

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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PROPOSED CHANGES TO WOKINGHAM BOROUGH'S RUBBISH AND RECYCLING COLLECTIONS

Wokingham Borough Council is looking to change the way it collects rubbish and recycling to increase recycling rate by 10 per cent and save more than £1 million per year within two years.

Proposals to change waste collections in Wokingham Borough will be discussed by the council's decision makers at their 21 March meeting, following more than a year of research, analysis, modelling and two rounds of consultation.

Wokingham Borough Council is proposing to move general rubbish and recycling collections from weekly to alternate weekly, meaning general rubbish will be collected one week and recycling will be collected the next. No changes will be made to food waste collections, which will continue to be weekly, or the subscription garden waste collection service. It also proposes to introduce wheeled bins for general rubbish, instead of using the current blue plastic bags.

Increase recycling rate and lower carbon emissions

The changes will bring positive outcomes to the environment by driving up the borough's recycling rate and reducing carbon emissions.

Wokingham Borough is currently ranked 80th out of 338 waste collecting authorities, with a recycling rate of 49.5 per cent, based on the most recent DEFRA data available (2020/21), although the council's own data shows its recycling rate has gone up to 54 per cent for 2021/22.

The proposed changes are expected to increase the recycling rate by 10 per cent, which would put the council up in the top 15 recycling authorities in the country, all of whom have fortnightly or three-weekly rubbish collections. It is also expected to decrease the total amount of 'blue bag' rubbish by 20 per cent.

A recent study by the council's waste management partner re3 shows that 57 per cent of what goes into the average blue rubbish bag is recyclable, with food waste alone taking up 24 per cent. This has a significant financial impact on the council, because it is up to six times more expensive to dispose of general rubbish than recycling.

Cllr Ian Shenton, executive member for environment, sport and leisure, said: "By having weekly collections, we recycle nine to 14 per cent less than local authorities that collect rubbish fortnightly or three-weekly. We need to improve our recycling performance, the government has a new recycling target for local authorities and we just aren't doing enough now.

"We have also set ourselves a goal in our climate emergency action plan of reaching a recycling rate of 70 per cent, and we're not going to get there without making some changes."

"Experience of other councils tells us that alternate weekly collections will not discourage recycling. On the contrary, it encourages residents to put recyclable waste back to recycling, instead of binning it. We expect, as a result of the changes, our recycling rate will go up to 64 per cent from our current rate of 54 per cent, and carbon emissions will be reduced by 2,400 tonnes per year."

Much-needed savings to protect vital services

If approved, the council anticipates rolling out the changes in summer 2024 and saving £500,000 in the 2024/25 financial year and more than £1million per year from 2025/26.

Alternate weekly collections will bring the council much-needed savings to maintain its support to residents during the cost of living crisis. This year, Wokingham Borough continues to receive the least government funding per resident of any unitary authority in the country – £30 million per year less than if it was funded in the same way as the average unitary authority.

Cllr Clive Jones, leader of the council, said: "Inadequate government funding and increasing costs have left us with no choice but to change our waste services, so that we can protect vital services and help our residents during this tough time.

"If introduced in the next financial year, the changes would save us around £500,000 to start with and at least £1 million in the year after. This is the best way to make savings before the current waste service contract expires in 2026."

The estimated savings will mainly come from a reduction in the amount of general rubbish produced in the borough and an increase in recyclable materials being put in the green recycling bags instead of in the blue general rubbish bags after the changes are in place.

Background

The proposals were reviewed by the council's overview and scrutiny management committee on 22 February and will go before its decision making executive at its meeting on 21 March.

Feedback from the consultations conducted in 2021 and 2022 shows that residents are willing to recycle more, and the majority will accept a change to alternate weekly collections, with wheeled bins for general rubbish.

Next steps

If approved at the 21 March executive meeting, the council will start planning for alternate weekly collections to start in late summer 2024, with delivery of wheeled bins to residents before then.

The changes will apply to 99 per cent of the 64,000 properties in Wokingham Borough. Flats and properties with narrow access are excluded from the changes.

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1. More from Cllr Clive Jones, leader of the council, at clive.jones@wokingham.gov.uk
2. More from Cllr Ian Shenton, executive member for environment, sport and leisure, at ian.shenton@wokingham.gov.uk