

Watford: Waste Service Changes

Benefits, challenges and opportunities

This paper outlines the benefits of the new waste collection service in Watford, supported with industry best practices, successes, challenges and opportunities.

1. Background

The new waste service configuration proposed by Watford Borough Council in 2019 with a view of implementing the changes from July 2020. The waste and recycling collection method in the Watford borough for households will be:

- Introduce a weekly collection of food waste (with a new 23 litre kerbside caddy).
- Retain a weekly collection of fully commingled recycling (using a blue-lidded bin).
- Move to a fortnightly collection of non-recyclable waste (using existing black bin).
- Move to a chargeable fortnightly collection of garden waste (using existing green bins).

2. Industry best practice and success

2.1 Introduce a weekly collection of food waste (with a new 23 litre kerbside caddy).

The move to a separate food waste collection from a commingled garden waste bin is an industry standard which delivers improved capture of food waste for recycling which is better both environmentally and economically. Where separate food waste collections are rolled out successfully they also improve resident satisfaction due to improved ease of use.

Veolia recognises the benefits of a weekly separate food waste collection as it is one of the key concepts going through consultation from the published national Resources and Waste Strategy for England (December 2018). The Strategy sets out how the country will 'preserve material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving towards a circular economy.'¹

WRAP in their Household Food Waste Collections Guide have highlighted that food waste typically makes up about a third of the residual waste stream.² Veolia in partnership with Watford Borough Council recently produced a Waste Compositional Analysis in July 2019 which supports this strategy as food waste was seen to be the major component of residual waste forming 30.5% of the total, equating to 1.4kg/hh/wk. By introducing a weekly separate food waste collection, food waste is encouraged to be diverted from the residual waste bin and into the correct stream for treatment.

Benefits of separate food waste collections:

- Contributing to targets for diverting organic waste from incineration treatments to Anaerobic Digestion (AD) facilities where the carbon footprint is greatly improved.
- Reduction of environmental impacts associated with landfill (toxicity in leachate and methane production). A small percentage of Watford's residual waste still enters this stream.
- Reduced disposal costs.
- Greater acceptance of fortnightly residual collection.
- Separately collected food and other bio-waste significantly reduces the weight of general waste collections, which in turn reduces the cost of disposing of general waste in landfill or Energy from waste (EfW) (lower weight reduces gate fee charges by landfills),
- Gate fees for the separately collected food waste are significantly lower at anaerobic digestion or composting facilities compared to landfill sites or EfW.³

2.2 Retain a weekly collection of fully commingled recycling (using a blue-lidded bin).

Retaining the recycling collection weekly in a 240l bin and moving the non-recyclable collection to fortnightly in a 140l bin will encourage residents to use their recycling bin more often as it has a bigger capacity and it is collected more frequently. This change in the collection service has the potential to increase recycling rates, but needs to be closely monitored as it can also lead to higher contamination rates. It has been widely recognised that by restricting the residual waste capacity through less frequent collections/and or smaller containers, is the key to driving up recycling performance.

¹ Local Government Association, 'Resources and Waste Strategy summary' <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20briefing%20-%20RW%20strategy%2020122018.pdf> 20 December 2018 (accessed 2 October 2019)

² WRAP, 'Household food waste collections guide' <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/household-food-waste-collections-guide> (accessed on 2 October 2019)

³ WRAP, 'Gate Fees Report 2018: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/collections-and-reprocessing/recovered-materials-markets/reports/gate-fee-reports/2018-report-map> 5 July 2018 (accessed 2 October 2019)

2.3 Move to a fortnightly collection of non-recyclable waste (using existing black bin).

Veolia have found that “well run” alternate weekly collection (AWC) schemes not only encourage recycling, but can also reduce the overall amount of waste produced as residents seek to avoid waste generation.⁴

Alternate weekly collections can produce behavioural change as it raises awareness of the volumes of waste generated, prompting the segregation of materials for recycling and composting; and further leading to an overall reduction in waste arising at the kerbside. The reduction is likely to be brought about by residents changing their habits regarding the amount of material they manage via other means (e.g. home composting) or by changing shopping habits to reduce e.g. food and packaging waste.

The top five high recycling councils in terms of household and recycling rates all offer AWC with weekly food waste collections. Eight of ten of the lowest performing councils have weekly domestic waste collections.⁵

Separate food and other bio-waste collections require fewer general waste collections (once the putrescible material has been removed on a weekly basis).

Research shows that as much as 80%⁶ of household waste can be recycled and, to help improve recycling rates, 248 out of 326 local authorities (76%) across England now collect residual waste fortnightly or less frequently.⁷ Households in Watford currently recycle around 45% of the waste they generate, and although not guaranteed, we hope to see an improvement when the residual waste becomes fortnightly.

Watford’s Waste Compositional Analysis highlighted that 43.9% of residual waste collected could have been recycled alternatively at the kerbside.

By embarking on AWC, Watford has the opportunity to encourage residents to not only recycle but also to think further up the waste hierarchy of reducing and reusing waste.

⁴ WRAP, ‘Alternate weekly collections guidance.’

<http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/AWC%20Revised%20Final%20Report%20-%20130707.PDF> 13 July 2007 (accessed on 3 October 2019).

⁵ O.Bennett, House of Commons library, ‘Bin collection—Alternate weekly collection.’ 4 February 2013

⁶ Recycling bins, ‘Recycling Facts’ <https://www.recyclingbins.co.uk/recycling-facts/> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

⁷ Press Association, ‘Three quarters of councils collect general waste once a fortnight’

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/oct/09/three-quarters-of-councils-collect-general-waste-once-a-forenight> 9 Oct 2017 (accessed on 3 October 2019).

2.4 Move to a fortnightly chargeable collection of garden waste (using existing green bin).

Watford residents have for many years enjoyed a free garden waste collection service, however with significant reduction in funding from Central Government over the last ten years, the majority of councils in England now charge for collecting garden waste to cover the cost of the service and this will be the case for Watford. The collection of garden waste is not a statutory service (i.e. one the council has to provide). It's also a service a number of people do not use, due to living in places without a garden.

It is known that 48% of the local authorities in England now charge for the collection of garden waste with the average annual subscription fee being £41.64.⁸ Watford's proposed annual subscription fee is £50 per bin (£0.96p per week). This is discounted to £45 if paying by direct debit and £40 if on certain income related benefits. The pricing margin falls in line with the country's subscription scheme average.

The below table shows the growth of local authorities charging for garden waste.



Source: mantis.co.uk

Watford's Waste Compositional Analysis showed that 0.6% of residual waste was found to be garden waste and whilst this might be a small amount; over the course of the year this adds up, and is costly to the Council as a disposal route. The restricted waste capacity will prevent residents from using the residual bin for garden waste as it will use more space in the bin and it is collected fortnightly.

⁸ Mantis, ;Garden bin tax: How does your council compare? <https://mantis.uk.com/garden-bin-tax-how-does-your-council-compare-2/> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

In Brent, where Veolia run the waste and recycling services, the following was achieved after the first year which the authority was very pleased with (London Borough of Brent).

	Brent
Date commenced	April 2015
Service offered	Fortnightly with one collection per month in Jan and Feb
Subscriptions managed	By Council
Disposal route	Separate food waste and garden waste disposal routes
Current cost	£60 per bin (with a £10 discount for early sign up and 20% discount for those on benefits)
No. target low rise properties	80,000
% sign up (of those with gardens)	22.5% - 23.8% (year 1 cost was £40 achieved 25% sign up)

Veolia will update Watford Borough Council on any new industry developments relating to the new waste collection service changes.