are required.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The key risk for the Council is its ability to deliver all waste and recycling services due to staff shortages brought about by the national HGV driver crisis or Covid 19. During September and October, the risk threat was assessed to be Amber as garden waste services were impacted and there was concern that further loss of staff could result in the recycling or refuse collections being affected.
- 5.2 The Council along with its contractor have taken steps to mitigate the risks and stabilise the garden waste service. Services are now fully operational, and the current level of risk is reduced as services are being maintained despite an increase in sickness due to Covid-19.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 A Members Briefing session was held on 2 November 2021 to outline the risks associated with the HGV driver shortage and provide Members with some reassurance of the actions being taken.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 The Waste Services Team will continue to work with the Waste Collection Contractor to monitor staffing levels and any risk to maintaining full services. They will use the text alert system and website to notify residents of any further service disruptions, however at the present time these are not expected.
- 7.2 The Business Continuity Plan remains in place and will be enacted should staffing levels require it to be.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None