



North Devon Council

Report Date: Strategy & Resources November 2022

Topic: **BRINGING THE THREE WEEKLY COLLECTIONS TRIAL TO AN END**

Report by: Paul Burton

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In 2017, North Devon Council (NDC) selected 3,500 properties (App 1) to take part in a 3 weekly trial. These properties in and around Barnstaple have their black bins collected every 3 weeks and their (unlimited) recycling collected weekly. The trial aimed to reduce black refuse and increase recycling.
- 1.2. The trial has now run for 5 years and although there is some evidence that it has resulted in increased recycling rates in some parts of the trial area, at least initially, it is not conclusive.
- 1.3. NDC is currently experiencing difficulties in maintaining an efficient and effective recycling service across the district due to resource issues and is not yet in a position to roll out three weekly collections across the district. If the trial were brought to a close and NDC reverted to fortnightly black bin collections across the district, crews and drivers can be reallocated to recycling rounds.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. This report recommends the three weekly trial is brought to a close and black bin collections return to fortnightly, in line with the rest of the district.
- 2.2. Drivers, crews and vehicles from the trial area rounds are to be redeployed on recycling rounds.
- 2.3. NDC revisits the idea of three weekly black bin collections across the whole district when recycling rounds are fully resourced, operating satisfactorily and the infrastructure is in place to deal with the material.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The trial area has continued for 5 years with no agreed end date to the trial.
- 3.2. NDC is currently experiencing difficulties in maintaining a satisfactory recycling service due to resource shortages, particularly drivers and loaders. Ending the trial and reallocating existing crews more efficiently will help to resolve the recycling round operational issues.
- 3.3. We are aware of the positives and negatives from the trial area so there is no real advantage in continuing the trial any longer with no confirmed end date. We are not yet in a position at this time to roll out three weekly bin collections



across the whole district, but will review this again when we have the necessary infrastructure in place and when resourcing issues allow.

4. REPORT

- 4.1. The 3 weekly trial showed that initially refuse reduced while recycling rates increased in the trial area (App 2). During this initial period, 5 temporary recycling advisors were employed by NDC to work in the trial areas, to educate and assist residents with recycling and help them reduce black bin waste. There is now only 1 Recycling Advisor employed by NDC and we have seen black bin waste increasing again as a result.
- 4.2. During the trial period, tonnages for residual black bin waste have increased (App 2) whilst recycling tonnages have decreased. This may be due to the fact residents are permitted to leave black side waste out and the fact that trial has continued for so long.
- 4.3. At present, NDC experiences difficulties in operating an effective and reliable recycling and waste service across the district, particularly during busy holiday periods. This is due to a combination of driver shortages, increasing volumes of recycling and larger rounds due to the construction of new homes. The trial rounds require 2 x HGV Drivers, 3 x Loaders and 1 van driver at various times over the 5 day week. Extra resources need to be found every 3 weeks for the trial area, this being 1 x bin lorry with 3 staff (for 5 days), 1 x small bin lorry with 2 staff (for 1 day), 1 transit with 1 staff (for 1 day). Operationally this causes difficulties for Supervisors, who need to plan their requirements based on the same numeric requirements each week.
- 4.4. To ease the problems with recycling rounds noted at point 4.5, it seems sensible to end the three weekly trial and reorganise crews to bolster the recycling rounds and bring consistency to the black rounds across the whole district.
- 4.5. Residents in the Trial area often complain about equality, in that they perceive that they are receiving a different black bin service to the rest of the district.
- 4.6. Currently, NDC are scoping a project to improve the layout of the yard and process hall and bring in new recycling balers at Brynsworthy Environment Centre. This will allow us to recycle material more efficiently and potentially increase income for the sale of recycled materials. This project is dependent on the requested capital funds being approved by NDC members but it is



unlikely that our current facility will be able to handle increased amounts of recycling materials and so carrying out an upgrade is an essential element of planning for increased recycling.

4.7. By stopping the trial now, we are not dismissing the idea of returning to a 3 weekly collection in the future once the necessary infrastructure is in place, but we can also explore other options for increasing recycling rates by learning from other councils that have been able to do this whilst still maintaining a 2 weekly collection routine.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. BY accepting the recommendations above, this would release the resources required to help resolve the operational issues highlighted in section 4.

5.2. Refuse rounds will need to be reset to a fortnightly schedule. This is a reasonably simple process with very minimal collection day changes for some customers. This can be done in house within a day or two.

5.3. A communications exercise will be needed to inform residents in the trial area they will be returning to fortnightly black bin collections and to explain the reasons for doing so.

5.4. If the recommendations are rejected, then the rounds will remain as they are, there is a risk of reputational damage for prolonging a trial for so long with no obvious end in sight. There is also a likelihood that the above highlighted inefficiencies will have a cost impact on the current revenue budgets if we continue to deliver an inconsistent recycling service.

6. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

6.1. By bringing the 3 weekly trial to a close, we restore equality to the district, with every one receiving a fortnightly collections (apart from those flats that are on a weekly collection).

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. An EIA has been completed (enc) which highlights a saving approximately 100 tCO₂e per annum, by cancelling the trial round.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

The commercialisation agenda – Positive impact due to better use of available resources.

Improving customer focus – Positive impact for customers in trial area who feel they are receiving a different black bin service to the wider district. Improved recycling service with less missed collections.

Regeneration or economic development – Positive impact, less uncollected recycling on the streets.

Environment – Positive impact through more efficient recycling. Possible negative reaction to the message we are not rolling out three weekly collections across the district. We need to be mindful of this and keep the public informed of the commitment we have to achieving the 63% recycling target for recycling rates by 2035.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Recycling trial area

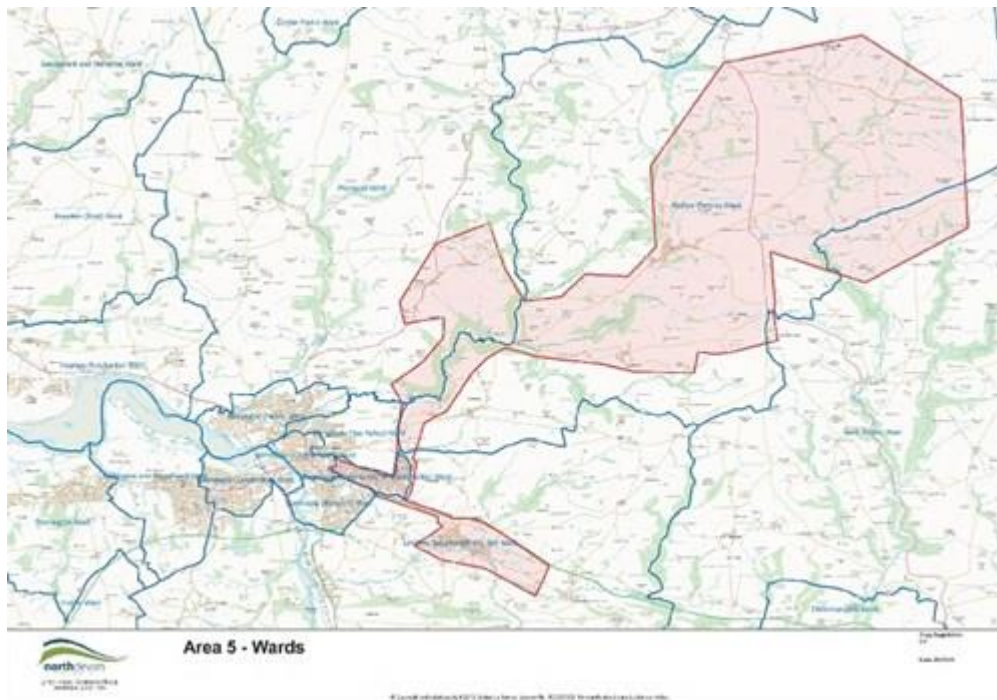
Since 5 June 2017 we have been trialling:

- weekly unlimited recycling collection
- three weekly black bin/bag collection
- Households in this area can request unlimited recycling boxes, green bags and brown bags

The trial area covers the following areas:

- Challacombe
- Bratton Fleming
- Part of Brayford
- Arlington
- Shirwell
- Landkey
- Whiddon Valley
- Forches
- Snapper
- Stoke Rivers
- Chelfham

The trial area is shown below:



Appendix 2

Black bin tonnages in Trial area

2016/17 Pre-trial	1625
2017/18	874
2018/19	963
2019/20	1152
2020/21	1335
2021/22	1121

This is an increase of 28%

Recycling Tonnages in Trial Area Year	Average weekly Trial tonnage
Pre trial	9.23
2017 (Nov)	17.54
2021 (Nov)	11.49

NDC Recycling Rate since 2017

2017/18	45.5%
2018/19	45.6%
2019/20	49.5%
2020/21	49.4%