

## BRIEFING NOTE

### REVIEW OF WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE DECEMBER 2010

In the week before Christmas 2010 heavy snow and ice resulted in two full collection days (Monday and Tuesday) of recycling being suspended. The decision to suspend collections was made on the Monday morning jointly by Steve Bishop the strategic director (and acting chief executive at the time), Verdant's contract manager and in consultation with the portfolio holder for Waste - the decisions was in accordance with the February 2010 Adverse weather report. (Appendix 1).

It should be noted that the timing of the snow with bank holidays gave us a 'worst case scenario'. Whereas the pre-agreed winter plan provides for a catch-up service in the event of only two full days being lost, that presupposes the following two Saturdays are available. However, in December 2010 the following Saturday was Christmas day, which could not be used. Therefore, the effect was the loss of three days. The winter plan - as appended to this report - requires us to revert to the calendar without catch-up in the event of three days being unavailable.

Therefore, no catch-up was intended; instead Verdant would revert to the calendar when conditions allowed for collections. Because conditions were predicted to be bad for the rest of the week it was agreed that Verdant would resume collections as normal only where it was safe to do so. Some collections re-started on Wednesday. Continued icy conditions that week meant that most parts of the district were affected with many smaller roads remaining impassable.

The rationale for the winter plan reverting to the published Christmas calendar without catching-up (and therefore the rationale for the December 2010 decision) was to disrupt as few residents as possible. Had we attempted to catch up the missed collections it would have meant disrupting the Christmas schedule for all 50,000 Vale households. It would also have resulted in collections not returning to normal until well into February.

Those residents that did miss a collection were advised that they could put out additional side waste at their next scheduled collection.

By keeping to the calendar and collecting side waste on the next collections, disruption was kept to a minimum and normal collections resumed on 24 January. Clearly there was disruption to a large number of residents, but it was the minimal disruption possible and much less than had we tried to catch up.

### **Verdant's inclement weather policy**

Verdant employees are expected to make every reasonable effort to get to work, adapting their means of travel if necessary. Verdant recognizes the need to safely maintain services during adverse weather conditions, whilst properly discharging its duty of care to employees.

All employees are expected to present themselves for duty, this may mean, with management approval, alternative duties may be given where it is not safe to carry out normal duties.

### **Re-deployment of resources**

Verdant staff were deployed where possible to help clear snow and ice from pavements, walkways and councils car parks in the main town centres.

This involved using Verdant's fleet of street cleansing vehicles, utilized to carry the equipment and grit/sand.

### **Garden Waste Collection**

During and immediately following the disruption the garden waste collection service was suspended and the vehicles and crews were used to help pick up additional side waste that was presented over the period. This exceeded the February 2010 adverse weather report and was a very flexible, pragmatic offer by Verdant, which should be applauded.

### **Communications**

Prior to the bad weather Verdant had delivered a bin hanger to all residents informing them of the Christmas collection dates. Other methods of communicating the collection days included a series of radio advertisements, updating the council website, informing all the parish/town councils and putting out press releases.

During the periods of disruption, the following communications were put out to ensure as many residents as possible were made aware of the changes to the waste collection arrangements:

- regular website updates
- weekly press releases
- parish and town council updates
- posters in main towns and villages
- council 'text' alerts to mobile phones – for those residents signed up to the scheme
- radio updates (Heart and Fox FM)
- Oxfordshire Waste Partnership (OWP) radio adverts and updates

Residents were told to follow the Christmas calendar for the correct collection day and which bin would be collected (recycling or waste).

### **Review**

Attached to this briefing note (Appendix 1) is the adverse weather report produced in February 2010 following the cold weather in December 2009 and January 2010 which formed the basis of the actions taken in December 2010.

A review of this years collections during the adverse weather took place in March and a revised report has been produced (Appendix 2)

### **Future action points**

In the event of a repeat of extreme weather conditions that affect refuse, recycling and garden waste collections, the following actions have been agreed:

### **Actions**

| <b>Action</b>  | <b>Verdant/Council</b> |
|--|------------------------|
| Follow scenarios a,b or c below depending on scale of disruption.  | Verdant                |
| 8am deadline for operational decisions to be made between council and Verdant.   | Verdant/Council        |
| 3 updates – 8am, midday and later afternoon. Information provided to the council at the end of each day regarding what is outstanding. | Verdant                |
| Use supervisor vans to deploy more staff and snow clearing equipment.  | Verdant                |
| Organise central working points close to where staff live.   | Verdant                |
| Utilization of the garden waste vehicles.  | Verdant                |
| Ensure adequate supply and storage of salt/grit.   | Council                |
| Increase no. of grit bins in public areas i.e. council leisure centres etc.  | Council                |

### **Operational scenarios:**

- a) 1 day disruption:-  
Collections will be one day late and catch up will take place on the Saturday. It will be necessary to ensure disposal sites are open on the Saturday.
  
- b) 2 days disruption:-  
Collections will be two days late in the initial week of disruption and one day late in the next week following a Saturday catch up. For example:-

| <b>Normal collection day</b> | <b>Revised collection day</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Monday                       | Wednesday                     |
| Tuesday                      | Thursday                      |
| Wednesday                    | Friday                        |
| Thursday                     | Saturday                      |
| Friday                       | Monday                        |
| Monday                       | Tuesday                       |
| Tuesday                      | Wednesday                     |
| Wednesday                    | Thursday                      |
| Thursday                     | Friday                        |
| Friday                       | Saturday                      |

If catch up for scenario's (a) and (b) can not be achieved prior to a Christmas calendar starting then refer to scenario (c) below. Also where certain roads still cannot be accessed these will be collected on the next scheduled collection as per scenario (c)

- c) 3 days disruption or more:-  
Revert back to the latest published calendar when collections resume and collect all excess waste and recycling for the next two weeks from properties which have missed collections.

### **Communications**

The following communication procedures have been agreed

| <b>Action</b>   | <b>Verdant/Council</b> |
|---|------------------------|
| Provide operational updates – 8am, midday and afternoon. Evening email with what is outstanding.                          | Verdant                |
| Script – for all staff both Verdant and Councils. Daily staff briefings to go through the script.                         | Verdant/Council        |
| Posters/information – send to council /communications to send out to parishes/councilors and encourage door stepping.     | Verdant/Council        |
| Look into diverting call centre number to a mobile phone held by the call centre manager.                                 | Verdant                |
| Daily town/parish and councilor email   | Councils               |
| Text and email alert system – (increase numbers on alert system). Be specific to each district i.e. which bin to put out. | Councils               |
| Regular website updates.  | Verdant/Council        |
| Phone system updates (recorded messages am and pm)  | Verdant/Council        |
| Radio updates   | Council/OWP            |
| Call newspapers – update their websites   | Council                |
| Disable postcode search   | Council                |

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Q. *Why could other companies such as Tesco's continue to access roads but Verdant could not?***

- A. The sizes and weight of the vehicles are very different. The waste vehicles are 26 tonnes and would cause considerable damage if they were to slide on icy roads.  
The vehicles are continually stopping and starting along the street rather than delivering to individual properties.  
The crew has to be able to wheel the bins from properties to the vehicles safely, which is more difficult with snow and ice on the ground.  
The vehicles have to be able to empty the waste at the County Councils waste sites, if these were not accessible or closed due to bank holidays it was not possible for Verdant to send out their vehicles either.

### **Q. *Why did the council not attempt to provide a catch up service?***

- A. The decision not to attempt a catch up of those residents who missed a collection was taken in order to safeguard collections for the majority of households who had been unaffected by the disruption. One of the most

challenging aspects of a service to every household is the inability to provide 'real time' updates on a daily or even more frequent basis. Our text service would be beneficial here but we only have a small percentage of residents who have currently signed up for this, although the numbers are growing. Therefore without a reliable means of communicating with all residents it was decided to seek to minimize the impact on the existing waste calendar. To have gone back to the routes that had been suspended would have meant every household in the Vale would have been affected with a delayed collection.

**Q *Who made the decision to suspend collections and not attempt to catch up?***

A This was a joint decision made on the first day of disruption by the strategic director, Verdants contracts manager and the portfolio holder for Waste.

**Q *Were additional resources provided to deal with the missed collections?***

A Yes, the garden waste crew and street cleansing crews were used to clear additional side waste at the next scheduled collection, crews worked longer hours within the restrictions imposed on them and they worked Saturdays.

**Q *Why did Verdant not employ additional staff to help catch up***

A Having an effective and cost efficient contractor means that the right number of staff is trained for delivery of the core service. This does however mean that when the service is disrupted due to extreme weather or when there are large quantities of material to collect such as over Christmas the service will take time to recover. It is not financially viable for the contractor to employ spare staff and vehicles for when these situations arise. It is also not possible to bring in at short notice additional waste vehicles (such as hiring) as well as provided instantly trained drivers and crews.

**Q *Why did the backlog take so long to clear?***

A The amount of waste, recycling and food waste presented at Christmas is at the highest level of the year in general. When the service resumed the waste vehicles were filling up much more quickly and therefore could not complete the usual rounds before having to go and empty the vehicles, this added time to the process.