

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
23rd January 2020**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Heulwen Hulme, Portfolio Holder for Environment

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor David Thomas

Residents in the in Tawe Uchaf, Aber-craf, Ystradgynlais, Ynyscedwyn and Cwmtwrch wards received a worse than poor recycling collection service over the Christmas period. This was because of a lack of strategic planning and communication from the Council with Councillors and the community.

What will the Council do to ensure this doesn't happen again?

Response

The Christmas period is a problematic time of year in terms of kerbside waste and recycling collections due to a number of factors. There is understandably a considerable rise in materials to collect, with it being essential to continue to provide a service, whilst recognising the need and value for staff to have time off work with their families.

There is no expectation for collections to be undertaken on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year Day, so with the knock-on effect of missing these days, and with the additional waste and recycling generated at this time of year, there is a considerable 'catch-up' required. Like most authorities, we do this by providing a service on the weekends following these days, and have had this arrangement in place for a number of years. Staff are asked to work on these weekends, for which they do receive an overtime payment, as opposed to some other Councils where it is a contractual requirement.

The majority of staff recognise the service need and respond well by making the effort to come in to work as necessary. This was the indeed the case in our Rhayader, Newtown and Welshpool Depots, where rounds were collected as planned and advertised, with very few problems. Unfortunately, this was not the case in the Brecon depot, where a significant minority of staff failed to turn in to work, either by refusing to work, or by initially agreeing but then not attending as planned. This was a significant let down and impacted badly on the arrangements that had been planned by supervisors and manager and advertised as such. Despite supervisors and managers attempting to reduce the impact to the public by covering some of the collection rounds themselves, there was as you describe a lower than acceptable performance.

It is simply not possible to get additional staff in at short notice at this time of year to cover for this period, and even if it were, then it would of course be at a considerable extra cost and anyone involved would of course had to have received appropriate training to carry out the work.

The arrangements were planned and advertised well in advance, and as previously stated were honoured in most cases. When the problems became apparent we did use all available channels to let residents know of changes. This is always difficult at short notice, but is helped with the use of social media. We also had notifications on our website when residents reported missed collections.

This is a problem specific to the Christmas period with staff generally willing to work on other Bank Holidays, but work is already underway to address the issue for future years. Many Councils simply make the Christmas working arrangements contractual, which will be considered as one of our options going forward.

Unfortunately, should this approach be adopted, it will unfairly penalise those staff who regularly do make the effort. The HTR senior management team has been restructured recently, with all the waste & recycling function now being overseen by one senior manager. Following on from this, the manager is currently reviewing the operational service area and Bank Holiday working will form part of this review. The Senior Manager for Waste and Recycling Services has offered to meet with Council Members in the Tawe Uchaf, Aber-craf, Ystradgynlais, Ynyscedwyn and Cwmtwrch wards to hear and understand their concerns first hand, so that we can work to address them.