Somerset Waste Partnership
Briefing for Members, Partners and Staff
January 2020 - COVID-19 early start special

6am start from Monday 1 February

All household kerbside collections - recycling, rubbish and garden waste - will begin at 6am, rather than the previous 7am, from Monday 1 February.

The aim is to step up staff and customer safety while ensuring waste services are maintained despite the continued disruptive pressure of COVID-19 on Somerset's kerbside collections.

Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) and its contractors take a precautionary approach to cut contact and risk. For example, crews work in tightly-controlled team bubbles; the whole bubble isolates if a member tests positive, is in contact with someone who tests positive, or is symptomatic.

This means far higher staff absences than expected, plus unpredictable daily changes as teams isolate or return to work, and crews are reallocated to maintain services. In the first three weeks of January, COVID-19 contributed to nearly 800 lost staff days, compared to just 58 lost days during December.

A precautionary approach to using extra agency staff to cover shortfalls adds to the strain on crews, many of whom have worked long hours for many weeks.

Extra steps help keep everyone safer

Collections from 6am will further reduce contact between team bubbles through widely spaced set-offs and allow an early start on work that may take longer or be incomplete if staff are absent.

SWP has appreciated how residents understood and supported early starts in the past, such as the 2019 heatwave, and to avoid specific traffic hold-ups.

Initially for the month of February, householders will need to put all their recycling, rubbish and garden waste out by 6am, or do so the night before.

Crews will not immediately return for some missed collections. This will be avoided if possible, but staff absences will sometimes make it impractical to go back for missed recycling or garden waste the following day. Residents will then need to take containers in until their next collection.

SWP will communicate with any affected areas via social media and local stakeholders. Rubbish collections will not be affected. Missed recycling will be prioritised for next time and extra recycling materials can be put out.

We encourage all councillors, parish clerks and residents to follow or like SWP at facebook.com/somersetwaste for up-to-date information.

Our My Waste Services system for missed collection reporting and other online tasks has been updated so residents know when we will return.

Comprehensive health measures

Safety steps for waste staff include working in bubbles, minimising contact with colleagues and customers, PPE use, good hygiene, plus a rigorous approach to tracing contacts and - if needed - isolating all members of a team bubble.

Staff who wish to wear masks are given reusable items and safe use guidance. All staff have full work PPE. Government guidance does not recommend face masks for the operational waste sector. It leads to frequent face touching, which carries extra risks from handling waste.

As well as working in small team bubbles, collection crews - where possible - meet drivers at an agreed point rather than at a depot. Guidance acknowledges that social distancing may not be possible inside vehicles.

All staff are encouraged and helped to maintain high hygiene standards, with hand sanitisers and washing facilities, including those on the latest recycling vehicles. At depots, safety includes screens, one-way systems, and spaced starts. Crews clean vehicle cabs and touch points at least three times a day.

What should residents do?

Personal waste from people who are infected, have symptoms or live with someone with symptoms, should be double bagged, stored securely, and kept separate from other waste within the home for at least 72 hours (three days) before being put in the rubbish outside the house for collection. Wash or sanitise hands before and after handling waste containers, disinfect container handles, and keep social distance from waste staff. More: somersetwaste.gov.uk/coronavirus.

Somerset Waste Board

SWP's governing body has two members from each of five partner councils: **Mendip** Cllrs Tom Ronan, Matthew Martin; **Sedgemoor** Cllrs Janet Keen, Andrew Gilling; **Somerset County** Cllrs David Hall, Clare Paul (Vice Chair); **Somerset West and Taunton** Cllrs Sarah Wakefield, David Mansell; **South Somerset** Cllrs Sarah Dyke (Chair), Tim Kerley. SWB agendas: somersetwaste.gov.uk/somerset-waste-board

Visit somersetwaste.gov.uk for advice and to sign up for our e-newsletter. Follow @Somersetwaste on Facebook and Twitter. All partner customer services can assist with enquiries.