

ITEM 6

Report to Environmental Well Being OSC A Review of Christmas Refuse Collection Arrangements 2005

BACKGROUND

During the summer of 2005 the Transport and General Workers Union formally requested that consideration be given to suspending household refuse collections during the week between Christmas and New Year 2005. The reason for the request was largely to allow staff time-off with their families.

CONSIDERATIONS

The majority of Copeland's residents are now accustomed to alternate weekly collections of their waste. In addition, extra black bin collections are provided to those householders on the bin scheme as green waste collections are suspended at least two weeks before Christmas and not re-instated until two weeks afterwards. Residents remaining on the traditional black sack system are currently not restricted in the amount of waste they put out.

On average 550 to 600 tonnes of waste is collected by Copeland refuse crews each week. During Christmas week 2004 the amount of waste collected was approximately 100 tonnes or 10 vehicle loads less than usual. During the same week in 2003 90 tonnes less than normal was collected.

Although changes to collection days are always published in the local press and are detailed on calendars issued to households on the alternate week service there are generally some residents unaware of the change. In the past comments have been made by residents to refuse crews collecting during Christmas holidays expressing their surprise that the service is operating. "We didn't think you would be working today" is a common comment at these times. Simply missing collections for one week makes public information straightforward and simple.

AGREEMENT

Agreement was made to suspend collections for the week commencing 26th December as long as refuse staff agreed to work Monday to Friday the following week thereby ensuring all refuse collections would be made on the normal collection day. This involved working Monday 2 January, a designated bank holiday.

OTHER SERVICES

The above arrangements applied to household refuse collection only, all other services provided by the waste team continued as normal and in the case of recycling at an increased level. The Environmental Cleaning team work in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act 363 days each year with Christmas Day and New Years Day being the only exceptions.

PUBLICITY

As the previous refuse collection calendar ended on 30 November 2005 a new annual collection service calendar was produced and distributed to all households covered by the alternate week collection service (20,000 properties). This detailed exactly when

collections would be made and when collections were suspended. Collection arrangements were also advertised on the Council's website and public notices were placed in the Whitehaven News, News and Star and the Evening Mail newspapers. Unfortunately households remaining on the traditional sack service were not provided with individual collection arrangements. It appears that some of these residents didn't see any of the publicity and therefore didn't know what the arrangements were. This led to some waste being left out inappropriately and in some cases for a number of days, however the problem was greatly exaggerated by the local media.

Lesson learned – When making similar changes, collection arrangements must be provided to all households.

RECYCLING

Large Banks

These banks are normally emptied on request as they are full, the majority are emptied within 24 hours of being reported by one of the Council's subcontractors.

Arrangements were made with the subcontractors who service Copeland's recycling sites to empty all large recycling containers in the week prior to Christmas. These containers hold up to 3.8 tonnes of glass and around 3 tonnes of paper and usually take between 2 and 4 weeks to fill. Between 20 and 22 December 9 large paper banks were serviced and a further 5 were emptied on 28 and 29 December. Glass containers on the main sites were also emptied between 19 and 22 December.

Small Banks

These banks are normally emptied on a frequency basis. Some of the busier paper/card banks such as the one at Tesco's are emptied 3 times per week by Smurfit Recycling and a further twice by Copeland's own waste team. Glass and can banks are normally serviced every 7 to 10 days depending on the use by Cumbria Crushing.

Prior to Christmas Smurfit serviced small paper/card banks on 22 December and the waste team emptied them on 24 December. The waste team then emptied paper and card banks every day from Boxing Day up to New Years Eve realising a total weight of 11.1 tonnes. In the run up to Christmas small glass sites were emptied on 19/20 December and then on 3/4 January.

In addition recycling sites are checked and cleaned on a daily basis by the Environmental cleaning team. This was carried out throughout the holiday period. Some additional containers were also located on a number of sites to provide additional capacity for the period.

Lessons Learned – The additional measures put in place to cover increased demand for recycling site use during the holiday period should be continued into the first 2 weeks of the New Year.

Kerbside

It was extremely disappointing that Doorstep Collections Ltd despite being urged to carry out collections during Christmas Week decided not to do so. Tonnages for December were obviously low due to them suspending collections and January figures do not appear to include tonnage from the missing week in December.

Recommendation – Collection of recyclables should continue throughout even if refuse collections do not.

CONCLUSION

Despite what was written in the local press the waste team view the Christmas/New year plans to have been a success. Other than the issue of getting information out to households on sack collections there were relatively few operational complaints. All properties had received a refuse collection by Friday 6 January 2006.

Some of the complaints have suggested that suspending collections was purely a cost saving exercise for the Council. The amount saved as a result of not collecting for the week was around £7000. To put this into context the annual refuse budget is £1.6 million of which £140,000 is spent on fuel. Each 1 pence per gallon increase in the price of fuel adds £40,000 on the cost of refuse collection, which has to be absorbed by the refuse budget. Therefore a £7,000 saving helps to balance the fuel increases.