

Policy Committee

20 January 2025



Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

Title	Rescheduling & Optimisation of Domestic Waste Collections
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Marcus Hermon – Recycling & Waste Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Cllr Rowland, Lead Councillor Environmental Services and Community Safety
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	1. That Policy Committee note the content of the report and the proposed changes to Recycling & Waste collection schedules required to deliver the improved operational efficiencies needed to meet current and future statutory obligations in respect of Simpler Recycling legislation.

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1. Following a detailed review of existing domestic recycling & waste collection schedules it is proposed to introduce new optimised waste collection schedules from 9th June 2025.
- 1.2. The optimised rounds ensure that resources are deployed in the most efficient fashion, addressing the fact that 15% of current scheduling has been identified as causing predictable completion issues, and 30% is vulnerable to completion issues in the event of a service challenge being experienced of up to 45mins.
- 1.3. Revised schedules will align recycling, residual and food collections as far as is practicable to the same weekday. Green waste collections will generally be scheduled for an alternate day of the week, to reduce the numbers of bins presented for collection on a single day in a geographic area, and to reduce the number of refuse collection vehicles operating in an area to avoid congestion/traffic related issues.
- 1.4. The rescheduling of rounds will additionally provide the service with a foundation on which it can plan for and meet the legislative obligations of emerging Simpler Recycling, which currently requires collection of glass and food from all domestic properties by 1st April 2026.
- 1.5. This paper provides an overview of the detailed process of review, its purpose, findings, and recommendations for member information.

2. Background

- 2.1. The service identified the need for a review of waste collection rounds for a number of reasons including property growth, changes to legislation and to ensure our rounds are at optimal efficiency.
- 2.2. The process of review is to be delivered in two phases: **Phase 1 – performance benchmarking (Complete)**: To establish a national benchmark for performance and

apply this to Reading’s waste collection rounds (as currently scheduled) to see if they are deliverable within the resources allocated to them in respect of both time & staff.

- 2.3. Rounds were RAG rated in respect of their deliverability when established national performance benchmark standards were applied. This exercise identified the following:

Baseline				
Collection	Collection rounds in fortnight	Red	Amber	Green
Residual	45	7	16	22
Recycling	45	9	12	24
Green	20	5	5	10
Food	40	4	18	18
Bulk	20	0	0	20
Totals	170	25	51	94
	Percentage	14.71%	30.00%	55.29%

2.3.1. **Red – 14.71%** of existing waste collection rounds were established as undeliverable within the working day with the resources allocated to them. With predicted over-runs, of up to 1hr & 31mins, not allowing for any service-related challenges.

2.3.2. **Amber - 30%** of the existing collection schedules were identified as having insufficient time capacity to deliver the service in the event of any in-day service challenge, such as a vehicle defect.

2.3.3. **Green – 55.29%** of existing collection schedules were considered adequate to be able to be completed if a challenge of no-longer than 45 mins is experienced.

- 2.4. The benchmarking outputs evidenced the urgent need for a full optimisation review of waste collection rounds as phase 2 of the project and made clear that the Local Agreement, and the task and finish approach it permitted to work, encouraged the workforce to work at a pace that disguised inadequacies and inequality in the scheduling of rounds.

- 2.5. 44.71% of collections were evidenced as vulnerable to non-completion in the event that the collection crew experience any defect with their vehicle or significant traffic delay in the course of their days work. This vulnerability has recently been exposed as a result of increased vehicle defects amongst the Council’s aged, spare, refuse collection fleet, and an increased incident of road works and road closures, causing the service to deploy overtime as a means of recovering collections.

- 2.6. The Recycling and Waste Service currently provide a start and end of day email to the Customer Contact Centre Team and interested senior stakeholders on the status of waste collections with information published daily on the Council’s website regarding rescheduled collections for public awareness. The number of calls received by the call centre regarding waste services was 43% lower over the period July – September 2024, than the same period in 2023, illustrating that improved communications are working.

- 2.7. **Phase 2 – Rescheduling and optimisation of all waste collection rounds to improve efficiency and ensure operational deliverability within existing resources.** The rescheduling of routes has now completed in draft format, with maps reviewed by the management team to address obvious anomalies. These maps/routes have been critically reviewed with the Refuse Driver teams to ensure buy-in and identify any issues, applying their local knowledge.

- 2.8. These revised rounds will be geographically set with all crews working in a defined and adjacent area. This change will result in 80% of households seeing a change of collection day.
- 2.9. An assessment of the revised rounds and predicted operating times /schedules, shows the following improvement when the same RAG rating used in phase 1 is applied:

Optimised				
Collection	Collection rounds in fortnight	Red	Amber	Green
Residual	45	0	15	30
Recycling	45	1	21	23
Green	20	0	6	14
Food	50	0	0	50
Bulk	20	0	0	20
Totals	180	1	42	137
	Percentage	0.56%	23.33%	76.11%

- 2.10. The below table shows the improvement forecast by the rescheduling of collection rounds:

Improvement/Movement				
Collection	Collection rounds in fortnight	Red	Amber	Green
Residual	45	-7	-1	8
Recycling	45	-8	9	-1
Green	20	-5	1	4
Food	50	-4	-18	32
Bulk	20	0	0	0
Totals	180	-24	-9	43

- 2.10.1. **Red** - When rescheduling is applied, only (0.56%) 1 of the 180 fortnightly scheduled collection rounds is forecast to have a time pressure, this is minor in nature and less than 10mins.
- 2.10.2. **Amber** – 23.33% of rounds remain vulnerable in the event that a service delay is experienced.
- 2.10.3. **Green** – 76.11% of rounds, can be expected to complete, with capacity to deal with in day challenges experienced. Refer to section 2.12 below.
- 2.11. **Mitigation of Red & Amber vulnerability:** Current operating schedules do not permit full team working, with 50% of crews collecting general waste, while 50% collect recycling week 1 and then the reverse in week 2. Currently those crews collecting recycling are unable to help general waste crews, as it would result in contamination of collected recycling and those collecting general waste are unable to assist recycling crews as it would result in lost recyclable material. The new round scheduling models all nine collection rounds collecting the same waste type (General or Recycling) each week of the fortnightly cycle. This change will permit greater capacity for crews to assist each other in

the event of service challenge and will address the 1 red and 36 amber rounds attributed to recycling and residual collections, by enabling teams to address in-day service challenges by assisting each other.

- 2.12. Our re3 waste management contractor FCC have agreed to the Council's proposed change to recycling & general waste collections, advising that they have capacity to receive, process and transfer the waste if the Council moves its existing split collections to the illustrated future pattern:

	Week 1					Week 2				
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Friday	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Friday
Existing 50%	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Residual	Residual	Residual	Residual	Residual
Existing 50%	Residual	Residual	Residual	Residual	Residual	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling
Future All	Residual	Residual	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Recycling	Residual	Residual	Residual

- 2.13. Whilst the rescheduling of Recycling & General waste collection rounds to one waste type each weekday permits significantly enhanced operational efficiency and teamworking, it does require the collection week of 40% of the boroughs residents to change, with these residents experiencing their first new collection to be delayed by a week (3 weeks, rather than 2 weeks). Properties that will experience this delay will be advised in advance, with the collection crews instructed to collect any excess waste that is presented at these properties as a result. This change, combined with new routes, is felt to present the greatest improvement in service provision, albeit with a greater degree of implementation challenge. For completeness, the Council could opt to continue with split collections as is currently the case, avoiding the initial delay in collections. Whilst this option avoids a brief period of implementation challenge, it dramatically reduces the benefits of rescheduling and will fail to provide the operational resilience required to address red and amber RAG rated collection round challenges.

- 2.14. Green waste collections will be scheduled in a way that permits the two crews to assist each other in the event that a service-related challenge is experienced, with amber rounds scheduled to not conflict with each other.

- 2.15. Food Waste Collections are forecast to improve significantly as a result of rescheduling and route optimisation, supported by the introduction of an additional collection round. The additional round has been created to ensure the resilience of the service and ability to meet the increased demands presented by continued roll out of the service to all properties within the borough, as required by legislation. The Service has submitted a growth bid to secure the additional resource required to address food waste pressures in a sustainable manner, with the cost met by Central Government under Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and New Burdens funding.

- 2.16. Whilst a programme of targeted resident communication is planned, it is predicted that there will be a period of adjustment from 3rd March 2025 that both residents and waste collection staff will experience, presenting the following challenges:

2.16.1. Increased incident of missed bins as waste collection crews adapt to and learn their new collection routes.

2.16.2. Residents failing to present the correct bin/s on the correct day/time.

- 2.17. These above issues are expected to be relatively short lived, for a period of approximately two to three collection cycles – four to six weeks, with waste service resources scheduled to be able to resolve identified issues in a timely fashion.

- 2.18. The Customer Contact Centre will be fully briefed to answer resident enquiries, with prominent website, email and social media communications scheduled throughout to

ensure all parties remain updated on progress and means of contact in the event of an issue being experienced.

- 2.19. **Next steps:** Following validation of the new rounds, the service will be able to assess the detail and scale of change required to resident collections by the revised rounds. This will inform a detailed resident communication plan (Draft attached as appendix 2).
- 2.20. It is understood that 80% of households within the borough will experience a change to their current collection schedules. This change is critical to address existing systemic issues and to realise the required resilience to meet the challenge of future legislative change and population/property growth.
- 2.21. Targeted written communication to each household in Reading is planned, providing each a revised collection calendar, accompanied with prominent website and social media posts. The forecast cost of targeted communications is £40k. An indicative timeline is set out below:

Task/Activity	Date/Week commencing
Comms Team briefed	Complete
Receipt of draft optimised routes	Complete
Review with refuse staff	Complete
Receipt of finalised schedules & implications	16/12/2024
Policy briefing	20/01/2025
Councillor Briefing	04/02/2025
Upgrade of Whitespace test system	08/01/2025
Upgrade of Whitespace live system	27/02/2025
Go-live of ARCUS CFC system (for waste)	27/02/2025
Data Load into test system (Whitespace)	03/04/2025
Data Load into live system (Whitespace)	24/04/2025
Resident Comms regarding changes	12/05/2025
Implementation of new rounds	*09/06/2025

*The introduction of the new rounds is scheduled for the 9th of June, to avoid confusion with rescheduled collections resulting from Easter and May Bank Holidays.

- 2.22. In order to complete collections to schedule the Recycling and Waste Collection Service is reliant upon the availability of both 1) staff and 2) fleet (vehicle) resources, alongside an ability to 3) gain access. In the event that the service experiences a loss of any of the above 3 requirements there is capacity for collection schedules to be impacted, requiring both in-day and next day rescheduling. The revised scheduling provides greater capacity to deal with in-day challenges but will not eradicate delays entirely.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. Optimised collection schedules will geographically group recycling, residual and food collections to the following areas and working days – refer to appendix 1.
- 3.1.1. **North Reading – Monday** – alternate weeks for Recycling & Residual, weekly for food.
 - 3.1.2. **Lower North & East Reading – Tuesday** - alternate weeks for Recycling & Residual, weekly for food.

- 3.1.3. **West Reading – Wednesday** - alternate weeks for Recycling & Residual, weekly for food.
 - 3.1.4. **Central Reading – Thursday** - alternate weeks for Recycling & Residual, weekly for food.
 - 3.1.5. **South Reading – Friday** - alternate weeks for Recycling & Residual, weekly for food.
- 3.2. Fortnightly Green Waste collections will be scheduled for collection days that avoid conflict with Residual, Recycling & Food Collections, as is currently the case, ensuring minimal traffic disruption and excess numbers of bins being presented on the same day in any given area.
- 3.3. Residents will be written to with a copy of their revised collection calendar during the week commencing 12th May 2025, ensuring advance awareness of specific changes applicable to each household. This communication will be supplemented by resident email, web site alerts and scripts provided to staff within the Customer Fulfilment Centre (CFC).

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 The proposal ensures that the Council is able to meet its statutory obligations in respect of waste and recycling legislation, whilst making a tangible contribution to the corporate priority of providing a healthy environment for the town's residents, business owners, visitors and other stakeholders by making Reading a cleaner, greener & safer place.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 Route optimisation work will reduce travel times between collection points, by reducing the distance covered. This action will further minimise the carbon footprint of collection operations, in addition to those environmental benefits achieved as a result of the electrification of the core refuse collection vehicle fleet.
- 5.2 Rescheduling of collections ensures that the Council is equipped to meet the increased responsibilities placed upon it by emerging Simpler Recycling legislation, ensuring a greater proportion of the town's recyclable waste is collected in a manner that permits its environmentally considerate treatment.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1 As section 3.3, residents will be written to with a copy of their revised collection calendar week commencing 12th May 2025, ensuring advance awareness of specific changes applicable to each household. This communication will be supplemented by resident email, web site alerts and scripts provided to staff within the Customer Fulfilment Centre (CFC).

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 There are no equality implications presented by this proposal. All adapted/assisted services to meet the needs of those most in need will be retained.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 The above changes provide the foundation for the Recycling & Waste Service to meet the Government's new default legislative requirements for most households and workplaces, which is currently stipulated as follows:

Default provision of 4 waste receptacles:

- residual (non-recyclable) waste
- food waste (mixed with garden waste if appropriate)
- paper and card
- all other dry recyclable materials (plastic, metal, and glass)

These may be various container types, including bags, bins, or stackable boxes.

This is the government's maximum default requirement and is not expected to increase in the future. However, councils and other waste collectors will still have the flexibility to make the best choices to suit local need. This is a sensible, pragmatic approach to the collection of materials for every household and business in England.

The aim is to make recycling easier: residents will be able to recycle the same materials across England whether at home, work, or school, and will no longer need to check what is accepted for recycling in their local area. A universal standard will ensure that everything that can be collected for household recycling is collected in every region.

Simpler Recycling will also end the 'postcode lottery' of bin collections in England whereby councils collect different materials for recycling, causing confusion for households. We will maintain flexibility for local authorities to deliver these changes in the most appropriate way for their area. We have published guidance for local authorities and other waste collectors to support their decision-making regarding the co-collection of paper and card with other dry recyclable materials.

Through Simpler Recycling, all householders will receive a comprehensive and consistent set of waste and recycling services. This will enable householders to recycle as much waste as possible and to frequently dispose of bad-smelling food waste, which will be collected from all households at least weekly.

We recognise that as recycling services are expanded and improved, local authorities may want to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing best value for money in line with local need. The government's priority is ensuring that households' needs are met, and we expect local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard, as they do now. Defra has published guidance on household waste collections to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained.

The government will progress the delivery of this policy, providing clarity to enable investment in UK recycling and a substantial contribution to emissions savings for the waste sector. This policy statement sets out the government's position on several exemptions, which will be implemented by an affirmative statutory instrument (SI) in December 2024. The timing of this statement ahead of that SI is to provide more time for businesses and local authorities to prepare.

It should be noted that councils can opt to co-collect all recyclables or choose a different separation, but this would be subject to justification under guidelines provided by Government. Historically this has considered whether the primary requirement is not Technically, Environmentally, or Economically Practicable (TEEP) within the local context and circumstances and requires formal review and assessment.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Rescheduling has identified the need for an additional food waste collection round to meet the requirements of simpler recycling, providing a weekly food waste collection to all domestic properties within the Borough. The service is already equipped with adequate vehicles/fleet to service this need but will require revenue budget growth of £155k to fund the required staff resources. This growth in revenue will be met by the Councils New Growth and Extended Producer Responsibility settlement and will not present a budget pressure.

10 Timetable for Implementation

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Comms Team briefed	Complete
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11 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Collection round grouping maps

Appendix 2 – Resident Communication Plan (Draft – To Be Finalised)