

Waste Management Team Annual Report, 2023-24

Foreword to the Waste Management Annual Team Report

Welcome to this annual report which reviews the work of our waste management service.

Of all the services a local authority delivers, waste management is perhaps the most important and scrutinised.

It's certainly the most visible to our residents, whether that's through weekly waste and recycling collections, or the cleanliness of our streets and open spaces, and it's the service we are most likely to receive public comments on - good, as well as bad.

We are one of the few authorities to retain our household waste and recycling collections in-house, meaning our crews are council employees, many of whom live in the borough, who take pride in their work and with whom we maintain excellent working relationships.

It means we can respond quickly to any issues that arise and the performance of our crews remains exceptionally high, week in and week out.

Alongside that we are working hard to encourage local residents and businesses to recycle even greater volumes of waste, through kerbside collections and readily available points for small electricals and clothing, the latter of which has seen us team up with the Salvation Army to benefit their invaluable work, as well as the environment.

The team is forever developing new ideas and processes to improve the service, and as you will read in this report, the coming year will see some significant changes, all of which will help that continual service improvement.

And of course, we continue to work with residents, through community engagement, communications and, more directly, our Street Champions initiative.

The work of our waste management team is forever evolving and delivering, and I hope this report gives you a flavour of just how dynamic and responsive the service is in response to the challenges it faces, and the performance targets it continues to meet.

Councillor Emma Morley, Cabinet Member for Waste Services

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 5 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 service

Completed Projects 2023/24

Officers have delivered a number of projects and service improvements during the financial year 2023-24, outlined below. The projects outlined within this report have delivered an additional 59 tonnes of recycling to date.

New Clothing & Textiles Contract with the Salvation Army

We have entered into a new partnership with the Salvation Army to bring new clothing donation banks to local residents where they can donate their pre-loved handbags, clothing and shoes.

Donations will be re-sold, and profits received will be given to the Salvation Army to support the great work they do throughout the country. The Salvation Army provides practical help for people in need, such as specialist support for survivors and potential victims of modern slavery, shelter for those experiencing homelessness and so much more.

The new contract has also resulted in more regular, thorough collections ensuring that recycling sites are kept tidier and ensuring that more material, which would previously have been disposed of as fly-tipping, is captured within the bring-banks for recycling or re-use.

In the first ten-months, 92 tonnes were collected, an increase of 31% year-on-year.



New Town Centre Recycling Round



A new town centre recycling round was introduced to offer recycling collections to 229 additional houses and flats in hard-to-reach areas in the town centre where a typical recycling collection vehicle (RCV) cannot reach. This was achieved by using a smaller 7.5-tonne RCV instead of a 26-tonne RCV.

The new arrangement has also enabled an additional 71 houses to have a weekly food waste collection.

The new service has yielded 16 tonnes of recycling (not including food waste) in the first eight-months.

In the future, additional blocks of flats in the town centre that do not currently have a recycling collection will be added on to the collection round.

Clinical Waste Service

Until February 2024, our clinical waste service was delivered by an external contractor, although a great deal of the administration of the service remained with our Waste Management Team.

The service was brought in-house to improve the customer experience of the service; to introduce digital automation processes to minimise administration time, and to deliver budget savings of £20,000 per year.

The previous contractor operated from Ashford, and so bringing the service in-house has also reduced carbon emissions arising from delivering the service.



Battery Recycling Project

Batteries must never be placed in household rubbish or recycling bins, as they can explode and catch fire if damaged or crushed. We have had two refuse collection vehicle (RCV) fires in recent years which have been attributed to batteries.

Any household batteries, including 'button' batteries from watches, battery packs from laptops, mobile phones, power tools and remote-control units can be recycled. Residents can recycle their household batteries with the kerbside refuse or recycling collection service by placing them on top of their bin or sacks in a clear bag on the usual collection day.



Our collection crews then put them into a storage box inside the vehicle cab. The battery storage boxes are then decanted at Pepperhill Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC). Alternatively, battery collection points have been introduced at our Civic Centre reception and at Gravesend Borough Market.

Since the collection points were introduced in December 2022, more than 314 kilograms of batteries have been collected for recycling. In January 2023, our collection crews were given additional training and advice about battery collections and residents were reminded of the collection service on social media and in the Summer 2023 edition of *Your Borough*.

We also promoted various social media campaigns, including the Take Charge Halloween and Christmas campaigns and National Battery Day to encourage battery recycling.

As a result, total battery recycling in 2023 increased by 50% year-on-year, delivering an additional 2.3 tonnes of used batteries.

There are now 34 battery collection points in total across Gravesham and officers will continue to explore avenues for additional collection points wherever possible.



MJ Award 2024 Shortlisting for Digital Transformation



In a national award category, Gravesham Borough Council's Waste Management Team were one of eight entries shortlisted for the MJ Awards 2024 Digital Transformation category.

Our digital transformation revolved around the development of more efficient, digital solutions to enable residents to access information about and services and to request services.

Historically, all communication with the Waste Management Team was by telephone, letter or email and the team had to manually update records and schedules.

In April 2019, the Waste Management Team began a digital overhaul of the way in which the waste collection services are managed, replacing a paper-based system, with a more efficient digital solution.

Utilising Bartec, Granicus govService and GOV.UK Notify, residents can now access an end-to-end, digital pathway through each of our services, meaning that residents can access more information regarding the waste collection services and street cleansing functions including;

- Check their bin collection day and what bin to put out
- Book/amend bulky collections
- Arrange new or renew their garden waste subscription
- Arrange clinical waste collection or sharp box exchanges and get collection day immediately

Ongoing Projects

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

“Recycle Your Electricals” Project

Work began in December 2022 to seek grant funding for enhanced small electrical recycling opportunities with the borough.



In the Spring of 2023, grant funding of £22,418 was successfully bid for to provide 18 small electrical recycling banks in the borough, as one of more than 40 UK projects funded by Material Focus, the not-for-profit organisation leading the Recycle Your Electricals campaign.

The project will join other projects around the country, making it easier for 10 million UK residents to recycle their electricals. The council is one of only two local authorities in Kent to provide permanent small electrical bring-banks.

The new collection points mean that almost all residents can now easily recycle their small electricals within a one-mile radius of their homes, without the need to book a visit to the Pepperhill HWRC.

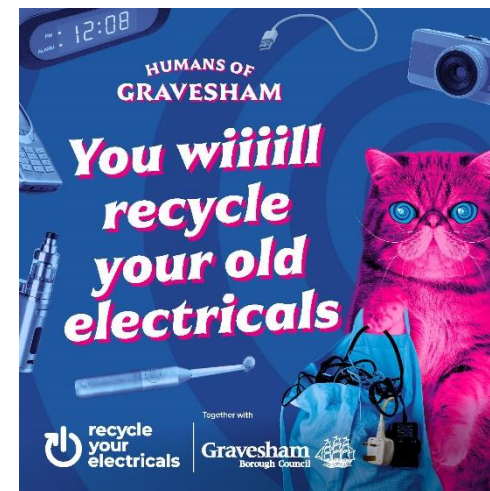
The bring-banks are emptied by an operative using an electric van at regular intervals, further reducing the overall environmental impact of the new recycling service.

The small electricals recycling banks are being supported by a year-long awareness-raising campaign to highlight the growing issue of e-waste and the ways that such electricals can be recycled or re-used.

Council officers have also begun to engage with schools, parish councils and community groups to raise awareness and to encourage the use of the new recycling banks.

To date, the small electricals project has yielded over 8,000 items in the first 5-months, weighing in at 7.3 tonnes. We are now encouraging bulky waste customers to dispose of their small electrical items via the bring-banks, diverting waste from the residual waste stream.

Our communications covering our small electricals project have reached 49,000 social media accounts; generated more than 480 likes; 90 shares; 4,600 views; 60 comments, and; 6,600 link 'clicks' in total across our corporate social media platforms.



Flats Recycling and Food Waste



commencement of the project.

Since August 2021, an additional 1,408 more flats in the borough have access to dry mixed recycling collections, an increase of 50%. In total, 81 blocks of flats have now been given recycling facilities.

Educational recycling leaflets have also been delivered to more than 2,009 flats in the borough, 30% of the total of all Council and private flats.

Currently, 62% of flats now have recycling compared to 45% at the

Similarly, in the same period an additional 819 flats have begun to receive weekly food waste collections, an increase of 209%.

Recycling and weekly food waste collections for flats will continue to be expanded in the coming year, providing a natural transition to the legal obligation for the Council to collect recycling and food waste from all flats by 31st March 2026, arising from the Environment Act 2021 and 'Simpler Recycling' reforms.

Recycling Contamination Reduction Campaign

Recycling contamination is a huge national issue, which can cause lorry loads of recycling to be rejected which is costly to taxpayers, harmful to the environment, and wastes the efforts of neighbouring properties. Recycling contamination peaked at 21% objectionable material contained within the recycling collected in Gravesham in Quarter 4 of 2022-23.

We embarked on a campaign of crew training, stickering & rejecting contaminated recycling bins alongside a consistent education campaign including social media posts, a video, letters, leaflets and officer visits.

In 2023-24, 10,328 letters were sent to properties that presented contaminated recycling bins, explaining the contamination type(s) within their bins and providing guidance and advice on how to recycle correctly.

Encouragingly, the tonnage of recycling rejected due to contamination decreased by 26% in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23 because of the targeted communications campaign facilitated by our digital systems and consistent messaging to residents. Objectionable material contained within the recycling collected in Gravesham fell to an average of 13% in 2023-24.



Excess Waste and Waste Minimisation Project

The Council proactively seeks to minimise residual waste and increase recycling by providing as many recycling services and opportunities as possible, and by ensuring residents are kept informed about the services available.

We embarked on a campaign of crew training, bin tagging, social media posts and automated letters to residents presenting additional refuse sacks which resulted in a 93% reduction in instances of excess waste sacks reported by crews and an average reduction of 14kg of refuse per household between 2021-22 and 2023-24.

Concurrent projects, such as battery recycling and the small electricals project are also contributing to waste minimisation and reducing overall residual waste.

Community Engagement

In 2023-24, Officers were invited to speak at eight venues, including schools, Scout Groups and community meetings, engaging with 798 residents and students 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 2023 to promote home composting and electricals recycling.

Officers also attended the Climate Change Resident Event at Woodville Halls in September 2023 and hosted a pop-up small electricals donation event at the Civic Centre reception for International e-Waste Day in October 2023, where 156 items were donated, weighing 81 kilograms.



Christmas Communications



In recent years, the Council has invested in producing high quality recycling videos for the Christmas period to advertise the recycling & refuse collection dates; which types of wrapping paper can be recycled, and; real Christmas tree recycling collections.

Overall recycling collected over the Christmas period has increased by 367 tonnes in 2023/24 compared to 2018/19.

The amount of recycling collected on average per household during the Christmas period has increased from 43 kilograms in 2018-19 to 50 kilograms in 2023/24, an increase of 7 kilograms per household (+16%).

Street Champions Initiative

Our Street Champions scheme grew to 585 active volunteers across the borough who have pledged to 'adopt' 357 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 2023-24, our Street Champions collected 4,212 sacks of litter (351 per month) and went on 2,143 litter picks (179 per month).

Since the launch of the initiative, in 2021-22, Street Champions have collected 10,899 sacks of litter and have been on 5,438 litter picks.

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

A future media campaign is proposed highlighting the devastating effect litter and fly-tipping can have on wildlife and the wider environment, as well as illuminating the work done by Street Champions to improve the local environment in collaboration with the Council.



Watch This Space - Projects for 2024/25

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

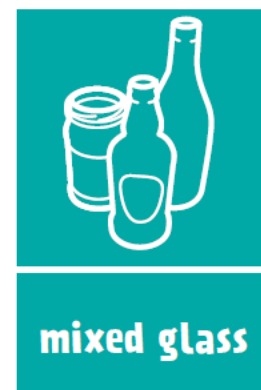
Kerbside Glass Recycling

As part of 'Simpler Recycling,' the government will require local authorities to collect glass for recycling at the kerbside from all households (including flats) by 31st March 2026.

Recently, the government has proposed new exemptions to ensure that local authorities can collect dry recyclables together, in the same bin or bag to keep the service as simple as possible for residents.

Officers are working to develop a communications plan to launch the addition of glass collections to the kerbside recycling service.

Future work will include reviewing the ongoing viability of the glass bring-banks.



Commercial Waste Recycling



'Simpler Recycling' will also require Gravesham Borough Council to offer a full recycling service to our commercial waste customers by 31st March 2025.

Currently, our customers receive a mixed waste collection and have the ability to opt-in for weekly paper & cardboard recycling collections.

Under the new regulations, we will be required to deliver a full recycling service to our more than 560 commercial waste customers, including a commingled collection of paper, cardboard, plastics, glass and metal; as well as separate food waste collections.

This will enable a re-balancing of the service operationally and from a customer perspective, as bin weighing will mean that our customers will pay for the disposal of the waste they produce, rather than a flat rate. Bin weighing will also incentivise businesses to recycle as much as possible.

Officers from the Waste Management Team are preparing a project plan to ensure that the enhanced recycling service is delivered by the deadline. Officers are in contact with local authorities and private waste management companies (outside the borough) to seek advice and benchmarking data.

Commercial Clinical Waste Service

When we brought our domestic clinical waste service in-house in February 2024, we identified an opportunity to expand our service to offer collections to commercial customers, such as care homes, GP surgeries, medical practices and funeral homes.

The digital automation processes to deliver such a service commercially are already in place and so we will seek to conduct market research to assess the viability of expanding our additional commercial service to generate income to help further the Council's financial position.

Domestic Collection Round Re-Routing

In the coming financial year, the Waste Management Team will design and continuously optimise new domestic waste collection routes by adding FleetRoute to our Bartec Collective waste management system.

By adding route optimisation to our existing Collective system, the team will be able to further improve the reliability and efficiency of services. The new optimisation functions will be used to create efficient collection routes for our domestic and commercial waste operations.

Vehicle speeds, participation rates, assisted collections and single / double-sided collection decisions will always be up-to-date so no matter how fast the service changes, FleetRoute will help the team to continually model the best collection routes will be updated and refined to incorporate new housing developments as they are built and become occupied.



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 2023/24 we received 62 valid official complaints about our Waste Management Unit. 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. Of these 62 valid complaints all were resolved at Stage One of our complaints process.

There were also several valuable lessons learnt and service improvements made from the complaints we received. For example, we have ensured that there is ongoing crew training and monitoring regarding returning bins and following the procedure for reporting bins damaged by crews while on the collection round.

Compliments highlight areas of good practice and acknowledge the hard work and commitment of our staff. During the same period, we received 64 compliments.

For example, one compliment stated that *"I wanted to write in to thank your street cleansing team for their sterling efforts in keeping our streets and road swept and free of litter and weeds. This morning I met one of your street operatives, Michael, who had been sweeping the length of Lennox Road from Pelham Road to The Overcliffe. As I was walking, I noticed Michael was evening trimming some branches of shrubs overhanging the pavement. Whilst this is not part of his duty, nevertheless I was very pleased to see he took pride in his work."*

On a more personal level, one compliment read that *"my mum is 89 years old, and house bound. She has her bin day on Fridays. This week she was waiting by her window for the bin men so that she could wave. They ALL waved back to her, and she was so happy with the acknowledgement. If you could pass on my thanks to those bin men on that route, I would be grateful. Something so simple completely made her day. Simple gestures go a long way to people on their own."*

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 a number of statutory functions, on behalf of Gravesham Borough Council.

Statutory Duty	
Legal duty on local authorities to keep relevant highways and land clear of litter and refuse.	Environment Protection Act 1990, Part IV, Section 89
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. 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"> • Would not be technically or economically practicable; or • Has no significant environmental benefit <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>	Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 45
For waste disposal authorities to arrange for the disposal of controlled waste collected by waste collection authorities.	Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 51

To keep land and highways clear of litter.	Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 89
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

Appendix 2: Key Data & Statistics for 2023/24

	Financial Year	PI 6 - % of household waste recycled			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
PI 6	2023-24	42.0%	41.2%	39.6%	40.0%
PI 8 (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%
	2013-14	25.3%	25.1%	25.0%	24.4%

	Financial Year	PI 7 - Volume of residual waste per household (kg)			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
PI 7	2023-24	124.6	248.0	359.1	475.5
PI 9 (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
	2013-14	143.5	285.3	422.1	571.4

PI 8	PI 8 - % of cleanliness reports completed within 5 working days			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
2023-24	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	84.1%

*Not yet reportable