

Report to: **Hub Committee**  
Date: **27 April 2021**  
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

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That the Hub Committee**

- 1. Endorses the findings of the trial of three weekly refuse collections to around 1000 households in the Borough;**
- 2. Receives a further report in September 2021 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; and**
- 3. Continues to collect on a three weekly basis from the trial households during the interim.**

## **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 to estimate the potential environmental and financial implications if the service was to be introduced Borough-wide.

1.2 The findings from the first six months of the trial were largely inconclusive due to skewing of the data caused by the effects of the Coronavirus lockdown and in August 2020, the Hub Committee approved an extension of the trial to March 2021 in the hope that more meaningful data could be obtained.

1.3 This report details the findings from the trial. It shows that waste habits have changed significantly since before the first lockdown and that whilst the changes have not been quite so dramatic during subsequent lockdowns, the data is difficult to interpret against the backdrop of changing habits. This has made it difficult to accurately predict any savings, income and costs of a full introduction across the Borough.

1.4 Nevertheless, other authorities that have reduced the frequency of residual (black sack) collections have benefitted from increased recycling rates and reductions in residual waste.

1.5 Residents surveys and the level and type of customer contact has been considered. The surveys show a trend towards acceptance of the service and more consideration by residents about the waste they create. Storage of waste still recurs as a concern, however, this is not evidenced by complaints or other contact.

1.6 Fly tipping of household black sack waste has increased since 2019-20. However, the general trend for black sack waste shows an increase over a number of years and this is reflected by trends in other types of fly tips both in West Devon and nationally so cannot be solely attributed to reducing the frequency of residual collections.

1.7 In conclusion, a reduction in the frequency of residual waste collections is very likely to divert waste from the residual stream to recycling and will help the Council to meet its climate change targets. After experiencing reduced frequency collections, residents on the trial appear to be generally accepting of the service. What is less clear is whether changing the service will deliver guaranteed savings.

## **2. Background**

2.1 On 15 September 2020, the Hub Committee approved the extension of the trial to allow a full year of results to be analysed. The Committee requested a further report in March 2021 to 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.

2.2 Three weekly residual (black sack) collections have proved successful in other local authority areas in both improving recycling rates and reducing costs and/or making savings. In Britain currently, 15 local authorities collect residual waste on a 3 weekly basis, with at least 9 more about to roll out the service, or considering it.

2.3 The trial started on 25 February 2020 and involved around 1,000 households in the wards of Bridestowe, Okehampton North, Okehampton South and Tavistock South East. Households were selected to gather information from both rural and urban areas with a variety of demographics and housing types.

2.4 Data and information incorporating a broad range of measures has been collated including:

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

2.5 The Government is currently consulting with the waste industry in order to form future national strategy. One of the areas being considered is the frequency of residual waste collections with a proposed minimum of fortnightly collections. Whilst it is unlikely that councils that have already introduced three or four weekly collections will be expected to revert back to fortnightly, there is a possibility that legislation may be changed to prevent other Councils from reducing frequencies in the future.

2.6 This fits with the Council themes of:

Environment  
Council  
Communities

### **3. Outcomes**

#### **3.1 Tonnages**

3.1.1 There is a tendency for waste to be diverted from residual to recycling when the collection frequency of residual waste is reduced and a weekly recycling collection is maintained. However, the data gathered has been difficult to interpret due to a background effect on all waste streams caused by the pandemic and the enhanced recycling scheme introduced in November 2019. These increases are tabulated below:

Table 1: Increase in kerbside waste collected April – December 2020 compared with April - December 2019

Residual	Dry Recycling	Food
5.4%	25.4%	18.6%

3.1.2 Although there was an increase in recycling in the trial areas, the background effect has meant that comparing tonnages from the trial areas before and during the trial alone, is not an accurate measure of how tonnages may act if the scheme were to be extended Borough-wide once Covid restrictions are lifted.

3.1.3 The effect on residual waste is easier to gauge as these weights were recorded at each collection and so can be directly compared with those collected from the whole district over the same period. Tonnages between April and December 2020 from the trial areas, show that trial residents produced 2.3% less residual waste when compared with the whole district.

3.1.4 As analysis of the data is not totally conclusive, the effect on those authorities that have reduced the residual collection frequency against national averages have been considered and are tabulated below:

Table 2: Changes to recycling rates in other local authorities after the introduction of 3 weekly collections.

	Recycling rate change	Average recycling rate 2019/20	Annual residual waste (*kg/hh) change	Average annual residual waste (kg/hh) 2019/20
English 3 weekly authorities (change from roll out)	+ 9.23%	50.7%	- 91.6	362.1
All England (change over similar period)	+ 0.10%	43.8%	- 28	529.3
Welsh 3 weekly properties (change from roll out)	+ 10.72%	66.06%	- 47	181.6
All Wales (change over similar period)	+ 1.30%	65%	- 14	180

\*kilograms per household

English authorities have been separated out from the Welsh authorities as there is a difference in the main collection regime between the two countries. West Devon's proposed scheme is similar to the Welsh model which demonstrates more dramatic improvements in each of the factors measured.

3.1.5 As of 2019/20, which is the latest year that tonnage data is available, East Devon is the only English district with a three weekly residual collection that has a similar collection regime to West Devon. East Devon saw a significant increase in recycling and reduction in residual waste when it moved to 3 weekly collections but it should be noted that other changes to the system happened at same time, such as the collection of more materials. The table below compares East Devon's results with West Devon's in 2019-20 in the national context.

Table 3: A comparison of East Devon and West Devon recycling rates and residual waste weights for 2019-20

	Recycling rate	Rank in England	Residual waste kg/hh/year	Rank in England
East Devon	60.5%	8	251.7	1
West Devon	53.7%	35	310.7	9

### 3.2 Residents' surveys

3.2.1 To monitor any change in attitudes as residents adjust to the service, three surveys were undertaken at the start of the trial, half way through, and recently in February 2021. Participation ranged from 5% in the first survey to 20% in the second, before falling partly back to 14% in the third.

3.2.2 The number of residents in each household ranged from 1 to over 5. An average of 9% of households had children using disposable nappies whilst 6% created incontinence waste and 5% preferred not to say.

3.2.3 The most significant changes in opinions reported by respondents of the surveys are as follows:

- A At the start, the majority said they weren't happy to be on the trial. This attitude changed over the trial period with the vast majority happy by the third survey.
- B At the start, the vast majority thought their waste would attract animals. However, by survey 3, the majority reported that the waste did not attract animals.
- C More of the trial residents now think about the amount of waste they create.
- D There is a reported increase in the amount of food waste put out for collection.
- E Whilst considerably fewer respondents stated that they struggled to store waste for 3 weeks by the end of the trial, there were still around half who said that they did have problems with storage.

3.2.4 At the final survey, recurring concerns from the open comment section were:

- Storing waste for collection if away or on holiday on day of collection
- Storage of dog waste/pet bedding
- It would be easier if we had wheelie bins
- Storing waste in summer is more difficult
- Confusion over collection days

3.2.5 It would be expected that the number of black sacks being put out by residents reduced once the frequency of collection reduced. However, it was reported that these initially rose at the second survey and then fell back at the time of the third though remaining higher than in survey 1. It is believed that this is the lockdown effect where we experienced an increase across all waste streams.

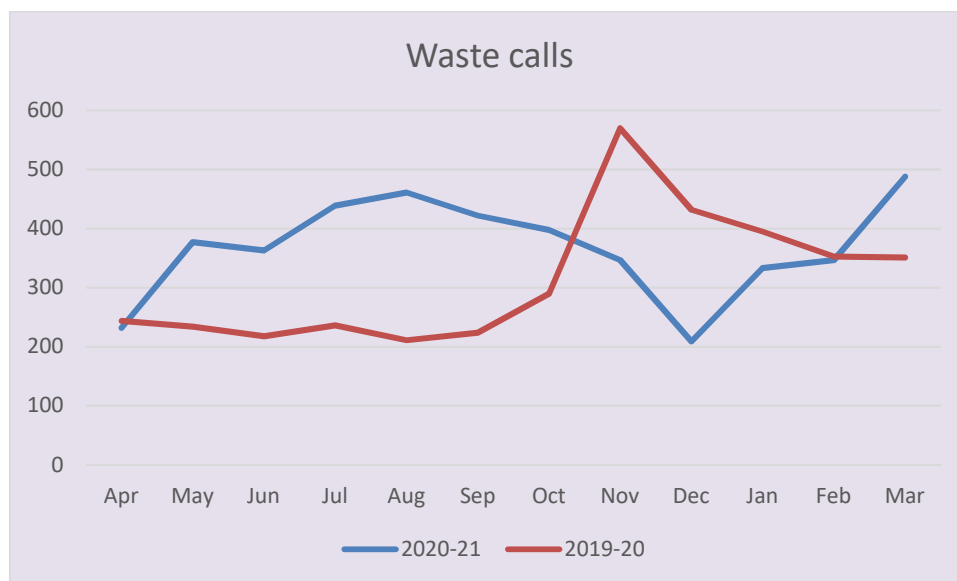
3.2.6 Participation in recycling and food waste collections would also be expected to increase on the trial. There was an initial increase which again fell back in the most recent survey though remained higher than before the trial. Again, this is believed to be attributable to lockdown.

3.2.7 The results regarding attitudes around storing nappies or incontinence related waste are inconclusive, as there were very few responses and the number of responses outweighed the total number of households that said they produce these types of waste. There were however extremely low levels of contact about either of these subjects, which may suggest that these types of waste are not of great concern.

### 3.3 Call numbers

3.3.1 The number of calls received via the specific phone line was very low considering the type and scale of changes happening across the whole Borough. For the 2 months immediately after the introduction of the trial, an additional 1.5 calls per day were received. Since November 2020, the number of calls has remained below the pre-trial (2019-20) levels.

Figure 1 Number of waste-related calls 2019/20 to 2020/21



Please note that these figures do not include calls to the dedicated garden waste line.

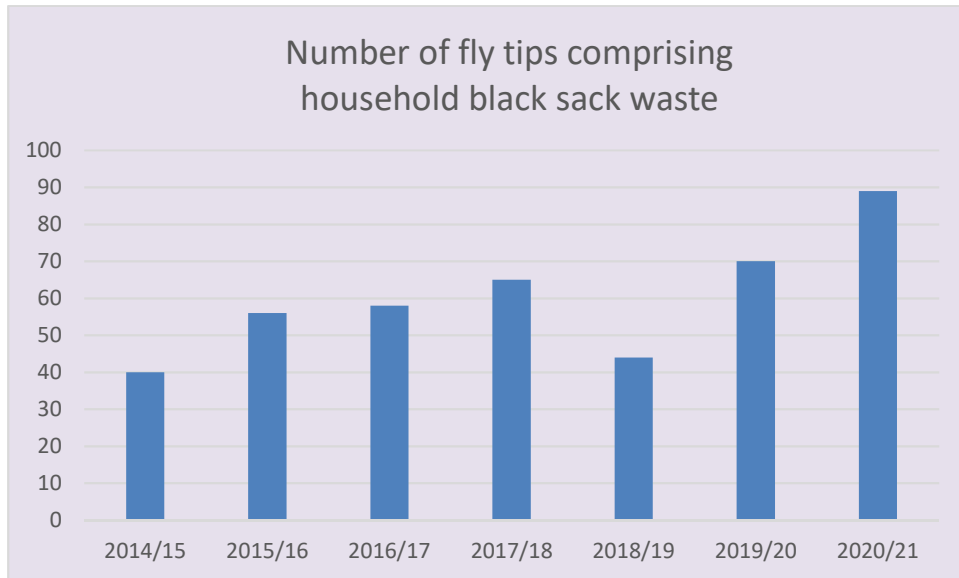
### 3.4 Complaints

3.4.1 There has been one formal complaint relating to the trial since April 2020 about a vermin issue which the complainant attributed to not all residents recycling at a communal collection point. This was received in June 2020 and since then there has been minimal contact with the Council over the trial other than through the surveys.

### 3.5 Fly tips

3.5.1 The chart below details the number of fly tips consisting of black sack waste since 2014.

Figure 2 Fly tipped household black sack waste 2014/15 to 2020/21



Please note that figures for 2018/19 are under-represented as the AllOnMobile reporting system was unavailable for a two short periods.

During the same period, both in West Devon and nationally, there has been an increase in the *total* number of fly tipping incidents. It therefore cannot be assumed that the increase is directly related to the trial. The effect of the lockdown and closure of recycling centres may also have affected the numbers for 2020/21.

### 3.6 Financial Impact

3.6.1 There are three main areas of potential savings, income and costs, and these are set out in 3.6.2 to 3.6.4. All three areas are affected by actual tonnages and so are difficult to calculate accurately using the data from the trial. Further details will be provided in the September 2021 report.

#### 3.6.2 Shared Savings Scheme

The Council is eligible to a share of the savings that Devon County Council benefit from as waste is diverted away from disposal to recycling. Initial indications show potential savings of between £100,000 and £150,000 per year and is indicative of pre-covid information. This scheme is expected to finish or adapt in 2025-26 dependent on the outcome of the national consultations.

#### 3.6.3 Income

Income will be available from recycling credits as these are paid by Devon County Council at a fixed annual rate and would be expected to rise with increased tonnage. Income from the sale of recyclable materials is less assured as it is subject to global markets. If markets are favourable income would increase. Conversely, if the markets degenerate, then the

income would reduce and may even become a cost. Currently these two factors are working against each other, and it is therefore assumed at this point that there will be no significant income from the additional recyclable materials in the short term. However, an annual saving could be gained if markets improve over the longer term.

#### 3.6.4 Cost

As waste is diverted from residual to recycling, there is likely to be a need for more recycling collection vehicles and fewer refuse collection vehicles and these factors may balance each other out. The implementation of a Borough-wide scheme would incur additional costs in the first year for communications and extra staffing resources.

### **4. Options available and consideration of risk**

4.1 The trial was extended in an attempt to improve the data gathered during the first 6 months but it is now clear that waste habits did not return to normal as the pandemic continued and subsequent lockdowns occurred. The tonnage data gathered cannot therefore be totally relied upon to evaluate accurate costs, income and savings. Further work is required in partnership with Devon County Council and the Council's waste contractor though assumptions on future domestic waste habits would have to be made.

4.2 Consistency of collections across all English waste authorities is one of the areas being considered amongst the on-going national consultations on the English waste strategy. The frequency of residual collections is included in the consistency of collections consultations. However, the waste industry considers any changes to policies brought about by the review on those authorities already providing three weekly collections to be unlikely, though it is not ruled out at this stage. Other areas being examined may also influence what is expected to be the biggest change in national waste policy for years.

4.3 Whilst the data gathered in West Devon is not totally conclusive, the positive effect on recycling and residual waste has been clearly proven in other authorities. Reducing the frequency of residual collection throughout the Borough would show a clear commitment towards meeting the Council's climate change goals.

4.4 The low number of complaints and customer contact suggests an acceptance of the collection frequency by those on the trial and attitudes have improved over the period of the trial.

### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

5.1 It is proposed that the recommendations are approved and that a further report is brought to the Hub Committee in September 2021 detailing full costings, expected income and savings, and any known impacts of the national waste consultations.



## 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	Initial indications of the annual disposal savings from moving to a three weekly collection scheme are in the region of £100,000 to £150,000. There will be additional income from recycling credits. There may be additional income or costs associated with the sale of the extra recyclable materials dependent on market factors. There are potential costs if additional recycling rounds are required though these may be mitigated by a corresponding reduction in refuse rounds. There would be implementation costs in the first year for communications and extra staffing resources. A full indication of the financial implications will be provided in the September report.
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:**

4 December 2018 Council Report- instructed officers to work with successful bidder on trial

4 June 2019 Hub Committee - approved initial 6 months trial of 1,000 households

10 September 2019 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'*.

15 September 2020 Hub Committee- approved extension to trial as information gathered in first 6 months was skewed by lockdown effects.