

Community Services Committee – 21st September 2021
Standing Order 30 questions and responses

Questions from Councillor O'Driscoll

- 1. Residents have raised concerns about garden waste not being collected. While I recognise the external factors that have influenced this situation, I would like to know what steps are being taken by Tandridge to get garden waste collected and when will collections run on time again? I would also like to thank Simon Mander for his wonderful work on sorting this.**

Response from Simon Mander (Locality Services Manager):

There were certain factors out of our control. The suspension of the garden waste service for a fortnight was due to HGV driver shortages which are affecting a myriad of businesses and local authorities across the country. For example, the garden waste collections in the joint waste collection contract area in the west of Surrey has been suspended until 2022 and flats in the South London Waste Partnership area are having their recycling collected as refuse. Therefore, in comparison to others, the two-week suspension has been frustrating for residents and ourselves but it feels like a good result taking into account those factors.

As part of the suspension, subscribers were notified that they could put out 3 additional sacks when the service resumes. In terms of volume, it's the same volume as a 240 litre bin so when Biffa started collecting again they were, in effect, collecting double the amount. Therefore, it is easy to understand that those collections took longer than planned. If the collection could not be completed on the day, we were rolling it to the next day and Biffa have been working Saturdays to complete all the garden waste collections. Unfortunately, last Saturday Biffa were not able to complete due to volumes presented and there was one day in the week when one of the two vehicles was not working. All the outstanding collections were made on Monday 20th September 2021.

Personally, over the two weeks, I have received very few concerns from residents about delays from either direct contract or through the Customer Services Team. I would like to thank all Members and parish clerks who have passed on my updates to residents as I'm sure this has helped manage the message.

No more excess will be collected from today (Tuesday 21st), and there's the opportunity that the service can resume to normality although it does rely on there being no further issues with agency drivers going to different jobs, sickness and the volumes of garden waste do not increase further. It's an important factor that the amount of garden waste collected is still above levels seen before the lockdown period. The amount of tonnage Biffa are collecting has gone up.

A word of caution – the garden waste service is not a statutory service and therefore the Council's legal priority is to ensure that the statutory collections (refuse and recycling) take place. Defra have issued non-statutory guidance on which services should be prioritised and I can confirm that Garden Waste is a low priority service to continue if there are driver and loader shortages.

In terms of building more resilience:

- *2 x loaders are currently going through LGV training and 4 x agency loaders are being trained to LGV standard by Biffa agency to serve on the Tandridge contract. However, it will take between 4 – 6 months to complete the training and test compared to a pre Covid times of around 2 months; and*
- *drivers have had their employment packages reviewed in light of market forces in order to improve retention.*

There is a meeting of the Surrey Environmental Partnership tomorrow (September 22nd) and there is going to be an update about driver shortages across Surrey as we are not in a unique position.

- 2. The wildflower project in Tandridge and especially in Hambledon Linear Park in my ward has been very positively received. Will this scheme be expanded to other green spaces in Tandridge and how can we work to enhance our green spaces, especially in Caterham?**

Response from Alison Boote (Executive Head of Communities):

I'm pleased to confirm that the wildflower meadows project will continue in both current locations and we are also planning to establish new meadows in other parts of the District.

We're following the Open Space Strategy ... number 25 of the District-wide actions states that we should review verge cutting frequency, consider wildflower meadows and, in particular, leave parts of the open space unmanaged so that wildlife can flourish. Also, number 2 of the Open Space Strategy states that we should explore opportunities to encourage biodiversity within the District's parks and open spaces. We are also going to look for opportunities to create wildflower corridors that provide safe havens for wildlife from one open space to the next. Wild spaces work so much better if they are connected in corridors rather than in isolation.

Question from Councillor Caulcott

I am pleased to see that Freedom Leisure are reporting a more favourable financial situation. However, I had been led to understand that the performance indicators for Freedom Leisure are poor, and difficult to enforce, leading to a less than ideal quality of service. What steps can the Council take to ensure that the quality of the provision by Freedom Leisure is acceptable and improves?

Response from Kate Haacke (Lead Asset Management Specialist):

An update on Freedom Leisure is provided in the agenda pack for item 4 on page 13. Prior to Covid, there were some concerns about the quality of the service, including the cleanliness of facilities. Those concerns had to be addressed during the pandemic to ensure they upheld high standards of cleaning for customers to feel comfortable to go back and use the facilities.

The contract that the Council has with Freedom Leisure does not specify specific KPIs, so enforcing good performance is challenging. Officers have been working on building a relationship with Freedom Leisure and this is going quite well.

We hold quarterly partnership meetings, the last of which was in July. We request key performance indicators from Freedom Leisure. The current area manager is very obliging and always happy to provide the information we request. We will continue to monitor their performance.

They were awarded some money from the National Leisure Recovery Fund grant from Sport England and one of the conditions was participation by the leisure provider [Freedom Leisure] in ongoing monitoring. This includes customer feedback surveys. Officers have not seen the results but will try to get hold of them.