

Appendix A

Conclusions and Recommendations, as a basis for an Action Plan

Conclusion A: Uttlesford District Council is right to have unreservedly apologised to all residents and businesses whose waste was not collected during this disruption to service.

Conclusion B: The task and finish group concluded that this was a serious disruption of service, of the council's own making, and experienced by nearly all residents and many businesses in the district.

Conclusion C: Many people worked long and hard both to fix the problem and to put in place the patchwork quilt solution as quickly and thoroughly as possible, and they deserve our recognition and genuine thanks. Uttlesford District Council is particularly grateful to Widdington Waste Ltd and Braintree District Council for their help.

Conclusion D: There was a significant failing in the proper management of the process to cope with the unplanned and immediate departure from the council of the previous staff member who held the necessary professional qualification on which continued permission to hold an Operator's Licence from the Office of the Traffic Commissioner is dependent. This failure to ensure a timely replacement was due to human error, and happened in the complex context of mitigating factors. However, this situation underlines the absence of a systemic solution to managing such major risks and critical service dependencies.

Further actions recommended: that the management and operation of the Environmental Services team is stabilised as soon as reasonably possible, so that temporary appointments made to meet Operators' Licence requirements are made permanent.

We further recommend that the necessary qualification requirement to support the Operators' Licence is integrated into the relevant job description as an essential occupational requirement, and that an appropriate requirement is also included in the director's job description. These job descriptions should be annually reviewed (and in between as necessary in response to events) to check that they remain up to date with regulatory requirements and other changing circumstances.

We further advise that alternative/secondary provision of an appropriately qualified person is maintained, rather than relying solely on one permanent staff member.

We also recommend that the Environmental Services function carries out a broader organisational review of team structure and training & development needs, also addressing succession planning.

Conclusion E: We noted that some of the colleagues from other waste collectors stepping in to help us out were not familiar with our area, its villages and its roads, and that this led at times to some being missed out, or approached in a sub-optimal/counter-intuitive order.

Further actions recommended: we strongly endorse the action being undertaken within Environmental Services to better document and map routes and for the purposes of resilience, ensuring that these are mapped onto commonly available cloud platforms such as Google Maps, and in hard copy, and using tools such as what3words.

Conclusion F: Councillors bring a wide span of professional knowledge and skills to their roles which needs to be better respected and harnessed, and councillors can be useful conduits in communicating with residents, and can be more actively used in future as a positive resource rather than treated as a stakeholder to be periodically updated.

Further actions recommended: we recommend some structured work is organised to build further on existing officer/member relations to better reflect that even in relation to operational issues councillors play an important ongoing role as representatives of the wider community.

This ongoing work should focus on drawing value from what councillors bring to the authority from their life experience, as well as helping building communication channels into local communities, both through existing hyper-local social media sites as well as potentially compiling new text/WhatsApp/email lists (such as residents can sign up to with the Environment Agency to get flood alerts).

Conclusion G: the cost to the taxpayer of this waste disruption is serious, and must not be repeated, but we do not recommend any further consideration of a refund or rebate.

Conclusion H: we strongly support the current exercise to identify, and then prioritise and mitigate, key service resilience risks across the whole organisation, and welcome that a senior colleague from a neighbouring council has kindly agreed to quality-assure that exercise. We believe that this is a key action, and must be reported up for consideration at Member level, not only in regards to this focused exercise, but also on an ongoing basis in relation to assurance of business continuity measures. We equally strongly welcome the clear indication given by the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Change that the whole Cabinet is taking a clear set of actions to liaise directly with their respective chief officers about major service.

Further actions recommended: we recommend that as well as this service resilience exercise being reported up to Cabinet (and Scrutiny) as is already planned, that we are reconvened later in the year as a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to explore and test the resultant new system in detail and in practice.

We acknowledge that such a detailed member-level testing will necessarily have to be in private, as the nature of such risk and resilience plans must necessarily remain confidential so as not to inadvertently enhance the risk by publicising unavoidable system weaknesses or mitigation measures to bad actors or saboteurs.

We further recommend that the balance is urgently reviewed by the Chief Executive as to the routine and ongoing administrative support provided to senior staff so that greater capacity to deal with routine but vital tasks is better resourced.

We also believe that notwithstanding the importance of improving and testing systems and processes which dominate this report, it is vital that the importance of organisational culture and behaviours are also equally valued – to hammer home the message that if you see something, bring it to light. This needs to become an ongoing process and a regular check on emerging issues/risks should be an agenda item at team meetings with the opportunity for people to pass on anything they come across in day-to-day work.