

Report to: **Hub Committee**
Date: **21 September 2021**
Title: **Waste Collection Frequency Trial**
Portfolio Area: **Lynn Daniel**
Lead Member for Environment

Wards Affected: **All**

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

Date next steps can be taken: After call-in

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Recommendations:

That the Hub Committee

- 1. Endorses the findings of the trial of three weekly residual (black sack) collections.**
- 2. Agrees that the service is not extended to the whole of the Borough in spring 2022 and recognises the potential impact of making a major service change at a time when significant structural changes are expected in the waste industry and other external pressures, including the national LGV driver shortage.**

- 3. Thanks the residents on the trial and reverts these collections to fortnightly in line with the rest of the Borough.**
- 4. Instructs the Head of Communications to develop a communications strategy for 2021-22 and beyond which builds on the findings of the trial with the aim of improving the Borough's recycling rate and reducing domestic residual waste.**
- 5. That three weekly residual collections be revisited once the outcome of the Government Consultation on the National Waste Strategy is known.**

1. Executive summary

1.1 On 4 June 2019, the Hub Committee approved the establishment of a trial of reduced frequency (3 weekly) residual collections to 1000 households. The trial which began in February 2020 was designed to provide the information necessary on which to base a decision whether to introduce reduced black sack collection frequencies across the Borough.

1.2 Despite two extensions to the trial, the findings are not conclusive due to the skewing of data caused by the effects of the Coronavirus lockdowns. This has made it difficult to accurately predict any savings from, and the income and costs of, a full introduction across the Borough.

1.3 A second round of the national Waste Strategy consultations have been completed since the last report. The outcome will change legislation through provisions in the Environment Bill. Whilst it is not expected that authorities that already have 3 weekly collections would be forced to revert back to a minimum 2 week frequency, it is not ruled out at this stage. What is clear is that the response from Government is likely to change the amount and types of waste collected by Local Authorities in the future.

1.4 Currently, as widely reported through the media, there is a UK workforce shortage which has resulted in a paucity of HGV/LGV drivers which we rely on to deliver our waste services. This shortage is not expected to be short lived and a major service change at this time would carry additional risk.

1.5 In conclusion, the report recommends that the reduced frequency residual service should not be extended to all households across the Borough at this time and that the trial is halted. However, the outcome of the trial does suggest that residents themselves would not be averse to reduced frequency residual collections if introduced at a future date. It also shows that there is potential to increase recycling rates and reduce residual with focussed resident engagement.

2. Background

Trial

2.1 The trial started on 25 February 2020 and involves approximately 1,000 households in the wards of Bridestowe, Okehampton North, Okehampton South and Tavistock South East. The trial has been subsequently extended twice because of the difficulty of interpreting the information received against a backdrop of a change in consumption habits due to national lockdowns.

2.2 The Hub Committee requested this report detailing the potential income/costs and national waste strategy impacts, so that a final decision can be made on whether a three weekly refuse collection should be implemented throughout the Borough from spring 2022 (Minute *HC86 refers).

National Waste Strategy

2.3 Since the last extension to the trial was approved by the Hub Committee in March 2021, there has been a further round of Government waste strategy consultations. These consultations with Local Authorities, the waste industry, including waste producers, and the general public are designed to inform the future direction of waste production, collection and treatment.

2.4 In its *Consultation on consistency in Household and Business Recycling in England*, the Government guidance states it will consider whether a recommended minimum service standard of alternate weekly collection for residual waste might be appropriate.

2.5 Other areas being considered are the *Extended Producer Responsibility* consultation for packaging which intends to make producers pay the full costs of dealing with the waste they produce, and a *Deposit Return Scheme* for drinks containers to improve recycling rates and reduce litter. Changes in both of these areas are expected to result in a transformation of the type and amount of waste put out on the kerbside by householders and therefore will require Local Authorities to adapt the local infrastructure for waste collection.

HGV/LGV Driver Shortage

2.6 According to the Road Haulage Association, there is now a shortage of more than 100,000 drivers in the UK. The number includes a substantial proportion of drivers who have retired along with those from EU member states who were living and working in the UK pre-Covid and Brexit.

2.7 The situation is so severe that the Government has announced a series of measures designed to tackle the problem which is impacting waste services across the country. Many authorities, including neighbouring authorities, are struggling to complete rounds with some suspending collections such as bulky and garden waste.

2.8 This fits with the Council themes of:
Environment
Council
Communities

3. Outcomes

Residents' Attitudes

3.1 Conducting the trial has allowed for a comprehensive range of information to be gathered, which will be useful in informing the shape of future waste services in West Devon.

3.2 An insight into the attitudes of residents on the trial was gained from the public surveys in tandem with consideration of the volume of calls and complaints received from the trial households.

3.3 Surveys were undertaken in February 2020, August 2020 and February 2021 and the conclusions reported to the Hub Committee in March 2021. To recap, with time spent on the trial, the public displayed a greater understanding of the reasoning behind it and initial fears were in the main allayed. However, by the final survey, some residents continued to report that they had problems storing the waste and there was some confusion over collection days.

3.4 The authority received relatively few calls and complaints relating to the trial when it was first introduced and these are now negligible.

3.5 Members were concerned that the number of fly tips would increase as a result of the residual waste restrictions and so the number of fly tips comprising of domestic black sack waste has been considered. Whilst the evidence shows there has been an increase since the start of the trial, this corresponds with an increase in the total number of fly tipping incidents in the Borough and an increase nationally over the same time period and so is unlikely to be attributable to the trial itself. It is worth noting that for the first quarter of this year, April to June 2021, domestic black sack fly tips have reduced compared with the same period over the previous 2 years (2019-20 and 2020-21).

3.6 Taking all these factors into account, it is therefore possible to assume that introducing a reduced frequency service across the Borough would be met with an initial level of objection which would subside after a relatively short period and would not attract more fly tipping.

Effect on Recycling

3.7 Less conclusive is the information gained from tonnage data. As previously reported, due to the effects of the coronavirus lockdowns, consumer habits have changed significantly over the past 3 years 2019, 2020, and 2021. This has resulted in a rise in domestic waste attributed to the combination of residents being confined mainly to the home and a change in shopping habits.

3.8 There appears to be little correlation between tonnages for each of the waste streams in the trial areas and the rest of the Borough. For this reason, it is impossible to predict with any accuracy how tonnages would react if the scheme was introduced Borough-wide.

Financial Considerations

3.9 Set out below are the main areas of potential savings, income and costs of a reduced frequency collection:

- a) Income from disposal savings
- b) Income from recycling credits
- c) Income/costs from sales of materials
- d) Costs associated with additional recycling vehicles.

3.10 All of these factors are determined by actual tonnages and as noted in 3.8 above, it has not been possible to calculate with any degree of accuracy what these tonnages may be and therefore the potential savings or additional costs though initial indications from Devon County Council showed a saving on disposal of between £100,000 and £150,000.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

4.1 Since the trial began, the context has now changed with the completion of a second round of national waste consultations. The waste industry is awaiting the next steps to be announced by Government which are expected to comprise the biggest change in national waste policy for a number of years and will result in a change to the types and amounts of waste collected both on the kerbside and via the bring banks.

4.2 The shortage of HGV/LGV drivers will not be resolved over the short term as there is a considerable backlog in testing.

4.3 The tonnage data gathered in West Devon is not totally conclusive. However, West Devon already enjoys a high recycling rate which increased by 2% to 55% in 2020-2021. In addition, West Devon residents put out a relatively low amount of residual waste compared with most other local authorities. Although, other authorities that have moved to a 3 weekly residual collection have all seen a significant increase in recycling and reduction in residual waste, it is unlikely that West Devon would see the same gains as other authorities starting from a lower baseline.

4.4 There is a risk that any assessment of expected resources made at this point in time for a full introduction, such as vehicles, crews and depot capacity, would become not fit for purpose in the near future due to the reasons stated above in 4.1 and 4.3.

5. Proposed Way Forward

5.1 The trial has provided good insight into how residents would react to a service change of this type. There is therefore scope for improvement by

building on this insight to develop a comprehensive communications strategy aimed at increasing recycling and reducing residual waste.

5.2 However, taking into account the development of the national waste strategy, the current driver shortage and the inconclusive data, it is proposed that the recommendations are approved.

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	The saving gained from ceasing the trial is approximately £600 per month. The Revenue Budget for 2021/22 included potential additional income of £50,000 in 21/22 and a further £75,000 in 22/23 for income from three weekly trials. This was stated that this was dependent on the outcome of the results from the three weekly trials. If the Hub Committee agree that the service is not extended to the whole of the Borough in Spring 2022, this will be reported in the Revenue Budget Monitoring report that this income will not be achieved.
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:

None

Background Papers:

None