

Recycling Centres and other service updates

Summary

- **Recycling Centres remain closed, due primarily to restrictions on non-essential travel. We are planning ahead so we can reopen them as soon as possible once it is safe to do so/government guidance on essential travel changes. It is likely that they will reopen in a phased way with some initial restrictions.**
- **Container delivers were reinstated this week, and we will restart taking new requests next week. Bulky item collections are due to resume next week, and we are planning for the reintroduction of garden waste collection.**
- **Weekly fly-tipping data shows a mixed picture – slightly up two districts, slightly down in two districts, but overall below our long-term average.**
- **We are raising awareness on issues, including nuisance bonfires and poor parking, working with partners, such as the fire service, where appropriate.**
- **Unfortunately, we will be temporarily suspending kerbside collections of textiles and shoes from Monday 27 April. With charity shops closed and international trade in textiles severely affected, we cannot be sure that these will be recycled or reused. We will look at all options to restart this service, but we do not want to undermine our commitment that everything we collect for recycling is recycled properly.**

Recycling Centres

The county's 16 centres, operated by Viridor on behalf of SWP, have been closed since 24 March and staff redeployed to help keep other services running, for example helping us to cope with the huge amount of cardboard being presented for recycling. Their ongoing closure is primarily in response to national legislation restricting non-essential travel to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus.

We know the situation is frustrating and inconvenient and SWP is keen to see the sites reopen as soon as possible. SWP is aware that suspension of garden waste collections (to protect recycling, rubbish and clinical collections) has increased the appetite to see the centres reopen, as have the greater levels of waste being generated with more people at home. But we would not want to provide a service that encourages people to breach government advice or which sends out a mixed message that could contribute to the spreading of Coronavirus in Somerset. At this stage, very few authorities nationally have open sites, and national data shows that well over 90% of sites are closed.

We are monitoring the evolving guidance closely and will respond as soon as anything changes. Plans are being prepared for how the centres can be reopened when it is safe to do so. A managed and phased approach will be needed with some initial restrictions in place so they can manage what will be considerable demand. While we will work to reopen centres as quickly as possible if government guidance on non-essential travel changes, it will not be overnight.

Reinstating services

- Deliveries of new or replacement recycling boxes and rubbish bins started this week, using redeployed staff and vehicles. Initially, we will be clearing the backlog of more 1,000 outstanding requests but hope to be able to take new requests at some stage next week.
- The bulky waste service is due to restart next week, making use of redeployed staff and temporary vehicles. Those with cancelled bookings will be contacted and asked to reschedule. We will still encourage people to store bulky items where they can so that those most in need can access this service.
- Garden waste is a much tougher challenge, but we are working with Suez to reinstate this service. This will involve securing additional vehicles and inducting more staff, as garden waste staff are currently providing crucial support to our recycling and rubbish collection services. We do not want to restart a service that we cannot maintain, or that will cause core services to fail. We will update you with a timetable as soon as one has been confirmed.

Fly-tipping

To enable us to make informed decisions in this rapidly changing situation we are now gathering weekly fly-tipping data from all districts. The figures show a small reduction in two districts and a small increase in the other two. Overall the figures are slightly up compared to the same period the previous year, but below our long-term average. Last year (2019/20) saw Somerset continuing to buck the national trend, with a 17% decrease in reported fly-tips. We will continue to closely track this shared priority (and data on waste fires) and use this information to inform our actions.

Other updates

We have collaborated with the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service to raise aware of the shared issues of nuisance bonfires and problem parking. SWP crews are distributing "poor parking" notes on behalf of the fire service. With so many people at home, this is causing a real challenge to our already stretched collection crews, and if a recycling vehicle cannot get through, it is unlikely a fire engine can. Our publicity is reminding people that if they burn plastic or other materials producing black smoke they may be breaking the law.

We are finalising plans to provide a subsidy for up to 1,000 home composting kits to make them a more attractive option for managing garden waste. We hope that this, as well as significantly increased levels of recycling, is a positive habit that continues long after we have emerged from the Covid-19 crisis.

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