

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
11 NOVEMBER 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: MOBILISATION OF WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING CONTRACT

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE SHARED SERVICE MANAGER, WASTE AND RECYCLING

EXECUTIVE MEMBER – ENVIRONMENT

PRIORITY – SUSTAINABILITY

1.SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the committee regarding the mobilisation of waste, recycling and collection services from the start of the new contract in May 2025, primarily focusing on the roll out of the new waste and recycling services from August 2025.

2 INFORMATION TO NOTE

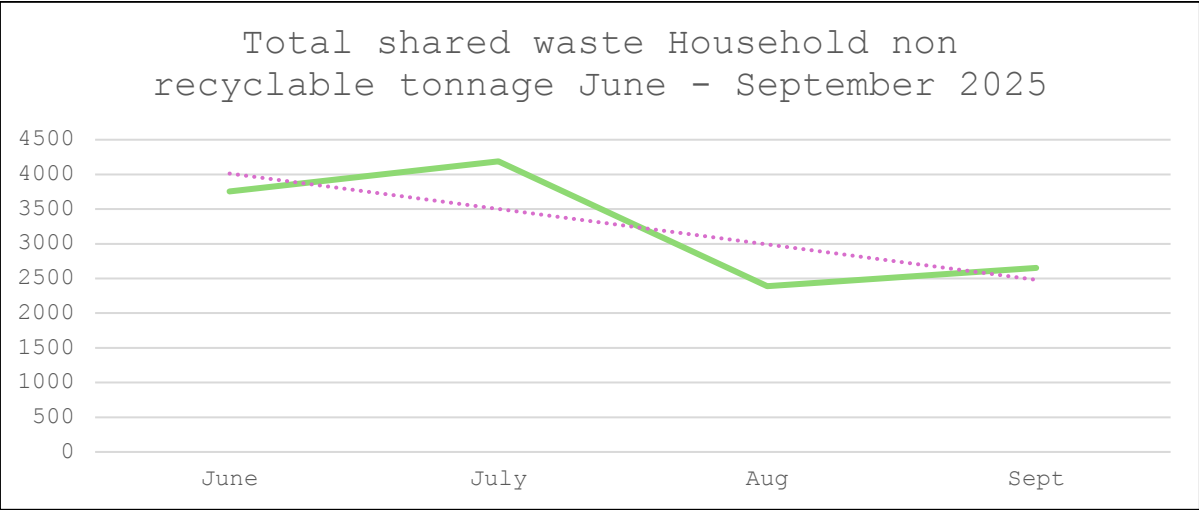
- 2.1 At its meeting on 9 July 2024, Cabinet agreed to award the new waste, recycling and street cleansing contract to Veolia UK Ltd. This contract has subsequently been mobilised with the contract beginning on 4 May 2025. Service changes introduced as part of the new contract commenced on 4 August
- 2.2 As reported at the 10 June 2025 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny, the initial mobilisation of the contract went well, with minimal disruption to collection and cleansing services. Keeping existing services and frequency at the start of the new contract allowed a bedding in period for the new contractor, with minimal disruption to residents.
- 2.3 As both the procurement of the contract and mobilisation of the service changes are large projects, a project team was established in August 2022, with officers from both councils. The team created a programme of works to oversee the procurement of the contract and subsequently the mobilisation of the contract including depot requirements, EV infrastructure, customer service and digital requirements, and communication.
- 2.4 A joint Project Board was also created to have strategic oversight of the procurement and subsequently the mobilisation of the contract and service

changes. A risk register was created and monitored at board meetings. Relevant Cabinet / Executive Members and Senior officers sit on the board.

- 2.5 The new service was rolled out from 4 August across both districts. Key changes include:
- Non-recyclable waste, mixed recycling and cardboard and paper bins have moved to a new alternating three-week collection cycle.
 - Inclusion of soft plastics in the mixed recycling bin
 - New collection days for some residents to improve route efficiency.
 - Weekly food waste collections continued for North Herts and introduced in East Herts.
 - Garden waste continues to be collected fortnightly for subscribers.
- 2.6 The new service has been designed to make recycling easier and more efficient for residents, while aligning with the Government’s ‘Simpler Recycling’ environmental requirements. Although these changes are scheduled for national implementation from 2026, we have chosen to introduce them earlier as part of the new contract procurement. This proactive approach ensures we operate as efficiently and effectively as possible throughout the duration of the contract.

Initial collection data:

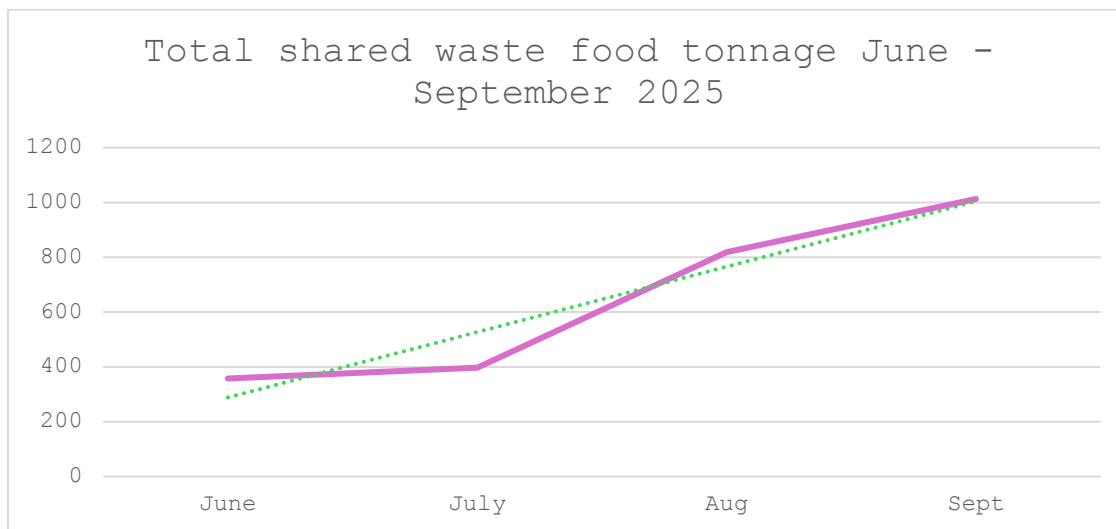
- The service changes in August have shown a significant impact on tonnages, particularly a big decrease in the amount of general waste being collected. The initial drop in tonnage aligns with the impact of the 3-weekly collections and the introduction of food waste collections in East Herts—diverting organic waste away from residual bins.



Graph 1
Table 1

Tonnage	June	July	Aug	Sept
Total Household non-recyclable	3755.44	4188.25	2388.88	2653.27

- There has been a large uptake of the new food waste services in East Herts and a further increase in participation in the food waste service in North Herts.

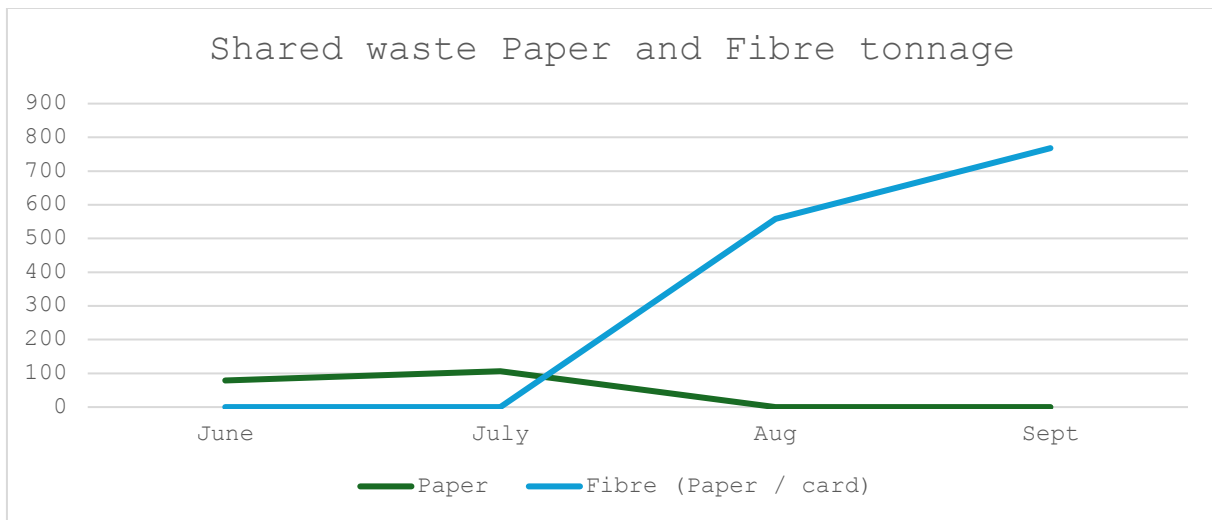


Graph 2

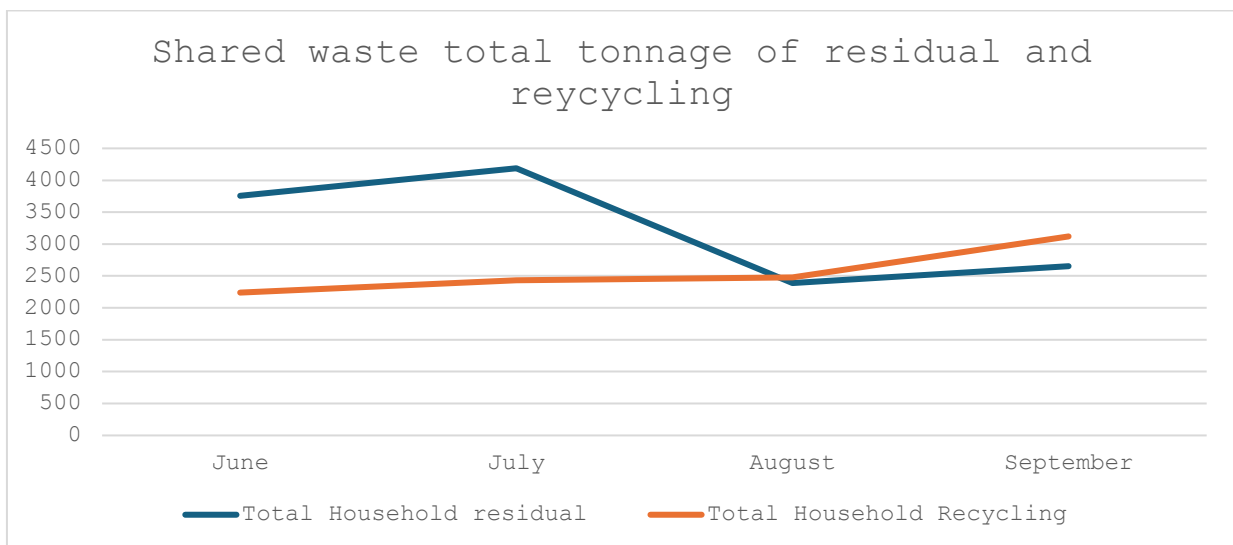
Tonnage	June	July	Aug	Sept
Food	357.75	396.72	818.5	1012.73

Table 2

- The inclusion of soft plastic into the mixed recycling has been welcomed by residents, the removal of card from this waste stream gives enough space in the recycling bin for the extra soft plastic volume to be captured. It is important to note that the inclusion of soft plastics recycling adds volume, but not significant weight.
- There was a significant increase in capture of fibre (paper and cardboard) in August, due to the inclusion of cardboard in this waste stream.



- Overall, the data is showing positive signs of behavioural shift: residual waste is decreasing, food waste is increasing, and recycling streams are adjusting. While soft plastics may inflate bin volume, the tonnage data helps clarify actual material tonnage recovery.
- The overall tonnage of general waste is showing a decrease of just under 43% compared to July's data (data supplied in recent O&S and council meetings were based on interim figures available at the time)
- A waste composition analysis is being carried out in Spring 2026, which should give further insight into the material being collected in each bin and opportunities to further target communications activity.



Graph 3

2.7 Container deliveries: In May, the process of delivering over 230,000 containers for the new service changes began, starting initially in North Herts, then from

June in East Herts. Veolia commissioned the UK market leader to deliver the bins for the new service

- 2.8 In North Herts this involved the introduction of a new 240l blue lidded bin for cardboard and paper, removing the card from the mixed recycling stream.
- 2.9 East Herts was more complex as the introduction of the new service required the following new containers to be delivered and other existing containers to be repurposed:
- Refuse - New 180-litre purple lidded bin delivered to kerbside properties to replace the previous 240-litre grey bin.
 - Mixed Recycling (plastic including soft plastic/glass/cans) - Black lidded 240-litre bin (formerly refuse bin) repurposed as a recycling bin.
 - Paper/cardboard - Blue lidded 240-litre bin (formerly mixed recycling bin) repurposed as cardboard and paper only bin.
 - Food waste - New 23-litre (kerbside) and 5-litre (kitchen) caddies delivered to kerbside properties as part of introduction of weekly food waste collection
 - Communal - services were expanded to mirror the collection offering for kerbside residents, including food waste, capacity adjustments continue to be carried out.
- 2.10 The delivery schedule was built based on the property data being used to build the new waste collection rounds, this had been provided by the client team from the previous contract dataset. The Client team had advised of reserved confidence in the dataset and additional checks were to be carried out by Veolia.
- 2.11 Deliveries in North Herts commenced in May, as here only one additional container was required and there was less change to current set up. The distribution company required at least a three-month window due to the quantity of deliveries required to be carried out across the full shared waste service.
- 2.12 East Herts bin deliveries commenced in June, with the expectation that all deliveries would have been completed by mid-July, allowing a two-week window ahead of service change to carry out any rectifications/oversight deliveries.
- 2.13 Although the delivery teams aimed to deliver to 468 households per day, this progress was slowed due to several factors.
- 2.14 There was a change to the originally identified bin storage site which added an extra 20 minutes to journey times, which were planned initially from the County Hall site in Hertford. This reduced productivity, as some teams were unable to reload vehicles as frequently during the day as planned.
- 2.15 Delivery staff had limited local knowledge, this did pose some issues with the delivery routing, very rural properties without street numbers and cross boundary errors.

- 2.16 Upon completing the list of deliveries, the team began working through the rectifications. It was then established that around 1,671 addresses in East Herts had been overlooked due to a data error. The data had been cleansed to remove commercial units and unfortunately the 1671 residential properties had also inadvertently been captured by this. Veolia has taken full accountability for this oversight and apologised for the issues it caused.
- 2.17 Due to IT system incompatibilities between Veolia, the council and the distribution company, this led to delays in real time data updates. This led to lack of oversight, a delay in responding to queries, and in some cases duplication of deliveries being carried out.
- 2.18 Despite this, as of 3 August, 53,488 residents (or 97%) in East Herts had received their new containers and were set up to start the new service from day one. North Herts deliveries had been completed to the delivery list by 4th August; however subsequent rectifications and deliveries were also carried out.
- 2.19 To address the issue Veolia brought in additional delivery crews during the week and at the weekends throughout August and into September to help deliver bins. The cost of this additional resource has been fully absorbed by Veolia.
- 2.20 Unfortunately, this issue led to an uplift in contact for both customer services team, this was especially noticeable in East Herts, due to the delay in some container deliveries. Problems with integration of bin request e-forms in East Herts also exacerbated the issue.
- 2.21 To address outstanding deliveries and reduce pressure on Customer Service Centre (CSC) teams, Veolia implemented a bespoke webform, accessible via both the North Herts and East Herts websites. This form allowed residents to report missing bin deliveries directly. In the interim, residents were advised to continue recycling using suitable containers until their bins were delivered. The table below shows the contacts received via the webform.

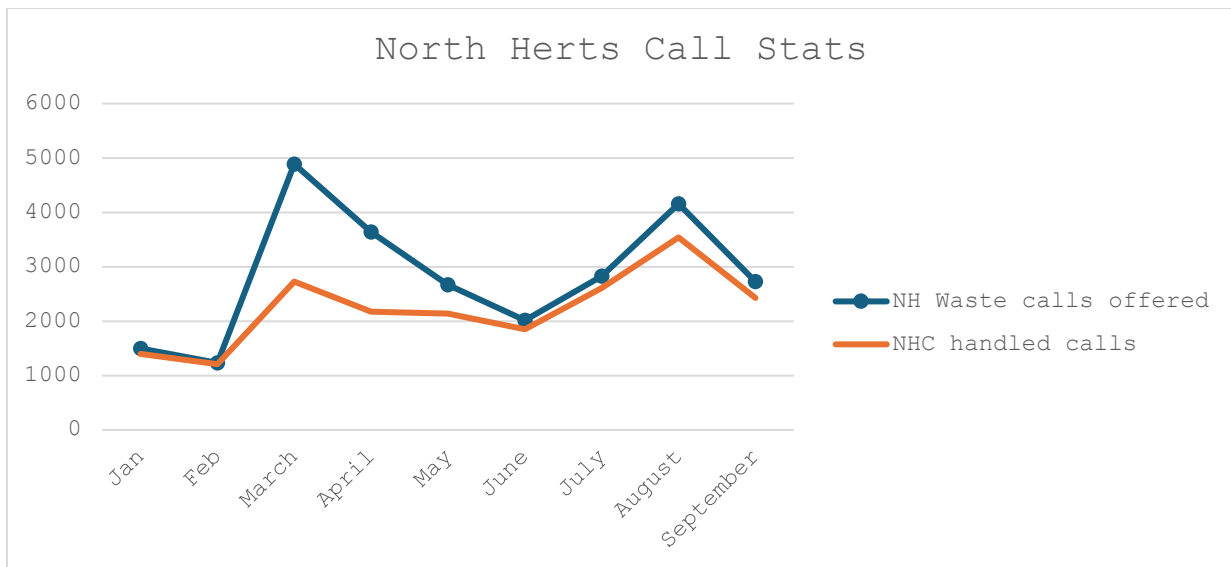
	East Herts	North Herts
Missed delivery as part of container rollout for service change	1454	395
Damaged container(s) (replacement delivered as part of this request)	435	57
Remove container(s) (delivered in error)	139	92
Total	2028	544

- 2.22 Although in North Herts residents have been participating in a weekly food waste collection since 2018, the new service change prompted a significant and unexpected demand for new food waste caddies. Due to long lead times of previously ordered stock, there was a short period in which there was no availability of caddies to be delivered to residents.

- 2.23 All deliveries relating to the new service roll out were completed by mid-September (this was mainly caddies due to stock shortage)
- 2.24 **Communications:** In July, Individual letters were sent to all domestic households advising of the change of frequency and collection day as required – letters also detailed their upcoming collection days for the first collection of each waste stream. Over 20 permutations of letters were sent out to over 107,000 households across both districts, this detailed specifics of their changes and any additional collections which were being provided. Each permutation required information to be mail merged covering address details, collection days and dates. These were sent by Royal Mail.
- 2.25 Residents already receiving an extra capacity service also received a bespoke letter advising them of the enhanced collection frequency that they would be on under the new service.
- 2.26 A detailed communications plan was produced, and communications channels utilised included e-newsletter updates, press releases, social media posts, including a Minecraft video to advise residents of the new service design, in addition to the letter, service leaflet and stickers which they received.
- 2.27 A poster was also designed and distributed to parishes and libraries to display for residents as a further visual aide.
- 2.28 Due to vacancies within the team, a limited in person events were held, however the Hitchin eco day was attended, also a small number of area forums, giving further advice and answering queries.
- 2.29 Monthly Cllr drop-in sessions were organised for Cllrs to join online and raise any concerns with the waste team. Whilst sessions were readily available and promoted in advance, attendance was low, which reduced opportunities for direct engagement and feedback.
- 2.30 Regular updates were communicated to Members via MIS /MIB.
- 2.31 Collection Day change communications: To enable the new three-weekly collection regime to operate as efficiently as possible, collection days changes were required for approximately 70% of residents across the two districts.
- 2.32 A delay in receiving the new design round data from Veolia impacted on the timing of the letter mail out, due to the complex set of permutations, which took time to batch and organise the delivery.
- 2.33 A corrupted batch of letters was also discovered, but once identified, corrected letters were resent out to those affected residents. There was also a delay in letters reaching some residents despite them being sent 1st class. This was outside of the client team's control.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

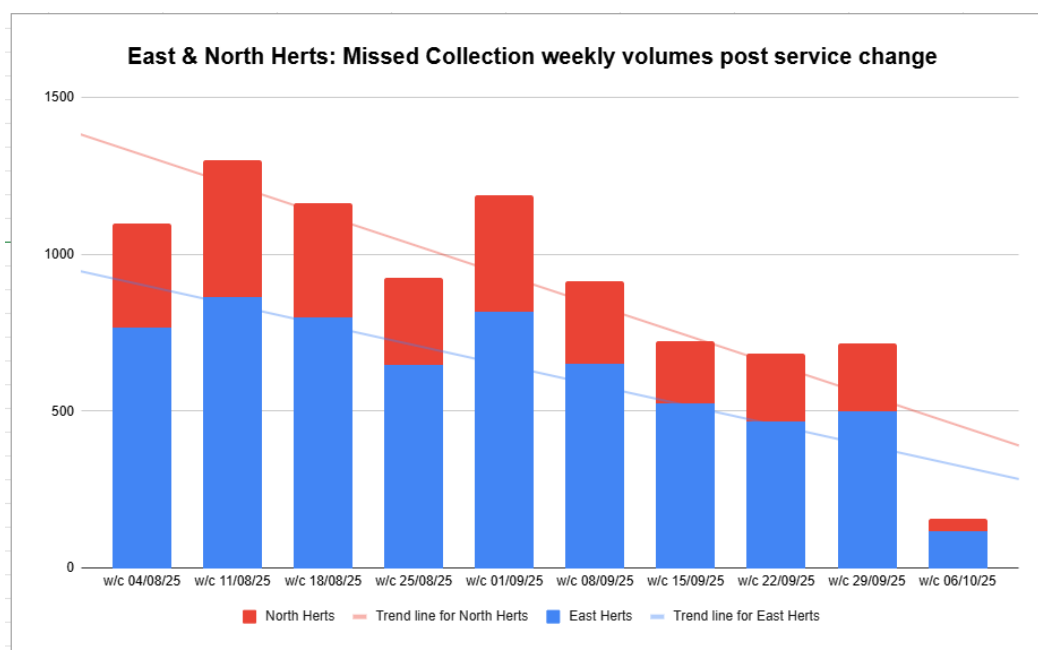
- 3.1 The successful implementation of customer service setup has been a critical part of the success or otherwise of the mobilisation of services. Not only does this ensure that residents can access the councils easily and efficiently, but it also ensures that should operational issues arise there is the capacity to manage a higher number of contacts. Operational issues will always create a higher number of contacts, but if business as usual contacts can be managed online effectively it frees up customer service agents to manage other issues
- 3.2 In North Herts, the rollout of new service changes has been a collaborative effort between the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and the Digital Transformation team, with a strong focus on improving customer experience, operational efficiency, and digital accessibility.
- 3.3 Drawing on lessons from previous service changes, the CSC recruited up to six additional temporary staff on a rolling basis to manage anticipated spikes in contact volumes, particularly during peak periods such as the garden waste subscription window and the main service change in July and August.
- 3.4 NHC Digital Services team developed and launched a new garden waste portal, fully integrated with the waste contractor's system. This enabled residents to set up and manage subscriptions via the portal, which feeds directly into the contractor's waste system, reducing pressure on the CSC and streamlining the customer journey.
- 3.5 Both teams worked together to redesign and streamline processes, ensuring that digital solutions were as efficient and effective as possible. This included the development of a suite of waste web forms, rolled out in phases to support the new contract and service launch.
- 3.6 The North Herts CSC experienced significant spikes in contact, especially around key service change dates. This was mitigated by additional staffing and by encouraging customers to use the new digital channels.
- 3.7 To support customers in using the new online digital tools, the CSC provided guidance and digital assistance, ensuring that those less confident with technology could still access services effectively.
- 3.8 The below graph shows the calls offered and handled by the customer service team in North Herts – the early spike in March shows the increased contact due to the garden waste subscription period. The subsequent rise in contact is seen at the end of July and continued to rise throughout August, with a decrease now being seen in September.



Graph 4

4. COLLECTIONS ISSUES

- 4.1 As with any major service change, some level of disruption was always anticipated. There was an uplift in missed collection reporting across all services over the first few cycles of the new service. This was due to the bedding in of new crews, getting used to new rounds and areas. Although many staff are experienced, this was not on all rounds, there are also a lot of new staff, particularly in East Herts, where the new food waste service began. The below graph shows the number of missed bins since the new service and the overall downtrend as services have bedded in.



Graph 5

- 4.2 Veolia had also planned additional vehicles and crew to support the teams over the initial new service period – these additional crews focused on the anticipated uplift of missed bins and general crew support to ensure daily completion.
- 4.3 It was also anticipated that the three-weekly cycle would encourage more reporting from residents who previously would manage if they missed a collection under the fortnightly scheme. As the service beds in and staff learn the rounds, missed collections should reduce.

Food waste

- 4.4 Food waste crews in East Herts experienced issues with the high volume of waste presented. Even after the initial first few weeks of the new service the tonnages remained high. Unfortunately, on occasion, this has led to some roads not being able to be completed due to driver hours, or the disposal location closing.
- 4.5 This was continuously monitored by Veolia and the client team, with assisted crews helping where possible, crews also working overtime and weekend work, making every effort to complete.
- 4.6 Due to continued challenges faced with those crews, Veolia have now taken the decision to provide an additional crew to support the food waste service on a permanent basis as of Mid-October 2025.

Narrow/farm Round

- 4.7 Efficiencies introduced by Veolia, merged the previously separate narrow and farm rounds from both authorities together, this regrettably led to issues around knowledge of the mostly rural areas, and presentation of containers.
- 4.8 The specific layout and access constraints of properties previously served by the narrow round presented unforeseen challenges for crews operating under the new configuration. This resulted in a pattern of missed and repeated missed collections for affected households.
- 4.9 Veolia acknowledged the operational difficulties this caused, and in response, the properties impacted by the merger have now been realigned under separate depot supervision. This realignment ensures that crews familiar with the area are assigned to these rounds, and that routing is tailored to the unique requirements of the locations involved.

Communal collections

- 4.10 A data error was identified affecting container sizes at several blocks of flats. As a result of this error, these properties were incorrectly scheduled for a three-weekly domestic collection, rather than the appropriate communal service frequency. This affected 3.77% of communal residents (897 residents) of East Herts and 6.7% (1166 residents) of North Herts communal residents.
- 4.11 Once identified, the issue was promptly investigated and corrected. An interim schedule was put in place, defaulting affected locations to weekly collections to prevent further overflow and ensure continuity of service.

- 4.12 Additional crews were deployed to service the impacted communal areas, and operational adjustments were made to ensure bins were collected reliably
- 4.13 Locations continue to be monitored closely by Veolia management and the waste team, any further issues identified are resolved promptly and data amended swiftly, with crews also being given extra guidance. The waste team are working with Veolia to ensure that data accuracy and service consistency are maintained going forward.
- 4.14 The waste team are currently also visiting all communal locations to ensure that correct signage is placed on both containers and wall space, bespoke communal leaflets are also being delivered to residents advising them of the services.

5. VEHICLES & GARAGE

- 5.1 The vehicle workshop has now been relocated to the Buntingford depot, installation of the equipment was delayed due to the EHC grounds maintenance contractor moving off site late, originally proposed February, and the area not being vacant until contract start.
- 5.2 Delays on receiving landlord permission also impacted on the scheduled works.
- 5.3 Due to a manufacturing recall, all but one of the planned electric vehicles was delayed. The new EV vehicles will be arriving between October and December 2025. Diesel fuelled vehicles were used at the commencement of the contract.
- 5.4 Due to the delayed exit of other contractors on sites, the installation of new bunded tanks and the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) was delayed until October 2025. This is now fully operational with all non-EV vehicles using HVO, reducing the carbon emissions of the fleet by appx 90%

6 CAPACITY IN THE SHARED WASTE TEAM

- 6.1 During the new service change, the client team carried vacant posts (as identified in Risk log Appendix 1). This included three contract officer posts, and the waste communications post. More recently we have seen the departure of a further contract officer, and the Shared Waste Service manager, and our performance and project officer job share.
- 6.2 Although the Service manager post has now been filled, this has left a further gap of the Contract manager role, which is currently being recruited to, along with the Performance and project officer post.
- 6.3 Those periods of vacant post have led to further pressure on the team during an extremely busy time for the team.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 A bedding in period is usual practice for a contract of this type, as a transition of wholesale services from one provider to another including a service change is complex. A “grace period” was observed following the introduction of new services, however the Performance Management Regime (PMR) for the contract will be commencing in full as of 1st November.
- 7.2 The PMR will be reviewed by the Service Manager on an ongoing basis with Veolia management team, in line with the terms of the contract.
- 7.3 Resource issues in the shared waste team - The Service manager position has now been filled as of 1 September 2025; the Contract Manager post is currently being recruited to.
- 7.4 Additional temporary support has been recruited until November to assist in the management of flats communication and audit.
- 7.5 A new app is being released early November, for residents of both East & North Herts to use, enabling them to set notification of the collection’s days, alongside other search functions enhancing the use for residents.
- 7.6 Street transformation program to be fully integrated over the coming months, seeing the use of E-trikes in the main town centres, looking at further efficiencies and enhancements.
- 7.7 The continued use of HVO, seeing carbon efficiencies throughout the service, providing both councils with environmental benefits to meet their aspiration of Net Zero 2030. The SWS are currently working with both East and North teams on the reporting of this data. The new electric vehicles are due to arrive before the end of the year.
- 7.8 Further work with East digital team to progress on the outstanding webforms with an anticipated completion of December 2025.
- 7.9 Looking ahead to the Christmas period, further communication and support to residents will be given to manage the additional waste and recycling produced over this period.
- 7.10 Social value will be monitored through the life of the contract, this includes local staff employed by the contract, apprenticeship programmes, support of local community projects, support of local economy.
- 7.11 As part of the project close-down process, a lesson learnt meeting will be convened to evaluate the delivery approach, highlight what worked well, and identify any areas for refinement. This will ensure that learning is captured and applied to future rollouts.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Risk log
Appendix 2 Work packages
Appendix 3 Work Programme
Appendix 4 Waste service change – activity plan

9. CONTACT OFFICERS

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10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None