

Place Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste



**Final Report
January 2024**

Place Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

I would like to thank the officers and contributors who have worked so hard on this report. I would also like to thank the Committee. This is the first review that I have chaired, and it could have been very difficult.

Due to national changes, the increasing costs, and our commitment to the environment and net zero, we, as a Council, need to change the way we collect and dispose of our waste. It is a difficult decision. For many years, the Council has had a fantastic waste team who work extremely hard, and Members and residents should be proud of the service provided. However, we must admit that the figures show that our recycling rate is not where we would like it to be.

This report will hopefully be a blueprint for the future, allowing the Council to move forward with its commitment to the environment, reduce costs and, most importantly, continue to give an outstanding service to our residents.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to the members of the Committee who have worked collaboratively and constructively to come to a unanimous decision, and I hope that all Members will continue to support this report.

Cllr Richard Eglington – Chair



**Councillor
Richard
Eglington
Chair – Place
Select
Committee**



**Councillor
Katie Weston
Vice-Chair –
Place Select
Committee**

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

This review will contribute to the following areas of the Council Plan 2023-2026 vision:

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive.

This means we will enjoy:

- great places to live and visit
- clean and green spaces

A Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

This means that we will make sure that we provide:

- financial sustainability and value for money
- dedicated and resourceful employees
- strong leadership and governance

The project would contribute to the Council's Environmental Sustainability & Carbon Reduction Strategy, specifically Aim 3 to "Maximise the use of existing resources, minimise waste and achieve high levels of re-use and recycling".

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Main Issues

Waste and recycling collections impact every resident in the Borough and are a key service and a statutory duty that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) deliver to residents. The service is highly visible and impacts on every household. The Council's waste and recycling provisions are very popular with residents and have regularly received excellent customer service feedback.

However, collecting refuse weekly in a 240L bin does bring with it a negative effect on the overall household waste recycling rate which the council can achieve. Residents currently have access to a large residual waste disposal capacity of 240 litres every week. This amount of refuse disposal capacity acts as a key disincentive for residents to recycle due to the convenience factor which the 240L green wheeled bins provide. Generally, only those residents with a keen interest in recycling, will recycle.

Due to new Government legislation, councils will need to rollout mandatory weekly food waste collections by 1st April 2026. As a result of this rollout date, which also aligns with the start date of the council's new waste disposal contract, SBC's current waste and recycling collection services should be reviewed to ensure an efficient, effective and resilient service in the future.

There are major financial pressures which local authorities will need to deal with over the coming years and, with the expected increase of gate fees from the new waste disposal contract on 1st April 2026, reviewing waste and recycling collections should be seen as an opportunity to help with the financial pressure on the authority.

The most common reason given for retaining weekly collection is the potential for food waste to create a smell and a hazard if it is uncollected for up to 2 weeks. This is particularly likely in warm weather. However, the introduction of mandatory weekly food waste collections from 1st April 2026, would resolve this issue and the benefits of alternative weekly collection of other residual waste may then outweigh the disadvantages.

The Council's continued failure to increase recycling and reduce its carbon impact could become the subject of national Government challenge and penalties as climate change accelerates.

Stockton's current recycling rate is the lowest in the Tees Valley at 24.3% in 2020/21, ranking SBC 328 out of 338 authorities nationally. This compares to the Tees Valley average of 30.58%, the northeast average of 32.84% and a national average of 42%.

Stockton's 240L weekly residual waste capacity has a significant impact on residual waste per household (KG/HH), which can be seen when compared to other Northeast Authorities, with Stockton having the highest KG/HH of the 7 authorities.

The Joint Waste Management Strategy (JWMS) and the Tees Valley Outline Business Case (TV OBC) has a target of a 45%-50% Tees Valley Recycling rate by 2027, with a national target of 65% recycling rate for municipal solid waste by 2035. Without significant collection model changes this would not be achievable.

The requirements of the *Resources and Waste Strategy for England 2018* and the *Environment Act 2021* places a statutory duty on all waste collection and unitary authorities in England to collect food waste separately and to treat this waste by recycling. The Council is awaiting clarity around the details of start date and funding, however, after discussions with Defra it is expected that SBC will need to collect food waste by 1st April 2026.

Also, the Government has now released their response to the *Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)* consultation. DRS will be introduced nationally from October 2025 and will include single use drinks containers of plastic bottles and cans. Glass will be excluded from the scheme. Local Authorities will now need to understand how the introduction of DRS will impact the kerbside recycling collections, as any drinks container in scope that would have been placed in the kerbside recycling container will now find its way to a DRS drop off point. It is anticipated that a 'levy' of around 20p will be added to each drinks container upon purchase and this will be refunded to the customer once the item has been returned.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is another element of the strategy and places the responsibility onto packaging producers to cover the full net cost of dealing with the packaging they place on the market. It is expected local authorities will receive payments from 2024/25 for any packaging which finds its way to kerbside waste streams. The details of how this funding mechanism will work is not yet known, though it is believed to be based on the quality and quantity of collected material.

Consistency in Collections is another consultation which will impact SBC collections with legislation which has placed a requirement on councils to collect glass, metal, plastic, paper and card, food and garden waste separately. Whether green waste collections should be free of charge or not is also the subject of discussions as part of this consultation.

Overall aim

Levels of recycling in the Borough are amongst the lowest in the country. The cost of the weekly collection of general waste is increasing rapidly. Food waste collection is likely to be a requirement in the coming years and a proactive approach could contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets. The free collection of garden waste/green waste also benefits some communities more than others.

Overall, the Council's approach to waste reduction could be improved to reduce the financial and carbon cost. Therefore, this review aims to take into account the potential public resistance but also give appropriate consideration to the importance of the environment, the costs of service delivery, and the direction of national policy over food waste.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What is the current waste management strategy for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and how does this align with the joint waste management strategy for the Tees Valley?
- What financial and strategic challenges does the authority face regarding waste management in the short, medium and long term?
- How do the key issues surrounding domestic waste, recycling and green waste vary across the Borough?
- How do SBC's recycling rates compare with other local authorities in the Tees Valley/ the North East/ nationally?
- What actions need to be taken following the Government's introduction of mandatory food waste collection?
- How will the introduction of the (Deposit Return Scheme DRS) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) impact on kerbside waste and recycling collections?
- How can the anticipated rise in gate fees be managed to ease additional financial pressures?
- What are the viable options to alter the current system of kerbside waste and recycling collections?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

Due to the introduction of mandatory weekly food waste collections, there are significant opportunities to deliver carbon reductions and environmental benefits across the whole service.

If changes are made from the review of waste and recycling collections, this would also help to support the Council's aspirations to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

The review would also help in achieving the targets set out in the Tees Valley Joint Waste Management Strategy (TVJWMS) which aims to increase recycling levels, reduce the carbon impact of waste management and reduce the amount of waste generated by households.

1.0 Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste.

Levels of recycling in the Borough are amongst the lowest in the country. The cost of the weekly collection of general waste is increasing rapidly. Food waste collection will be a requirement in the coming years and a proactive approach could contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets. The collection of garden waste/green waste also benefits some communities more than others.

Overall, the Council's approach to waste reduction could be improved to reduce the financial and carbon cost. Therefore, this review aimed to consider the potential public resistance but also give appropriate consideration to the importance of the environment, the costs of service delivery, and the direction of national policy over food waste.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- Nationally, due to the Resources & Waste Strategy & Environment Act 2021, weekly food waste collections will become mandatory by 2026.
- As part of the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' reforms, the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) will also be introduced from October 2025. Local authorities will also be able to charge for the collection of green waste.
- Locally, from 2026, the energy from residual waste gate fee is expected to double following the necessary procurement of a new residual waste disposal facility.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) currently has the lowest recycling rate in the Tees Valley (25.2% in 2022/23) and the highest level of residual waste per household in the country. SBC is also one of a small number of local authorities to collect weekly residual waste in a 240-litre bin.
- Therefore, SBC's waste management service must be re-evaluated to ensure it is sustainable and financially viable. This includes the frequency of recycling and residual waste collections.
- An assessment of SBC's waste and recycling service by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has provided the Committee with additional data on the Council's current performance compared to similar local authorities.
- WRAP's review also included an assessment of 4 alternative collection scenarios. This included performance levels (percentage recycled and amount of residual waste), carbon impact, and revenue and capital costs.
- Scenario 3 (fortnightly refuse collection with a weekly 'multi-stream collection of dry recycling and food waste) resulted in the lowest levels of residual waste, the highest levels of recycling and the lowest level of carbon impact. This scenario had the joint highest level of projected number of staff.

- In a closed session, the Committee received information on the projected costs for each scenario. Scenario 3 had the lowest level of:
 - projected total revenue costs (excluding garden waste)
 - projected annual 'whole system' costs relative to the current baseline costs assuming 2026 and 2028 EfW (Energy from Waste) gate fee (the only scenario to achieve savings). However, container capital costs (vehicles included in projected revenue costs) also had to be considered for scenario 3.
- SBC has enjoyed high levels of customer satisfaction for its waste and recycling collection service. Material collected for recycling is also of a high quality with low levels of contamination. Both factors need to be considered when deciding on any changes to the service.
- A comprehensive communications plan on proposed changes is vital to ensure residents are sufficiently informed before changes are implemented. Following this community engagement would be required for a short time to help embed the changes. A project manager and ICT software would also need to be resourced.

Conclusion

Through this review, the Committee has evaluated the Council's current waste management strategy. It has been evidenced that the Borough has the highest level of residual waste per household in the country and the lowest recycling rate regionally.

Owing to several factors, the Council must implement an alternative waste management strategy which is both financially viable and reduces the Council's carbon impact. These include the introduction of national legislation on weekly food waste collections, the unprecedented financial pressures exerted on local authorities and the Council's commitment to carbon reduction to combat climate change.

Therefore, the Committee has considered four alternative collection scenarios and has concluded that weekly dry recycling and food waste collections and fortnightly residual waste collections is the most appropriate choice. The implementation of a comprehensive communication and community engagement plan to inform residents of these changes has also been recommended. Additionally, it has emerged that the Council's green waste collection service should be reevaluated in light of the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' reforms.

Recommendations

1. That the council adopt a fortnightly refuse collection service.
2. That scenario 3 (fortnightly refuse collection with a weekly 'multi-stream collection of dry recycling and food waste) is adopted as the Council's new waste and recycling collection service, when considering timescales around national mandated services and local waste disposal arrangements.
3. To review the green waste collection service in line with updated government guidance.
4. That a comprehensive communications and community engagement plan on proposed changes is implemented to ensure residents are sufficiently informed prior to the enactment of any changes, and to help embed the changes, to the waste and recycling service.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Domestic Waste Collections, Kerbside Recycling and Green Waste.

2.2 Levels of recycling in the Borough are amongst the lowest in the country. The cost of the weekly collection of general waste is increasing rapidly. Food waste collection will be a requirement in the coming years and a proactive approach could contribute to the Council's carbon reduction targets. The collection of garden waste/green waste also benefits some communities more than others.

2.3 Overall, the Council's approach to waste reduction could be improved to reduce the financial and carbon cost. Therefore, this review aimed to consider the potential public resistance but also give appropriate consideration to the importance of the environment, the costs of service delivery, and the direction of national policy over food waste.

2.4 It was envisaged that a review of domestic waste collections, kerbside recycling and green waste could potentially lead to the following efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

- Due to the introduction of mandatory weekly food waste collections, there are significant opportunities to deliver carbon reductions and environmental benefits across the whole service.
- If changes are made from the review of waste and recycling collections, this would also help to support the Council's aspirations to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions.
- The review would also help in achieving the targets set out in the Tees Valley Joint Waste Management Strategy (TVJWMS) which aims to increase recycling levels, reduce the carbon impact of waste management and reduce the amount of waste generated by households.

2.5 The Committee undertook the following key lines of enquiry:

- What is the current waste management strategy for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) and how does this align with the joint waste management strategy for the Tees Valley?
- What financial and strategic challenges does the authority face regarding waste management in the short, medium and long term?
- How do the key issues surrounding domestic waste, recycling and green waste vary across the Borough?
- How do SBC's recycling rates compare with other local authorities in the Tees Valley/ the North East/ nationally?
- What actions need to be taken following the Government's introduction of mandatory food waste collection?

- How will the introduction of the (Deposit Return Scheme DRS) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) impact on kerbside waste and recycling collections?
- How can the anticipated rise in gate fees be managed to ease additional financial pressures?
- What are the viable options to alter the current system of kerbside waste and recycling collections?

2.6 The Committee received evidence from Council Officers and a representative from the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

2.7 The Committee visited J&B Recycling, Hartlepool in November 2023 as part of this review.

2.8 Recognising the increasing pressures on the Council's finances, it is imperative that in-depth scrutiny reviews promote the Council's policy priorities and, where possible, seek to identify efficiencies and reduce demand for services.

3.0 Background

3.1. Further background information in relation to this scrutiny topic includes:

His Majesty's Government, *Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy for England* (2021). Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf

Environment Act 2021. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/enacted>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Waste Management Plan for England* (2021). Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955897/waste-management-plan-for-england-2021.pdf

Tees Valley Joint Waste Management Strategy 2020 to 2035. Available at: https://www.stockton.gov.uk/media/2591/Tees-Valley-Joint-Waste-Management-Strategy-2020-to-2035/pdf/Tees_Valley_Joint_Waste_Management_Strategy_2020_to_2035.pdf?m=637813895580900000

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, *Bins, rubbish and recycling webpages*. Available at: <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/bins-rubbish-and-recycling>

Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), *Citizen Insights: UK Household Food Waste Tracking Survey 2022*. Available at: <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/20230309%20Food%20Trends%202022.pdf>

4.0 Evidence

Waste and Recycling in the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees: Overview

4.1 Key dates of changes to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) waste management service are:

2002 – Introduction of first phases of kerbside recycling (paper collections via Cheshire Recycling) in a pilot area

2003 – Transfer to SWS recycling with additional roll out of tins and glass using a phased approach over 18 months

2004 – Service brought in-house

2005 – Green Waste collection service introduced (initially for 30 weeks)

2007 – Plastic and Cardboard Collections introduced over a period of 18 months (3 phases)

2008 – Removal of the 'side waste' policy for refuse collection and the launch of a three pronged strategy to ensure compliance and increase recycling participation –operational effectiveness, waste awareness and measured use of enforcement powers. Two year funding to support increased recycling.

4.2 The Council's current collection schedule is as follows:

- Weekly Refuse Collection (13/14 domestic rounds)
- Fortnightly Kerbside Recycling Rounds (7/8 rounds)
- Seasonal (30 week) Green Waste Collection, funded for 26 weeks

4.3 Currently, the receptacles available to residents to dispose of residual waste, recycling and garden waste are:

- 240L Wheeled Bin for residual waste
- 55L box (glass)
- 120L bag (plastic, cardboard, cans, paper pouch)
- Reusable green waste sack or roll of disposable bags



Waste Disposal

4.4 For the current year, 2022/2023, 83,000 tonnes of household waste were collected from 89,050 households. Of this, 56,400 tonnes of household waste was collected from the green wheeled bin. Residual waste per household per year is currently 698.

4.5 This waste is deposited at the SUEZ Household Waste facility at Haverton Hill. The current contract for waste disposal, which includes a competitive gate fee, has been extended until April 2026. In the meantime, local authorities across the Tees Valley are in the process of procuring a new facility to be utilised from April 2026. This process is ongoing and a site has yet to be confirmed. The current landfill rate is 5.9%, and 93.1% of non-recyclable waste is deposited at the Energy from Waste (EFW) plant.

Kerbside Recycling

4.6 The 2018 Waste Strategy for England states, “[the] Government continues to support separate collection of dry materials as the default to achieve high quality recycling in particular separating glass and fibres”.

For the current year, 2022/23, 20,890 tonnes of recycling were collected, and the Council’s recycling rate is 25.2%. The contamination rates are less than 5% and ‘desirable’ recyclable material generates income.

Recycling Rate and Targets

4.7 SBC’s current recycling rate is the lowest in the Tees Valley at 25.2% in 2022/2023. This compares to the Tees Valley average of 30.58%, the North East average of 33.5% and National average of 42%.

4.8 The Joint Waste Management Strategy (JWMS) has a recycling target of a 45%-50% for the Tees Valley by 2027. A national target, of a recycling rate of 65%, has also been set for Municipal solid waste by 2035.

How does the Council compare?

4.9 SBC currently has the highest Residual Waste per household in the country and is one of the only local authorities to collect weekly residual waste in a 240L bin. In 2020/21 SBC were ranked 328 out of 338 local authorities nationally for recycling performance.

North	East	Comparison	4.10
Year	Authority	Residual Household Waste per household (KG/HH)	
2020-2021	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council		783
2020-2021	Middlesbrough Borough Council		714.19
2020-2021	County Durham		612.3
2020-2021	Hartlepool Borough Council		607.4
2020-2021	Darlington Borough Council		601.6
2020-2021	Redcar and Cleveland		581.8
2020-2021	Newcastle-upon-Tyne		499.6

Top Performers

4.11

Year	Authority	KG/HH Residual	Residual Frequency	Recycling rate	Food Waste	Recycling Frequency
2020-21	St Albans City and District Council	335.5	Fortnightly 180L	64.2%	Weekly	Weekly/Fortnightly
2020-21	South Oxfordshire District Council	336.3	Fortnightly 180L	63.6%	Weekly	Fortnightly
2020-21	Three Rivers District Council	333.6	Fortnightly 140L	63.1%	Weekly	Weekly/Fortnightly
2020-21	Vale of White Horse District Council	325.2	Fortnightly 180L	62.6%	Weekly	Fortnightly
2020-21	Surrey Heath Borough Council	364.9	Fortnightly 180L	61.3%	Weekly	Weekly/Fortnightly
2020-21	East Riding of Yorkshire Council	450.7	Fortnightly 240L	60.8%	Mixed with Green	Fortnightly
2020-21	North Somerset Council	405.7	Fortnightly 180L	60.4%	Weekly	Weekly
2020-21	Dorset Council	392.0	Fortnightly 140L	60.1%	Weekly	Fortnightly
2020-21	East Devon District Council	269.4	3 Weekly 140L	60.0%	Weekly	Weekly
2020-21	Tandridge District Council	379.6	Fortnightly 180L	59.9%	Weekly	Weekly/Fortnightly

SBC comparison 698.13 Weekly 240L 25.2% N/A Fortnightly

Stakeholders

4.12 Customer Satisfaction levels are very high on both Refuse & Recycling Collection Services. Refuse Collection is currently tracking at 94% and Recycling Collection at 91%. Both have regularly been over 90%. SBC collect high quality material with very low levels of contamination.

4.13 A review of SBC's Kerbside Recycling Collection was last undertaken in 2015/16 with the following recommendations made:

1. *Undertake consultation exercise to obtain residents views on current collection methodology*
2. *Assess the suitability of current recycling receptacles*
3. *Communications strategy to encourage greater recycling participation*

Future National Strategy

4.14 The following national initiatives will come into effect by the dates listed:

- Mandatory Food Waste Collections - April 2026
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) – October 2025
- Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) – October 2025
- Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) – 2028

Challenges and Risks

4.15 There is a significant financial risk associated with residual waste disposal if the Council continues to collect at current levels with gate fees expected to significantly increase. Also, the current collection arrangements do not encourage residents to recycle and there is a need to educate residents on being more environmentally responsible. There is also uncertainty around the National Strategy.

4.16 SBC currently has the highest kg's of residual waste per household in the country and are one of the only councils to collect weekly residual waste in a 240ltr wheeled bin. The need to increase recycling rates was discussed at length by the Committee and it was suggested, by the Committee, that recycling could be collected weekly and residual waste could be collected fortnightly. The Committee highlighted that the introduction of weekly mandatory food waste collections, and the requirement for separate food receptacles, could decrease the need for weekly residual waste

collections. It was agreed that sufficient communication plans to inform residents of changes to services and to encourage higher recycling rates were essential.

4.17 The Committee raised concerns over the additional pressures on waste and recycling collection services arising from new housing developments currently under construction across the Borough. Concerns about additional bin/receptacle storage for residents in multi-occupancy properties were also raised. It was explained that the Council was working with DEFRA on this issue and this would be considered as part of the review.

4.18 In terms of income generated from the collection of clean recycling, the Committee were informed that this was included in the annual budget for waste collection and disposal and fluctuated depending on market prices for materials. Income generated in the previous financial year amounted to around £190,000.

Waste and Recycling in Stockton: M.E.L Waste Analysis

M.E.L Waste Insights

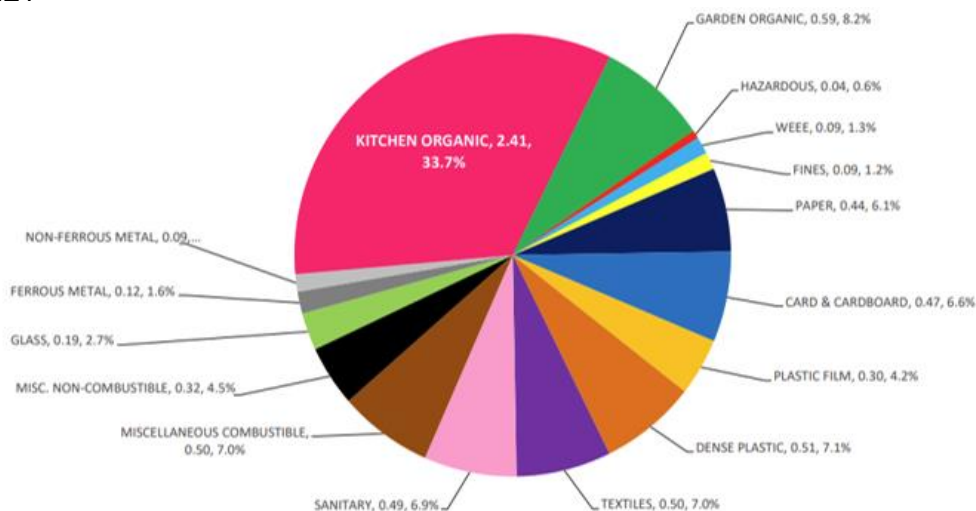
4.19 M.E.L was commissioned to provide analysis of kerbside and residual waste. Data was collected from approximately 200 target properties equally representing 4 of the 5 socio-demographic properties (Acorn categories).

4.20 Acorn Categories

- Acorn 1: Affluent Achievers
- Acorn 3: Comfortable Communities
- Acorn 4: Financially Stretched
- Acorn 5: Urban Diversity

Composition of Residual Waste

4.21



4.22

Waste Type	Percentage of Recyclable in Residual Waste	Percentage Alternatively Recyclable at Kerbside
Paper	6.1%	42%
Card and Cardboard	6.6%	64%
Plastic	11.4%	25%
Metallic	2.9%	64%
Glass	2.7%	79%
Food Waste	33.7%	85%*

Table shows proportion of recyclable waste in residual waste and proportion alternatively recyclable at the kerbside. *If food was offered a kerbside collection.

Participation Rates

4.23

Set Out Rates	Acorn 1	Acorn 3	Acorn 4	Acorn 5	Average
Residual Waste Bin	76%	58%	61%	56%	63%
Blue Box (Glass)	48%	26%	25%	37%	34%
White Bag (Mixed Recycling)	67%	48%	43%	28%	47%
Garden Waste	64%	28%	23%	25%	35%

Food Waste

4.24

	Acorn 1	Acorn 3	Acorn 4	Acorn 5	Average
Total Food Waste	34.4%	24.2%	34.6%	36.4%	33.7%
Proportion of Food Waste Avoidable	80.0%	91.1%	80.8%	86.8%	84.8%
Proportion of Food Waste Packaged	37.3%	41.1%	39.7%	15.6%	32.8%

4.25 33.7% of all residual waste was food waste. 85% of food waste was deemed as avoidable. 33% of all discarded food waste was still packaged.

Summary

4.26 On average, 63% of residents place their wheeled bins out for collection weekly. Food waste makes up around 34% of the waste in the residual bin equating to 2.41kg/hh/wk. 19% of residual waste could have been alternatively recycled at the kerbside with 5.4% of this being garden waste. If all recyclable items were correctly recycled Stockton could achieve a 43% recycling rate, based on current collection models.

WRAP support to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council: Helping the Council review and assess its household waste collection service

4.27 In October and November, the Committee received evidence from a representative from the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). The purpose of WRAP'S assessment was to review and update the findings of the 2017/18 WRAP support with the aim of helping officers and Members to understand how the Council's household waste collection service could be reconfigured to meet the anticipated future financial pressures and regulatory requirements.

National context

4.28 Key points from the Resources & Waste Strategy & Environment Act 2021 which were highlighted were:

- Requirement to separately collect 'recyclable waste streams' including food waste
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) significant new (replacement?) funding stream
- Funding will come from producers of packaging waste
- Modelled net costs
- 'Efficient and effective collections'
- Deposit Return Scheme
- Quality the common factor linking all the above

Local context

4.29 A new waste disposal facility was currently being procured with other Tees Valley Authorities. Consequently, the future residual waste gate fee was likely to be significantly higher than it was at present.

Benchmarking performance

4.30 WRAP’s assessment included a comparison of:

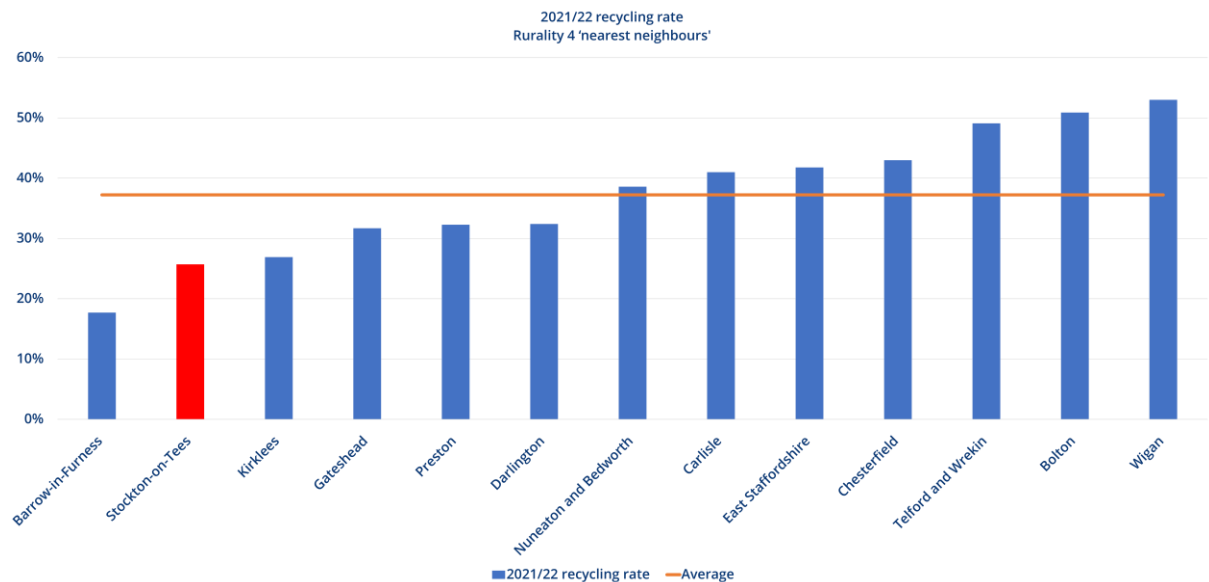
- SBC’s recycling rate with WRAP ‘nearest neighbour’ Rurality 4 authorities
- SBC’s residual waste arisings with WRAP ‘nearest neighbour’ Rurality 4 authorities

4.31 SBC was included in the WRAP Rurality Group 4 (suburban/ high deprivation) and the list of ‘nearest neighbours’ comprised:

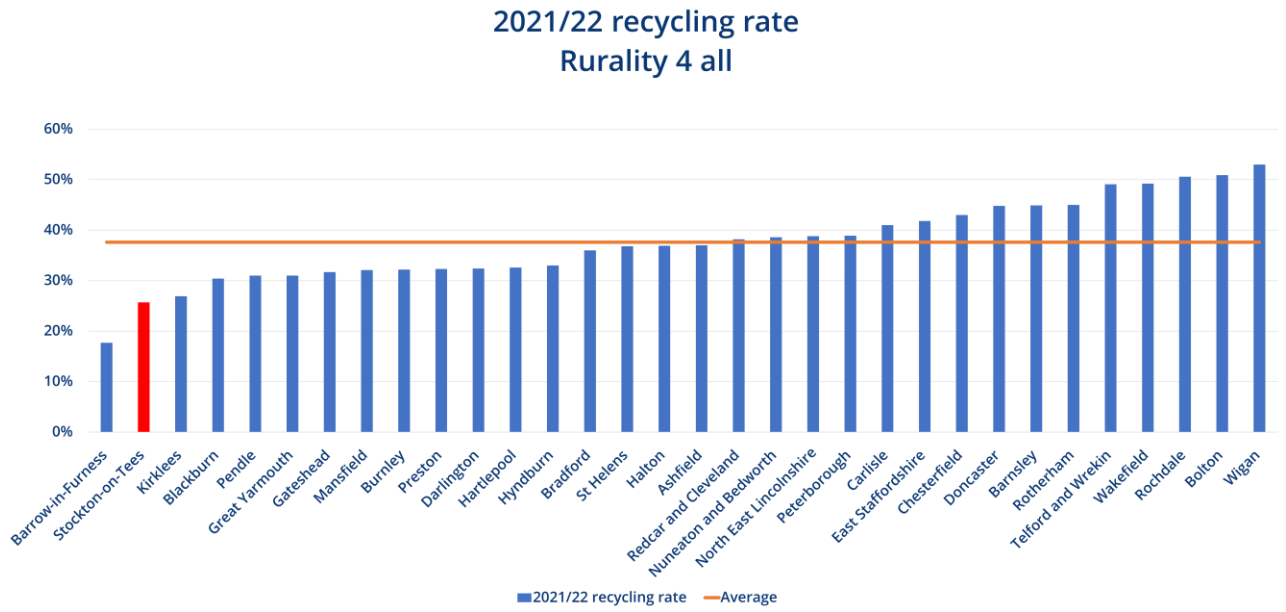
- Barrow-in-Furness
- Kirklees
- Gateshead
- Preston
- Darlington
- Nuneaton and Bedworth
- Carlisle
- East Staffordshire
- Chesterfield
- Telford and Wrekin
- Bolton
- Wigan

4.32 The following graphs provide comparison data with SBC’s ‘nearest neighbours’:

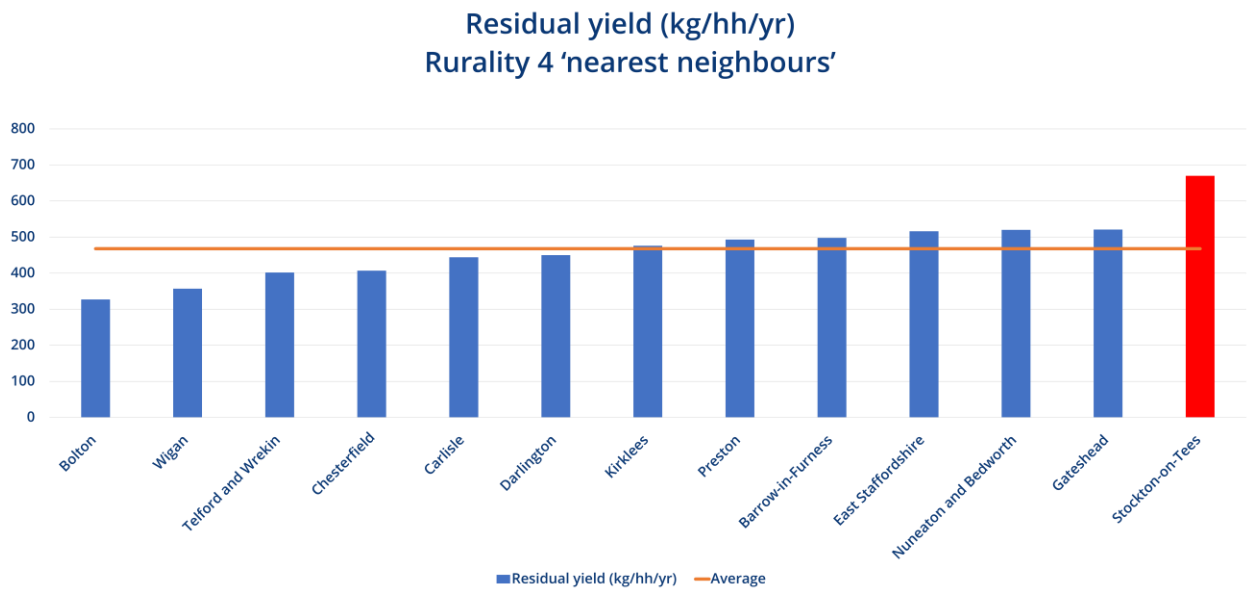
2021/22 recycling rate Rurality 4 ‘nearest neighbours’



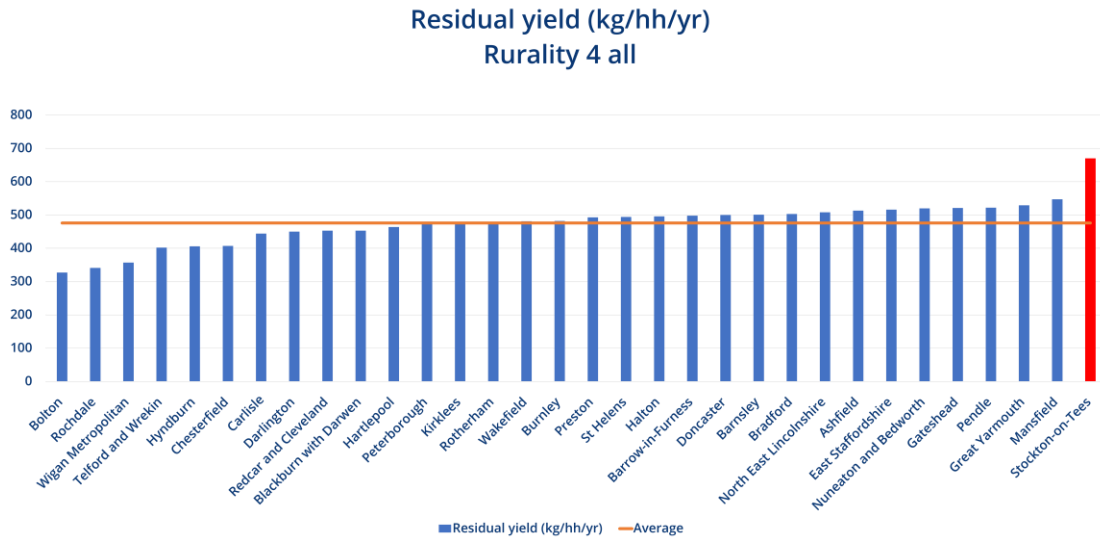
2021/22 recycling rate: Rurality 4 all



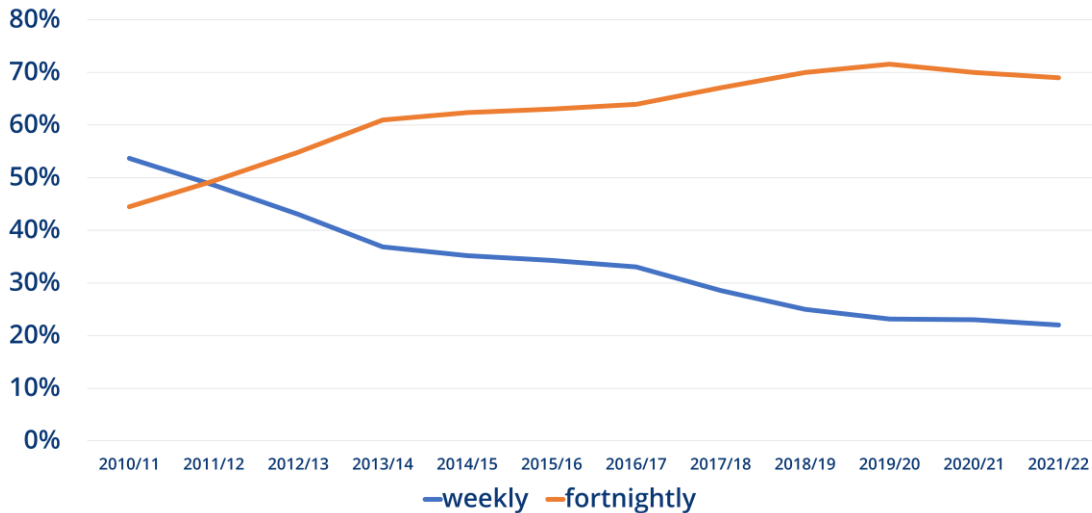
Residual yield (kg/hh/yr): Rurality 4 'nearest neighbours'



Residual yield (kg/hh/yr): Rurality 4 all



Refuse collection frequency over time (% households in England)



4.33 Following the coronavirus pandemic, national waste composition had changed because of a change in buying habits. There was an increase in cardboard packaging disposal, due to an increase in online purchasing, and a decrease in paper disposal, due to a decrease in purchasing of printed newspapers.

4.34 SBC’s Current service comprises a weekly collection of residual waste (i.e. refuse), a fortnightly collection of dry recycling (3 streams) and a fortnightly seasonal collection of garden waste.

4.35 In terms of benchmarking, it was highlighted that SBC collected high quality recycling but only collected a low amount compared to other authorities. SBC also collected its residual waste more frequently than other Councils and provided residents with a larger bin. Barrow-in Furness Council was the only other Council within the Rurality Group 4 that collected residual waste weekly.

4.36 Other local authorities had experienced a reduction in overall waste tonnage by reducing the capacity of residual waste bins (either by reducing the size of bins or the frequency of collections).

4.37 The Committee questioned if there had been an increase in fly tipping if bin sizes or frequency of collections were reduced. WRAP had researched this issue previously and could not find a clear link between an increase in fly tipping resulting from a decrease in the frequency of collection or size of bins. However, it was noted that fly tipping was reported through various channels, and this made it difficult to assess the situation fully.

Summary of the Government’s Simpler Recycling reforms

4.38

Summary of the Simpler Recycling reforms

What?

- Reforms to recycling collections in England
- Household and non-household premises to have separate collections of:
 - Residual
 - Organic recyclable waste
 - Dry recyclable waste

Why? Contribute towards reaching: **65%** municipal recycling rate by 2035

Environmental, economic or social benefit

- Reduced landfill and incineration and associated carbon emissions
- Reduced carbon emissions as a result of reduced production from virgin materials
- Support growth of UK recycling industry

Who?

All households in England including flats

Non-household municipal (NHM) premises in England

- Businesses:

MICRO	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE
≤10	≤50	≤250	>250

 (number of full-time equivalent employees)
- Residential homes
- Educational establishments
- Hospitals or nursing homes

Subject to consultation:

- Places of worship
- Penal institutes
- Charity shops
- Hostels
- Public meeting places

Collectors

- (Subject to consultation) Local authorities / other waste collectors can co-collect dry recyclables and/or co-collect organic waste to reduce the number of containers required
- Local authorities must provide a weekly food waste collection to all households
- Local authorities must provide garden waste collections to households where requested

When?

- 31st March 2025: Small, medium, and large NHM premises recycle all waste streams, except plastic film
- 31st March 2026: Households recycle all waste streams, except plastic film
- 31st March 2027: Micro-firms recycle all waste streams; Plastic film collections from all properties

How?

- Funding will be provided to local authorities for the household collection requirements:
 - Local authorities will receive payments from packaging producers under EPR from October 2025
 - Local authorities will receive new burdens funding for providing food waste collections
 - Local authorities can charge for garden collections

*Garden waste requirement only applies to households and only where specifically requested by the householder.

4.39 It was now a requirement for local authorities to collect garden waste separately and this service could be chargeable. Two-thirds of local authorities currently charged for the collection of green waste and SBC was included in the remaining third that did not currently charge. It was acknowledged that some residents would deposit their green waste in their residual bin. In general, those who currently paid for a garden waste service tended to have larger gardens or produced a higher amount of garden waste.

WRAP's Four Alternative Scenarios

4.40 Scenario 1

Same as your current service except for the addition of a separate weekly collection of food waste.

Scenario 2

Same as Scenario 1 except refuse is collected once every fortnight rather than once a week.

Separate weekly food waste collection.

Scenario 3

Fortnightly refuse collection with a weekly 'multi-stream collection of dry recycling and food waste.

Scenario 4

Fortnightly refuse collection with a fortnightly 'comingled' collection of dry recycling and weekly food waste.

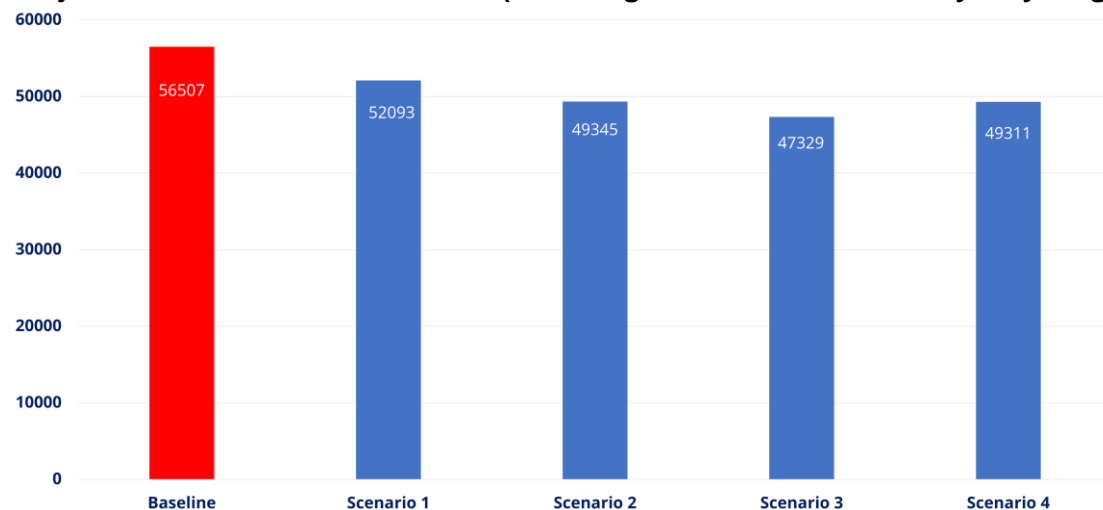
WRAP's Findings from Alternative Waste and Recycling Collection Scenarios Assessment

4.41 WRAP's assessment was conducted using the following criteria:

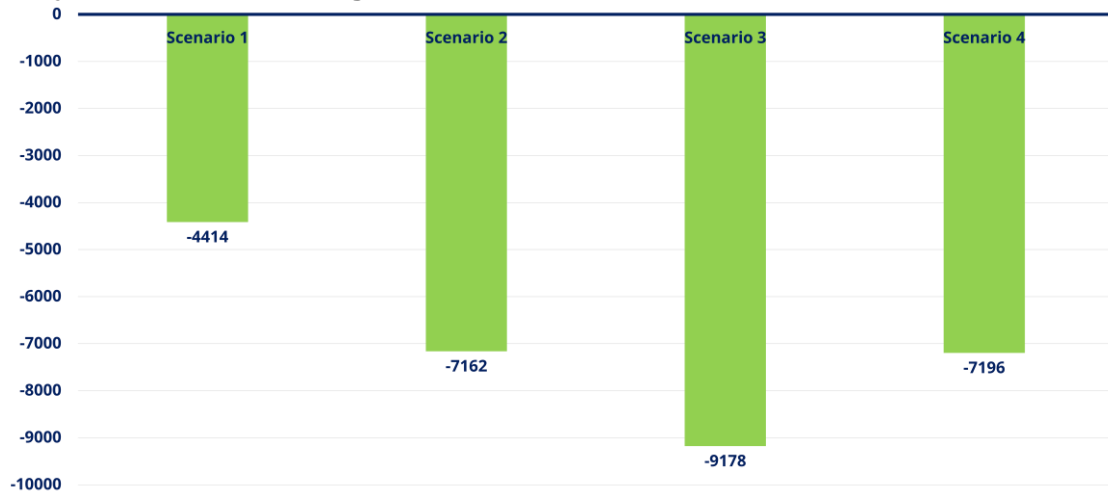
- Performance (% recycled, amount of residual waste)
- Carbon impact
- Cost (Revenue & Capital)
- Impact on the customer
- Employment

4.42 The following graphs provide data on WRAP's assessment on the four alternative scenarios:

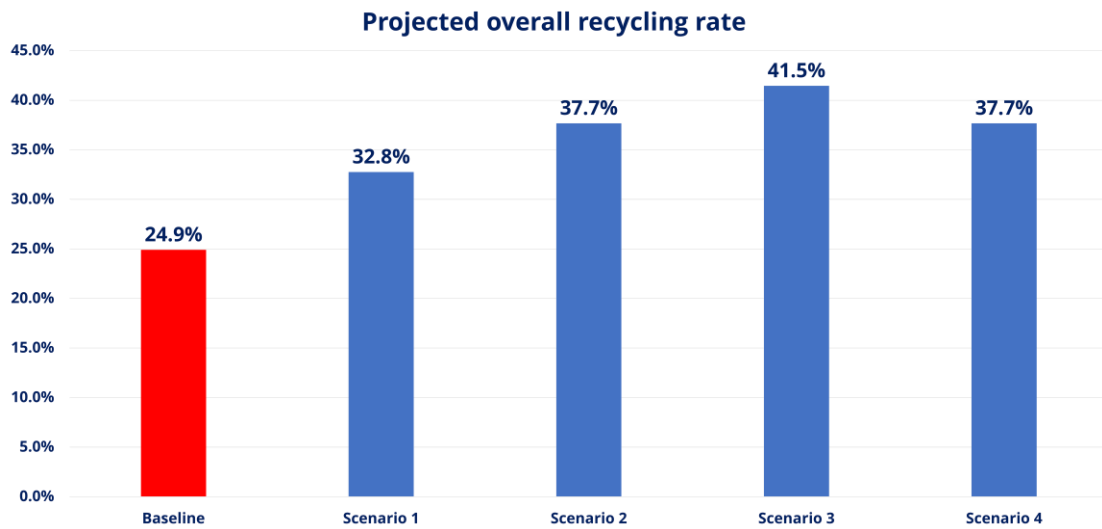
Projected tonnes of residual waste (including contamination from dry recycling)



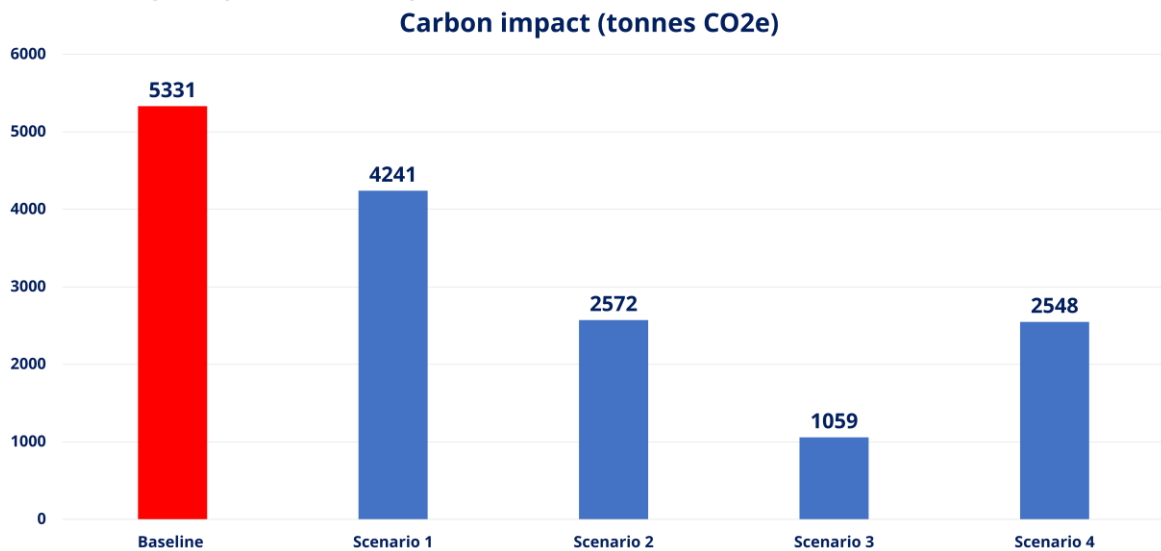
Projected residual tonnage relative to the baseline



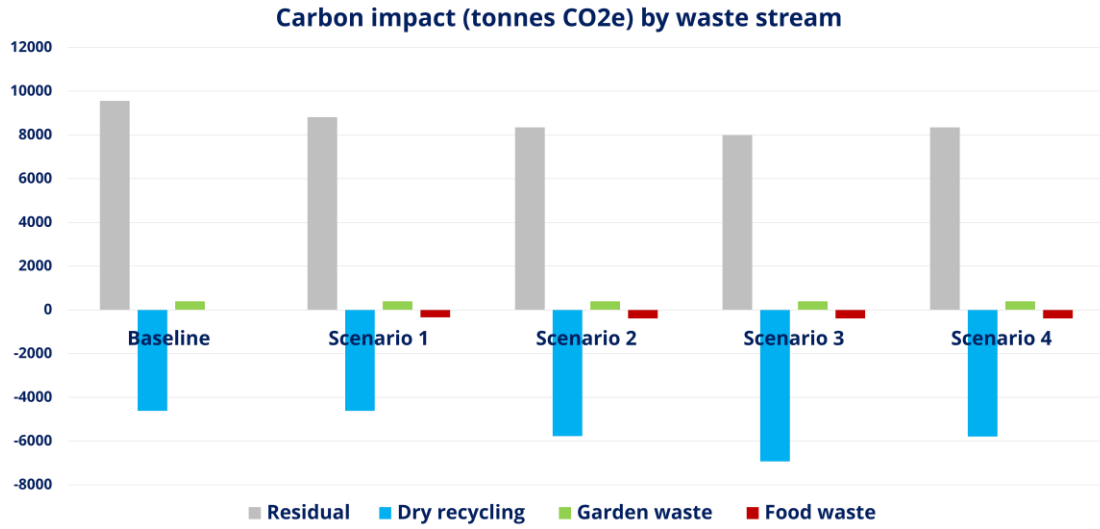
Projected overall recycling rate



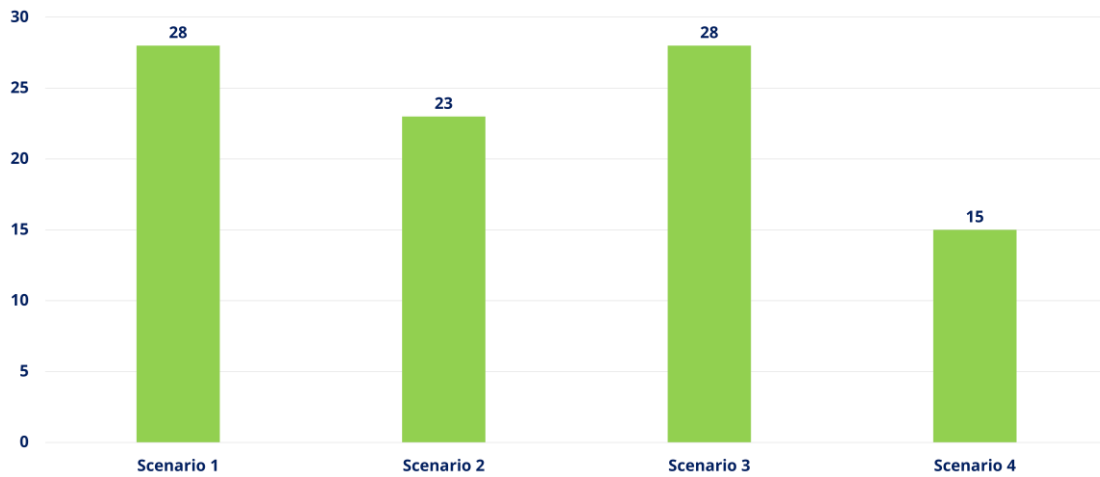
Carbon impact (tonnes CO2e)



Carbon impact (tonnes CO2e) by waste stream



Projected number of staff relative to the baseline



WRAP Closed Session November 2023

4.43 In November 2023, the Committee received evidence in a closed session, as part of WRAP’s assessment, on projected costs in relation to the 4 alternative scenarios outlined above.

4.44 The following provides a summary of this data:

In terms of projected total revenue costs (excluding garden waste), for the current year, 2026 and 2028, scenario 3 resulted in the lowest levels and scenario 1 resulted in the highest levels.

In terms of projected annual ‘whole system’ costs relative to the current baseline costs assuming current EfW (Energy from Waste) gate fee, scenario 3 was the only scenario to result in a saving and scenario 1 resulted in the highest cost.

In terms of projected annual 'whole system' costs relative to the current baseline costs assuming 2026 EfW gate fee, scenario 3 was the only scenario to result in a saving and scenario 1 resulted in the highest cost.

In terms of the projected annual 'whole system' costs relative to the current baseline costs assuming 2028 EfW gate fee, scenario 3 was the only scenario to result in a saving and scenario 1 resulted in the highest cost.

In terms of container capital costs (vehicles included in projected revenue costs), scenarios 1 and 2 resulted in the lowest costs, which only included costs for food waste caddies which are expected to be covered by new burdens funding. Scenario 4 resulted in the highest costs.

In terms of the 'overview of total costs for each scenario for each gate fee', scenario 3 resulted in the lowest costs and the highest overall rate of recycling. Scenario 1 resulted in the highest costs and the lowest overall rate of recycling.

Site Visit November 2023

4.45 As part of this review, a site visit to J&B Recycling, Hartlepool took place on 30 November 2023. This provided the Committee with the opportunity to view and compare the different processing methods for comingled and separated recycled materials (cardboard, paper, plastics, glass).

4.46 Discussions centred on the importance of effective communication with residents to encourage recycling and increase recycling rates, problems associated with the disposal of vapes (including fire hazards, volume of vapes deposited in recycling collections), the fluctuation in market prices for recycled materials.





Waste and Recycling Service Viewpoint and Youth Viewpoint Panel Survey 2023

4.47 As part of this review, an online survey was issued to members of SBC’s Viewpoint Panel and Youth Viewpoint panel in October 2023. The aim of the anonymous survey was to gather panel members’ views on waste and recycling. In total, 94 responses were received.

4.48 The main findings from the survey were:

- 90% of respondents currently recycled.
- ‘Don’t have enough storage space’ was the most popular reason for respondents not recycling (24%).
- According to respondents, the most important reason to recycle was ‘It’s good for the environment’ (83%). This was followed by ‘It saves natural resources’ (54%).
- 90% of respondents put out their recycling on a fortnightly basis.
- In terms of other recycling facilities, 65% of respondents used Charity clothes collections and 50% used the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Haverton Hill.
- When asked to describe how important recycling was to them personally, 73% of respondents opted for ‘very important’ and only 6% opted for ‘not important’.
- On attitudes to recycling, 73% of respondents stated, ‘I recycle even if it requires additional effort’.
- 56% of respondents recycled ‘anything that can be recycled’ whereas only 2% recycled ‘to manage my bin capacity or when my bin is full’.

- 73% of respondents used the Council's kerbside green waste collection service.
- The most popular reason why respondents did not use the green waste collection service was 'I compost my green waste at home' (41%). 19% of respondents selected the option 'I have enough space in my green wheeled bin'.
- 64% of respondents stated that they would not pay a reasonable charge for a green waste collection service if the Council could no longer provide this as a free service.
- Of those who answered yes to paying a charge, 71% stated that 'Up to £20' was a reasonable annual charge for an all year round green waste collection service.
- For the question, 'Some Council's provide an alternative weekly collection service (i.e. getting your bins emptied one week and your recycling collected the next week). Would you see this as being a better or worse service if provided by the Council?', 48% responded 'worse', 17% responded 'better' and 35% responded 'no change at all'.
- 52% of respondents stated that they would use a food waste collection service.
- 50% of respondents stated that they were 'satisfied' with the Council's current waste and recycling collection services, 37% were 'very satisfied' and 7% were 'dissatisfied'.
- Responses were received from residents across the Borough.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

5.1 Through this review, the Committee has evaluated the Council's current waste management strategy. It has been evidenced that the Borough has the highest level of residual waste per household in the country and the lowest recycling rate regionally.

5.2 Owing to several factors, the Council must implement an alternative waste management strategy which is both financially viable and reduces the Council's carbon impact. These include the introduction of national legislation on weekly food waste collections, the unprecedented financial pressures exerted on local authorities and the Council's commitment to carbon reduction to combat climate change.

5.3 Therefore, the Committee has considered four alternative collection scenarios and has concluded that weekly recycling collections and fortnightly residual waste collections is the most appropriate choice. The implementation of a comprehensive communication and community engagement plan to inform residents of these changes has also been recommended. Additionally, it has emerged that the Council's green waste collection service should be reevaluated in light of the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' reforms.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend:

- 1. That the council adopt a fortnightly refuse collection service.**
- 2. That scenario 3 (fortnightly refuse collection with a weekly 'multi-stream collection of dry recycling and food waste) is adopted as the Council's new waste and recycling collection service, when considering timescales around national mandated services and local waste disposal arrangements.**
- 3. To review the green waste collection service in line with updated government guidance.**
- 4. That a comprehensive communications and community engagement plan on proposed changes is implemented to ensure residents are sufficiently informed prior to the enactment of any changes, and to help embed the changes, to the waste and recycling service.**

Glossary of Terms

DEFRA	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
DRS	Deposit Return Scheme
EfW	Energy from Waste
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
ETS	Emissions Trading Scheme
JWMS	The Joint Waste Management Strategy
SBC	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
TV OBC	Tees Valley Outline Business Case
WRAP	Waste and Resources Action Programme