

Teignbridge District Council
Overview and Scrutiny
3rd February 2026
Part i

Recycling Collection Service Improvements

Purpose of Report

To consider changes to the Council's recycling collection service to ensure compliance with the 'Simpler Recycling' reforms and waste permitting regulations.

Recommendation(s)

The Committee RECOMMENDS to Council that:

- (1) The collection of cartons, plastic bags and wrapping for recycling is introduced in line with Option 1 as detailed in this report.
- (2) The collection of batteries is removed from the household recycling collection service from April 2027.

Financial Implications

External Funding has been provided for this new service. This has been factored into the revenue budgets for 2026/27.

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Legal Implications

The Council must comply with the newly introduced legislation to meet its statutory obligations.

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Risk Assessment

Please see section 4.3 of the report

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Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

Please see section 4.4 of the report

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Executive Member

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Appendices/Background Papers

Appendix 1 – Bag and sack definitions

Appendix 2 – Trial outcomes

[Material Focus](#) report

[CIWM Batteries report](#)

[Flexible Plastic Fund FlexCollect](#)

EIA Attached Yes

[Environment Act 2021](#)

[The Separation of Waste \(England\) Regulations 2025](#)

[The Environmental Permitting \(England and Wales\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#)

1. Background

1.1 Simpler Recycling Reforms

In 2023, the UK Government introduced Simpler Recycling, aimed at standardising recycling services across England by improving consistency in the materials collected from households and businesses.

Legislation introduced through the Environment Act 2021 was brought into force in May 2024. As a result, waste collection authorities are now legally required to provide kerbside recycling collections for a defined set of core materials.

Teignbridge District Council's current recycling service already meets most of these statutory requirements, but to achieve full compliance the following service enhancements are required:

- Cartons to be added to the kerbside collection service by March 2026
- Plastic bags and wrapping to be added to the kerbside collection service by March 2027

1.2 Battery recycling collections

Battery fires in waste vehicles and sites create a significant safety risk to our collection crews, vehicles and at our Waste Transfer Station.

Recent research conducted for [Material Focus](#) found there were more than 1,200 fires suspected to have been caused by batteries at UK waste and recycling sites and vehicles in 2023 (Material Focus, 2024), an increase of 71% from 2022.

The National Fire Chief Council and the waste industry have called for urgent action to divert batteries from mixed waste streams to reduce this growing risk. A recent proposal from the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) sets out recommendations to governments and legislators for extended producer responsibility for batteries and a targeted deposit return scheme. [CIWM Batteries report](#)

In the UK, only 26% of Local Authorities offer kerbside battery collections.

In 2024/25, battery recycling accounted for 0.01% of the Council's recycling rate, capturing less than 1 tonne per year, compared to over 11,000 tonnes of other dry recycling materials collected. It is often challenging for collection crews to spot batteries when presented with other recyclables, meaning they enter the wrong compartments on collection vehicles and travel through the recycling sorting equipment, increasing the likelihood of fires on the vehicles at the waste transfer station.

Despite low volumes, the associated risks are high. In recent years, there have been 8 small fires at the Waste Transfer Station and on collection vehicles, with 3 requiring interventions from the fire service. While these incidents were contained, the potential consequences could have been devastating, created risk to life and significant disruption to waste collection services.

Under the Fire Prevention Plan required for the new Waste Transfer Station permit, storage of hazardous items, including batteries, will be prohibited. Accepting batteries would require the introduction of additional measures and processes that are not currently incorporated into site development plans.

2. Recycling service change options

Trials have taken place to test how best to meet the new Simpler Recycling requirements and establish the most efficient way to add cartons, plastic bags and wrapping to our household recycling service.

A 6-month carton collection trial to 5000 properties began in March 2025. The focus of the trial was to identify the potential volumes of cartons in the waste stream and

inform decisions around collection and handling and sorting at the waste transfer station.

In September 2025 a 10-week trial to 500 properties to collect both cartons and plastic bags and wrapping provided feedback on the following

- the use of indoor collection bags to separate plastic bags and wrapping from other waste materials
- whether the new materials could be added to the existing recycling service without additional containers,
- whether separating card and glass could improve collection efficiency.

This was designed using recommendations from the Government and industry led [Flexible Plastic Fund FlexCollect](#) project. This was a large-scale trial of plastic bags and wrapping collections from households between 2022 and 2025 delivered by a wide range of local authorities.

One key finding was that providing collection bags for use indoors to contain the plastic bags and wrapping before presenting at the kerbside facilitates efficient collection, separation and consolidation, preventing loose plastics from contaminating other waste streams in the collection vehicle and reduces littering.

Based on this finding all participating households in our trial were provided with a roll of indoor collection bags for gathering their plastic bags and wrapping and were advised to securely tie these prior to presenting for collection.

Two kerbside collection container options were considered.

Option 1

New materials (plastic bags and wrapping, and cartons) were added to the regular recycling service using existing recycling boxes.

Residents were instructed to place cartons and the indoor collection bag containing plastic bags and wrapping in their existing black recycling box.

Option 2

A new kerbside recycling sack was introduced for plastics, metals, cartons and the indoor collection bag containing plastic bags and wrapping. This allowed the recycling box freed up to be used to separate out card from glass.

See Appendix 1

3. Trial outcomes

See Appendix 2

Key findings include

- Providing indoor collection bags to contain plastic bags and wrapping before presenting at the kerbside facilitates efficient collection, separation and consolidation.
- Survey responses show that 70% of householders found that their current recycling boxes were adequate for the materials collected.
- Kerbside collections were completed more quickly at households using their existing recycling boxes (Option 1) compared to those provided with a kerbside recycling sack and asked to present card and glass in separate containers (Option 2).

4. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact

4.1 Financial

The estimated Year 1 (26/27) costs for each option are shown below.

Roll out costs Yr 1 (26/27)			
Option 1		Option 2	
To procure indoor collection bags	£48,048.00	To procure indoor collection bags	£48,048.00
To deliver indoor collection bags	£42,186.80	To procure kerbside recycling sack	£154,200.00
Communications	£89,100.00	To deliver indoor collection bags and kerbside recycling sack	£60,225.20
Additional recycling boxes	£6,230.40	Communications	£89,100.00
Total	£185,565.20	Total	£351,573.20

The estimated Year 2 (27/28) ongoing costs of each option are shown below

Ongoing costs Yr 2 (27/28)			
Option 1		Option 2	
Indoor collection bag replenishment	£57,657.60	Indoor collection bag replenishment	£57,657.60
Additional recycling boxes	£6,230.40	Kerbside recycling sack replacement	£11,585.56
Total	£63,888.00	Total	£69,243.16

4.2 Legal/Governance

Legislation introduced through the Environment Act 2021 relating to the 'Simpler Recycling' reforms was brought into force in May 2024.

Local authorities are legally required to implement the necessary service changes within the specified timeframes to meet statutory obligations. Failure to do so could result in regulatory action against the authority.

There is no statutory obligation for local authorities to collect batteries under the Simpler Recycling reforms or any other legislation. Continuing to collect and store batteries at the Waste Transfer Station would require additional compliance measures to meet permit conditions.

4.3 Risks

4.3.1 Timeframes

To meet the statutory timeframes set out in the Simpler Recycling legislation, the timely procurement of goods and services is essential. There are identifiable risks associated with delays in acquiring and distributing collection bags, as well as in delivering associated communications to residents.

4.3.2 Reputational

Failure to comply with Simpler Recycling Reforms could result in reputational damage to the Council.

4.3.3 Operational

Whilst interim infrastructure will be in place at the Waste Transfer station to handle carton collections from March 2026, introducing the collection of plastic bags and wrapping will be dependent on completion of the works at the Waste Transfer Station.

4.3.4 Communication

An effective communication plan is essential to deliver the roll out of the new recycling service successfully. Recommendations from the FlexCollect report will inform our communication strategy, to include the timely delivery of an introduction flyer, instruction leaflet, dedicated webpage and information sharing with all key stakeholders.

4.4 Environmental/Climate Change Impact

Analysis using WRAP's [Carbon Waste and Resources Metric](#) (Table 14) indicates that recycling plastic film delivers substantial climate benefits by significantly reducing carbon emissions compared to treatment at energy-from-waste facilities.

Carton recycling is less effective, but consumer behaviour—such as opting for cartons over glass or plastic bottles—can contribute to improved overall sustainability due to cartons being a more energy-efficient packaging material.

Continuing to collect and store batteries increases the risk from fires on our collection vehicles and at the waste transfer station. The environmental damage from battery fires at waste sites is extensive, with harmful greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere, spikes in local air pollution and water pollution caused by run-off from extinguishing the fires. A report commissioned by Material Focus and

research conducted by Imperial College London, explores the growing issue of batteries causing fires in the waste system and how they affect [air quality](#).

5. Alternative Options

The Simpler Recycling reforms are now set in legislation so not collecting the specified set of core materials is not an option.

Adding the new materials into our existing recycling service, without providing households with indoor collection bags would go against the recommendations made in the FlexCollect final report. A trial of self-supplied bags was undertaken in South Gloucestershire, evidencing lower participation rates and bringing challenges of identification for sorting and untied bags causing contamination and litter.

Adopting Option 2 would cost £166,008.00 more than Option 1, with trials confirming that extra container capacity is unnecessary and offers no operational benefit.

Continuing the kerbside collection of batteries poses a significant and ongoing safety risk to collection crews, vehicles, and the Waste Transfer Station.

6. Conclusion

Following the outcomes of the recycling trials, and the recommendations from the [FlexCollect](#) final report, Option 1 is recommended as the preferred approach for meeting the statutory requirements of Simpler Recycling.

This option enables residents to place newly added materials, specifically cartons and plastic bags and wrapping (contained within 'indoor collection bags'), into their existing recycling boxes. This avoids the need for the provision of additional containers. Those requiring extra capacity will retain the option to request an additional recycling box through the Council's established ordering process.

The use of indoor collection bags for plastic bags and wrapping recommended in the FlexCollect report was found to be effective in maintaining material separation during collection and processing and reducing contamination and littering. It is therefore recommended that indoor collection bags, accompanied by supporting communications, be distributed to all households as part of the initial rollout. Replacement indoor collection bags will be available upon request via the Council's online container ordering form.

Prompt adoption of the recommendations outlined in this report will enable the Council to begin kerbside collection of cartons by March 2026, and to roll out indoor collection bags for plastic bags and wrapping by March 2027, in line with Simpler Recycling requirements.

With no legal requirement or statutory obligation to collect batteries from households, and the significant risks to safety and critical infrastructure, it is recommended that the collection of batteries is removed from the household recycling collection service

from April 2027.

Aligning with national best practice, discontinuing the kerbside collection of batteries will significantly reduce the growing risk of fires affecting collection crews, vehicles, and the Waste Transfer Station, as well as prevent environmental harm caused by battery-related incidents.

Residents will instead be signposted to their nearest recycling centre or websites such as [Recycle Your Electricals](#) and [Recycle Now](#) to find their nearest recycling facility. All UK distributors and retailers selling more than 32 kg of batteries annually must provide a take-back service, which is also offered by some online retailers.