

Update from Somerset Waste Partnership

Summary

- **Collection performance – reliability of collections has improved, but there are still serious issues, especially with the return times for missed collections.**
- **SUEZ is taking significant action to address the staffing issues, bringing in temporary staff and investing in recruitment and retention. Similar issues are being seen in many other waste services across the region and the country.**
- **Recycle More has launched in South Somerset and customer survey responses show considerable support for the new service in Mendip.**
- **For the foreseeable future residents are asked to put their waste out for collection by 6am at the latest.**

Collection performance

We have had a sustained period of disruption to collections since the beginning June, largely caused by shortage of LGV drivers (see below).

Too many collections have been missed and we have not been returning as quickly as we should when they are missed. This puts pressure on staff throughout the partnership, most notably district Customer Services teams. We apologise for this and are working hard with our contractor, SUEZ, to get things back on track.

The reliability of collections has improved to some degree over the last two weeks, though it is still some way off where it needs to be. Improving return times for missed collections is now the key area of the SWP challenge to SUEZ. It's important that we are clear and transparent with residents and manage expectations.

There is no quick fix to the underlying issue of driver shortages, so we have to anticipate that there will be some level of disruption for some time. We will do what we can to minimise this but ask for your continued patience.

Residents can report a missed collection using the My Waste Service function on the SWP homepage somersetwaste.gov.uk and we encourage online reporting to ease the pressure on Customer Service teams.

Providing an accurate running commentary on missed collections is difficult. The situation changes during the course of the day and a full picture is not known until late afternoon or into the evening.

We have been provided daily updates with as much detail as possible and updating a rolling news story on the SWP website [Service update – Somerset Waste Partnership](#) We are also posting information into community Facebook pages and groups where possible.

What is causing the disruption?

The main reason for the recent pressures is the national shortage of drivers which has hit Somerset (with its many distribution companies) especially hard. The pressures of a temporary depot as we upgrade our depot are also making services in Taunton and Sedgemoor particularly challenging, especially when combined with the impact of heavy tonnage and road closures.

Covid has delayed driver training, many EU drivers have left the country and the reopening of non-essential retail has increased demand for smaller pool of qualified LGV drivers. This issue is affecting more and more organisations. A long-term trend has dramatically accelerated in the last year and recent weeks have exposed the scale of the problem.

Crews have also been working long hours collecting heavier loads for the last year and this has put a cumulative strain on them. While it does not help our own situation, it is worth noting that waste authorities across the region are beginning to suffer similar pressures and disruption of collections.

Steps taken by SUEZ

SUEZ is a marketing-leading, international provider of waste collections and took on the contract last April. It has already temporarily redeployed staff – including around 20 drivers – into Somerset from elsewhere in the country to address immediate pressures.

At the same time, wide-reaching recruitment and retention work is underway to address the medium and long-term pressures including:

- Senior HR manager seconded to Somerset.
- 2 full time recruiters now dedicated to Somerset, responsible for advertising and interviewing prospective drivers and loaders.
- Approaches to employers where staff are known to be at risk of redundancy (e.g. Oscar Mayer, Argos), to employers of other LGV drives to explore if they have any surplus capacity, and to armed forces veterans associations and much more.
- Upskilling staff by paying to train 25 loaders as drivers (minimum 12-week programme)
- An employee referral scheme, which has seen over 15 referrals since launched.
- Improved Saturday overtime payments and weekly performance incentive payments to staff to help address morale and retention challenges.
- Reducing our reliance on agency drivers through an ongoing 'temp to perm' scheme (converting agency staff to permanent staff)
- Working closely with agency staff providers to ensure we maximise our chances of recruitment in a very competitive market
- Increased advertising – social media, Your Somerset, banners at depots and on vehicles, and using radio and TV interviews to highlight the issues and opportunities
- Employee engagement forum introduced, crew performance awards.

Over the course of June, SUEZ headcount of permanent staff increased by 19. The introduction of each phase of the Recycle More reduces our driver requirement as we need fewer refuse crews. This will not result in any redundancies. We expect the South Somerset roll-out to reduce our driver requirement by around ten.

Recycle More – South Somerset launch

Despite the challenging circumstances, the new Recycle More service is now up and running in South Somerset, adding new materials to weekly kerbside collections.

It's very early days but the signs are promising that the right recycling is being put out on the right day by the vast majority of households.

The distribution of new recycling containers – the Bright Blue Bag – has been difficult and patchy in places. Anyone living in South Somerset who has not received one yet can order one using the My Waste Service feature on the SWP homepage somersetwaste.gov.uk (choose the 'waste boxes, bins and bags' option).

If a bag has not arrived by the time of the first new collection, new items can be put out in the existing containers – sorted if possible – or a cardboard box or other container and they should be collected.

Recycle More – Mendip progress

The first six months of Recycle More saw 2,500 extra tonnes of recycling collected – roughly 100 tonnes extra per week, an 18% increase. This included a 36% increase (314 tonnes) of plastic, 24% (786 tonnes) increase in glass and 15% increase in food waste (676 tonnes).

At the same time, there was a 19% decrease in the weight of rubbish collected.

We now have the results of the Customer Survey carried out in Mendip in April (online) and May (1,000 randomly distributed paper copies).

In total there were 1,840 response 1,435 online and 405 paper copies. Some headline results are shown below

Question	Online	Paper
Agree that the new service is an improvement	81%	87%
Agree that Recycle More has made it easier to recycle	95%	98%
Felt their bin was the right size or too big	71%	85%
Know what can be recycled	88%	94%
Know how to separate their recycling	92%	96%
Remember their recycling day	86%	83%
Agreed it was easy to store rubbish between collections	68%	69%
agreed it was easy to remember rubbish collection days	58%	67%
Found the information leaflets helpful	89%	82%

All containers out by 6am please

With immediate effect and until further notice, recycling, rubbish and garden waste should all be put out the night before collection days, or by 6am at the latest on the day itself.

This will allow crews to start collections early if needed - for example during a period of hot weather - and give SWP and SUEZ more flexibility when planning how to keep on top of collections and deal with any special circumstances.