

## **NORTH DEVON COUNCIL**

### **STRATEGY AND RESOURCES: 7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2020**

#### **ENVIRONMENT LEAD'S REPORT**

It has been an interesting year for all services having to face the sorts of challenge and changes that Covid 19 brought and demonstrating just how adaptable our officers can be. It has also been encouraging to have received public appreciation for our services, not least of which were the children's pictures and thank you notes left for the waste and recycling crews. The crowning glory of the year was winning the Environment Cup awarded by the Mayor of Barnstaple for the efforts of the crews during lockdown.

Covid wasn't the only problem for waste and recycling teams. There has been no Head of Service for a year, which has put extra pressures on staff and on a service which has high public visibility. I say service but, of course, we have more than one because we have collections for both domestic and trade waste and recycling, plus we empty litter and dog bins, and sweep the streets. This department also manages public conveniences and has a close working relationship with enforcement who deal with fly-tipping and dog fouling.

Waste and recycling services have been even more challenging than usual over the last two weeks with a number of staff isolating through contact with Covid sufferers; some of these have been agency staff, compounding the shortage of resources already constrained by confining the crews to 'bubbles' to reduce the likelihood of spreading the virus.

Then there are the equipment problems. We are receiving assistance from Stuart Noyce, currently Head of Service at Somerset West and Taunton Council, in determining our fleet replacement strategy for the next 7 years. We have very little spare capacity in our fleet, and what capacity we have is not always immediately deployable when needed.

Whilst collecting domestic waste is our statutory responsibility, so takes priority over trade when there is a resource shortage, we need to make sure that we meet our contractual obligations to our trade customers, even if it means rescheduled collections. There have been issues with the trade service over the last few years which have increased costs and reduced income to the point where the service is currently making a net loss. Some of this has been caused by reliance on paper based systems and processes.

A good deal of progress has been achieved in resolving trade service problems thanks to Christine Birch and the team who have spent the year streamlining the documentation systems, building relationships with customers, and improving communications. The team and Ray Jones are working well together, identifying

problem areas with respect to fly-tipping and dog fouling, and proposing solutions. Appendix A gives a summary of trade waste highlights, progress, and future plans.

Trade waste, of course, is a chargeable service so we should be taking a professional and commercial approach to it, ensuring it is properly resourced and not subject to being rescheduled because of problems arising outside the service area.

On the domestic side Paul Burton and the team of supervisors have the task of managing the crews and vehicles and this year has been particularly challenging. The introduction of the blue boxes for domestic collection of glass for recycling has meant that the crews have been able to complete their rounds much more rapidly: this, in spite of the amount of recycling increasing during lockdown. Unfortunately the amount of waste also increased so the ratio of recycling collected has not been as high as we would have liked. Appendix B has a summary of highlights, issues, and plans.

We are developing a litter strategy and have had an initial meeting on 'recycling on the go' with Hubbub, a social enterprise who work with all sorts of organisations, including local authorities, to help them make a positive difference to their environment. I am looking forward to a brighter, cleaner, and perhaps quirkier, North Devon next year.

The plans for next year:

- organising the team structures is key to take pressure off the supervisors and to improve overall communications. This can only happen once a service manager is in place.
- trade waste computer integration should be complete, a marketing strategy in place, and a fully accountable system working.
- the fleet replacement system will be agreed and implemented.
- the plan to develop the processing hall will be initiated.
- technology problems should have been resolved leading to more accurate reporting.
- campaigns to reduce waste and litter, and increase recycling should lead to fewer grot spots across the district.

Cllr Netti Pearson December 2020