

Dear , 20 October

I hope that you are well.

This issue was discussed at the Development Committee last week and I was asked to contact you to express concern about the impact of the current erratic recycling collection service. Many residents are having collections every other week and some seem to not had a collection for over a month.

Members understand the issues with the recruitment of HGV drivers and the impact of Covid-19 on staffing. However, the lack of regular collection of recycling waste is having the following impact:

- Causing a health risk as food and other waste is being left to rot for several weeks encouraging foxes and badgers to disturb the food bins which are not secure.
- Causing residents storage issues, especially those in terrace streets where inside/outside storage is a problem.
- Encouraging some residents to make additional trips to the tip – resulting in increased pollution from cars.
- Causing some residents to lose interest in the habit of recycling so they put all their waste in the black bin.
- Causing an increase in fly tipping.

Members understand the resource issues and suggest as a short term remedy that the actual schedule of collection be altered to what is achievable at the moment. This could mean an advertised fortnightly collection so that actually happens so that residents expectations are managed. This would be preferable to a weekly collection that does not happen.

Members who currently live in Mytholmroyd have commented that they are still receiving a weekly collection so maybe Todmorden is disproportionately affected as it is further away? Also, when I have enquired in the past I was informed that there is only one recycling wagon for the whole of Calderdale. If this is correct it is not surprising that there is a problem if there is an increase in demand as residents are encouraged to recycle and want to do their bit for the planet.

On a side issue, I also have received complaints that the receptacles provided for recycling are not fit for purpose resulting with recycling waste being blown around the streets on a windy day. Several different containers are provided but unfortunately not of them are robust or big enough for the materials to be collected. Elsewhere, a separate wheelie bin is provided which is more robust and easier to use. This would, however, require that recycled materials would need to be sorted at the collection point although this probably takes place already to some extent.

I look forward to receiving your comments so I can feed them back to the Development Committee.

Kind regards,
Susan

Hello Susan 20 October

I have attached the latest Members update that was sent out a couple of weeks ago and provides relevant information for some of your queries.

In respect of other general comments there is most definitely more than one recycling vehicle in Calderdale, when fully resourced Suez have 20 recycling crews out each day, making collections from around 19,000 properties. I can also assure you, as I have confirmed with Calderdale Councillors, that the issues are borough wide with no area exempt from the current problems. With regards to the collection methodology, this is something that will be discussed in the coming months as work towards the next contract commences.

Senior Manager Waste

Dear Councillor 25 September

I am sure you are aware that we have been experiencing difficulties in completing household waste and recycling collections to schedule over the past few weeks, and so I thought you might appreciate an update on the reasons for this and the actions we are taking to address the situation.

1. What's the issue?

The main problem stems from the national shortage of HGV drivers, and you will have seen the impact this is having on various sectors of the economy, from supermarkets to fuel distribution.

Suez require 40 class 1 and 2 HGV drivers to fully resource the waste and recycling collection service, but now have only 32 due to resignations as drivers have secured alternative employment which is often both better paid and far less taxing than manoeuvring a large vehicle around the streets of Calderdale on a daily basis.

Therefore, Suez are currently operating with 20% less drivers than they need, without factoring in sickness or other absence (Covid-related absence, whilst much reduced, is still cropping up, with a crew of 3 - including the driver - all testing positive last week).

The usual option of bringing in agency staff is closed off as these people are also in high demand by other organisations who are able to offer more attractive terms and conditions of employment, and the same applies when trying to recruit permanent replacements (we have heard of large 'golden hellos' and retainer payments, as well as substantial hourly rate increases being offered by competitors).

On top of this, there continue to be access problems in many areas, despite the best efforts of crews to deal with this using the standard cards on windscreens etc. (and, in some cases, interventions by our community wardens).

This is one of the reasons why the main impact is upon the recycling service (as the vehicles are less manoeuvrable than the Refuse Collection Vehicles, which have rear axle steering). The other reasons are that it is a weekly service and the fact that the volume of material being presented continues to be high and so necessitates more 'down time' to tip off as the recycling

vehicles do not have the compaction and extra capacity that is available on the Refuse Collection Vehicles.

So, whilst refuse collections are being pretty well maintained on a fortnightly basis, with crews catching up at the weekend on anything missed during the week, it has not been possible to provide a weekly recycling collection for everyone over the past couple of months.

The amount of recycling work outstanding at the end of each week has fluctuated between 70 and 155 hours, averaging at 108 hours. As there are 160 operational hours each day this means that, on average, around 12,000 properties have not received a collection each week, which equates to about 13% of the borough.

Even though it is no consolation for the households whose collections are not picked up, the majority of properties in the Borough (85%+) are still receiving a weekly recycling collection.

It is important that Members are reassured that there is no move to fortnightly recycling by stealth, it is simply that, for reasons beyond our control, we do not have the necessary resources in terms of drivers to be able to guarantee a weekly collection for everyone at the moment.

2. What are we doing about it?

As a vehicle cannot leave the depot without a driver, regardless of the number of loaders available, the effect of the driver shortage is that full rounds are having to be dropped each day, i.e. no households on that round receive a collection. However, we have put in place measures with Suez to ensure that where work is dropped one week, it becomes the priority for the next week.

Where possible, the dropped work will coincide with the corresponding 'refuse week' for properties, so residents receive a collection of some form each week. To ensure rounds dropped entirely are caught up the following week they are paired up with another crew and once all the two-week old recycling is collected, they then move on to start the scheduled work of the crew that assisted - whilst they may not complete the entire round, the combined efforts of the two normally results in less work being outstanding than the previous week.

So, **our key operational response is to avoid consecutive missed collections** in order to minimise impact on residents (and, as stated above, the majority will still get a weekly collection).

We have amended the web pages, missed report form and the email reminder service to reflect the current approach, and Contact Centre staff will give out the same information to callers.

The key message to residents is that if their recycling is not collected then they should take their containers back in and place back out on the next scheduled collection day (not leave out until Sunday, as per previous instructions). The full message is as follows:

Recycling collection delays

Please note: Waste and Recycling services are currently severely disrupted due to driver shortages and your recycling may not be collected every week. If your recycling collection does not take place on your scheduled collection day, it will be a priority on your next scheduled collection day.

We are sorry that some recycling collections are not able to be completed each day. This is mainly due to the impact of the national driver shortage, as well as high volumes of recycling. If your recycling is not collected, please take your containers back onto your property until your next collection day. We cannot return earlier than this, as we are trying to keep overall disruption to a minimum and to avoid any property being missed for two consecutive weeks. If you prefer not to wait, please take recycling to the Household Waste Recycling Centre if you are able to.

Help us by making sure your street is accessible to service vehicles, do not park close to junctions or opposite junctions, and fold in wing mirrors. On narrow streets, park cars on one side of the road only, against the kerb with wheels straight.

The rural routes, serviced by four-wheel drive vehicles, are now having recycling collected fortnightly. These collections are on alternate weeks to the refuse, until further notice.

*There is no need to report missed collections unless you have been missed for **two consecutive weeks**. We know where work is outstanding and have put in place a service disruption plan. We are sorry for the inconvenience, but please bear with us during this challenging time.*

In terms of other actions, Suez have several volunteers for HGV training, but this is taking time to deliver due to delays with testing and licence application processes.

Suez are also moving staff around to make best use of those employees with HGV licences - the limited access vehicle and the rural collection vehicles can be driven on an ordinary licence, for example, but both the recycling vehicles (at 12 tonnes) and the Refuse Collection Vehicles (at 26 tonnes) require HGV licences, as do the vehicles used to take material from HWRCs and from the Transfer Loading Station in Halifax.

We are speaking with Suez about ways they might become more attractive as an employer but, as you can imagine, they have indicated that they would look towards the Council for assistance with funding any uplift in pay rates beyond the normal annual increases – and this is money the Council does not have, a point we continually make to Suez.

3. What about other services?

As mentioned above, refuse collections are the least affected but, in order to support front line collection of recycling, bulky waste collections and container deliveries are operating at a reduced level, though there are request slots available each day on a 'first come first served' basis.

The garden waste and clinical waste collections are operating as normal, and household waste recycling centres are open as usual, accepting the full range of materials.

There have been some recent IT issues with website messages giving incorrect information on completed collections (and there is nothing more frustrating for a resident to be told their collection has been made when they are looking at it still sitting outside their property ...) This has now been traced to the connection between Council systems and Suez, and a temporary fix is in place until it is fully resolved.

In summary, I am sorry to have to write to you once again to explain why there are problems with waste and recycling collection, which is one of the most basic, universal services provided by the Council and so creates understandable frustration for residents and Members. However, the situation is not of our own making and there is no point simply

'cracking the whip' at Suez as they cannot magically make more HGV drivers appear – the approach must be to work together as outlined above to manage current circumstances and mitigate the impact on residents.

I hope this at least gives you some context within which you can respond to residents' concerns but please do not hesitate to contact me if anything is unclear or you require any further information.

Regards,

Assistant Director Neighbourhoods