

North Devon Council

Strategy and Resources Committee – 6 December 2021

Litter Working Group

Report by Lead Member for the Environment

Introduction

The impact of litter on the social, economic, and environmental fabric of our communities cannot be overstated. All over the country local authorities and local communities are trying to find effective ways to address the problems created by the increase in litter. We are no different.

The litter working group discovered that the mapping does not always tally with the location of bins; there is no established procedure for requesting a bin; no established procedure for determining if the right bin is in the right place, and no readily available record of the number and types of bin in stock.

Around the district there are obvious hotspots for littering, disappointingly bad around educational establishments, but also where there are transport interchanges, and verges of main roads as a result of the inexplicable tendency of drivers to eject rubbish from their vehicles whilst in transit. Areas which look uncared-for are areas which attract antisocial behaviour and both are on the rise.

We need to address the causes of litter in as much as we can, incorporating known techniques for effecting behaviour change, as well as delivering an effective litter collection service.

The working group considers that partnership working with businesses, parishes and community groups will be key and that clearly defined practices and processes are necessary to improve the service.

Recommendation

- Note the report
- Consider an annual purchasing plan for litter bins that takes into account the baseline data collected, with a view to removing and/or replacing broken bins with the right size, colour, and type of bin and an understanding of appropriate placement.
- Consider developing a website dedicated to litter campaigns.
- Authorise Head of Planning Housing and Health to delegate litter-related enforcement powers to other groups where it can be demonstrated that they hold the appropriate competencies, e.g. Police Officers, Parish Council Officers and specific individual landowners on request.

A programme of accreditation - which takes into account the requirements of all legislation and associated guidance shall be put in place to enable a robust assessment of competence to take place before such delegation is given.

- Read Litterology to get an insight into the psychology of littering.

Report

Earlier this year NDC adopted a Litter Strategy: this is quite high level and may need to be revisited once the baseline data about the existing bins and litter zones have been identified and mapped.

The litter working group found that there is a lack of accurate information on the types and locations of litter bins across the district. Ideally the mapping of bins should include all NDC and parish council maintained and emptied bins, plus an indication of the zone in which the bins are placed, e.g. rural, high pedestrian traffic, public transport interchange, bus shelter. It would also be useful to know of any privately installed and emptied bins when reviewing the appropriateness of bin placement.

Once the bins have been mapped then an exercise to identify litter hotspots will need to be undertaken: the teams who keep the streets clean will no doubt know very well which these are, but all waste and recycling staff could be encouraged to report them.

The waste and recycling team keeps a stock of litter bins available on request, however there is no formal process for determining whether the request is appropriate for the location nor is there a record of exactly what bins are in store.

At the moment we are concerned with litter bins only although will need to consider how best to roll out on-street recycling bins, for which there is definitely a demand, and will need to consider methods of ensuring bins are correctly identified, e.g. by colour, and style. The logical colour for litter bins is black.

This information is needed before a detailed programme of work can be undertaken. With a map of the bins, the types of location, and identification of litter hotspots, then there can be a more measured approach to bin placement – and replacement. If a request for a bin is received it would need to fit with the placement strategy.

Partnerships will play a key part in making sure our streets are litter-free. The litter working group is planning to run a workshop early in the new year with parish councils, finding out what they perceive to be the main problem areas and agreeing plans of action to address them together.

Education is also key: during term time the roads around many of our schools and colleges are a disgrace and the neighbourhood warden team, working with the litter group are planning to meet shortly with Petroc staff to work on a litter-free campaign. This can then be used to inform a structured programme for educational and youth organisations.

The group has reviewed the litter pages on the NDC website and agreed improvements in the way information is displayed and with input from community litter-picking groups has facilitated the access to request collections and borrowing of equipment. It would be worth considering a lively, colourful, website for North Devon (and Torridge, perhaps?) dedicated to litter education and campaigns, cf. Litter Free Dorset

The communications team provide not only essential support for litter campaigns but also have great ideas for getting messages across to the public, some of which will require expenditure on signage.

This report only addresses the bins and an understanding of the places where they are – or are not – used currently. Further effort will be required to gather data about people's littering habits, cf Litterology (reading material for the working group), and to experiment with signage to see what is most effective: the ultimate goal is to raise people's awareness and change their behaviour.