Office of the Auditor General
City of Ottawa

Audit of Curbside Garbage Collection - Highlights



Why we did this audit

Solid Waste Services (SWS) is responsible for the development, management, and operation of the City's residential solid waste system. In 2024, City Council approved the Solid Waste Master Plan, establishing a long-term framework to reduce landfill reliance, increase waste diversion, and support environmentally sustainable waste management.

As curbside collection is a core service provided to over 315,000 households and plays a critical role in managing the flow of waste to the landfill as well as controlling future disposal costs, this audit was undertaken to assess whether the City has designed and implemented processes to manage curbside garbage collection effectively, in compliance with applicable regulations, and in a manner that achieves value for money.

What we found

The City has implemented significant changes to support waste diversion and reduce landfill reliance over recent years, including the three-item limit. However, the audit found that operational guidance and training provided to collectors are not fully aligned with the Solid Waste By-law requirements, contributing to inconsistent collection decisions.

The audit further noted that monitoring of collection activities is primarily reactive and complaint-driven, limiting management's ability to assess whether collection requirements are applied consistently across collection zones.

The audit noted that the City has education, inspection, contractual, and escalation tools available to address collector, contractor, and resident non-compliance. However, these tools are infrequently used to address recurring non-compliance by contractors or residents.

While the audit recognized improvements in the City's efforts to better align resources with operational requirements, opportunities for improvement were identified to enhance budgeting practices by linking expenditures more closely to service cost drivers.

Finally, as the City continues to mature its current curbside collection program, opportunities exist to improve performance measurement and benchmarking practices to support program evaluation and decision-making.

We made eight recommendations to ensure that:

- Collector guidance aligns with the By-law and is supported by formal training to promote a consistent understanding;
- A formal proactive monitoring approach is implemented to support consistent application of collection requirements;
- The feasibility of implementing technology solutions, such as truck-mounted cameras, across all collection zones is evaluated;
- A documented compliance, education, and enforcement framework is established to improve accountability and address recurring non-compliance by contractors and residents;
- Annual budgets and forecasts are developed using key operational drivers to align funding with staffing, fleet, and contract requirements;
- Key collection challenges affecting program effectiveness, including common pads and other operational considerations, are reviewed to determine whether amendments to the By-law are required; and
- Performance and cost information is benchmarked across in-house and contracted operations to assess value for money.

For more details on this report please visit our website.
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