



Darlington Association on Disability

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Established since 1986

This report from Darlington Association on Disability is to highlight some of the negative impacts for disabled people owing to the proposed introduction of the Alternate Weekly Collections & Recycling scheme. It also offers solutions to some of the problems.

Obstructions on the pavement

When DBC carried out its equality impact assessment for the introduction of the refuse wheelie bins the council said obstructions on the pavement wouldn't happen but it is happening. In most streets on collection day there is a mixture of wheelie bins within the property and others on the pavement. People were told not to put the wheelie bins on the pavements but they do and the problem is compounded by the men who empty them being told to put the bin back where they got it, so they return the bin back to the same spot on the pavement not onto the property and that's where it remains for the rest of the day. The enforcement promised to ensure that the refuse wheelie bin would not be allowed on the pavement, has been very limited and it was this promise of enforcement that was the foremost part of mitigation coming out of the equality impact assessment.

This problem will get even worse with the introduction of a recycling wheelie bin and boxes. Though the recycling wheelie bin and the refuse wheelie bin won't be put out together, the recycling is always collected from the pavement not the property, so the confusion will come from people having to put one bin for collection from their property and the following week put it out on the pavement for collection.

Pavements with pavement crossings on them leading to driveways only have a very short section, usually near the building line that is accessible for a wheelchair user and it is on this short section that most people put their wheelie bins, making the full pavement inaccessible for wheelchair users. The problem of walking along the pavement for people with a visual impairment has increased since the introduction of the wheelie bins because they have not been confined to people's property as promised. After collection many bins left on the pavement blow over and the introduction of recycling wheelie bins and boxes will only make it worse.

Solution:

The only way that will encourage people to stop putting wheelie bins on the pavement is if DBC refuse to collect them. That way there will be no need for a few enforcement officers trying to control thousands of households. Though this might be unpopular with some people at first, the message would get out quicker than any advertising.

Assisted collections

If recycling wheelie bins are introduced then the same arrangements will be needed regarding assisted collections, if people can't put a refuse wheelie bin out then they can't put a recycling one out either. The same goes for a box full of glass. There is the misunderstanding that bins on wide pavements aren't a problem. It must also be realised that any recycling boxes not returned back to the exact spot on someone's property that they were collected from can become a trip hazard for someone who can't see where they have been placed.

Assisted collection cannot solve the problem of unavailable storage space. Owing to the shortage of space on their property quite a few people were persuaded to share a refuse wheelie bin with a neighbour. Not only will they have limited capacity with only one refuse wheelie bin for a fortnightly collection, they will not have any space on the property for recycling wheelie bins and boxes. The space needed to manoeuvre a wheelchair is always underestimated and these wheelie bins take up a lot of that valuable space making it impossible at some homes to accommodate the bins and boxes. This is the same for people using walkers, crutches etc.

Solution:

Lessons need to be learnt from the introduction of the refuse wheelie bins. More time is needed to work with households and housing associations. If space is not available then it is no good forcing people to cram bins and boxes into an area that makes day to day life impossible. Many housing associations need time to find funds and time to make major alterations to some areas for their properties to accommodate more wheelie bins and boxes. When housing associations and other landlords own a lot of property the work can only be carried out over a long period of time.

There will be properties in areas or in a complex that now have refuse wheelie bin but it will be impossible for them to accommodate any of the three options. In these cases communal recycling bins should be an option and time and support given to find a place to put them so they don't become a public dumping area with broken bottles etc.

Can recycle

There will be some disabled people who with the best will in the world will not be able to recycle. This could be through not being able to see what can be recycled or not being able to physically separate items owing to very limited dexterity. There are also people who may not have the mental capacity to understand what can be recycled etc.

Solution:

If people through no fault of their own cannot recycle, they might accumulate too much refuse for a fortnightly collection and should be allowed to have a black bag collected alongside their wheelie bins.

Gordon Pybus

Chair, Darlington Association on Disability

