

## Waste Management Team Annual Report

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## Foreword by Cllr Emma Morley

Welcome to our annual review of the work of our Waste Management Team.

This has been a period of significant change for our teams as we have worked to keep ahead of national legislation and drive up our recycling rates.

Our kerbside recycling in particular has been revolutionised, with the introduction of glass collection the notable highlight, along with the continued expansion of our commercial waste service, making life easier for the borough's businesses.

Our small electricals recycling programme continues to be a great success, and I would like to thank local residents for playing their part in making sure as much of their household waste as possible finds its way into our recycling streams.

To keep on top of all of this is no small challenge.

After a long and detailed review, we introduced significant changes to our domestic waste collection routes, meaning in some areas residents saw changes to the day their bins are emptied.

As with any change of this significance, teething troubles were expected, but I must congratulate everyone concerned as these were minimal and our missed collection rate remains impressively low.

We are only too aware that litter and fly tipping continue to be a big concern and annoyance.

We are reviewing our street cleaning operation to try and keep on top of the problem and, of course, I must say an enormous thank you to our volunteer Street Champions who now number more than 800.

Their efforts highlight that our waste management team and our residents, businesses and visitors can all work together to keep our borough clean, and do our bit to reduce, reuse and recycle.

I hope this report gives you a window into just how much work goes into making that happen.

## Our Teams

### Waste Management

- **Waste and Recycling Team** - Responsible for collecting domestic refuse and recycling, food waste, garden waste and clinical waste.
- **Street Cleansing Team** - Responsible for litter picking, litter bin emptying, road sweeping and fly-tipping removal.

## Our Purpose

The Waste Management Team is responsible for delivering the Corporate Plan commitments below:

### Commitments

**#OneBorough:** a safe, clean and attractive living environment enhanced by a sustainable and increasingly energised local economy.

- **Cleaner environment:** create a greener Gravesham by encouraging household recycling and actively addressing contaminated land and noise, flood and oil pollution.
- **Attractive borough:** boost local civic pride through a comprehensive programme of street cleansing and environmental enhancements, underpinned by active enforcement of environmental crime.

### Performance Indicators

|      |   |
|------|---|
| PI 6 | % of household waste recycled                               |
| PI 7 | Volume of residual waste per household (kg)                 |
| PI 8 | % of cleanliness reports completed within five-working days |

### Our Key Priorities

- To provide an effective and efficient refuse and recycling service
- To deliver effective and efficient chargeable services including commercial waste and garden waste services
- To provide an effective and efficient cleansing street cleansing service

## Project Updates

### Kerbside Glass Recycling

As part of 'Simpler Recycling,' the government required local authorities to collect glass for recycling at the kerbside from all households by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.

The service was launched ahead of schedule in July 2024, alongside a comprehensive communications plan to make residents aware of the addition of glass collections to the kerbside recycling service.

Compared to 2023-24, there has been a **10.7% increase** in glass collected for recycling in Gravesham.

Future work will include reviewing the ongoing viability of the glass bring-banks, as we now collect just 18.8% of the glass recycled in Gravesham via glass bring-banks compared to 68.6% in 2023-24.

### Commercial Waste Recycling

'Simpler Recycling' also required Gravesham Borough Council to offer a full recycling service to our commercial waste customers by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

In response, the team offered a comingled dry mixed recycling collection to our customers and arranged for a new separate food waste collection service through a third-party.

Our Commercial Waste Service performed well in 2025-26, with 531 customers in the borough. Throughout 2025-26 there was a **593.8 kilogram decrease** in residual waste per premises year-on-year, a **reduction of 15.5%**. Concurrently, recycling per premises **increased by 121.3 kilograms** year-on-year (**+130.6%**).

We are now actively promoting our commercial waste services amongst Gravesham businesses, and in light of the current financial challenges facing businesses, we have reviewed our pricing structure and have decided to implement measures to reduce the costs of our waste collection services to customers in the current financial year.

### "Recycle Your Electricals" Project

Between November 2023 and March 2026 **60,500 individual small electrical items** weighing in at **52.9 tonnes** have been recycled.

Total small electricals recycled via the bring-banks and Pepperhill Household Waste Recycling Centre have **increased by 8.6 tonnes per month (+42.9%)**. Total small electricals recycled **increased by 2.1 kilograms** per household (**+38.4%**) over the same period.

Bulky bookings for electrical items have **reduced by 41.3%**, while **100%** of electrical items collected are now recycled.

Officers continue to work with the Gravesham Repair Café to signpost their service users to our recycling facility when items cannot be repaired, while simultaneously signposting users of the small electrical recycling bring-banks to use the Gravesham Repair Café services.

## Completed Projects 2025-26

Officers have delivered several projects and service improvements during the financial year 2025-26, outlined below.

### Domestic Collection Round Re-Routing

In early 2025, the Waste Management Team began a project to re-design & optimise the domestic waste collection routes.

Using route optimisation alongside our existing Bartec Collective system, the team was able to further improve the reliability and efficiency of services delivered to meet the growing demand on waste collection services in the borough. The new optimisation functions were used to successfully create efficient collection routes for our domestic waste operations.

The new collection rounds were implemented later in September 2025 and involved:

- Rescheduling the entire refuse and recycling service - This change meant that **around 40% of households had their waste collection day changed** to make the service more efficient and effective for present operation, and for the future, by reducing mileage and driving downtime.
- Ceasing the co-collection of residual/recycling and food waste on 'pod' vehicles - The service now uses separate vehicles for each waste stream.

The above implementation was supported by a comprehensive resident engagement campaign to ensure borough-wide awareness of the collection changes.

### Narrow Access Recycling & Food Waste

In the past, some rural parts of the borough only received a refuse collection owing to the nature of some of the rural roads in the borough - some are too narrow or lack turning points for a standard refuse collection vehicle.

Officers have now introduced a new service delivery model for narrow access properties to improve operational efficiency and environmental performance.

As such, the project has enabled **an additional 385 rural properties** to have recycling and food waste, in-line with the Separation of Waste Regulations (England).

### Anglo Doorstep Collections

To increase residents' accessibility to re-use & recycling opportunities, we have partnered with Anglo Doorstep Collections to offer residents free doorstep collection service for unwanted clothes, shoes, and household items.

The service is completely free, with around 95% of donations re-homed, with the remaining 5% recycled.

Approximately **60% of proceeds** are then shared with their partner charities, supporting good causes.

In 2025-26, **39.1 tonnes** of items were donated by Gravesham households for re-use or recycling via Anglo Doorstep Collections.

### Refurbished Refuse Collection Vehicles

An integral part of the domestic collection round changes has been the procurement of a mixture of newer vehicles and the refurbishment of our existing vehicles within the fleet.

The work to carry out the vehicle refurbishments, which included body swaps, has been undertaken by the Council's vehicle workshop which has reduced the implementation costs of the new service.

In total, there are five vehicles that have been refurbished, which will help to ensure the resilience of our vehicle fleet for delivering key services to our residents.

### Ongoing Projects

Officers have also embarked on delivering several other projects and service improvements commenced in the previous financial year to continue to be delivered and developed in the current financial year.

## Food Waste Campaign

Over the summer we ran a campaign in partnership with Kent County Council to encourage food waste recycling in the borough.

Analysis of waste composition data from June 2025 showed that Gravesham households recycle more vegetable and fruit waste than the Kent average, suggesting more preparation of food from home.

Despite these high arisings, caddy presentation rates were low, with **only 28%** of households presenting food waste for collection in June (compared with 34% Kent average).

Waste composition analysis undertaken in February 2026, however, records a significantly higher caddy set out rate of 42% (**an increase of 50% and now 3rd highest caddy set-out rate in Kent**) and second highest kilograms of food waste collected per household, per week.

The food waste campaign has yielded an **additional 516.1 tonnes of food waste** year-on-year between June 2025 and March 2026, **an increase of 23.2%**. This equates to an **additional 11.2 kilograms** of food waste collected per household.

## Garden Waste Service Review

A review of the garden waste service has been conducted to identify further efficiencies; to benchmark our charges against other local authorities, and; to look at ways to minimise lost subscription income.

The Waste Management Team now offer a single-size garden bin to offer all subscribers the same capacity to improve our recycling performance and to offer better value-for-money for our service subscribers. This change has also rationalised bin procurement costs and will minimise the administrative and operational burden of swapping bin sizes for subscribers.

The Waste Management Team are also proactively engaging with collection crews to identify unsubscribed bins that are being presented for collection, so that they remain uncollected and can be removed if the occupier of the property refuses to renew the subscription.

## Flats Recycling and Food Waste

A recycling and weekly food waste collection is offered to all blocks of flats within Gravesham, and officers continue to work with private management agents to ensure that the correct bins and information are available for their tenants to use.

Officers also continue to work with the Council's Housing Team to improve the recycling facilities available to residents, and to encourage participation in the recycling services on offer.

## Community Engagement

In 2025-26, Officers were invited to speak at six venues, including schools, Scout Groups and community meetings, engaging with 1,145 adults and school pupils about waste & recycling and litter. The attendees were very engaged with the subject matter, and Officers were asked many questions about waste and recycling, particularly regarding what happens to it once it has been collected from households.

Officers also attended the Riverside Festival in July 2025 to promote domestic recycling and small electricals recycling. In 2026, the theme will be food waste recycling to coincide with the joint campaign with Kent County Council.

Looking ahead, contact will be made with all schools and colleges in the borough offering assemblies, workshops and litter picking equipment to bring these important issues to the attention of young people in Gravesham.

### Street Cleansing Round Re-Routing

Currently all the street cleansing schedules are being reviewed so that the routes reflect the new waste collection & recycling rounds.

Intelligence collected from the review will allow the team to modify the street cleansing schedules so that street sweeping, and litter picking can be undertaken in areas to reflect the new domestic waste collection rounds.

Additional improvements will include enhanced weed spraying in Council-owned rear accessways and hard surfaced spaces to better-manage these spaces on a cyclical basis. Further street washing and traffic cleansing will continue to add to the overall cleanliness of the borough.

### Street Champions Initiative

Our Street Champions scheme grew to **859 active volunteers** across the borough who pledged to 'adopt' **432** streets, parks and alleyways. The Street Champions do more than litter picking - they act as our eyes and ears; reporting fly-tipping, graffiti and other problems to us. Some volunteers even suggest locations for new litter bins and educational signage.

In 2025-26, our Street Champions collected **4,655** sacks of litter (**388** per month) and went on **2,378** litter picks (**198** per month).

Since the launch of the initiative, in 2021-22, Street Champions have collected **19,976** sacks of litter and have been on **10,089** litter picks.

This is a phenomenal achievement and demonstrates a fantastic commitment from residents to keep their local environment free from litter.

Further promotion of the work done by Street Champions to improve the local environment in collaboration with the Council is planned.

### 'Cleaner, Safer Streets' Campaign

'*Together - Creating Cleaner, Safer Streets*' is a campaign led by Gravesham Council, working together with the community and other agencies to:

- Galvanise Gravesham's civic pride
- Create 1,000 Street Champions - including residents and businesses across the borough
- Develop a programme of out-reach and engagement to raise awareness
- Support 'Days of Action' in the borough
- Highlight bad behaviours to promote positive change

- Increase awareness of the Council's services, projects and initiatives
- Grow our commercial waste customer base

This campaign has run alongside the Council's everyday activity of street cleansing, community safety, environmental controls, housing services and waste management.

The Council has been working together with the community, groups, businesses and stakeholders to counteract unfounded negative perceptions of the town and borough and highlight Gravesham - as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

Since the commencement of our *Cleaner, Safer Streets* campaign in July 2024, **598 sacks of litter** have been collected on "days of action" and **167 fly-tipped items** have been identified for removal. There has also been an **increase of 270 Street Champions** during the campaign activity and awareness-raising of the work of Gravesham's Street Champions.

Signage has been put up across the borough at shopping parades, in Gravesend Town Centre and outside schools in the coming months to encourage pride in the borough and stewardship of the local environment.

## Watch This Space - Projects for 2026-27

Officers have several projects and service improvements planned for the upcoming financial year, some of which are outlined below.

### Flexible Plastics

Flexible plastic packaging now accounts for **more than half of the global plastic packaging market**, and volumes are expected to rise further in the coming years - most of which is landfilled or sent to energy-from-waste plants for incineration. Many supermarkets chains in the UK have flexible plastic recycling bins in-store.

Flexible plastic like bread bags, crisp packets, and food pouches must be collected at the kerbside **by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027**.

Officers are keeping a watching brief on this policy and are engaging with colleagues across Kent to determine the best way to deliver this service for residents.

### Deposit Return Scheme

From October 2027, a UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for single-use plastic and metal drink containers will launch in **October 2027** across England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, **aiming to increase recycling rates to over 90%** and reduce litter.

Consumers will pay a small, refundable deposit when buying drinks in plastic (PET) or metal containers, which is redeemed when returning empty containers to retailers or reverse vending machines.

While the Council will not be responsible for delivering the scheme, Officers are keeping a watching brief on this policy to ascertain what the impact might be on the volumes of recycling collected at the kerbside and by our Street Cleansing Operatives.

## Digital Waste Tracking (DWT)

Mandatory digital waste tracking (DWT) is expected to launch in the UK later in 2026, and from October 2027 Gravesham Borough Council will be required to use the system as a carrier of wastes.

Legislation across the UK requires that on the transfer of waste, a written description is transferred to enable other people to appropriately manage the waste. The lack of consistent digital record-keeping in the waste industry is frequently exploited by organised criminals, with paper-based records providing the opportunity to hide evidence of the systematic mishandling (and fly-tipping) of large volumes of waste - waste crime costs the UK economy an estimated £1 billion each year.

DWT aims to provide a seamless digital record of transactions for the movement of waste from cradle-to-grave, eventually in real-time, throughout the economy in a simple and effective way, providing value for all users.

The DWT service will provide unparalleled amounts of data about the movement of waste, which will ultimately help regulators, such as the Environment Agency, to crack-down on waste crime.

Officers will keep up-to-date on developments to prepare for the changes and to ensure that we are ready to be fully compliant with DWT.

## Complaints and Compliments

We really value the feedback we receive from residents. It's great to know what you think we do well, but also when we get things wrong so that we can look at how we can improve our services based on your experience. We know there will always be things that don't go to plan, and we welcome complaints as a learning opportunity.

Throughout 2025-26 we received **60** valid official complaints about our Waste Management Unit. To put that into context, we carry out **almost 4.3 million refuse & recycling collections per year**. Whilst we are sorry that we haven't always got things right first time; every complaint allows us to listen to residents; explain why we have made a particular decision, and; put things right but also understand how we can do things better next time.

Thank you to those who contacted us to tell us that they were unhappy with the service they had received, as it has helped us to continuously improve the service. All valid complaints were resolved at Stage One of our complaints process. This compares to 51 valid complaints in 2024-25.

There were also several valuable lessons learned, and service improvements made from the complaints we received. For example, we have introduced improved crew training on the Bartec Collective in-cab system and have reviewed the assisted waste collection process in response to several complaints received from residents.

Compliments highlight areas of good practice and acknowledge the hard work and commitment of our staff. During the same period, we received **58** compliments, compared to 53 in 2024-25.

For example, one compliment stated that ‘I have recently contacted you about the state of Hall Road in relation to littering, today I noticed your teams doing a litter pick, I would like to thank you and your team for dealing with this matter and doing such a good job.’

Another read, ‘My recycling bin was not collected. I reported it yesterday evening and before I got up this morning it was already collected. Thank you. We are quick to moan, but in this case excellent service.’

On a more personal level, one compliment read that, ‘My elderly mother had a fall on a driveway this morning. Please thank the three bin men that helped her - their caring hearts made a difference.’

Thank you to all residents who took the time to contact us to formally compliment a staff member or service.

### Appendix 1: Our Duties

The service carries out several statutory functions, on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council.

| Statutory Duty  |   |
|---|---|
| Meeting requirements of the Waste Framework Directive - household recycling target of 50%; duty to provide separate collection of paper, glass, metal and plastic by 2015; required to produce waste management plans.  | Household Waste Recycling Act 2003  |
| To arrange for the collection of household and commercial waste in its area.  | Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 45   |
| <p>Recyclable household waste must be collected separately from other household waste, for recycling or composting (‘recyclable household waste’ being defined in the amended EPA 1990 to reference specific recyclable waste streams).</p> <p>The Secretary of State (“SoS”) will have the power to add further recyclable waste streams.</p> <p>Recyclable household waste must be collected as individual streams unless the exceptions in the new Section 45A(6) EPA 1990 apply.</p> <p>To rely on these exceptions, a WCA must provide a written assessment stating it considers that separate collection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would not be technically or economically practicable; or</li> <li>• Has no significant environmental benefit</li> </ul> <p>In any case, dry recyclable waste streams must never be mixed with food or garden waste streams.</p> <p>Food waste collection must take place at least once a week.</p> | <p>Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 45</p> <p>Environment Act 2021</p> <p>Separation of Waste Regulations (England) 2024 &amp; 2025</p> |
| For waste disposal authorities to arrange for the disposal of controlled waste collected by waste collection authorities.   | Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 51   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Duty on local authorities to empty and maintain litter bins and to consult from time to time amongst themselves and with voluntary bodies on taking measures to abate litter. | Litter Act 1983  |
| Legal duty on local authorities to keep relevant highways and land clear of litter and refuse.  | Environmental Protection Act 1990, Part IV, Section 89 |

## Appendix 2: Key Data & Statistics for 2025-26

|                   | Financial Year | % of Household Waste Recycled |       |       |       |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
|                   |                | Q1                            | Q2    | Q3    | Q4    |
| PI 6              | 2025-26        | 42.8%                         | 42.8% | 41.5% | 41.0% |
|                   | 2024-25        | 42.7%                         | 41.8% | 41.3% | 40.4% |
|                   | 2023-24        | 41.4%                         | 40.5% | 39.8% | 40.0% |
| PI 8<br>(2019-23) | 2022-23        | 44.1%                         | 42.5% | 42.4% | 40.4% |
|                   | 2021-22        | 44.3%                         | 44.8% | 43.3% | 42.4% |
|                   | 2020-21        | 45.7%                         | 45.3% | 44.5% | 43.6% |
|                   | 2019-20        | 44.3%                         | 44.2% | 43.0% | 42.6% |
|                   | 2018-19        | 45.8%                         | 43.2% | 42.0% | 42.2% |
|                   | 2017-18        | 37.4%                         | 41.2% | 41.5% | 40.7% |
|                   | 2016-17        | 35.3%                         | 35.4% | 35.0% | 34.6% |
|                   | 2015-16        | 35.4%                         | 35.1% | 35.0% | 34.5% |
|                   | 2014-15        | 26.0%                         | 32.6% | 34.1% | 34.3% |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  |  | Volume of Residual Waste per Household (Kg) |
|--|--|---|

|                   | Financial Year | Q1    | Q2    | Q3    | Q4    |
|-------------------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| PI 7              | 2025-26        | 114.1 | 220.1 | 331.9 | 444.9 |
|                   | 2024-25        | 117.2 | 230.2 | 334.1 | 445.7 |
|                   | 2023-24        | 123.2 | 239.9 | 359.1 | 475.5 |
| PI 9<br>(2019-23) | 2022-23        | 120.7 | 237.6 | 348.3 | 481.6 |
|                   | 2021-22        | 125.1 | 250.4 | 374.5 | 487.9 |
|                   | 2020-21        | 125.1 | 240.0 | 353.0 | 477.0 |
|                   | 2019-20        | 108.0 | 212.7 | 320.0 | 427.6 |
|                   | 2018-19        | 108.3 | 213.4 | 322.8 | 431.6 |
|                   | 2017-18        | 119.0 | 219.4 | 320.2 | 428.3 |
|                   | 2016-17        | 130.2 | 257.2 | 380.6 | 510.2 |
|                   | 2015-16        | 125.6 | 246.9 | 367.6 | 494.6 |
|                   | 2014-15        | 150.0 | 261.5 | 378.2 | 499.0 |

| PI 8    | % of Cleanliness Reports Completed Within Five-Working Days |       |       |       |
|---------|---|-------|-------|-------|
|         | Q1  | Q2    | Q3    | Q4    |
| 2025-26 | 92.0%   | 82.5% | 78.1% | 92.3% |
| 2024-25 | 89.5%   | 64.9% | 95.7% | 98.3% |
| 2023-24 | N/A   | N/A   | N/A   | 84.1% |