

Report to: **Hub Committee**
Date: **15 September 2020**
Title: **Waste Collection Frequency Trial**
Portfolio Area: **Caroline Mott**
Lead Member for Environment

Wards Affected: **All**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained:

Date next steps can be taken: After call-in

Authors: **Jane Savage & Natalie Johnson** Role: **Head of Contracts & Commissioning**
Senior Specialist (Waste)

Contact: **01822 813657**
jane.savage@swdevon.gov.uk
natalie.johnson@swdevon.gov.uk

Recommendations: that the Hub Committee

1. Approves the continuation of the trial of three weekly refuse collections to around 1000 households in the Borough until March 2021 to allow a full year of data to be analysed.
2. Receives an outcome report in March 2021 that will include an officer appraisal over whether or not the Committee should recommend to Council that a three weekly refuse collection should be implemented for all households in the Borough with a potential start date of Autumn 2021.
3. Notes the success of the enhanced recycling service.

1. Executive summary

1.1 In 2019, the Hub Committee approved the establishment of a trial of reduced frequency (3 weekly) residual collections to 1000 households and the introduction of an enhanced recycling service to all households, with an update report to be brought back to the committee in September 2020.

1.2 The 3 weekly trial began in February 2020 to provide the information necessary to estimate the potential environmental and financial implications if the service was to be introduced Borough-wide.

1.3 The findings at this stage are inconclusive due to skewing of the data caused by the effects of lockdown and it is recommended that the trial continues until March 2021 with no additional risks or financial implications.

1.4 The enhanced recycling service was introduced across the Borough in November 2019 and has proved successful with a 2.4% increase in the amount of domestic waste being recycled in 2019-20 compared with the previous year.

2. Background

2.1 Three weekly residual (black sack) collections have proved successful in other local authority areas in both improving recycling rates and reducing costs. Council Minute CM42 (8) of the Council Report of 4 December 2018, resolved that the Council:

“instruct officers to work with the successful bidder on the implementation of a three-weekly residual waste collection trial as soon as is practicable, subject to a report detailing potential savings and timescales being approved by the Hub Committee.”

2.2 On 4 June 2019 the Hub Committee approved the establishment of a trial of three weekly refuse collections to around 1000 households and agreed for a report to be brought back to Hub including an officer appraisal regarding whether the Committee should recommend to Council that a three weekly refuse collection should be implemented for all households in the Borough.

2.3 At the same time, the Hub Committee approved an enhanced recycling service with the addition of plastic pots, tubs, trays and printer cartridges, card drinks containers and foil to the kerbside recycling service.

2.4 On 10 September 2019, the Hub Committee approved a set of desired outcomes for the Council's strategic theme of Environment including to: *'Increase the amount of waste we recycle'*.

2.5 The Council continues to face considerable financial challenges as a result of uncertainty in the wider economy and constraints on public sector spending. COVID-19 has put additional strain on Council's budget and this is reported in the monthly Revenue Budget Monitoring Reports. The Month 3 Budget Monitoring report to the Hub Committee on 28 July 2020 forecasts a budget shortfall for 2020-21 of £501,000. During September 2020, the Council will set an Amended Budget for 2020/21 taking into account the impact the pandemic has had on the Council's finances.

2.6 Annual savings are expected from reducing the collection frequency of residual waste. These may come from 4 sources:

- i. lower collection costs (may not materialise as recycling collection costs increase)
- ii. income from sales of materials if more are recycled (this is dependent on markets and may result in a debit position)
- iii. income from recycling credits if more materials are recycled (payable by the waste disposal authority Devon County Council)
- iv. a share of the overall disposal savings with the disposal authority under the Shared Savings Scheme.

The latter has been set up to encourage districts to make significant changes to services in line with the Devon waste strategy which result in disposal savings for Devon County Council. These savings are shared equally with the district.

2.7 The annual savings expected from a three weekly scheme has been estimated at between £100,000 and £150,000 per year. However, this is an indicative figure only as payments are based on actual tonnages of residual waste and recycling collected. These tonnages can only be determined by trialling the service to gather the data needed to assess the environmental and financial benefits if the scheme were to be introduced across the whole Borough.

2.8 The trial started on 25 February 2020 and involved around 1,000 households in the wards of Bridestowe, Lewdown, Okehampton, and Tavistock. Households were selected to form a representative sample of the Borough as a whole and included rural and urban areas with different demographics.

2.9 Data and information incorporating a broad range of measures is being collated including:

- a) Residents' surveys
- b) Call numbers
- c) Complaints
- d) Flytips
- e) Tonnages of dry recycling, food and residual waste

2.10 This fits with the Council themes of:

3. Outcomes

3.1 Residents' surveys

3.1.1 Households on the trial are being surveyed to monitor any change in attitudes as they become accustomed and adjust to the service change. The first survey took place around February 2020 and this was followed by a second survey in August 2020.

3.1.2 The first survey had less than 5% take up from those participating in the trial. The results show that most respondents were concerned about storing their waste for three weeks and the risk of this attracting animals. The limited number of respondents should be taken into account, however it is more usual for high responses to contentious issues so it may be concluded that the majority of residents on the trial are not inconvenienced by the reduction in collections.

3.1.3 The second survey received a higher participation rate of 20%. The results show that most respondents still have concerns about storing waste for three weeks though most have found that it has not attracted animals. Often these concerns are linked to the number of people living in the property. The majority of respondents are content with the trial and understand why it is being carried out. The majority also agree that they had put out more recycling and waste for collection during lockdown but that the trial has made them think about the amount of waste they produce and encouraged them to make changes at home to reduce this. A number of respondents questioned why the Council didn't provide bins for residual waste. Negative comments reflected the misconception that trial addresses were chosen on the basis of receiving positive results.

3.2 Call numbers

3.2.1 The number of calls received via the phone line set up specifically for the enhanced service and 3 weekly trial, was very low considering the type and scale of changes happening across the whole Borough. At the beginning of the enhanced service in November 2019, the number of calls peaked with approximately 13 additional calls received daily. For the 2 months immediately after the introduction of the trial, an additional 1.5 calls per day were received.

3.2.2. According to our external validator, this is an 'astonishingly low level of calls' suggesting that the quality of the communication strategy and promotional materials was very high as residents had fully understood what they were required to do and the reasons for it.

3.3 Complaints

3.3.1 There have been 3 formal complaints relating to the trial since it began. Two of these were received at the beginning of the trial and related to lack of storage space and the other was about a vermin issue

attributed to 'not all residents recycling' at a communal collection point. This compares with around 50 complaints in total regarding domestic waste collections over the same time period.

3.4 Fly tips

3.4.1 Fly tipping events were observed in response to concerns that there would be a corresponding increase once residual collection frequencies were reduced. Monitoring over the 4 month period between March and June shows that the number of fly tips has in fact gone down during the trial from 88 in 2019 to 79 in 2020 which suggests that these fears were unfounded.

3.5 Tonnages

3.5.1 Before residents were aware that their household was part of the trial, weights were obtained for the residual, dry recycling and food waste collected from trial households to provide clean baseline data. It should be noted that these baseline tonnages are likely to have been slightly inflated due to the usual behaviour of more waste being put out during and after Christmas though this can be cross checked and accounted for against tonnages for the same week in January 2021.

3.5.2 The same data was collected again after five months so that a comparison could be made with the baseline. The table below shows the differences in tonnages collected from the trial households for residual (black sack), dry recycling (all recycling with the exception of garden and food waste) and food waste.

Table 1 Changes in tonnages between the baseline data and those collected after 4 months on the trial

Residual	+4%
Dry Recycling	+57%
Food Waste	+25%

3.5.3 It is clear that the results are not consistent with expectations nor are they similar across areas.

3.5.4 This inconsistency is most likely to be attributed to the coronavirus lockdown from March. Since lockdown we have seen a rise in domestic waste due to the combination of people being confined mainly to the home and a change in shopping habits. More meals were prepared at home with more time available to clear out lofts and garages and tidy gardens. With all but essential shops closed, there was a significant increase in online purchases and a corresponding increase in packaging waste.

3.5.5 There is no doubt that the results have been affected by the issues outlined above and as such are inconclusive, and that further information is required from a longer timeframe. It should also be noted that it is difficult to predict whether the change in shopping habits may become

permanent and/or whether any further periods of lockdown will further skew the data.

3.6 Enhanced recycling service

3.6.1 The enhanced recycling service which allowed for the additional materials listed in 2.3 was introduced to all households in December 2019. Since then, the amount of dry recycling collected has increased by 223t (11%) compared with the same period the previous year. The recycling rate in 2019-20 for the Borough, has risen by 2.4% to 53.7% (at time of writing awaiting verification from DEFRA).

4. Options available and consideration of risk

4.1 The information gathered to date shows overall positive feedback in terms of public acceptance of reducing the frequency of residual collections. However, in order to fully assess the true potential diversion of waste from residual to recycling, the study needs to continue beyond the short term as there is no doubt that lockdown has affected the data. Whilst the change in the waste stream is likely to continue over the period of the proposed extension, it is not expected to be so pronounced as schools return and businesses return further towards the 'normal'. Continuing with the trial will allow for a more robust set of tonnage data to be examined and taken into account for a final report to be presented to the Hub Committee in March 2021.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1 It is proposed that the recommendations are approved to more fully assess the feasibility of the introduction of three weekly collections across the whole Borough in autumn 2021.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The Authority has a duty to arrange for collection and disposal of household waste. The legislative framework is to be found in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Waste Framework Directive 2008, and Controlled Waste Regulations 2012.
Financial	Y	There are no financial implications for continuing with the trial until March 2021. The annual savings expected from a three weekly scheme across the whole Borough is estimated at between £100,000 and £150,000 per year. These are based on indicative figures on shared savings from Devon County Council and our calculations on the potential effect on recycling credits based on the domestic waste audit of 2017. However, these

		<p>figures cannot be quantify accurately as there is not enough evidence available from other Authorities with similar demographics and starting points. For the same reason, it is difficult to accurately predict the additional recycling resource that may be required for collections.</p> <p>The net cost of the trial of £17,000 in 2019-20 and £7,500 in 2020-21 has been approved by Council to be funded from the Strategic Waste Earmarked Reserve. Additional income from recycling credits will be paid back into the reserve.</p>
Risk	Y	The risks are set out in section 4 of this report.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		N/A
Safeguarding		N/A
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		N/A
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		N/A
Other implications		N/A

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Background Papers:

Process checklist	Completed
Portfolio Holder briefed	Y
SLT Rep briefed	Y
Relevant Exec Director sign off (draft)	Y
Data protection issues considered	Y
If exempt information, public (part 1) report also drafted. (Committee/Scrutiny)	N/A