

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 8 NOVEMBER
2023

QUESTION NO. 1

Philip Brooks to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Green Waste Collection

For several months the Green Waste collection service has been a mess, resulting in the containers being left on the pavement for many extra days. The Council has not kept the householders informed on the rescheduled collections. This incompetence is unacceptable on a service which we pay for! I would like a full explanation and to know what corrective actions the Council is taking.

REPLY by Councillor Dennis:

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

Thank you Councillor Dennis.

I would like to thank Mr Brooks for his question regarding the operation of the Green Waste service and the opportunity this provides to raise awareness of the challenges the service has experienced, as well as the actions that we have taken to improve the service to our Green Waste customers in the future.

Challenges:

1. This past growing season, with its particular high levels of rain, resulted in a significantly extended and high volume of vegetation growth across the region. Reading Borough Council and our Re3 partners (Wokingham BC and Bracknell Forest BC) have each experienced a significant increase in the volume of green waste that has been presented for collection this year. In Reading we experienced a 36% increase, which has required the collection crews to make more frequent trips to the waste treatment site to tip off green waste. The increased volumes of waste collected have exceeded the allocated staff resources and this has caused collections to over-run.
2. Our Recycling and waste service team delivers a range of statutory waste collections alongside the paid-for green waste collections. As an Authority, we are required to prioritise waste collections to ensure public health. In the event of an inability to deliver all our eighteen waste collection rounds, as a result of vehicle failure or staff sickness, we must prioritise collections as follows:
 - a. Food
 - b. General Waste

- c. Recycling
- d. Green Waste.

As a consequence - when operational challenges arise, the order of priority afforded to collections impacts Green Waste collections more frequently than other waste streams, as of all those streams, it is the least putrescible. Saying that, we thoroughly accept that this is not optimal in the provision of a paid-for service. As such, we are making changes to ensure that we can better resource our green waste collections for the future, building in needed resiliency to ensure collections of even heightened green waste volumes should they occur again in the future.

Action taken:

To address the pressures experienced by the service, we are rescheduling our broader waste collection rounds to provide an additional 4 days of dedicated green waste collections each fortnight. This will provide greater consistency of collection and is expected to deliver an on-time solution, barring unforeseen situations over which we have no control. For a fifth of our green waste customers, this will mean a change in their collection day.

The additional resources allocated to green waste collections will ensure customers receive an improved service, accepting that the necessary prioritisation of waste collections may occasionally still impact some collections in the future with short-lived delays.

These changes will be introduced over the course of this winter, when the increased volume demands for the service is historically experienced to reduce. All customers will be contacted to advise of these changes and if their collections days will change or remain the same, outlining the benefits the changes will deliver.

In parallel, we are additionally working to introduce measures to improve the ways we keep you informed on the status of collections, through enhanced use of our operating systems, enabling automated communication to customers via their council registered contact details and preferred method of contact.

I understand and accept the frustrations customers have experienced over what was an especially wet summer have not been optimal and for that we not only can apologise, but we must ensure we set it right for the future. Green waste collections are important to us, they help all of us work together to reduce our impact on landfill and we do thank our customers for bearing with us as we've struggled to deliver consistency over the course of this past summer. I do have confidence that the forward plans we are putting in place will resolve this going forward.