

# Residual Waste with additional recycling

## The Issue

Waste collection authorities (WCAs) have a legal duty under the [Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) to provide household waste collections. Government guidance sets out key considerations for service delivery to ensure reasonable standards are maintained: [Ensuring good waste collection services for households - GOV.UK](#).

When it comes to household residual (non-recyclable) waste, neither the Act nor any associated regulations or guidance specify:

- How often collections need to take place
- What container type or volume should be provided

The government guidance states that WCAs should continue to decide collection frequency and methodology for residual waste in a way that meets local needs and provides value for money for the taxpayer. Service requirements will vary based on local circumstances and local authorities should therefore read the following good practice guidance in conjunction with consideration of their local needs.

There are strong financial and environmental reasons to keep residual waste to a minimum, in line with the Waste Hierarchy. This has led some WCAs to reduce residual waste capacity – either by volume or frequency – often while increasing recycling capacity at the same time. Councils have found this can drive up recycling figures and save money on collection and disposal. While cost savings may be a focus, simply reducing the residual service should not be considered as an appropriate option. Additional recycling services that incentivise good practices to encourage good quality materials should be provided when considering any reduction to residual waste capacity.

Overall, more than 80%<sup>1</sup> of the waste generated by households is already recyclable or suitable for re-use via local authority kerbside collections or at Household Waste and Recycling Centres. This rate is increasing over time with UK government encouraging producers to increase the recyclability of products they create through Extended Producer Responsibility. Therefore, WCAs are increasingly re-evaluating the costs of running regular residual collections alongside high frequency recycling and food collections, and have sought efficiencies in the overall delivery of waste and recycling services to households. Residual waste containment capacity provided to residents for waste collection has been reducing over time across the UK and is strongly associated with high recycling rates.

Under Simpler Recycling<sup>2</sup>, all local authorities in England will be required to provide households with weekly collections of food waste (unless Transitional Arrangements<sup>3</sup> apply) and to collect a wider range of dry recyclables from 31 March 2026. As a result, authorities may consider that households will not require as much capacity for residual waste as might have been needed previously.

There are key challenges and opportunities ahead relating to the quantities of residual waste produced.

The [Environmental Targets \(Residual Waste\) \(England\) Regulations 2023](#) sets a statutory target to halve the amount of residual waste generated by 2042 from 2019 levels.

The UK Emissions Trading Scheme is expected to significantly increase the costs of disposing of household waste from 2028.

At the same time, the [Producer Responsibility Obligations \(Packaging and Packaging Waste\) Regulations 2024](#) aims to encourage packaging producers to stop using and design out non-recyclable packaging. This should cut the amount of residual waste created over time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished WRAP review of [Compositional analysis of Local Authority collected and non-Local Authority collected non-household municipal waste, 2020](#). Assumed that textiles can be re-used and the following materials recycled: paper, card, plastic film, dense plastic, glass, food waste, garden waste, ferrous and non-ferrous metals and WEEE.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/simpler-recycling-in-england-policy-update/simpler-recycling-in-england-policy-update>

<sup>3</sup> [The Environment Act 2021 \(Commencement No. 9 and Transitional Provisions\) Regulations 2024](#) list the local authorities with an exemption to delay to provide weekly food waste collections, which are required by the Environment Act 2021.

Additionally, the introduction of a [Deposit Return Scheme](#) in 2027 will also divert single use drinks containers from residual waste.

One factor that influences consideration of residual waste service provision is the impact of any missed collections. With millions of households being served waste collections every day, it is inevitable there will be some instances of missed collection. Good practice collections, whether outsourced or provided *in house*, will have very low rates of missed bins.

Typically missed collections occur either through crews not seeing the presented waste, or households not presenting in the format that the council advises. Councils have developed policies that set out clear criteria for how containers must be presented and how they will resolve issues if a container has genuinely been missed. Especially as collection schemes expand in the range of materials over time, it is important that missed collections are minimised. This is to maintain high satisfaction and avoid waste becoming a disamenity.

Prior to their introduction, restricting residual waste collections may initially be perceived as a reduction in service. However, surveys show very high levels of satisfaction where residual capacity is reduced. Critically, this is with the proviso of additional recycling services and high frequency collections of waste that may be odorous. Clear communications to set expectations and then reliable service delivery are essential to deliver high quality holistic waste and recycling services to households.

## **Good Practice**

### ***Volume control***

For standard<sup>4</sup> households with kerbside access, providing no more than the weekly equivalent of 120 litres<sup>5</sup> for non-recyclable waste is advisable, but only where WCAs are satisfied that recycling services and provision are sufficiently comprehensive. More good practice guidance can be found in documents on [food waste collection](#) and [dry recycling](#) and you should review services holistically to reflect local need.

How WCAs manage this issue is a local decision. It might involve setting a maximum number of black sacks per week, where bins are not provided. WCAs considering reducing residual waste capacity should ensure that recycling services meet localised need. To ensure sufficient, comprehensive recycling capacity, it is likely that recycling containment capacity will need to be increased, through the use of larger bins or additional sacks or boxes.

### ***Larger households***

Arrangements for larger households with six or more residents, or other circumstances where additional capacity for residual waste may be required, is addressed in the Good Practice document - [Additional Capacity for Residual Waste](#).

### ***Collections frequency and organic waste***

The overall service should focus on high frequency organics collections and ensuring that sufficient recycling and residual waste containment is provided for the types and volumes of waste households in the area produce.

Residual collections should be complemented with high frequency collections of organic or potentially smelly waste. In England all councils will be required to provide households with at least weekly food waste recycling collections, as per amended Section 45A of the Environmental Protection Act. If residual collections occur less often than every fortnight, residents should be offered frequent Absorbent Hygiene Product collections (Please see Good Practice document - [Absorbent Hygiene Products](#) for further information) to manage the volume and odour of this type of waste.

---

<sup>4</sup> Standard household – where the number of permanent residents is 6 or fewer, or where the number of children in nappies is no more than 1, or where a resident has no medical condition that generates extra waste, or the property is not remotely located so as to have irregular waste collections

<sup>5</sup> 120 litres is the effective weekly containment provided where 240 litre wheeled bins are collected fortnightly. Many local authorities provide smaller bins when replacing damaged or lost bins or issuing bins to new-build properties.

### ***Missed collections***

The key principles for managing missed collections are to set out clearly:

- requirements for households to present residual waste, to ensure that missed collections are avoided in the first instance;
- requirements for crews to signal to households why their container was not collected;
- requests to households to report a missed collection promptly if they wish crews to return to collect the waste;
- the council's expected response time to resolve missed collections.

Specific nationwide guidance on circumstances around missed collections is not possible given the variety of types of residual waste collection from different housing types, the containment used and range of council settings. However, common elements which comprise good practice include the following points:

- the council should set out the details for where the waste is to be presented;
- the use of the council's provided container;
- what materials can be accepted; and
- the collection day and frequency.

If the presented residual waste cannot be collected the council should leave a standardised note, sticker or tag explaining the reasons why and what action the household must now take.

If no information has been left by the crew for the householder, it should be clear to the householder via communication from the council (usually its website) what the time in the same working day by which a missed collection should be reported. If the report is received within the allotted time, then the missed collection should be collected within 24 hours.

For persistent missed collections the council will send an officer to the address to investigate the issue. Where the council is at fault, senior staff should follow its own disciplinary process with its internal teams or enter contractual dispute with its collection contractor.

If the missed collection is not notified within the timescale, the council may require residents to wait until the next collection or the resident may prefer to take their waste to the nearest Household Waste and Recycling Centre.

Where persistent missed collections are proven to be the fault of the council, residents can lay a complaint with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, who can investigate and potentially recommend ordering remedies to put things right where the council has acted improperly or failed to provide a required service.

### ***Communication is key...***

Households should be given clear and visually appealing communications on how their waste and recyclables are to be collected and processed via:

- Regularly distributed printed leaflets
- Websites
- Social media
- Online newsletters

This can help households use services more efficiently, understand the extra recycling capacity provided and increase the understanding and acceptance of any changes required.

If a council's website cannot use images, then a separate website dedicated to the topic should be considered.

### ***...And should cover***

**What** materials are collected

**When** collections are made (and steps to be taken in case of missed collections)

**Where** to put different materials to ensure good quality recycling

When rolling- out a service involving changes to residual waste services, communications should focus on the positive benefits of:

- the improved and additional recycling provision
- value for money for Council Taxpayers
- environmental benefits, globally and locally
- recognition of some households' circumstances where more residual capacity can be provided
- opportunities of managing our resources, as the design of our waste streams changes over time.

## **Key Recommendations**

Public satisfaction and safety are vital requirements of waste and recycling services. Well-designed, reliable services with as few missed collections as possible help maintain high satisfaction levels.

Residual waste collection services should focus on how they are delivered as part of a high-quality holistic waste and recycling service. The design of the overall service should prioritise high frequency organics collections and that sufficient recycling and residual waste containment is provided for the types and volumes of waste households in the area produce.

Guidance on this subject is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-good-waste-collection-services-for-households>

The provision of additional residual capacity, where appropriate for example for larger households and those with medical needs is advised.

Councils should clearly communicate where residents should present their containers for collection and the process for reporting and dealing with any missed collections. For lower frequency collections it is essential that crews return to collect missed collections and that investigations are undertaken where there are repeat problems. Clear advice and support should be provided when households have problems with the service provided.