

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO HEALTH WELLBEING & PARTNERSHIPS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

07 March 2022

Report Title: How Services have managed with Winter Pressures

Submitted by: Executive Director of

Portfolios: Environment & Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To inform members of the Health wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee of how the Council coped with winter pressures on front line services

Recommendation

That the report be noted

Reasons

A request was made by members of the Health wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to hear how the Council coped with winter pressures on front line services with the COVID pandemic still prevalent.

1. **Background**

Winter is always a challenging time for front line operational services provided by Local Authorities. Recycling and waste services in particular face vastly increased tonnage of material to collect due to the Christmas and New Year period. With Streetscene the situation is slightly different, with less work required on grounds maintenance, apart from tree management, however street cleansing remains busy, and dealing with leaf fall puts added pressure on to services, but is offset by reduced grounds maintenance work

2. **Issues**

Poor weather conditions and winter bugs always put pressure onto front line services, but clearly the last couple of years with the COVID pandemic has put added pressure to maintain operations of all front line services. Nationally this has further been exasperated by a national shortage of HGV drivers.

While HGV driver shortages haven't impacted on the Council Recycling Waste and sweeping operations, the Omicron variant of COVID has had an impact, and one which has been more severe in terms of the number of staff affected at any time during the pandemic. At its most severe, in the first week of January, combined with other sickness, 30% of the workforce within Recycling & Waste were absent, while dealing with a 50% increase in the tonnage of recycling collected and similarly a 30% increase in the tonnage of food waste. Luckily, garden waste collections are suspended for two weeks over Christmas and New Year, and with the help of streetscene and agency staff we were able to run all collection services with minimal disruption, with 112,140 collections made that week.

The situation nationally was and continues not to be as good. A regular survey undertaken by LARAC, which represents Local Authority Recycling and Waste Services the following impacts:-

- 20% residual waste collections nationally are disrupted
- 28% recycling collections nationally are disrupted.

- 35% garden waste collections nationally are disrupted, with 8% fully suspended
- 40% of Street sweeping operations nationally are disrupted / not taking place.

3. **Management and Resolution of Issues**

The Council has Business continuity plans which cover the Recycling & Waste and Streetscene services. These are 'live' documents which are continually under review, as incidents take place to ensure the Council is best equipped to keep front line operations taking place, or to bring them back to normal operation in the safest and quickest time.

The plan sets out minimum staff requirements for each operation, for example dry recycling collections, and sets out how resources can be moved between services to ensure effective operations which ultimately protect public health, for example ensuring waste does not build up on streets. If services have to be suspended the plan considers how this can be dealt with and recovered, again for example we may look to collect garden waste with residual waste on the same vehicle, if we don't have resources to run the garden waste service. This is considered preferable to suspending a collection service all together, and can be deployed in a catch-up situation following a spell of very bad weather, snow for example, or a lack of available staff due to sickness / COVID.

Elements of the business continuity plan have been successfully utilised during January 2022.

Additionally the Council utilises and follows national guidance from the Waste Industry Safety Forum (WISH) which has been very proactive during the COVID. Applying this guidance around promoting good hygiene, social distancing, ventilation in cabs, and limiting the mixing of workforce staff, for instance trying as far as reasonably practical maintain the same collection team (bubble) group together on collection rounds.

By ensuring we are following this guidance, and the compliance of staff in following the guidance has ensured we have only had one confirmed workplace transmission of COVID, and that was confined to the working bubble they were in.

4. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

The Council has a number of statutory requirements in front line services it has to supply to its residents, these cover all recycling and waste collection services, with the exception of garden waste, which is none statutory. Additionally there are statutory requirements to keep our local environment clean and free of litter.

5. **Equality Impact Assessment**

This is not applicable to this report.

6. **Financial and Resource Implications**

Staff absences puts pressure on budgets as there is a need to potentially employ agency staff, however increased levels of absence caused through the COVID pandemic have been managed within existing budgets.

7. **Major Risks**

Not having effective business continuity plans in place, and ensuring they are reviewed on a regular basis would mean front line services could be severely affected, causing reputational damage to the Council.

8. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

Ensuring operations are run efficiently is key to ensuring the Council has sustainable services, and minimises its operational impact with regard to climate change. Having an effective business continuity plan along ensures negative impacts are kept to

9. **Key Decision Information**

This report is not a key decision

10. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

There are no earlier Cabinet or Committee resolutions

11. **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 - LARAC National Survey of Local Authorities

12. **Background Papers**

None