

Cabinet – 3 December 2025

Waste Service Budget Position

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>New Forest District Council (NFDC) is implementing a phased rollout of a new waste collection service to meet statutory requirements under the Environment Act 2021 and improve recycling performance.</p> <p>Phases 1 and 2 of the new service commenced in June and October 2025, with Phase 3 scheduled for March 2026.</p> <p>The transition has delivered environmental benefits, including higher recycling rates and reduced street litter. However, operational challenges have emerged, notably resource shortfalls and the need for policy adjustments to manage food waste collections in areas with free-roaming livestock. A temporary “behind-the-gate” collection policy for food waste caddies in the pannage period, as advocated for and supported by forest partners, has significantly reduced animal interactions with waste and is recommended for permanent adoption.</p> <p>Additional ongoing operational pressures include maintaining bring site services amid rising contamination and fly-tipping, and resourcing extra rounds to ensure service continuity.</p> <p>These factors require increased funding beyond the original Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).</p>
Recommendation(s)	<p>That Cabinet support recommendations of the Waste Programme Board to:</p> <p>1. Make permanent the collections of food waste containers from “behind the gate” in the defined areas open to free roaming livestock.</p>

	<p>2. Instruct officers to conduct a whole-service review after the completion of the phase 3 roll-out to include consideration of the approach to collection of wheeled bins from areas open to livestock and to also assess overall service productivity and efficiency.</p> <p>3. Support additional funding to the current bring-site service, and that a review be conducted upon completion of the phase 3 roll-out.</p> <p>4. Recommend to Council the;</p> <p>a) Approval of an additional £1.500m of annual budget to be added to the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan from 2026/27 onwards to maintain collection service continuity, bring site services and retain the collections of food waste containers from behind gates in areas open to free roaming livestock</p> <p>b) Approval of an additional £967,000 to be added to the Council’s Capital Programme for 2026/27 to accommodate the purchase of the additional vehicles required to support recommendation 4a.</p> <p>c) Approval of supplementary budget of £301,000 to 2025/26 to support the continued bring-site service</p>
<p>Reasons for recommendation(s)</p>	<p>The recommendations are made to address the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Continuity: The additional funding ensures that the waste collection service can continue operating effectively across all areas, especially where logistical challenges have created resource shortfalls. • Animal Interactions: Behind-the-gate food waste collections in areas with free-roaming livestock have significantly reduced incidents of animals interacting with waste containers. This approach is advocated for and supported by forest partner organisations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Protection: Investment in resources for bring sites will reduce litter and overflowing bins at these sites and protect our local environment. • Legal Compliance: The Environment Act 2021 mandates separate food waste collection by April 2026. The funding supports compliance with this legislation.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Geoff Blunden – Environment and Sustainability
Strategic Director(s)	James Carpenter – Place, Operations and Sustainability
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Introduction and background

1. New Forest District Council (NFDC) began a phased rollout of a new waste collection service for residents in June 2025 as part of a wider waste management strategy and programme. The changes are designed to improve recycling rates, modernise collection services and meet the statutory requirements set out in the Environment Act 2021 which come into force in 2026. The Act requires that by 1 April 2026, household food waste is collected separately from other waste, and sent for recycling.
2. The waste strategy was agreed at a meeting of the Council in July 2022 with an updated rollout programme and timetable considered in February 2024. The policies to support the strategy were agreed at a meeting of the Council in July 2023.
3. The key elements of the new service are:
 - New weekly food waste collections with a lockable 23-litre caddy and a 7-litre kitchen caddy; and
 - Fortnightly recycling and rubbish collections using new 240-litre (recycling) and 180-litre (rubbish) wheelie bins

4. In support of these frontline service changes, the overall Waste Programme includes many supporting projects, including depot improvements (new depot at Hardley, enhancements at others), revised route planning, procurement, new ICT, and communications and engagement to support the new service.
5. A dedicated Waste Management Programme Board is in place to oversee the complex workstreams required to deliver the roll out in time to meet government targets, and within approved budgets. The membership of the Board comprises the Leader, Portfolio Holders for Environment & Sustainability and Finance & Corporate, members of the Executive Management Team and senior waste officers. The Board meets monthly and is supported by weekly steering group meetings.
6. In keeping with the approved strategy, the project rollout is being completed in three phases:
 - Phase 1 (Lymington Depot area) commenced June 2025
 - Phase 2 (Ringwood Depot area) commenced October 2025
 - Phase 3 (Hardley Depot area) commencing March 2026
7. At a meeting on 3 September 2025, the Council's Cabinet considered a report (see background papers) containing a review of phase 1. The Cabinet approved a recommendation that phases 2 and 3 should continue as planned, with the agreed mitigations and improvements noted in the report. Since this report, the new service has commenced in the phase two area.
8. The report also made recommendations relating to the collection of food waste within areas with free-roaming livestock to address the issues raised below.

Changes to food waste caddy collection within the parts of the district where there are free-roaming livestock

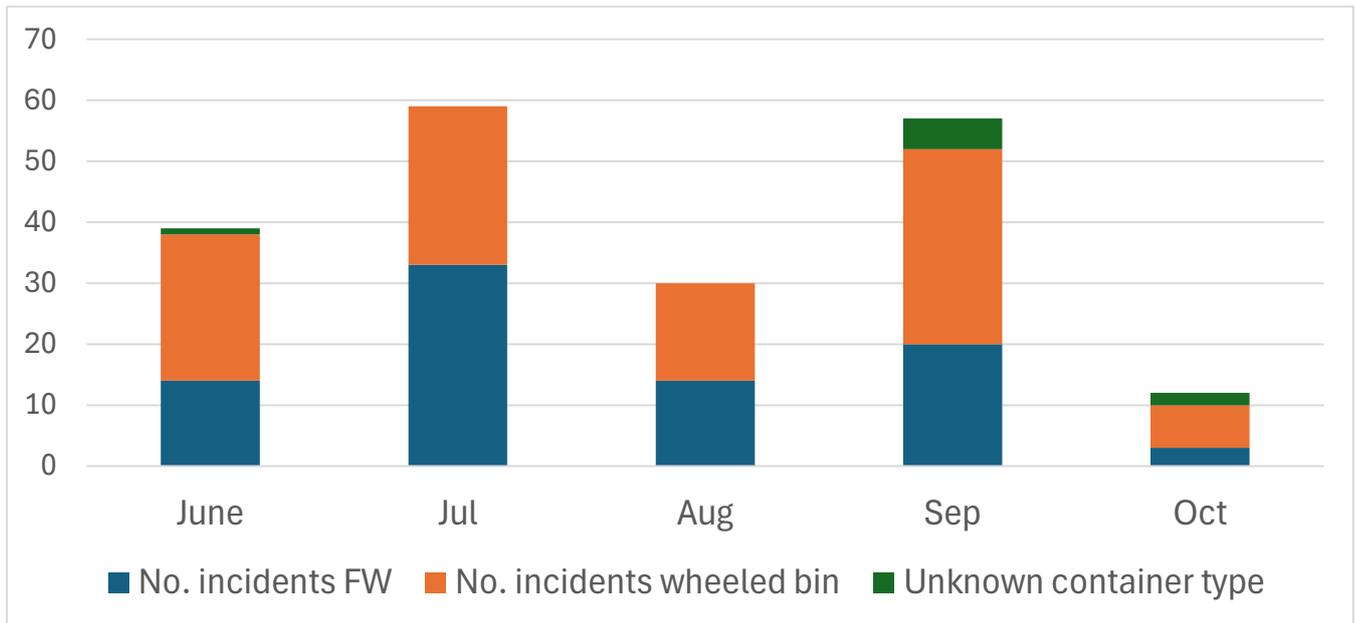
9. The Council's agreed waste and recycling service collection policy (see background papers) is that for properties with access to free-roaming animals, *"all containers should be set out at the edge or curtilage of the property, where it meets the public highway. In some circumstances the council may request that containers are left behind the householder's gate. Safe pedestrian access must be maintained, operatives cannot cross a cattle grid to collect waste and recycling containers."*

10. During the phase 1 rollout, there were instances of animals accessing food waste caddies and the contents of wheeled bins. National and local media coverage of the very visual and evocative images of forest animals breaking into the newly introduced food waste bins posed a clear reputational risk to the Council, and was the subject of prolonged media coverage and public outcry and complaint.
11. Whilst designed to be "lockable" and despite advice being given on how to effectively present food waste caddies, some animal interactions remained and some bins were either forcibly accessed, or accessible through mis-presentation.
12. Further engagement was had with our Forest Partner organisations the Verderers, Forestry England, the Commoners Defence Association, and the New Forest Association. Whilst concerned for all animals, Forest partners had specific concerns about the implications of food waste being consumed by pigs, due to specific risk of disease. This was most notably in the pannage period, when pigs are released to deal with the acorn mast, a traditional part of the management of the forest, and its environmental and ecosystem management.
13. At the time the Animal & Plant Health Agency ("APHA"), contacted the council, via Hampshire County Councils Trading Standards in response to public concerns. They were satisfied with the detail provided including details of the bins and food waste caddies, however the Council wanted to ensure further steps were taken to reduce the risk.
14. Ensuring that waste can be collected with as little interaction with animals is key. Take up of the food waste service across the New Forest has vastly exceeded expectations, and it is essential that residents continue to have confidence in the service to ensure that food waste is not instead displaced into refuse collections. By proxy, ensuring an effective and secure food waste service has the benefit of removing waste that may be of interest to animals from wheeled bins, which remain comparably more secure in terms of the presentation of bagged waste inside of them, than previous sack collection presentation.
15. As a result of the animal interactions with the food waste caddies during the phase 1 roll-out, in September, additional funding of £150,000 was endorsed by the Cabinet to enable a trial of "behind the gate" food waste collection within the parts of the district where there are free-roaming livestock for the pannage period. In these areas the crew now collect and return the caddies to the behind the gate position. Cabinet agreed "in principle" to this policy change

being made permanent, subject to the review of the business case/cost implications as presented here.

16. In support of obtaining effective data, since June, an online tool for reporting of incidents involving animals and waste has been available. The graph below shows this data between June and October, with significant reduction in incidents related to both wheeled bins and food waste between September and October.

Fig. 1 – Number of incidents of animal interactions with waste reported



17. Work has been carried out to assess options for how to manage collections in the area open to free roaming livestock in the longer term. This must be carefully considered, because a change in policy can significantly affect the time taken to collect waste from each property, reducing collection efficiency and increasing the amount of resource required to complete collections. This cost needs to be understood, and consideration given to how long it may take to hire additional staff and secure additional vehicles, if needed. A decision to alter the policy without due consideration to these issues would result in incomplete rounds and waste left uncollected.
18. Getting collection resource levels right is a complex exercise taking account of numbers of properties, set-out rates, travel times, distances and speed of working, with the aim of ensuring that work is completed safely and efficiently within working hours. This is a fine balance, and in practice, in phase 1, work has taken longer than planned to complete.

19. Contributing factors have included higher than expected participation rates for food waste (which as yet show no sign of reducing), an increasing number of assisted collections, and containers being collected from behind gates (both before and after this approach was taken for the panning period). This led to rounds not completing on some days in the first 2 months of phase 1, with additional resource being brought forward from later phases and now being used to ensure round completion in the phase 1 area.
20. The original resources estimated for food waste collections were 11 full crews, and 19 refuse/recycling wheeled bin crews. To resolve the issues described in above, including the permanent delivery of "behind the gate" collections of food waste, modelling suggests there is a requirement for 4 more food waste rounds and 1 more wheeled bin round. The financial implications of this are covered below.

Glass and Bring Site collections, vehicle and crew resourcing

21. The council operates 19 "bring sites" in NFDC or supermarket car parks for the depositing of recyclable waste by residents. This includes glass and mixed recycling containers. NFDC is the only Council in Hampshire to operate mixed recycling containers in bring sites, all other councils have removed them due to the coverage provided by household collections and HCC's network of Household Waste Recycling Centres.
22. Bring sites provide an additional service to the public, but they also have a range of historical problems, including high levels of environmental crime, and loss of valuable recyclable material through very high levels of contamination of recycling with non-recyclable material.
23. There has been a more recent escalation in problems, where we are now seeing levels of both illegal activity and genuine depositing of domestic recycling rise to levels that are unmanageable based on the current resource level across our operational services. This increase not only impacts our waste collection teams, but also the street scene operatives clearing the sites and recording fly tipping, and the enforcement team as they work to monitor and investigate non-compliance.
24. In the original operational planning for the new service there was a proposal to deal with bring site collections using bulk collection crews and support from kerbside collection vehicles. Prior to the new service roll out this was confirmed as an appropriate workable resource level based on previous waste levels. However, the change in resident behaviour and the increased material at bring sites combined with the changes linked to the new service, including the

switch to fortnightly collections, now make it much more difficult to regularly service bring sites utilising the kerbside rounds.

25. The Waste Programme Board has agreed at this point in the new service roll out the bring site service should be maintained and the costs of this have been included in this report. Once the phase 3 rollout has been completed, ongoing provision of bring site services would be subject to a review.

26. The Financial implications are considered below.

Corporate plan priorities

27. The new waste collection service supports Corporate Plan Priority 2 - Protecting our climate, coast, and natural world by:
- Minimising non-recycled waste through the separate collection of food waste from households
 - Cutting vehicle emissions by using the Bartec system to design more efficient waste collection routes.
 - Boosting recycling rates by introducing separate food waste collections and providing larger wheeled bins for recyclables.
 - Reducing litter and spillages by replacing sacks with more secure and contained waste collection methods.

Options appraisal

28. With regard to the general increase in resource requirement, delivery of core statutory collections must be maintained.

29. With regard to future of food waste collections in areas open to livestock, as described above, the recommendation is to continue with food waste collections from "behind the gate". Other options considered included:

- a) Cease food waste collections at these properties – discounted because food collection is a legal requirement as of April 2026
- b) Revert to food waste caddies presented outside gates – the data shows that moving the caddies behind gates has reduced the instances of animal strikes and this would likely increase again if the "behind gate" approach was reversed.
- c) Issuing of alternative food waste containers with increased security - these are unproven in the unique environment of the New Forest, and such a service would be difficult to achieve now that food waste caddies have been moved behind the gate.

30. Moving food waste "behind the gate" has removed the higher risk interactions with waste containers and as covered in paragraph 14 of this report serves to alleviate wider risk balanced against the

historic context. Where there may remain a view that a longer-term change of approach to collection of wheeled bins from areas open to livestock should be considered, it is appropriate at this time that the data, and collection round productivity and efficiency continue to be reviewed to inform as appropriate.

31. It is recognised that a full review of bring site provision is required, and this will be carried out after the full rollout of the new kerbside service is complete. Undertaking this now, whilst within Service change would not allow time for the service to bed in, nor for wider data or action (e.g. enforcement) to have been effective

Financial and resource implications

32. The last full year waste service budget pre-service change was set in 2023/24 and was £5.5m. This represented 24.4% of the overall General Fund budget for that year.
33. In order to commence the roll-out of the new waste service, the annual budget for 2025/26 was set at £8.5m. The largest elements of the increase related to the estimated first-time roll-out of the new food waste collection service, with varying assurances received from the government that the additional costs would be financed through new burdens funding. The new service budget of £8.5m represented 33.2% of the overall General Fund budget for the 25/26 financial year.
34. The waste roll-out programme was also supported by an additional 3-year Transition budget. In September 2025 this was increased by £88,000 in order to provide additional waste advisor and customer advisor capacity to assist with the roll out of phases 2 and 3.
35. Aside from variations in the one-off transition estimates as the programme commenced, it has also been important for the ongoing new service costs to be closely monitored and continually re-evaluated.
36. There were three other additional resource costs identified in September:
 - a) During the phase 1 roll out, a new and additional round was identified as required to facilitate waste collections around narrow access areas. A new 2025/26 service budget of £59,000 was approved, with an annual implication of £95,000. In 2026/27, a new vehicle will also be required to continue this service
 - b) An additional waste supervisor role was agreed for 2025/26 at a cost of £19,000 (with an annual implication of £45,000),

taking the new supervisory capacity from 4 posts to 5, reflecting the overall increase in frontline workforce numbers, which by March 2026 will stand at 52.7 additional FTE's (primarily employed for food waste collections). Supervisor vehicle costs will be incurred in 2026/27.

- c) Phase 1 resourcing was not sufficient to complete rounds, particularly food waste rounds where participation has been higher than expected. To ensure service resilience, recruitment of staff planned for phase 3 was brought forward, with a 25/26 implication of £67,000.

37. The three areas of ongoing costs described above have led to a budget increase of 1.7% on the original estimated service budget for 2025/26.

38. The following table shows:

- a) Part A – Budget increase for new waste service, as per Feb 2025 MTFP (noting the previously anticipated increased service cost to £2.505m (+£534k from 2025/26) in reflection of the part-year roll-out during 2025/26
- b) Part B – items described in section 13 and approved in September 2025
- c) Part C – Vehicle cost implications as described in section 13
- d) Part D – Cost of resource required to maintain service delivery, including behind the gate collections of food waste and improved service to bring sites, as described in sections 22 and 27. These costs include some vehicle hire costs in 2026/27 whilst awaiting delivery of new vehicles which need to be procured. From 2027/28, these additional costs will be removed to deliver a saving of £60,000.

WASTE - NEW SERVICE ROLL OUT (NSRO) AND NEW IMPLICATIONS		25/26 REVENUE	26/27 REVENUE	26/27 CAPITAL New Vehicles
		£'000	£'000	£'000
Part A - New Service MTFP				
New Service - Wheeled Bins		357	219	-
New Service - Food Waste		1,441	2,113	-
New Service - Bring Sites		173	173	-
MTFP - Feb'25		1,971	2,505	-
Part B - New items reported in 25/26 and 26/27 implications;	See Report section:			
Narrow Access Round (+1 crew)	13	59	95	-
New Supervisor		19	45	-
Behind Gates Collection trial		150	-	-
New Drivers appointed earlier than budgeted		67	-	-
Total New Items		295	140	-
TOTAL NSRO AND NEW APPROVED ITEMS (MTFP Oct'25)		2,266	2,645	-
Part C - New items reported in 25/26 - 26/27 Vehicle implications;	See Report section:			
Narrow Access Round crew - new vehicle	13	-	26	180
New Supervisor - new vehicle		-	16	33
New Items to be agreed		-	42	213
Part D - New items identified, to be agreed	See Report section:			
Food Waste combination of 'Behind the Gate' & Resource shortfall	22	-	684	496
Wheeled Bins Collections - resource shortfall	22	-	185	258
Bring Sites Continued service delivery	27	301	589	-
New Items to be agreed		301	1,458	754
TOTAL new items to be agreed (Part C + D)		301	1,500	967
TOTAL AFTER NEW ITEMS		2,567	4,145	967

39. The recommendation of this report ultimately seeks Council resolution of the additional budget required in accordance with the summarised position as above. This includes a supplementary budget request of £301,000 to 2025/26, an additional budget requirement to the 2026/27 year, to be reflected in the Council's Medium-Term Financial planning, of £1.500 million and an additional capital programme budget of £967,000 for 2026/27 to enable the procurement of the additional vehicles required to fulfil the 'behind the gate' food waste collection position.
40. Whilst work is ongoing on setting the Council's budget for 2026/27, it is anticipated that the annual waste service budget will represent in the region of 41% of the Council's 2026/27 general fund.

Legal implications

41. The Council has taken appropriate legal advice at various stages of the implementation of the Waste Rollout, and as issues have arisen. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Council has a legal responsibility to collect household waste, and to collect food waste from all households from 1 April 2026.
42. It has to be noted that this duty does not apply where it is "*situated at a place which in the opinion of the authority is so isolated or inaccessible that the cost of collecting it would be unreasonably high, and... as to which the authority is satisfied that adequate arrangements for its disposal have been or can reasonably be expected to be made by a person who controls the waste.*"
43. In accordance with the Best Value Duty under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999, the Council must make arrangements to secure best value in the way its waste services are exercised, having regard to a combination of cost, efficiency and effectiveness. The resources required to maintain this statutory duty at varying levels of effectiveness, considering local conditions, are included in this report.
44. The proposed approach regarding the collection of food waste is considered legally compliant and to ensure that all affected properties are effectively communicated to around the continuing approach, the Council will write to those households to reaffirm the position in line with the Section 46 notice requirements if Cabinet approves recommendation 1.

Risk assessment

45. The additional resources detailed in this report mitigate against the risk of a failure to deliver statutory collection services, and also reduce the risk of animal interaction with waste material in a proportionate way.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

46. The change to the waste service is leading to a significant increase in recycling rate and is reducing waste being sent to incineration. Any changes in policy should encourage participation in our services to maximise benefits.
47. Investment in resources for bring sites will reduce litter and overflowing bins at these sites and protect our local environment.

Equalities Implications, Crime and disorder implications, Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

48. The proposed changes to “behind the gate” do not raise any specific considerations beyond those previously covered in the report. The Councils original policy considered equalities implications and there is a flexibility built in through our assisted collection policy, and the ability to request differing capacity of bins.
49. The issues relating to “fly tipping” at bring sites are set out in the report, and enforcement and partnership working across the Forest to tackle this issue holistically remains the Councils core approach.

New Forest National Park / Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

50. The issue of livestock interactions with waste is one which is unique to the New Forest. NFDC recognises its duty to protect the character of the New Forest, including the tradition of free-roaming livestock.

Consultation undertaken

51. The Council has discussed the future of food waste collections, with Forest partner organisations including the Verderers, Commoners Defence Association, Forestry England, and the New Forest Association. These organisations are in support of the continuation of food waste collections from behind the gate.
52. The proposed changes have not been subject to wider public engagement.

Conclusion

53. The new waste service has been successful in increasing recycling rate and reducing street litter through better containment of waste.
54. The factors described in this report mean that there are resource shortfalls in some areas, which must be resourced to ensure service continuity, maintenance of the behind gate policy for food waste, and improvements in bring site management.
55. The report clearly sets out the steps to be taken, and the cost implications, both in terms of capital and revenue of the recommendations made.

Appendices:

Background Papers:

Review of new waste collection service phase 1 roll out and motion to suspend phases 2 and 3 – Item 28, Cabinet, September 2025

Waste and recycling service collection policy