

Update on industrial action causing disruption to waste services Briefing Note No. 22-04

Service: Waste Management

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We wanted to update you on the ongoing impact of the industrial action between our contractor Hills Municipal Collections and the GMB union, which is continuing to disrupt our waste and recycling collection services.

Background

To recap, some Hills Municipal Collections workers represented by the GMB Union are taking industrial action, in the form of striking, until 18 March. However, unless agreement is reached between the two parties then there potentially could be further periods of industrial action soon. UNISON and UNITE union members working for Hills Municipal Collections have now accepted a 7.1% pay increase.

Safety concerns

We anticipated and had planned for some disruption to waste services as a result of the industrial action, but frustratingly we have had scenes at our various depots where picket lines regularly exceed the number of people typically allowed under picketing guidance and vehicles appear to have been intentionally prevented from leaving the sites. We have serious safety concerns arising from these activities at the picket lines, and have published a full response to these, which you can read here www.wiltshire.gov.uk/news/council-condemns-depot-scenes

Current impact on services

Due to the knock-on effect of the disruption at our depots, outlined in the above section, we made the difficult decision to immediately suspend the collection of household recycling materials (blue lidded bins and black boxes), and we currently expect those services to resume the week of 21 March. This was always a component of our contingency plans, but one we had hoped not to have to implement.

The suspension of recycling services does not impact on the collection of household residual waste and garden waste, and we are advising residents to put those bins out on their collection day as normal and they will be emptied, if not on their normal day, then a day or so after.

However, despite the challenges we're pleased that both special recovery and scheduled collection rounds for residual and garden waste are still making good progress. Hills Municipal Collections are confident that all household residual waste will be completed by Saturday 12 March. Garden waste collections in the north and west of the county are also looking to be completed by the end of Saturday 12 March, but some garden waste collections in the south of the county may not be fully received by then. These will be prioritised w/c 14 March, along with the residual waste collections. This positive service recovery will take us into next week in a strong position. We thank the Hills workers that are working for their efforts in recovering the waste collection service in really challenging circumstances.

Next steps

As stated above, we hope to resume the collection of household recycling materials (blue lidded bins and black boxes) during the week of 21 March. However, there may well be further industrial action by GMB.

If that is the case, we would look to review and implement our contingency plans again.

We'd expect that if further strike action did take place, and we don't see the kind of disruption we've referred to in the 'safety concerns' section of this briefing, we would hope to not have to suspend any services, though some delays to collections would still be likely. However, this would all depend on if and when GMB members decided to strike – and we will, of course, keep you updated on this to ensure both members and our residents have as much notice as possible. As you can imagine, this situation is very fluid at present, but we have plans in place to limit the impact on residents as much as possible and we are in frequent contact with Hills Municipal Collections throughout this process.

Mitigating against excess customer contacts

Due to the wholesale suspension of kerbside Mixed Dry Recycling collection service, our waste and customer services teams will be unable to reply to missed collection queries in relation to that service, between 7 – 18 March. Email autoreplies have been modified to reflect this, and the online missed collection reporting forms also no longer allow the reporting of "missed" mixed dry recycling bins. Users of these online forms will see an automated message explaining why this facility has been disabled.

Where to go for information

This is a fast moving and evolving situation. Therefore we have set up some FAQs and responses at this page www.wiltshire.gov.uk/rubbish-and-recycling/faq-hills-municipal-collections-industrial-action. If you do get contacted by any residents not quite sure on what's happening, then we'd really appreciate you pointing them in the direction of those. We will regularly update the FAQs as the situation develops.

We have also issued numerous press release updates which have been widely covered by local media, residents' newsletter articles and social media content (<https://twitter.com/wiltscouncil>). Therefore, we hope as many people as possible are aware of the latest information, and the fact that our crews are not seeing many blue lidded bins and black boxes being presented on their rounds would suggest that.

If you need clarification on anything or have any further questions, please don't hesitate to email martin.litherland@wiltshire.gov.uk.

We will endeavour to keep you updated on any significant updates.