

# Derbyshire Dales & Serco

Waste Management Contract Independent Review  
(Private & Confidential)

**Prepared by: Allen Graham MBA, C Dir, MloD, IRRV Hons**

# Contents

| Report Section                      | Page(s) |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Independent Review Remit            | 3 - 6   |
| Method Utilised                     | 7       |
| Contract Process - Procurement      | 8 - 11  |
| Contract Process - Specification    | 12 - 16 |
| Contract Process - Award            | 17 - 19 |
| Contract Mobilisation               | 20 - 25 |
| Contract Implementation             | 21 - 34 |
| Service disruption and intervention | 35 - 38 |
| Contract Implementation Findings    | 39      |
| Review Recommendations              | 40      |
| Areas of Good Practice              | 41      |
| Areas for Improvement               | 42      |
| Acknowledgements                    | 43      |

# Independent Review Remit

- Following an approach by the Local Government Association and submission of a written proposal, Derbyshire Dales District Council commissioned Circling Squares Ltd to conduct an independent review regarding the history, actions, approach and recovery plan adopted following severe service disruption experienced by the residents of Derbyshire Dales District Council in relation to the domestic waste and recycling services.
- The scope was additionally and subsequently defined by a cross party member group as reviewing whether the contract remains “ fit for purpose” whilst verifying and commenting upon the actions taken within the current external environment in particular the impacts of the pandemic.
- The work of Circling Squares was supported by the commissioning of Recircle Consulting Ltd who were separately commissioned to provide expert market knowledge together with an objective evaluation of the contractors performance in the delivery of the waste collections contract (Item c of the full terms of reference).

LIMITATION: This report has been prepared on behalf of and for the exclusive use of Circling Squares Limited's Client, and is subject to and issued in connection with the provisions of the agreement between Circling Squares Limited and its Client (Derbyshire Dales District Council). Circling Squares Limited accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for the use of this report for any purpose other than within the Client agreement, or in respect of any use of or reliance upon this report by any third party.

# Review Stakeholder Structure

Independent Officer

Allen Graham – Circling Squares Ltd

Member Working Group

Senior Officers

External Service Provider  
Serco Representatives

External Specialist Consultant  
Recircle Consulting

Derbyshire Dales Services / Staff  
Contract Team  
Customer Services

# Terms of reference (Summarised)

A) Evaluate the provisions of the contract with Serco which took effect in August 2020

- Specification
- Mobilisation
- Implementation

B) Evaluate the Councils management of the contract

- Response upon contract start date
- Response to recent service disruption and decisions taken by officers / members
  - Necessary
  - Effective
  - Proportionate
- Areas of good practice
- Areas for improvement
- Operational / market constraints

# Terms of reference (Summarised) 2

## C) Evaluate Serco's performance in the delivery of the contract\*

- Contract documents and requests
- Contract mobilisation and August 2020 implementation
- Quantitative analysis of data in relation to KPI's
- Review of financial impact associated with diversion of waste stream
- Qualitative review of other contract performance / compliance
- Review feedback from the waste and recycling team in their dealing with residents and elected members, and serco's response to those requests

## D) Evaluate and summarise

- Root causes of recent service disruption
- Identify the actions required to be considered in order to mitigate future wide scale service disruption to residents.

\* Section C to be undertaken by Recircle Consulting Ltd

# Methods Utilised

- Circling Squares Ltd have endeavoured to utilise its experience and knowledge of local government to consider and comment upon the written information presented by officers, members of Derbyshire Dales District Council and representatives of Serco.
- The investigation has incorporated information provided including the following:
  - Contract documentation incorporating:
    - Specification
    - Method Statements
    - Contract
  - Report produced by Recircle Consulting Ltd
  - Copies of emails and correspondence supplied by officers of Derbyshire Dales District Council.
- The independent review process also incorporated :
  - gathering information and views from 10 meetings (both on-site and virtually)
  - Speaking to range of council staff, a cross party members working group and a representative of Serco.
  - Visiting the Serco depot
  - Undertaking additional research and reading.

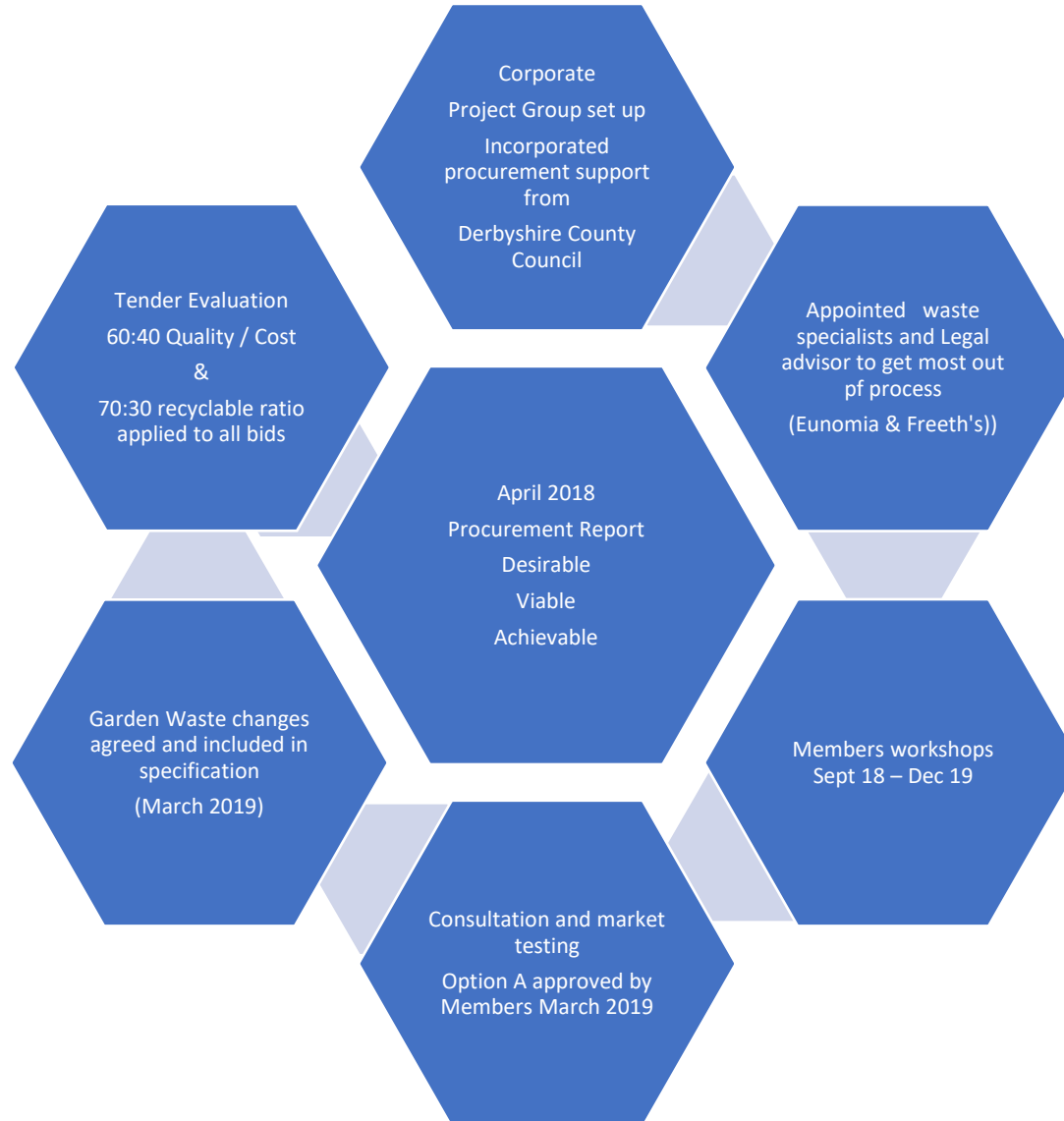
# Overview of Procurement Process Adopted

To evaluate the provisions of the contract with Serco it is first necessary to also consider the process adopted to establish the requirements, specification and objective decision making to award the contract.

- Derbyshire Dales District Council had previously awarded an 8 year contract (2012 – 2020) to provide waste collection services. Serco was the appointed contractor for that period.
- In 2017 the Authority recognised the need to review the existing service provision, test the market, seek improvements and secure best value through a competitive process.
- The further procurement was identified as likely to be a challenge, especially to attract competition to bid against an existing external supplier and taking into account the changing market environment, the size and value of the contract and the particular localised challenges in existence within the Derbyshire Dales District Council area.
- The review quickly concluded that the Authority adopted a recognised and robust corporate approach to review, research and advise members upon options for the procurement.
- The procurement approach included the engagement and proactive involvement of necessary external support. This approach recognised the gaps in internal capacity, knowledge and expertise – the review identified three key areas:
  - Waste management Industry expertise (supplied by Eunomia Ltd)
  - Contract legal advice and representation (supplied by Freeth's)
  - Procurement procedure advice (Supplied by Derbyshire County Council)
- There was evidence to suggest that meaningful opportunities were presented to actively engage, brief and listen to members throughout the procurement process.



# Overview of procurement process adopted



- A procurement report was received by the Council in April 2018.
- The report concluded that a procurement was desirable, viable and achievable.
- Member workshops ran throughout the procurement process
- A decision was made by the Council in March 2019 to include garden waste charges within the specification
- Particular focus was given towards the level of shared risk that would be applied for recyclables to attract competitors (70:30 risk).
- Tender evaluation was split between 60% Quality and 40% Cost.

# Corporate procurement project team – notable good practice

## Corporate Support

Head of Regeneration & Policy  
(Chair)  
Head of Corporate Services  
Head of Resources (S151)

Financial Service Manager  
Communications & Marketing Officer  
Digital Communications Officer

## Waste Service Area

Head of Community and Environment

Environmental Service Manager  
Recycling Advisor  
Waste & Recycling Officer  
Waste Supervisor

## External Support

Waste Specialists  
(Eunomia)

Legal Specialists  
(Freeth Solicitors)

Derbyshire County Council  
(Senior Procurement Officer)

# Procurement – Summary of key risks identified

The documentation supplied, together with the reports available provide confidence that clear and careful consideration was given to market conditions and specific incentives or clauses to ensure a competitive procurement process was successful. The key risks can be summarised as:

- No contractor would take 100% liability in respect of recyclables therefore would require a joint risk approach (70:30 identified as applicable).
- Areas highlighted as potential risks for contractors (thus preventing them bidding) included:
  - No provision for an extension of contract (8 years option included by Council)
  - Inadequate provision for change control procedures within the contract (Incorporated into the contract)
  - Inappropriate performance management Framework (Appropriate KPI framework identified in contract)
  - Insufficient provision for good quality data relevant to the service - to address this concern, the Council included the requirement for a management information system (MIS). (Whitespace was Serco's proposed solution included in their offer to meet the Council's specification).
- The market had changed significantly since the previous procurement in 2012. It was highlighted that the reduced market was likely to reduce the number who would bid for a contract of the scale and complexity being offered by Derbyshire Dales District Council.
- Following three bidders showing interest only two bids were actually received.

# Contract Specification - Overview

An independent review of the documentation and procurement process has concluded that the contract specification included within the package was formulated and communicated to bidders in a clear and transparent manner.

It also appears clear that through the comprehensive and diligent use of the external resources available and in particular the waste advisor appointed by Eunomia the specification was produced to take account of:

- The requirements needed to increase engagement by contractors
- Required reporting mechanisms to assist with efficient and effective self monitoring of the contract by the contractor
- Changing market conditions prevailing at that time
- The changing and growing use of technology to maximise efficiency, performance and customer responsiveness.
- The likely foreseeable future demands though housing growth and behavioural changes to support future sustainability.

# Specification – The specifics (1)

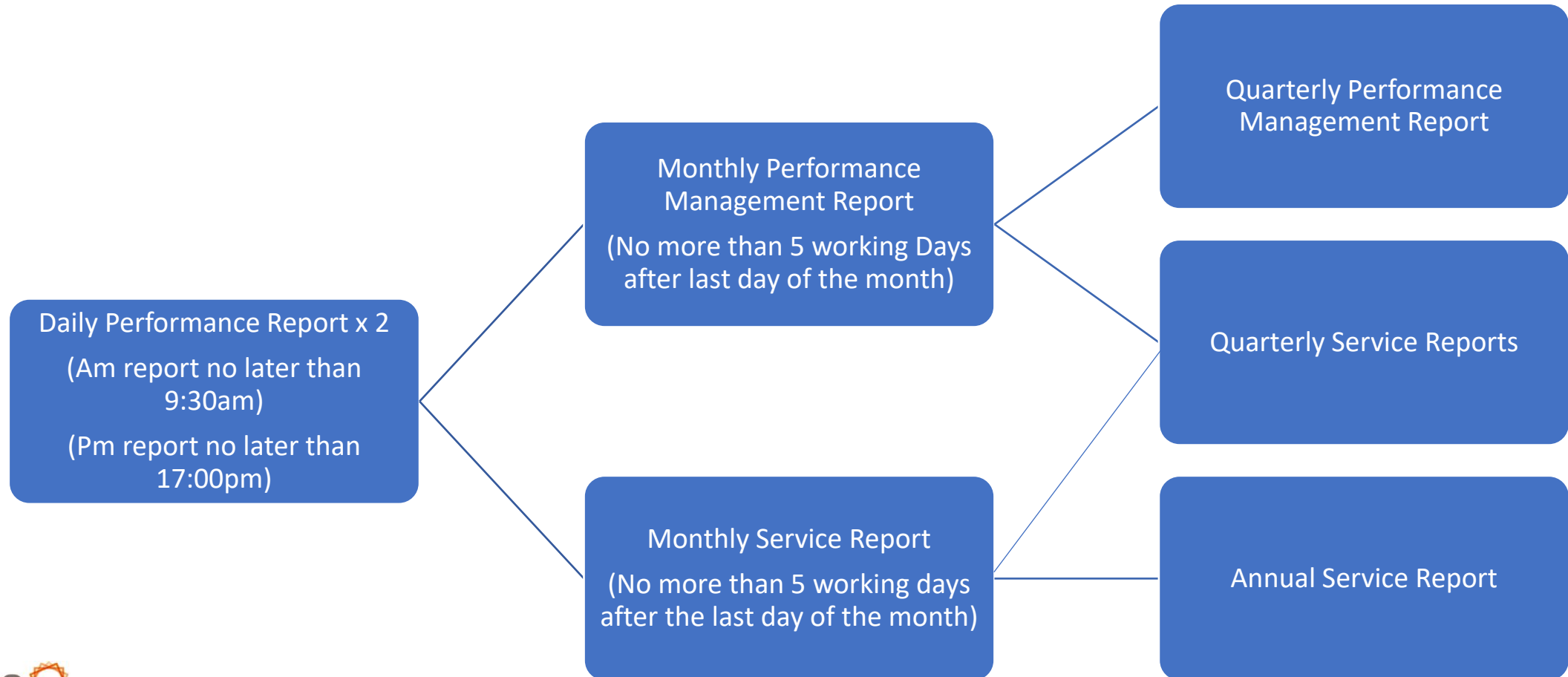
The Independent Review identified the following key components included within the specification:

1. A requirement to introduce a revised and modernised service model in particular to meet 3 strategic outcomes:
  - i. The customer is at the centre of service delivery and the Authority and Contractor address the needs of the customer in a modern, friendly and efficient way.
  - ii. The contract delivers maximum value for money
  - iii. The parties work together and share their respective responsibilities.
2. In relation to (1) above the specification detailed a commitment (by the authority) to provide modern vehicles and for the contractor to operate utilising in-cab technology to log real time service issues.
3. The in-cab technology was to be operated in real time to enable both the contractor and the Authority to locate and contact vehicles at any time during operational hours.
4. The need to develop use of the technology by stipulating a clear and unambiguous performance management framework.
  - “The contractor shall monitor its own performance against the requirements of this specification and report to Derbyshire Dales District Council on its performance of the services in the Monthly Performance Management Report” (S12.1 Specification pg19).
5. The specification also detailed the outputs required through the use of a management information system (MIS)
  - “The MIS will seamlessly integrate with the Authority’s systems to ensure that information can flow between the parties as required by the specification from service commencement” (S14 Service output 5 Specification pg 20)
6. The specification then adequately highlighted the data and reporting framework utilising the authorised officer to represent the interests of Derbyshire Dales District Council.

# Specification – The specifics (2)

7. Information and an indication of how a joint management board would be set up was provided.
  - “The contractor and the Authority will form a Joint Management Board, comprising of the Authorised Officer, the Contractor’s representative, and senior staff from each organisation as appropriate for the circumstances”. (S15.11 Specification pg 24)
8. A business continuity plan was also required as a “service output” and it specifically included three key areas which relate to the recent service disruption.
  - The loss of access to Contractors Staff (e.g. flu pandemic, industrial action) (S16.3.2)
  - Failures relating to technology, e.g. the MIS (S16.3.5); and
  - Failure of the supply chain (16.3.6)
9. The specification also covered the intended standards and interface for enquiries and complaints. (S18 pg28 – 29)

# Summary of management reporting requirements – contractor required to provide (Table1 S15.3 pg23)



# Summary of key points in relation to the specification

- The contract specification was significantly clear and contributed to a robust and transparent procurement process.
- The bidders responded to address and make commitments in respect of the specification points summarised above.
- The specification documented a strategic intent for the contract to be implemented and managed within a framework based upon joint and transparent working designed to deliver their respective responsibilities and commitments.
- The specification was built upon a clear understanding that efficiency and responsiveness would be achieved through the use of a management information system that would provide real time information.
- At the time of issue the specification combined with the bid documents and contract appears to take account of all the reasonable services that would be required for effective and improved service delivery.

Therefore there was no reason to believe that the contract or the procurement process was not fit for purpose. The package issued also provided for a clear change control process that could facilitate and take into account any unforeseen changes that needed to be considered and agreed over the proposed term of the contract.



# Award of Contract

As a result of the procurement process a final report was presented on 18th December 2019 it included:

- A comprehensive explanation of the procurement process
- Commentary in respect of key elements and risks – majoring upon future delivery (3 weekly collections), Garden waste and finance

The report also clearly referred to:

- Better use of technology – including this key feature to modernise the service.
- Serco committing to providing a fully functional management information system that would integrate with Derbyshire Dales District Council customer relationship system. However further research revealed that there was a reliance on the specification and the contractors response rather than the use of specific clauses regarding non-delivery being written into the contract
- The possibility of the introduction of three weekly collection services from the midpoint of the contract. It was clarified that this would be a further decision of the Council. However this also effectively illustrated that the Council (and contractor) would have a future opportunity to review the contract cost taking into future financial pressures.

The procurement process had also resulted in higher than anticipated cost resulting in a significant financial deficit against the budget previously allocated. This is illustrated in summary form as follows:

# Award of contract - financial deficit

|  | 2020/2021<br>£000 | 2021/2022<br>£000 | 2022/2023<br>£000 |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Contract price<br>(Contract cost – fully inclusive of vehicle financing, depot costs and recycling income) | £3,080            | £3,182            | £3,117            |
| Anticipated net income from garden waste   | £(166) Cost       | £475              | £566              |
| Net Contract Cost  | £3,246            | £2,707            | £2,551            |
| Budgeted   | £2,433            | £2,433            | £2,433            |
| Estimated Shortfall  | £813              | £274              | £118              |

- Fluctuation reserve created £712,000 to allow for reduction in recyclable income which can be volatile
- Deficit would need to be balanced by 1) better than budgeted income from garden waste or recyclables 2) service efficiencies.

# Summary of award of contract

The report documented the rationale, reasons and risks to award the contract to Serco. The award included a decision for the Council to fully finance the procurement of new vehicles to support the modernisation and delivery of the contract.

The decision to award the contract was made on the understanding that the following key features would also be included:

- Electronic bin lifts
- In Cab technology to improve efficiency and performance data
- Introduction of a management information system to improve speed and quality of information between the customer, the district council and the contractor.
- Introduction of an “opt in” chargeable green waste service
- weekly food waste collections using dedicated vehicles.

The review has not highlighted any evidence that the contract awarded was not fit for purpose and the decision to award the contract was clearly supported by a majority of the Council. The procurement and decision was by both officer and members focussed upon the new and improved service delivery model. This focus may have inadvertently deflected consideration of the provisions within the contract in respect of early termination. This is not uncommon and therefore maybe should be a learning point for the future to ensure consideration to the “what if” scenarios are modelled and where possible (within a commercial negotiation) included within the contract.

The start date of the contract was specified as being the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020 – providing an eight month mobilisation period.

# Contract Mobilisation & considerations and Impacts as a result of Covid19 (1)

Following the decision in December 2019 to award the contract to Serco, evidence both written and verbally shows that initial steps were taken to commence key elements of the mobilisation of the contract. In particular letters have been provided confirming that the vehicles were ordered by Serco and that they had received assurances that delivery slots were allocated.

Throughout this review there appears to have been an expectation that business was being conducted as normal. Clearly by March 2020 the whole Country was placed in a lockdown situation and Local Authorities as key public service leaders and providers were tasked with supporting a “National Crisis”.

The effect of the pandemic is still effectively impacting upon the running of the organisation nearly two years later and this cannot and should not be underestimated. Derbyshire Dales has prided itself over many years on running a highly efficient and lean organisation and this review has revealed that there continues to be a high level of pressure, being managed by senior leaders and front line staff in particular, to maintain normal services whilst reacting to the demands and support requirements of other public sector partners and central government.

As a result of this unpredictable and unfamiliar working environment it is necessary to acknowledge the significant impact of Covid19 upon the working environment, which in turn impacted upon the mobilisation and delivery of the contract. In particular there was a requirement for members of the corporate leadership team to:

- support the needs and demands of the Local Resilience Forum and Government Departments ( requiring up to 3 meetings each week from April 2020 – present)
- initiate new processes and procedures to support payments to local businesses, collection and delivery of food for vulnerable residents, returning to the high streets initiatives, vaccination and test sites support whilst ensuring licensed premisses were COVID safe.
- Initiate and implement remote working arrangements for staff and members
- Switch partnership arrangements from face to face and “on site” meetings to remote business relationship building – thus relying upon the integrity of the remote systems and personnel involved to record and relay accurate decision making and progress reporting
- Ensure governance and safe working was maintained whilst also continuing normal statutory business (e.g. closing accounts and collecting waste etc).

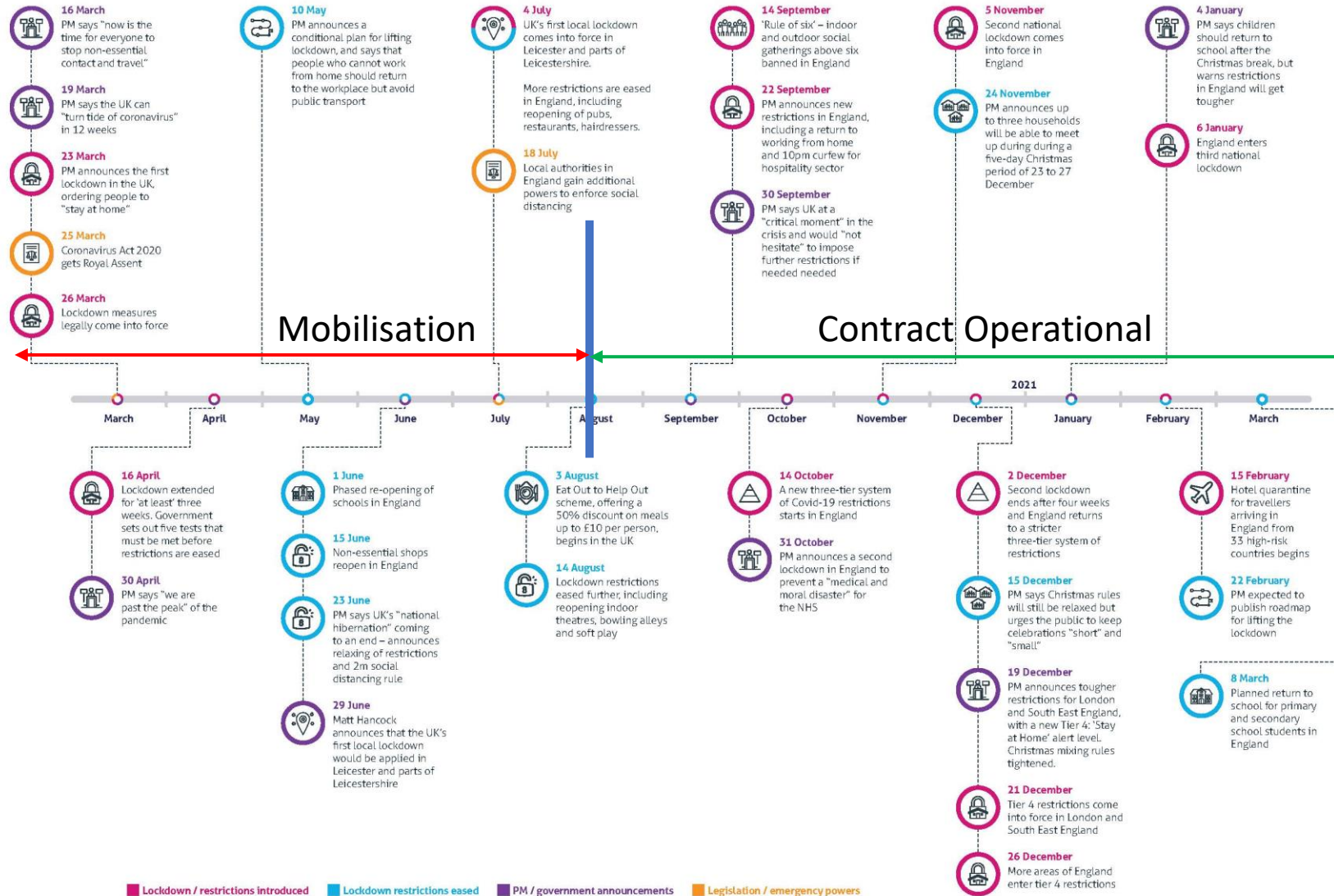
# Contract Mobilisation & considerations and Impacts as a result of Covid19 (2)

There was therefore naturally a period of adjustment (never experienced before) to take into account the following:

- Disruption to normal reporting and line management arrangements (requiring trust and empowerment of staff to work with less supervision and direction).
- Introducing new and transformational meeting and decision making procedures within both the operational and democratic domains.
- Re-prioritisation of the transformational elements of the programme to ensure remote working was adequately supported whilst continuing business as usual.

There appears to have been an expectation by officers and members that they needed to continue to deliver everyday services whilst also reacting to the new demands being placed by central government to protect the community, supporting businesses and implementing and maintaining contractual relationships in key areas such as leisure and waste. This was undertaken without any significant increase in resources.

The following section details findings in respect of the mobilisation of the contract which was clearly undertaken through a remote working environment with the contractor Serco, who also would have been adjusting to the challenges of managing a business through a remote working environment. The following diagram illustrates the timeline and cross over with mobilisation and delivery.



# Contract Mobilisation

- The good practice of utilising a corporate team approach with external support (legal and waste specialist) was initially maintained and was an essential requirement to ensure that:
  1. The key commitments of the contractor was tracked and fulfilled
  2. That the timelines agreed was either maintained or reviewed
  3. That any difficulties or blockages were identified and either resolved or escalated as required.
- However, partly due to the changing environment, during the mobilisation period and many of the aspects in relation to mobilisation being seen as operational, there was a migration of responsibilities away from the chair of the procurement group back towards the director responsible for the delivery of the service (Community and Environmental Services)
- This change may have contributed to a deflection from the consideration and importance of the transformational elements of a service redesign in respect of the customer journey. In particular the central customer service team could have benefited from greater access to data to minimise customer queries within the service area. This is an area which is still frustrating to customer service staff and contributed to further pressures when the service delivery began to fail.
- Corporate focus switched from the mobilisation of the contract to the specifics and management of the introduction of green waste charging. This was understandable as there was a requirement to ensure income was maximised.
- The transformational elements of the data integration rested with the transformation team, working along side operational staff of the waste team. The review has revealed this is a small and specialised resource , which has a stretching agenda, this would have been further compounded by the emerging covid19 requirements.
- External support arrangements changed resulting in reducing the specialist advice and support being provided by Eunomia during the mobilisation period, This was at a critical time and contributed to a reduction in capacity to hold the contractor to account and advise the authority upon industry issues emerging.
- Emerging difficulties were identified in respect of vehicles delivery delays , data and technology implementation and slow and fragmented responsiveness from Serco.

# Contract Mobilisation Review Findings (1)

- Covid Lockdown was in full force resulting in an extremely stretched senior team and workforce in Derbyshire Dales District Council .
- Clearly the Covid19 lockdown presented new and unknown challenges in communications, management processes and prioritisation – it was not and continues not to be business as normal.
- There is significant evidence that meetings, reporting and decision making became less formal resulting in actions potentially being either lost or reliant upon single points of contact who were also working in isolation.
- Establishing new relationships between senior Serco staff became much more challenging and not helped by the apparent lack of continuity and clarity from Serco.
- The remote challenges and increasing lack of continuity resulted in council officers having to pursue issues more than could have reasonably been expected..
- The lack of engagement is evidenced from the difficulties officers experienced in securing Serco engagement and escalation for key issues including vehicle delivery, data migration and round optimisation.
- The staff clearly feel loyal to the brand and reputation of Derbyshire Dales District Council and discussions with staff illustrated that they attempted to go “the extra mile” in trying to resolve the emerging issues.
- The contract management structure and processes for Derbyshire Dales District Council may have benefited from a review by the corporate leadership team to ensure it was fit for purpose within the new environment. However this does not appear to have been undertaken due to competing priorities and lack of time caused by the demands of the pandemic response.



# Contract Mobilisation Review Findings (2)

- It appears clear that during the mobilisation period the first evidence of household waste increasing became evident to Serco. – however there is no evidence that the contractor formally documented or raised this as an issue with Derbyshire Dales DC.
- Covid19 rule changes (law) potentially presented a legitimate reason to exercise the change control procedures contained within the contract, however no evidence has been provided that this was initiated or raised.
- Supply chain issues in respect of vehicle delivery can be evidenced but no record was provided to illustrate Serco wished to action a change control, revert to pre-contract operating models or delay contract deliverables (In cab technology).
- It has been confirmed that no consideration was given to either extending the mobilisation period or delaying the contract start date, which effectively resulted in the commencement of the contract without some of the key deliverables detailed within the specification and method statements.

# Implementation (Derbyshire Dales District Council)

Despite the continuing uncertainty caused by the prevailing pandemic and additional uncertain economic factors (vehicles delays and driver shortages) the contract implementation proceeded with effect from 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

At the beginning of the contract it was natural that the implementation focussed upon the operational delivery of the contract – collecting household and bulky refuse however there was evidence that there were problems being experienced at an early stage including:

- data sharing and integration to the Council systems was very limited and basic.
- Contract relationships appeared to be based upon informal one to one meetings (Waste and Recycling Manager & Serco Contract Manager) rather than a formalised and structured approach – this exposed an increasing risk to a perception of a single point of contact, closed management style and lack of formal recording and communication of decisions.
- Verbal evidence presented that some staff felt uncomfortable that they were actively deterred staff from raising emerging issues directly with Serco.
- Reporting and partnership arrangements defined within the specification and contract were not formalised and fully defined and do not appear to have been set up by either party.
- A lack of corporate leadership team (CLT) oversight of the implementation therefore there was a minimal level of collective awareness of the emerging key issues including:
  1. KPI's and how these related to finance (Invoice certification and payment process).
  2. Transformation (CRM and customer service interaction)
  3. Vehicle delivery
  4. Increasing sense of isolation felt by key members of the waste team

# Implementation (Serco)

It should maybe be acknowledged that the onus for implementation of the contract would have mainly fell upon the contractor. They had the responsibility to ensure all the key deliverables were in place to carry out the contract in accordance with the specification.

Where this was not achievable then the contractor would have had the responsibility to be transparent and highlight any difficulties with their client (utilising the agreed management and monitoring arrangements).

The review has led to a view that this was not utilised as intended and that the Authority was having to constantly pursue Serco outside the agreed framework. The review together with the report produced by Recircle has identified the following key aspects which ultimately appears to have significantly contributed to the service failure experienced from May 2021 – September 2021.

- Clear and unequivocal evidence that vehicle delivery was substantially delayed resulting in severe delays in the ability to provide in-cab technology and data.
- Inconsistent contract management personnel resulting in lack of continuity, local knowledge and corporate memory of the contract. (4 regional directors and 3 contract managers with the post currently vacant).
- A strong perception of remote and light oversight of contract implementation resulting in Serco being slow to respond to the increasing number of service failures.
- On-going commitments being made but not being delivered. e.g. Whitespace data and round optimisation.
- Lack of data integration resulting in increasing service failures and a deteriorating responsiveness.
- No urgency or evidence of implementing the processes and data management to provide round optimisation options.
- As a result of the national shortage of drivers it triggered an increased movement of employees which impacted upon teams across the County, region and nation.

However it is acknowledged and supported that the challenging external environment was an increasing factor in the ability of Serco to respond to aspects of the increasing demand being experienced. In particular the vehicle delays and driver shortages were impacting on waste collection services nationally.

# Contract Management & Governance

The contract together with the specification and the contractors response details the contract management and monitoring arrangements. This should have been put in place and become operational from the contract start date..

This framework along with the KPI monitoring arrangements does not appear to have been formally set-up during either the mobilisation or contract implementation periods.

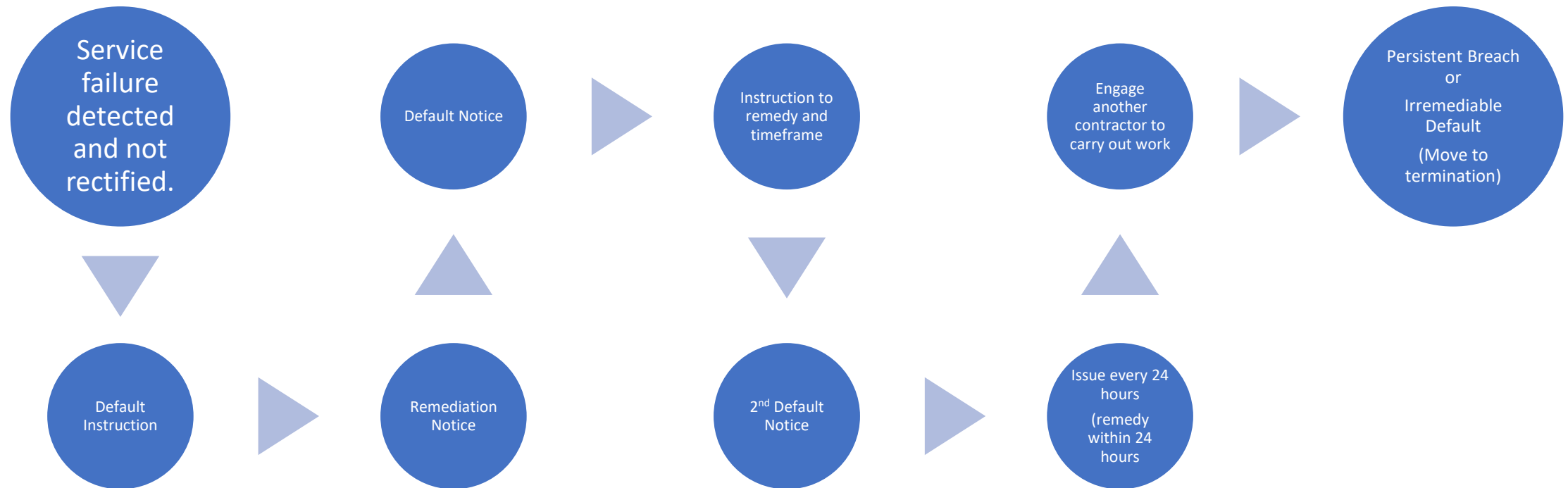
There has been evidence produced to suggest that this is now in existence and operating on a formal basis (with recorded decisions).



# Authorised Officer – Contract Monitoring

- Only one post (Waste and Recycling Manager) was the specified post to be the authorised officer.
- Data presented illustrates that the officer attempted to evaluate, record and impose KPI reductions, however these were disputed due to Serco having a lack of confidence in the data capture.
- The review has established that despite the performance framework stipulating that daily and monthly management reports should be produced these were not being received by the authorised officer.
- The authorised officer should have ensured senior officers were fully apprised of the deteriorating situation, ensuring senior officers become involved through the use of the contract reporting arrangements . But there appears to be no formal record that this occurred.
- It would also appear the authorised officer attempted to remedy the situation in isolation and with minimum transparency with colleagues and line managers.
- Once service completions discrepancies came to light there was a clear process put in place to establish the facts.
- As a result there was a significantly reduced opportunity to utilise contract provisions to protect the councils overall position at an earlier opportunity. An example of the process that should have been adopted to record an increase of missed bins and incomplete rounds is illustrated as follows;

# Contract monitoring and escalation for service failure



Note: If disputed refer to partnership board within 28 days – In writing or if verbally followed up in writing ASAP

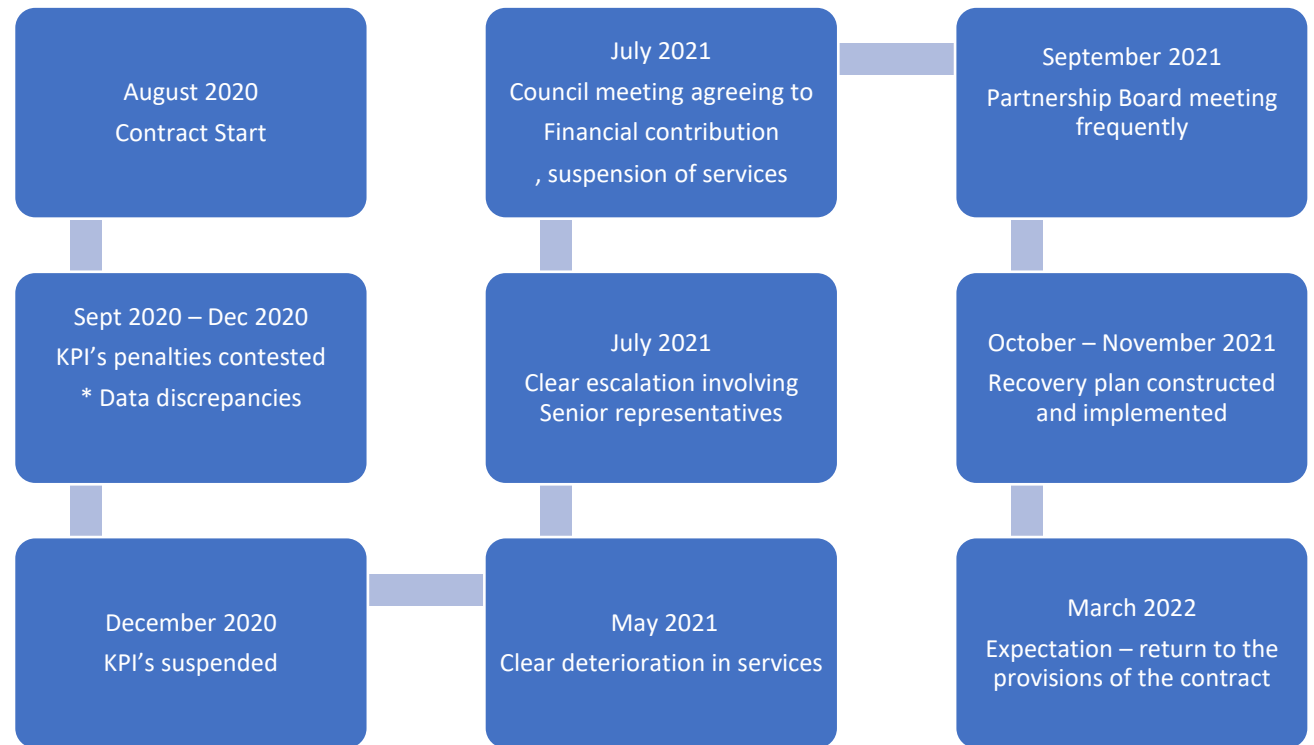
# Post Contract – Key milestones and issues identified.

The contract was implemented on time but was weakened by three key issues – late vehicle delivery, lack of working in cab technology and failure to provide reports.

The Authority were co-operative by agreeing to suspend the measurement of KPI's in December, however this did not prevent a steady decline in service delivery with missed collections and an increasing perception of deteriorating staff availability and morale.

Whilst the national shortage of drivers began to bite Serco also experienced difficulty in retaining staff and requested additional financial support – again the authority supported the request

As the service failure became more evident internal investigations revealed weaknesses that required senior management intervention and action by both organisations – this resulted to in changes to personnel and a further escalation in engagement at a senior level with Serco.



# Impact of Service Failure

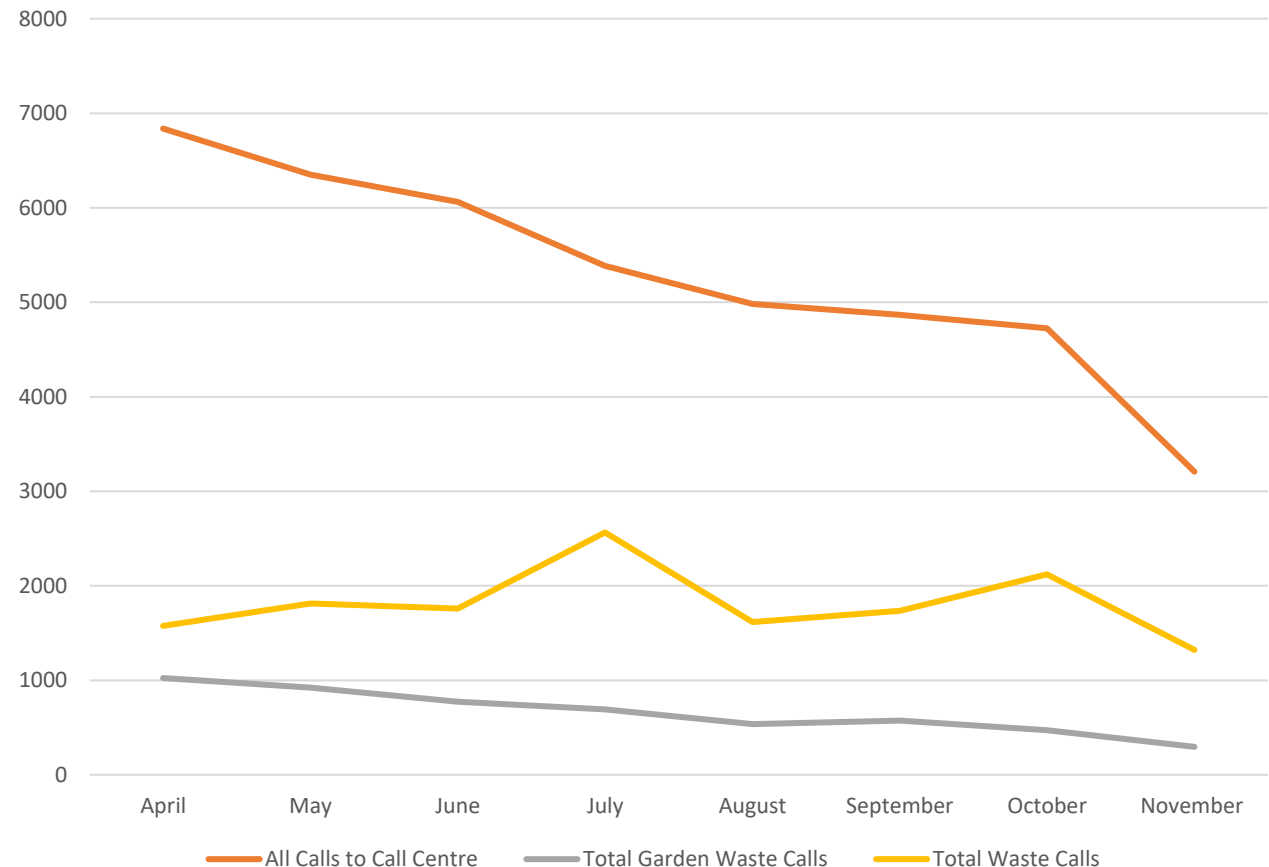
The impact of the continued service failure in respect of management reporting, data integration and failed round completions was significant in respect of reputation, customer dissatisfaction and resource utilisation.

In particular officers of both waste management and customer services were increasingly deflected from key duties to resolve an increase in customer and member queries and complaints.

The graph opposite illustrates that despite the suspension of garden waste services there was an increase both in number and proportion of waste calls which became difficult to manage. The graph however excludes emails received which were significant and overwhelming resulting in a significant deterioration in responsiveness.

Staff shared examples of how they went “the extra mile” to ensure the deteriorating situation was brought back under control. It was clear that the number of channels and methods used by customers and members resulted in a duplication of enquiries which became difficult to manage,

Customer Service Centre Calls received  
April 2021 – November 2021





## Perceived operational / market constraints

There is no doubt that the implementation and operation of the waste contract was impacted by the wider challenges caused by the pandemic and arguably other economic factors materialising from national changes.

However it would be wrong to immediately conclude that this accounts for the non-delivery of significant elements of the contract deliverables which were clearly documented within the specification.

This review has consistently received representations that there was either a slow response or uncoordinated or inconsistent project planning during the mobilisation and implementation of the contract. The likely impacts of such behaviours upon the successful delivery of a contract are illustrated in the table opposite.

It should be noted that since the intervention of the senior management of both organisations that two of the key elements ( speedier allocation of resources and coordinated and planned project management) have improved. As a consequence the recovery plan is succeeding in reducing the service disruptions and complaint volumes are decreasing

This approach should be maintained whilst the true and longer term impacts of the pandemic and associated behaviour changes are established.

|  | Pandemic Impact                   | Likely Impact of inconsistent or slow allocation of resources | Likely Impact of fragmented project planning |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Vehicle Delivery                                     | High                              | Medium  | High   |
| Lack of Data Reporting                               | Low                               | High  | High   |
| In Cab Technology                                    | Impacted by late vehicle delivery | High  | High   |
| Round Optimisation                                   | Medium (volatile volumes)         | High  | High   |
| Increase in waste volumes                            | High                              | Medium  | High   |
| Customer Relationship Management integration (CRM)   | Medium                            | High  | High   |
| Implementing the required governance of the contract | High                              | High  | High   |

# Reporting and Invoicing

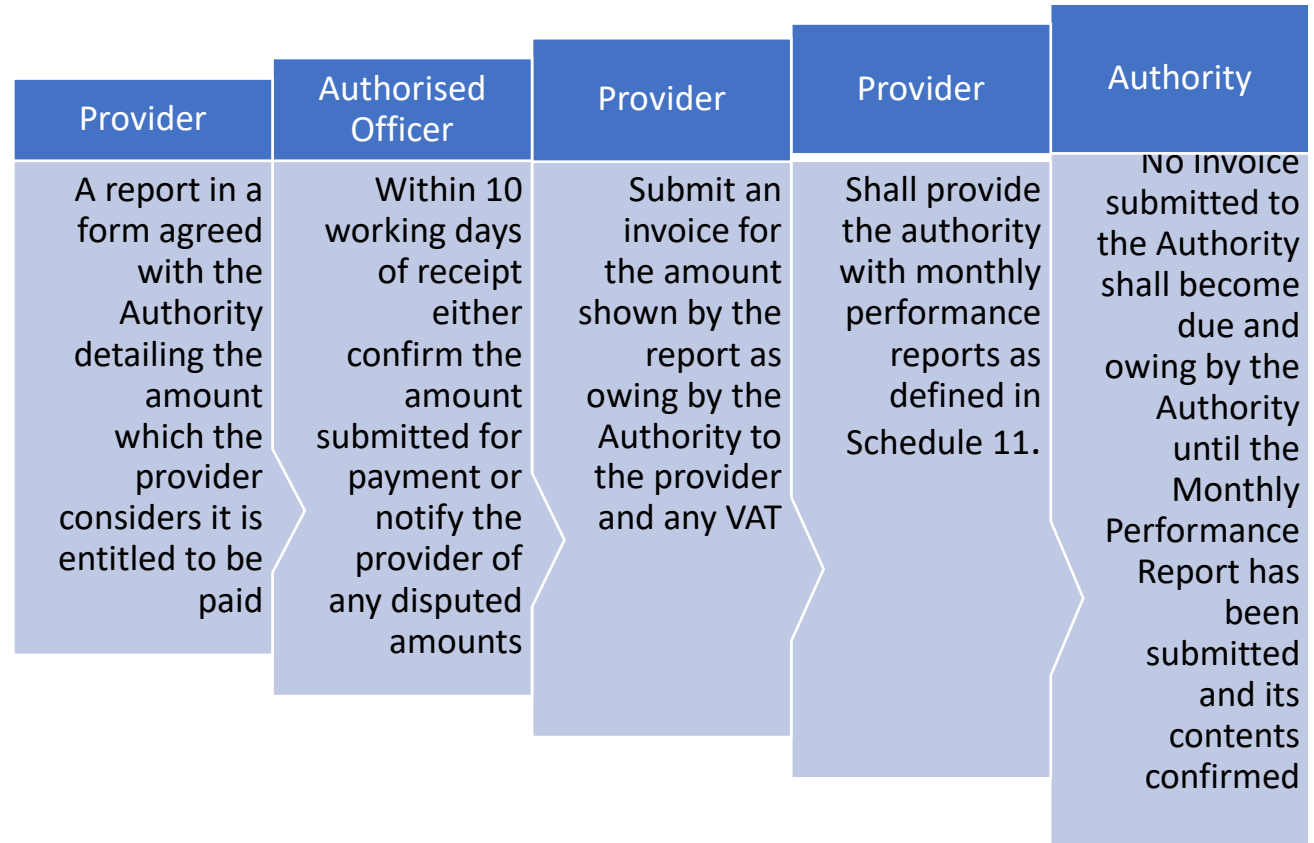
The contract provided a clear process and framework in respect of how payments under the contract should be calculated.

Central to the performance monitoring and payment mechanisms was a core requirement for the contractor to provide daily and monthly performance reports.

The contract also stipulates that no invoice submitted shall become due and owing by the Authority until the monthly performance report has been received.

My review can confirm that no monthly performance reports were received by the Authority until December 2021.

However despite the clear frustrations and service failures Derbyshire Dales District Council continued to make payments to Serco for invoices received up until June 2021.



# Service disruption and intervention

This independent review has involved discussions and receipt of copies of emails and documents from numerous staff within the Authority.

Problems following implementation of the contract were overseen by the Waste and Recycling Manager who clearly engaged and received instruction from the Chief Executive in November 2020. The service disruption began to further escalate from March 2021 and peaked during the summer of 2021. The response of staff from within the Authority was in my view proportionate and involved a variety of actions to establish the causes, seek solutions and escalate communications with Serco. Through this approach and as a result of a whistle-blower it was discovered that there were discrepancies internally in respect of reported service issues. As a result an internal investigation was established by the Director of Community and Environmental Services in accordance with recognised employment law practice, this concluded in August 2021. In addition an internal audit report was instigated by the Monitoring Officer and Director of Resources and this reported its findings to senior officers in November 2021.

During my engagement I have also received alternative views regarding the options and actions under the contract that could have been pursued. This included the more aggressive option of accelerating a legal route to implement non payment and non delivery of the contract. This view contrasts with the pragmatic approach adopted to ensure the service was maintained, problems communicated and stability in service delivery secured before pursuing redress for unsatisfactory delivery.

From the material available to me, and my own research I have concluded that the Chief Executive and his senior team took a balanced and proportionate approach to consulting key staff, informing lead politicians, securing member support and engaging senior representatives from Serco to resolve immediate problems. This was done whilst preserving the options open to the Authority to pursue appropriate reassurances or future redress for service failure or incomplete contract delivery.

In reaching this conclusion I have taken into account the unusual operating environment caused by the on-going pandemic, the national crisis declared by the government in 2020 and the following cabinet office guidance on contractual behaviour issued to all local authorities in May and June 2020.

The cabinet office guidance encouraged authorities to pursue a pragmatic approach and ultimately the Chief Executive and his Directors also needed to consider the best use of resources to prevent further deterioration in the situation.

The recent improvements in the service delivery supported by formalised governance and an emerging recovery plan should provide members with a growing confidence that their interests are being continued to be pursued.

# Cabinet Office - Guidance on responsible contractual behaviour in the preference and enforcement of contracts impacted by the covid19 emergency. Issued 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020

- In summary, the Government is strongly encouraging all individuals, businesses (including funders) and public authorities to act responsibly and fairly in the national interest in performing and enforcing their contracts, to support the response to Covid-19 and to protect jobs and the economy. (para 3)
- Responsible and fair behaviour is strongly encouraged in performing and enforcing contracts where there has been a material impact from Covid-19. This includes being reasonable and proportionate in responding to performance issues and enforcing contracts (including dealing with any disputes), acting in a spirit of co-operation having regard to the impact on the other party (or parties), the availability of financial resources, the protection of public health and the national interest (Para 5)
- In particular, responsible and fair behaviour is strongly encouraged in relation to the following:
  - (a) requesting, and giving, relief for impaired performance, including in respect of the time for delivery and completion, the nature and scope of goods, works and services, the making of payments and the operation of payment and performance mechanisms;
  - (b) requesting, and allowing, extensions of time, substitute or alternative performance and compensation, including compensation for increased cost or additional performance;
  - (c) making, and responding to, *force majeure*, frustration, change in law, relief event, delay event, compensation event and excusing cause claims;
  - (d) requesting, and making, payment under the contract;
  - (e) making, and responding to, claims for damages, including under liquidated damages provisions;
  - (g) exercising remedies in respect of impaired performance, including enforcement of security, forfeiture or repossession of property, calling of bonds or guarantees or the initiation or continuation of insolvency or winding up (or equivalent) proceedings;
  - (h) claiming breach of contract and enforcing events

# Cabinet Office - Guidance on responsible contractual behaviour in the preference and enforcement of contracts impacted by the covid19 emergency. Issued 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020 (Update 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020)

## Issue 2 – Extensions of time (and associated costs)

- Parties to commercial contracts should consider carefully, and reasonably, what reliefs may be available, including whether an extension of time for performance should be granted, how additional costs should be dealt with and whether terms should be renegotiated to preserve the viability of the contract to accommodate the impact of Covid-19. (para 11)

## Issue 3 – Avoidance and resolution of disputes

- The Government strongly encourages parties to seek to resolve any emerging contractual issues responsibly, through negotiation, an early neutral evaluation or mediation, before these escalate into formal intractable disputes.
- Links to full guidance:
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/883737/ Covid-19 and Responsible Contractual Behaviour web final 7 May .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/883737/ Covid-19 and Responsible Contractual Behaviour web final 7 May .pdf)
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/899175/ Update - Covid-19 and Responsible Contractual Behaviour - 30 June final for web .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899175/ Update - Covid-19 and Responsible Contractual Behaviour - 30 June final for web .pdf)

# Derbyshire Dales DC - Commitment to Partnership

As a result of the approach taken there appears to be a significant level of evidence that demonstrates the flexibility and pragmatic behaviour by Derbyshire Dales District Council to assist Serco. This included providing substantial increased financial commitments to sustain the partnership despite important elements of the contract specification not being currently delivered. This includes:

- Providing the vehicle capital cost £3,612,382 (£451,548 PA)
- Authorising up to 50% contribution to support a request by Serco, to support the pay uplift for HGV drivers
- Authorising the cost of leasing an additional vehicle requested by Serco
- Agreeing to reduce the Green waste charge from £50 to £35 following the inability to maintain a full green waste service
- Agreeing for KPI's to not be applied for a period of 3 months
- Agreeing the suspension of side waste collection for recycling thus impacting upon the level of income likely to be received.
- Agreeing to return to the co-mingling of food waste for 3 months
- Agreeing to the suspension of green waste

# Contract Implementation Conclusions (1)

- The evidence provided both verbally and in writing during the course of this review has led to the conclusion that there has been an incomplete delivery of the contract requirements by Serco.
- As a result of key components not being fully implemented or delivered there has been an undoubted impact upon service delivery resulting in an accelerated and unmanageable volume of customer enquiries and complaints.
- The volatile external environment caused by the pandemic impacted significantly upon the strategic and operational capacity of both the contractor and the authority. In particular the escalation of household waste resulting from the changing behaviours combined with vehicle delays and staff shortages placed additional pressures that required close management by the contractor.
- The remote working environment imposed upon both parties appears to have been significant in disrupting the effective management of the contract in its early stages as key service areas were disrupted and stretched to react to competing and variable priorities.
- Evidence presented provided reassurance that senior management remained responsive to supporting the Waste & Recycling Manager, providing clear advice and direction as within the first 3 months of the contract commencement.
- Officers of Derbyshire Dales District Council, and in particular the waste and customer service teams have continually gone the “extra mile” to protect the authorities reputation, resolve customer complaints and assist the contractor in recovering the situation.
- My review has established that once the seriousness of the situation became apparent that the Chief Executive and Director of Community and Environment had taken proportionate and necessary steps to:
  1. Communicate effectively with the senior management of Serco
  2. Engage and communicate with members of the authority
  3. Identify the root causes and attempt to negotiate remedial steps to establish an emerging recovery plan.
- The Authority has not yet received the benefits of the whole of the contract as intended.

# Contract Implementation Conclusions (2)

- It will be necessary to evaluate and agree the financial and contractual consequences caused by non delivery of the key deliverables of the contract whilst considering the future impacts of any customer behavioural changes which continue as the pandemic hopefully recedes.
- Serco is responding and has acknowledged in an discussion during my visit to the depot that they “took the eye of the ball” and the contract was not supervised and managed to the level they set themselves.
- A recovery plan is now in place which was an essential first step to prevent further deterioration and secure improvement for the residents.
- A separate technical evaluation of Serco’s performance (Terms of reference part C) has been concluded and the report produced by Recircle Consulting Ltd has been made available to senior staff and supports the conclusions of this review.



# Review Recommendations

As a result of this review and the detailed findings contained within the report of Recircle Consulting Ltd it is recommended that Derbyshire Dales District Council:

1. Continue to maintain and further develop the dialogue utilising the formalised contract monitoring arrangements.
2. That the dialogue is extended to include:
  1. resolving existing performance and payment discrepancies to ensure these are equitably resolved taking into account the Councils additional support commitments
  2. an agreement regarding how any re-basing required to take account of changes in customer behaviour caused by either the pandemic or the emerging sustainability agenda will be addressed.
  3. establishing the intentions and approach for both parties to ensure the ongoing fulfilment of the contract
3. That the Council also communicates the importance and urgency of resolving the MIS and round optimisation issues through a clear and robust plan
4. That the Corporate Leadership Team re-establish a corporate approach to overseeing the critical success factors of implementing the contract, reacting to unsatisfactory performance and advising members of on-going options for future delivery.
5. That consideration is given to enabling customer service staff access to relevant data and options to escalate and remedy customer queries
6. That a review of the corporate management capacity is undertaken to ensure that future major transformational and modernisation projects are adequately resourced.

# Areas of Good Practice

The review has confirmed that there have been areas where the authority has adopted best practice including:

- Independent and corporate lead for procurement.
- Recognising and beginning to utilise data management and technology to inform the customer journey / interaction
- Ceasing the opportunity to modernise and attempt to future proof the service through a contracting arrangement.
- Utilising the Council's buying and financial capacity to purchase new vehicles.
- Communication messaging to residents to highlight known issues, promote targets and confirm progress.
- Council decisions to be collaborative and identifying priorities.
- Senior officer utilisation of negotiation techniques to leverage a response whilst ensuring an improvement was secured.

# Areas of Improvement

The review has revealed a number of key areas where improvement is required to minimise the chances of either a system failure or sudden decline in service standards:

- Urgently formalise the contract management group required to oversee the contract. These need to have clear terms of reference, agenda standards and action note protocols.
- Ensure finance have representation on the joint management board.
- Ensure the S151 officer creates and maintains adequate invoicing procedures to complement the deduction process identified within the contract.
- Consider appointing an additional authorising officer
- Establish “whitespace” read access requirements for customer contact staff to assist with minimising “hand offs” to waste officers.
- Review resources required to document the customer journey and consider how customer service staff could be further utilised to manage expectations and ad hoc service delivery items.
- Undertake a review of the corporate capacity to support the contract in particular how finance and legal support can and should be accessed.
- Staffing levels in the key areas of
  - Corporate leadership
  - Finance
  - Contract management

# Acknowledgments

The completion of this review could not have been possible without the participation, openness and transparency of staff from Derbyshire Dales District Council, Recircle Consulting Ltd and Serco.

Circling Squares Ltd would like to acknowledge the trust placed in the process particularly the staff from waste, customer, legal and democratic services. It has become increasingly clear during the review that the staff have endeavoured to ensure that the services and reputation of the authority have been protected despite the continuing uncertain and volatile environment.

Thanks and appreciation is also extended to the cross party member group established to provide me with guidance, structure and feedback to ensure the review remained independent and focussed upon the learning opportunities available for all parties to deliver consistent and appropriate waste services for the residents of Derbyshire Dales District Council.