

**Recycling and Alternate Weekly Collections****Introduction**

Alternate weekly collections of residual waste and dry / organics were first introduced in the mid-1990s when councils first started kerbside collections of recyclables to supplement the old traditional bottle banks. It also provided a more convenient service to residents, with the aim of increasing recycling rates. Since then, the number of authorities moving to alternate weekly collection of residual waste has grown significantly as councils see the benefits with increased recycling, reduced residual waste, lower carbon footprint and cost savings for both collection and disposal.

Investment in infrastructure at the Materials Recycling Facility has enabled increases in the amount of household packaging that can now be recycled. This has resulted in substantially more household waste being able to be segregated for recycling with the percentage of non-recyclable material steadily decreasing.

**National context**

To date out of 295 councils in England approximately:

- 239 collect recycling and rubbish fortnightly on alternating weeks.
- 13 collect recycling fortnightly and rubbish every three weeks.

This means just under 15% of local authorities have maintained a weekly residual waste collection. This figure is increasing all the time and will continue to do so in light of DEFRA's Simpler Recycling which will mandate a separate food waste collection.

**West Sussex and other local authorities**

The table below shows the collection regimes within West Sussex, neighbouring authorities and some who share a similar rurality group as Crawley:

*Table 1*

<b>Council</b>	<b>Frequency of residual waste collection</b>	<b>Food waste</b>	<b>Standard size residual waste bin</b>
Crawley Borough Council	Analyse various options which would include moving from weekly to alternate weekly when food waste introduced	No	140 litre
Chichester District Council	Alternate weekly	No	240 litre
Horsham District Council	Alternate weekly	No	140 litre
Arun District Council	Moving from weekly to alternate weekly when food waste introduced	No	Introducing 180 litre from sack service
Adur and Worthing District Council	Alternate weekly	No	140 litre
Mid Sussex District Council	Moving from alternate to three weekly	Rolling out now	240 litre
Reigate and Banstead District Council	Alternate weekly	Yes	140 litre
Mole Valley District Council	Alternate weekly	Yes	140 litre
Tandridge District Council	Alternate weekly	Yes	180 litre
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Council	Alternate weekly	Yes	180 litre

Ealing London Borough	Alternate weekly	Yes	180 litre
Harrow London Borough	Alternate weekly	Yes	240 litre
Croydon London Borough	Alternate weekly	Yes	180 litre
Merton London Borough	Alternate weekly	Yes	180 litre
Portsmouth City Council	Alternate weekly	Yes	140 litre

### Waste composition

Since 2005 Crawley Borough Council has provided a co-mingled kerbside recycling collection service. The number of different materials which can be placed into recycling bins has increased over the years with cartons, glass and plastic pots, tubs and trays all now since introduced.

In addition, textiles, small electricals and batteries are now collected as part of the service provided to Crawley residents.

A subscription-based garden waste collection service has over 11,500 households signed up to it, which equates to 32% of those who have a garden.

Diagram 1 below shows the waste composition of a typical Crawley rubbish bin (Oct 2021). 44% of household waste is food waste with a further 17.5% able to be recycled through the other services the council offers. With nearly 62% of normal rubbish able to be recycled with a separate food waste collection service a move to separate food waste and less frequent residual waste collections has significant potential to increase recycling rates.

Further analysis from neighbouring authorities has found that potentially remaining with weekly residual waste collections may not encourage residents to use the new food waste collection service or try to squeeze the 17.5% of recycling from their residual waste bins to recycle.

The average amount of food waste in residual waste bins across West Sussex is broadly comparable to Crawley (40% across West Sussex compared with 44% for Crawley). The average co-mingled dry recycling in residual waste bins across West Sussex is 12.9%, compared to 12% for Crawley.

Diagram 1



## **Bin Size**

Wheeled bins for household waste were introduced in Crawley in 2014 as part of the service improvements implemented when the collection contract was awarded to Biffa. A 140 litre residual waste bin is provided as standard and the council operates a no side waste policy, except when collections are delayed.

A larger 240 litre wheeled bin is available to households of five or more or to those with special circumstances such as children in nappies, pets and those who have a lot of waste created due to a medical condition, which does not fit the definition of the Council's separate clinical waste collection service. The latter is reviewed on an individual basis. In all circumstances the Council request a commitment to fully recycle and those who still have one of the old small or medium sized recycling bins will be swapped over for our standard 240 litre recycling bin.

The Council does not limit the number of recycling bins householders can have, although three tends to be the maximum.

From table 1, it is evident that bin size does vary across local authorities. Interestingly, both Horsham and Adur and Worthing councils operate a fortnightly residual waste collection (with no separate food waste collection) and have retained a 140 litre bin. Given the significant amount of food waste currently in the residual waste bin in Crawley, it is recommended that retaining the 140 litre bin for an alternate weekly collection will suffice, providing households are using the food waste and dry recycling services provided correctly. This view is supported by Ricardo, the Council's Waste consultant and who has undertaken modelling work for many local authorities who have switched alternate weekly collections.

It must also be noted that residual waste bins are for general household waste only and should a householder have a significant amount of waste in a given week (eg clearing out their loft or similar) and have more waste than usual, then following standard practice this waste should be taken to the Recycling Centre for disposal.

The addition of mandated flexible plastic kerbside recycling collections from 2027 will further reduce the amount of waste being placed into residual waste bins. Further details on these arrangements are to be published by DEFRA.

## **Addressing concerns over food waste and alternate weekly collections**

As with all changes to major services, some residents will have concerns and may feel anxious about the possibility of alternate weekly residual waste collections.

With over 85% of waste collection authorities having previously moved to alternate weekly residual waste collections, there is considerable industry knowledge and experience which can be drawn on.

The Council anticipates working with other districts and boroughs in West Sussex and with the County Council to co-ordinate information and publicity to help to allay concerns residents may have.

Some of the key areas that residents tend to have concerns with when introducing a food waste collection service and alternate weekly collections are covered below:

- **Smells**  
If food waste is placed into the normal rubbish bin, then it might start to smell before it's collected, particularly in the warmer months. This is why it's so important for residents to use their food waste collection service, which will remain weekly. Food waste is the main reason why bins tend to smell.

- **Nappies and incontinence waste**  
Nappies and other hygiene waste should be placed in securely tied nappy bags before being placed in a rubbish bag, to reduce the risk of odours. Households who produce a bag or more of incontinence waste a week should be having this waste collected via our clinical waste collection service. Those households who have two or more in nappies will be entitled to apply for a larger rubbish bin even though there may be less than five within their household.
- **Flies and maggots**  
As long as good practice measures are taken, which includes not leaving wasted food uncovered and open to attract flies, keeping waste containers closed to keep out flies, bagging all waste and using food waste liners, placing containers outdoors and out of direct sunlight, if possible and occasionally washing out bins and containers if feasible, then residents should experience very few if any issues with flies and maggots.
- **Vermin and health problems**  
There is an occasional perception that alternate weekly collections of refuse leads to an increase in vermin or health problems. They have however been successfully operating in the UK for years now and it's just not been proven to be the case. There have been studies conducted by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) and the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management which found no documented evidence of a direct link between the frequency of waste collection and any actual health impacts on householders or waste collectors.
- **Volume of residual waste and bin size**  
This is largely covered in the section above and as noted, if residents are using the recycling bins, the 140ltr residual waste bin will be sufficient for the majority of households. It is also noted that the National Waste Strategy proposes a levy on materials packaging as a means of encouraging producers to reduce the quantity of packaging being used. As this takes effect, it is anticipated that this will reduce the amount of packaging and the volume demand in the residual waste bin. As with any change it will take a little while for residents to adapt to the new service and see the benefits if they fully recycle and separate out all of their food waste. Residents will be encouraged to give the service a go before applying for a larger rubbish bin if eligible. A small review of the larger bin policy will form part of the preparation work over the next 12 – 18 months.

In summary, what a lot of councils have discovered is that a weekly collection of food waste removes most other concerns to alternate weekly refuse. Putrescible materials are kept out of the refuse bin and taken away every week, which then alleviates the concerns and issues over smells, flies, maggots and similar.

### **Flats – Recycling**

The Council currently provides the same waste and recycling collection service to the majority of the communal flats and HMO's within the borough.

Within Crawley there are 10,970 flats across 989 blocks. 3,769 flats (505 blocks) are managed by Crawley Homes. There are around another 135 managing agents and private landlords who are responsible for the remaining flats.

The Council's Waste and Recycling Team has carried out a number of improvement projects at flats over the last few years in conjunction with the West Sussex Waste Partnership, in order to try to improve recycling rates and reduce contamination.

The initial pilot project won the Best Communications Campaign of the Year 2017 Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee Award for the work that was done to improve recycling at flats.

West Sussex authorities were amongst the first to implement substantial improvements to flats recycling provision.

Improvements implemented at flats were phased in following the pilot in 2016 and included the following:

- Bespoke large 1100 litre recycling bins at larger blocks of flats with special locked and reversed lids with some having see-through sides, to help to keep contamination to a minimum.
- At smaller blocks, new 240 litre two wheeled recycling bins were replaced with new ones and additional ones delivered where necessary.
- All recycling bins had new recycling labels stuck on them informing residents what can be placed into them.
- New signage boards were placed up within bin areas next to recycling bins indicating what can be recycled.
- Reusable bags and an information pack were issued out to each flat. The bags are for residents to store recycling in within their flats and take down to the bin store to empty when full.
- The initial phases had the West Sussex team of door steppers visit each flat to deliver the bags and information pack and speak to residents about recycling.
- In later phases battery caddies were delivered along with information on the new service

The above improvements are now also implemented at all new blocks of flats.

Recycling at flats presents a number of barriers and challenges including storage space constraints within homes, the state and location of communal bin areas and confusion over what can and cannot be recycled. Blocks of flats can vary considerably from the refuse disposal methods used to the communication opportunities available, meaning different approaches may be appropriate depending upon circumstance.

Engagement and support are not only required at a household level, but also with managing agents, landlords and caretakers. Fly tipping, excess waste and contamination are a daily part of managing the service and some managing agents are more responsive than others, which can prove a barrier when trying to improve services for residents.

Resource London, a partnership between London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB) and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) undertook research in 2018 which revealed that the three factors – motivation, ease and knowledge - are all necessary conditions for improving recycling rates. The report showed that while many people living in flats are keen to recycle, they don't always feel that it's easy enough or that they have the right knowledge to recycle effectively.

The improvement projects the council first piloted in 2016 were designed to try to address some of the above barriers.

Since Crawley Council piloted and rolled out improvements at flats, ReLondon (the operating name for LWARB), which is a partnership of the Mayor of London and the London boroughs to improve waste and resource management also did a similar project in 2018. They have since developed these improvements, which include food waste collections and taken them further, which are now recognised as best practice.

The West Sussex Waste Partnership researched into these further improvements last year, which included further signage within bin areas and communal notice boards, particularly focusing on directing residents to use bulky waste collection services instead of dumping large items within bin stores, new tenant recycling packs and working more closely with managing agents. The latter includes placing more responsibility onto managing agents and landlords, particularly when it comes to fly tipping within bin areas and contaminated recycling bins. We would also like to trial putting in bespoke bins for small electricals and textiles.

Although a rough project plan was produced, the work of the partnership has had to be redirected due to mandated food waste collections. There is a commitment however to put together a new tenants' information pack with the onus put on the managing agent to issue out as they are the ones who know when new tenants are moving in. All managing agents will have to be contacted with regards to food waste collections in any case so this piece of work will be incorporated into this.

### **Flats – Food Waste Collections**

The new Simpler Recycling regulations stipulate that food waste collections must be provided to all households including flats.

From data gathered by WRAP, authorities can expect food waste yields at flats to be between one-third and one-half of that collected from kerbside properties. There generally tends to be a low participation rate in food waste recycling at flats.

WRAP has produced guidance material based on best practice as to how to roll out a food waste collection service to flats and this will form the basis of how it is implemented within Crawley.