

Customer Services Briefing: 25/3/20

Suspension of Garden Waste Collections

As of Thursday 26th March 2020 Swindon Borough Council is suspending its paid for Garden Waste Collection Service as a result of COVID-19.

The email below will be sent to all customers that have an email on their account at 12:00pm Thursday 26th.

There are circa 3,000 subscribers with no email address who we will not be able to contact directly – please be prepared that these will very likely try to make contact with SBC most likely to report a missed collection in the first instance. Please provide these residents with the same information provided in the email and wherever possible try to obtain an email address to add to the account so they receive future updates.

Important information regarding your Garden Waste Collections

Dear <Name>,

It is with regret that, due to pressures on our frontline services in Waste & Recycling as a result of COVID-19, we are writing to inform you of the temporary suspension of Garden Waste Collections as of Thursday, 26 March until Wednesday, 8 April. If you have already placed your bin out for collection today then please bring it back inside your property.

We know you will be disappointed with this decision, but we must use our increasingly limited resources during this difficult time to continue the collection of priority waste services such as black bin waste, food waste and clinical waste for the 100,000 properties across the borough.

We appreciate that your garden waste collection is a priority to you and would like to assure you that we will be looking to provide compensation for any collections that are suspended this year. This will likely be in the form of either an extension to the current subscription year or a deduction from your 2021 subscription. We will notify you of the final decision in the coming months please, wherever possible, refrain from trying to contact us during this time.

If we are unable to resume collections on Thursday, 9 April we will let you know via email with as much notice as possible. We will do our best to deliver as many collections as possible in the coming months which might mean we have to stop and start collections a number of times over the coming weeks and months so please look to our Facebook page (facebook.com/swindonboroughcouncil) and website (swindon.gov.uk/coronavirus) for further updates and advice on how you can help us during this challenging period by managing your waste differently.

If you have recently subscribed or renewed your subscription please note your garden waste subscription sticker will be posted as soon as possible, but is unlikely to arrive before the 1st of April. Please only contact us if you have not received the sticker by the end of April.

Thank you for your support during this challenging time.

Further information to help customer service staff advise residents appropriately can be found in the FAQ's below.

FAQ's

- [Missed garden waste](#)
- [It is a paid for service why isn't it a priority?](#)
- [I want to cancel my subscription how do I get a refund?](#)
- [Will I be refunded for the missed collections?](#)
- [What do I do with my garden waste?](#)
- [When will you start the service again?](#)
- [Why hasn't my bin/bags/sticker arrived yet?](#)

Missed garden waste.

Please advise the customer that garden waste service has been suspended as per the information above. For the same reason we are unable to return for any outstanding missed collections reported earlier this week.

It is a paid for service why isn't it a priority?

Garden waste collections are not a statutory service that the Council has to provide, it is a service provided only to those that require it.

At the end of the 2019/20 subscription year there were 20,000 properties subscribed, however, we collect waste and recycling from around 100,000 properties. Therefore it is right that all available resources are tasked to keep the key services going.

Covid-19 represents an event beyond the Council's control which is covered by Section 15 of the Terms and Conditions – extract below.

'If collections are missed due to any event beyond the Council's reasonable control, such as, but not restricted to, adverse weather conditions or vehicle access problems, attempts will be made to return and empty the bin when practicable however collections under these circumstances cannot be guaranteed. In the event of sustained adverse weather such as severe snow, the service may be suspended in order to redirect resources to refuse collections.'

I want to cancel my subscription how do I get a refund?

Customers that have paid within the last 14 days - If the customer is within the cooling off period then we will have to cancel their subscription and raise a refund. Please cancel their subscription via the my account and give the following advice depending on payment method;

- Direct Debit – Please cancel DD with your bank, payment should not yet have been processed as it is taken after the cooling off period.
- Card/Cash/Cheque – We will have to raise a refund request with finance and this will take some time as we have limited resource to process these at the moment.

Customers that paid more than 14 days ago – Clauses 7 & 8 of the T&C's set out cancellation rights, extracts below. This means that unfortunately we are unable to process refunds for payments outside of the cooling off period (14 days from payment).

Clause 7. In line with the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation & Additional Charges) Regulations 2013, you have fourteen days starting on the date of our acceptance of your order to cancel the service for a full refund of the subscription cost

Clause 8. The subscription cannot be transferred to a different customer and there are no refunds or part-refunds for the cancellation of the service part way through the year

Will I be refunded for the missed collections?

We appreciate the inconvenience and financial impact this will have on our customers and providing a good service is very important to us. However, our priority at this time is to focus on ensuring the continued delivery of our priority services.

At this time we only plan to suspend collections for a two week period (one collection per customer), however, we may have to stop and start the service several times over the coming weeks and months so the full scale and length of disruption is as yet unknown. Our Terms and Conditions make provision for the need to suspend the garden waste service in order to support domestic refuse collections in events outside of our control (clause 15) however we do not wish customers to be out of pocket because of the current circumstances.

Unfortunately we cannot process part refunds for collections that have been missed however we will look at either extending the current subscription year or offering a discount on the next service year depending on what is possible within our systems. Please be assured that we be in touch with customers to confirm our approach to compensation as soon as we are able.

What do I do with my garden waste?

Please see the following tips to help manage your garden waste in the meantime;

- Avoid doing large amounts of pruning, landscaping or maintenance until Autumn unless you have an area you can store the waste until collections resume.
- Shake your grass cuttings over your garden, this will put vital nutrients back into the soil
- If you have space start your own compost heap – the basic rule is mix it up with 50% wet (e.g. grass, green leaves & flowers) and 50% dry (e.g. twigs, dried leaves)
- It doesn't hurt the garden to go a little wild now and then. Try re-wilding an area that you just leave completely or create a wildlife haven with log piles or bug hotels made from your prunings.
- Please avoid bonfires as this can upset neighbours, aggravate health conditions such as asthma and increases local air quality.

Further advice will be placed on the website <https://www.swindon.gov.uk/coronavirus> as soon as possible.

When will you start the service again?

We hope to start again from Thursday 9th April but if this changes we will let you know as soon as we possibly can. It may be that we start collections again but if the situation worsens then we have to enact a further suspension. Please bear with us during this challenging time and stay up to date by following our Facebook page.

Why hasn't my bin/bags/sticker arrived yet?

Our depleted resources have also meant a delay in bin/bag and sticker deliveries. We are working through these as quickly as possible however delivery will be outside of the timescales we usually promise.

For new or renewed subscriptions placed before 25th March please only contact us if you still haven't received your bin/bags or sticker by the end of April. New or renewed subscriptions placed after this date may have a three week delivery lead time.