

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
8 SEPTEMBER 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: WASTE AND RECYCLING CONTRACT PERFORMANCE

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE: Director - Environment

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Environment

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Accessible Services; Sustainability;

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this information note is to provide Members with an update on the performance of the waste and recycling service, specifically addressing areas identified by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- Lessons learned from communal collection service issues and the time taken to resolve them.
 - Household composting performance.
 - Recycling performance trends and reasons why expected increases have not fully materialised.
 - Missed collection performance and actions being taken to improve service reliability.

2 STEPS TO DATE

- 2.1 This note has been prepared following a request from Members for an update on the current position, including a review of actions taken to date, the outcomes achieved, and lessons learned. The purpose of the report is to provide Members with assurance regarding progress made and to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

3 INFORMATION TO NOTE

3.1 COMMUNAL COLLECTIONS

3.1.1 Background

Following the introduction of the new service arrangements in August 2025, a number of communal properties experienced service issues. These were primarily linked to data inaccuracies relating to collection frequencies having been rescheduled to align with the three weekly service change.

3.1.2 Impact

This represented 6.7% of communal developments in North Herts, and approximately 1166 residents were affected.

The principal issue arose from an error meaning collection frequencies were amended to a three-weekly schedule at some sites. Additionally, in some locations, existing container capacity was insufficient to accommodate the change alongside the expansion of recyclable material.

This caused capacity issues in bin stores and a build-up of waste at a number of locations.

The impact of these issues can be seen in Graph 1 and 2. Graph 1 shows the total communal missed bins increased significantly following the August service changes. Missed communal bins rose from 1 in August 2025 to a peak of 53 in November 2025, remaining at elevated levels throughout December 2025 (41) and January 2026 (49).

Graph 2 breaks down the total missed collections by waste stream showing that the issue was primarily driven by residual waste collections, which accounted for the largest proportion of communal misses during this period. Mixed recycling and cardboard and paper collections also experienced increased missed collections, although to a lesser extent. The data suggests that the combination of incorrect collection frequencies and insufficient container capacity particularly affected sites with higher levels of residual waste generation.

3.1.3 Actions Taken

A number of actions were implemented to address those issues: -

- Additional crews were put in place to correct the frequency error and ensure all communal locations were cleared of any backlog of waste.
- A review was carried out to identify and correct communal property data affected by the error.
- Site visits undertaken by the Shared Waste Service, signage and newly created communal information leaflet delivered to all residents.
- Capacity assessments were undertaken at affected communal locations to identify capacity shortfalls, with additional or larger containers provided and collection frequencies revised where required.
- Revised collection schedules implemented where required.

3.1.4 Time Taken to Resolve

Whilst immediate action was taken to address the most urgent service issues, resolving the communal collection problems required a phased approach over several months. The underlying causes varied between sites and included incorrect collection frequency data, insufficient container capacity and site-specific operational requirements. As a result, each affected development required individual review and validation to ensure that the correct collection arrangements were implemented.

The resolution process involved detailed data checking and correction of property records, site visits by Shared Waste Service officers and Veolia, capacity assessments, liaison with managing agents and residents, and where necessary the provision of additional containers or changes to collection frequencies. The period also coincided with the Christmas collection season, when waste volumes traditionally increase and operational resources are under additional pressure. Although additional crews were deployed to clear accumulated waste and restore services, implementing permanent solutions across multiple communal developments took longer as changes needed to be assessed, agreed and embedded on a site-by-site basis.

As shown in Graph 1, missed communal bins reduced steadily following the peak period in late 2025 and early 2026. The sustained downward trend indicates that whilst the issues could not be resolved immediately, the measures implemented resulted in continual improvement and ultimately restored service performance to expected levels.

3.1.5 Lessons Learnt

Key lessons identified include:

- Greater verification of communal property data prior to implementing major service changes, including additional quality assurance checks on collection frequencies and property records.

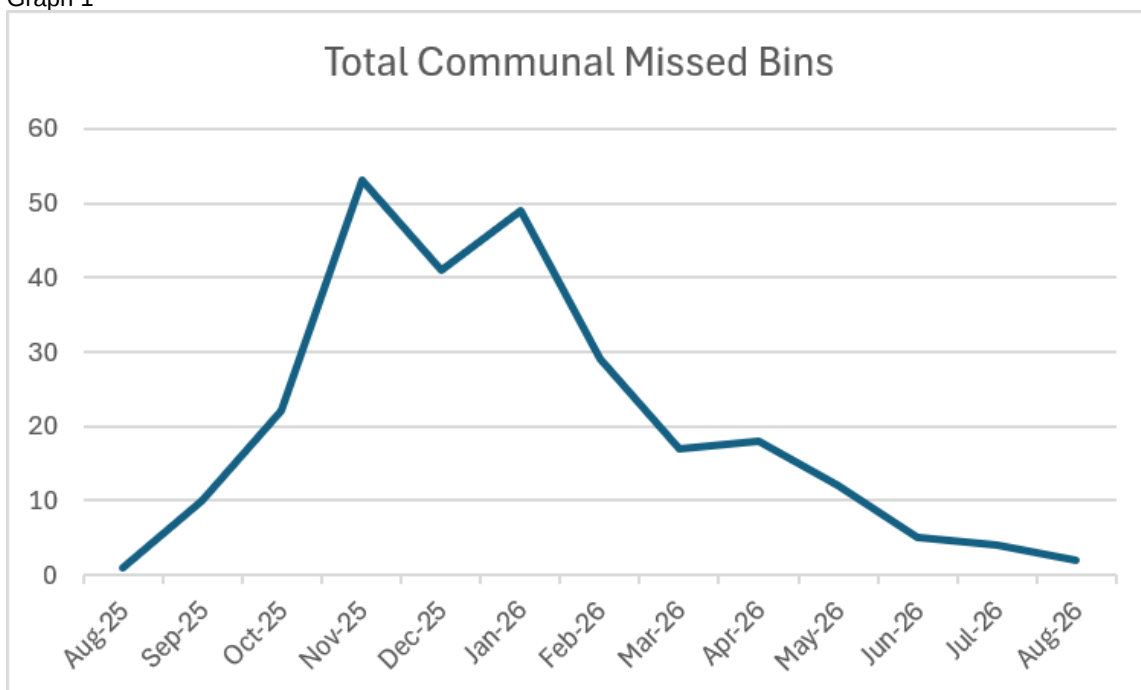
- Earlier engagement with managing agents, housing providers and residents to identify site-specific issues and agree suitable collection arrangements before changes are introduced.
- More robust validation of collection frequencies and container capacities to ensure they remain appropriate when service models or material streams change.
- The importance of undertaking capacity assessments in advance of service changes, particularly where additional recyclable materials are being collected or collection frequencies are changing. The need for enhanced monitoring of communal sites immediately following service implementation so that emerging issues can be identified and addressed before significant waste build-up occurs.
- Greater use of site-specific communication materials and clear signage to help residents understand collection arrangements and make best use of recycling facilities.
- Improved cross-team governance between operational, contract management and customer service teams to ensure issues are identified, escalated and resolved more quickly.
- The importance of maintaining accurate communal property databases and implementing formal change-control processes when collection schedules are amended.

3.1.6 Current Position

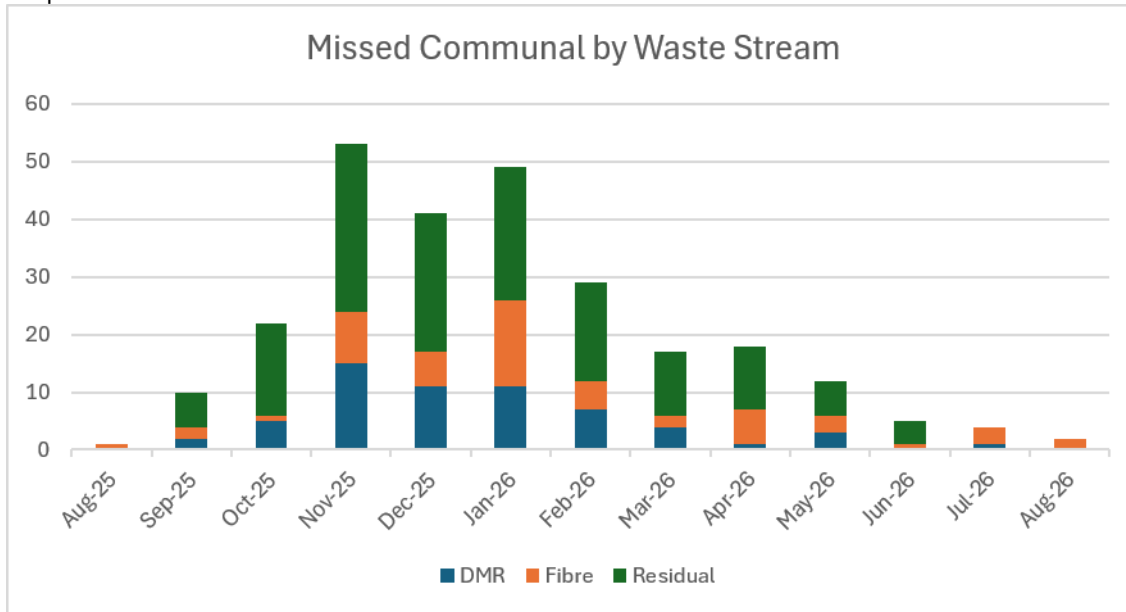
Following the corrective actions undertaken, all known communal properties affected by the frequency error have been reviewed and appropriate collection arrangements implemented.

- Performance data demonstrates that these actions have been effective. As shown in Graph 1, communal missed bins reduced from a peak of 53 in November 2025 to just 2 in August 2026, representing a reduction of approximately 96%. The sustained downward trend suggests that the underlying causes have been successfully addressed rather than simply mitigated.

Graph 1



Graph 2



3.2 HOUSEHOLD COMPOSTING PERFORMANCE

3.2.1 Background

Household composting contributes significantly to the Council's overall recycling performance and is influenced by seasonal factors, weather conditions and resident participation in garden waste collection services. During 2025/26, composting tonnages were lower than anticipated, reflecting both local and national trends. The exceptionally dry and warm conditions experienced during spring and summer 2025 affected vegetation growth and reduced the volume of garden waste generated by households, resulting in lower composting tonnages than in previous years.

3.2.2 Impact

A number of factors contributed to the reduction in household composting tonnages during 2025/26:

- Prolonged dry weather and reduced rainfall resulting in lower garden waste arisings.
- Reduced grass growth and garden maintenance requirements during the spring and summer periods.
- Changes in the volume and composition of waste being presented for collection.
- Increased diversion of food waste through separate food waste collection services.
- National trends indicating reduced garden waste tonnages in areas experiencing similar weather conditions.

These factors reduced the volume of compostable material available for collection and processing, impacting overall composting performance against target.

3.2.3 Actions Taken

The Council continues to take proactive steps to support household composting performance and maximise participation:

- Promoting home composting through education and awareness campaigns.
- Delivering targeted communications to encourage residents to make full use of garden waste and food waste services.

- Reviewing garden waste subscription trends and resident feedback to identify opportunities to increase participation.
- Monitoring seasonal tonnage performance and benchmarking against regional and national trends.
- Continuing to promote waste reduction and the correct segregation of organic waste streams.
- Using performance data to inform future service planning and forecasting assumptions.

3.2.4 Lessons Learnt

Key lessons identified include:

- Composting performance is significantly influenced by external factors, particularly weather conditions and seasonal garden growth patterns.
- Extreme weather events can have a substantial impact on garden waste arisings and composting tonnages.
- Annual performance should be assessed alongside wider environmental and seasonal factors.
- Monitoring participation and renewal rates following the annual subscription period to identify opportunities to improve customer engagement and maximise service uptake.
- Resident engagement is best measured through a combination of participation levels, subscription data and tonnage performance.
- Forecasts and targets should allow greater flexibility where performance is heavily weather dependent.
- Regular monitoring enables the Council to identify trends early and adapt communications and service planning accordingly.

3.2.5 Current Position

Household composting tonnages remain below those achieved in 2024/25, particularly during the peak growing season between May and August. As shown in Graph 3, this reflects a reduction in the amount of garden waste generated rather than a reduction in resident participation. Garden waste subscription levels, shown in Graph 4, have remained broadly stable at around 30,000 subscriptions throughout the reporting period, demonstrating continued resident engagement with the service. The evidence therefore suggests that lower composting tonnages have been driven primarily by environmental factors rather than reduced participation.

Performance against the missed garden waste collection KPI has remained above target during parts of the reporting period. As shown in Graph 4a, missed collections follow a seasonal pattern, with lower rates recorded during the winter months when fewer garden waste bins are presented for collection and service demand is reduced. Performance then increases during the spring and summer period when garden waste volumes are at their highest.

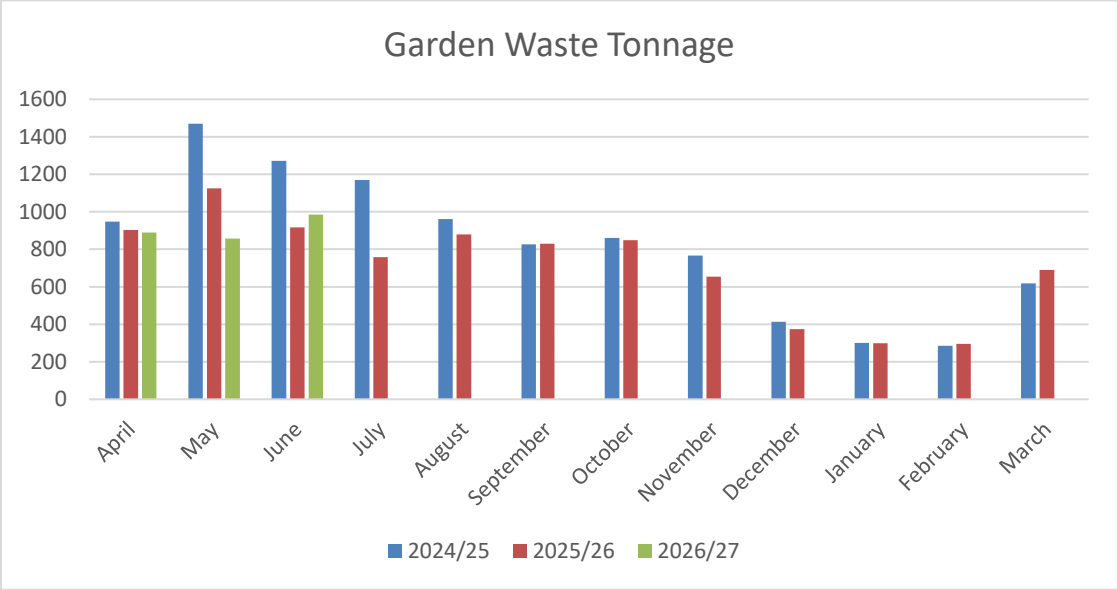
Graph 4a also shows a significant spike in reported missed collections at the start of the annual subscription period in April 2026. A key contributing factor has been residents renewing or subscribing to the service shortly before, or on the day of, their scheduled collection. Whilst subscriptions are processed as quickly as possible, there can be a short delay before information is updated across operational systems and communicated to collection crews. Residents are advised to allow up to 10 working days for service activation; however, collections reported during this period are still recorded within the missed collection figures.

The Council has worked closely with its contractor to improve performance through weekly monitoring of missed collection data, review of collection rounds where issues have been identified, and improved communication of subscription information to operational crews. The graph demonstrates that performance has improved significantly since the peak seen in April. Whilst performance remains above the missed collection target, the downward trend shown in Graph 4a demonstrates that the actions introduced by the Council and contractor are having a positive effect and that performance is moving in the right direction.

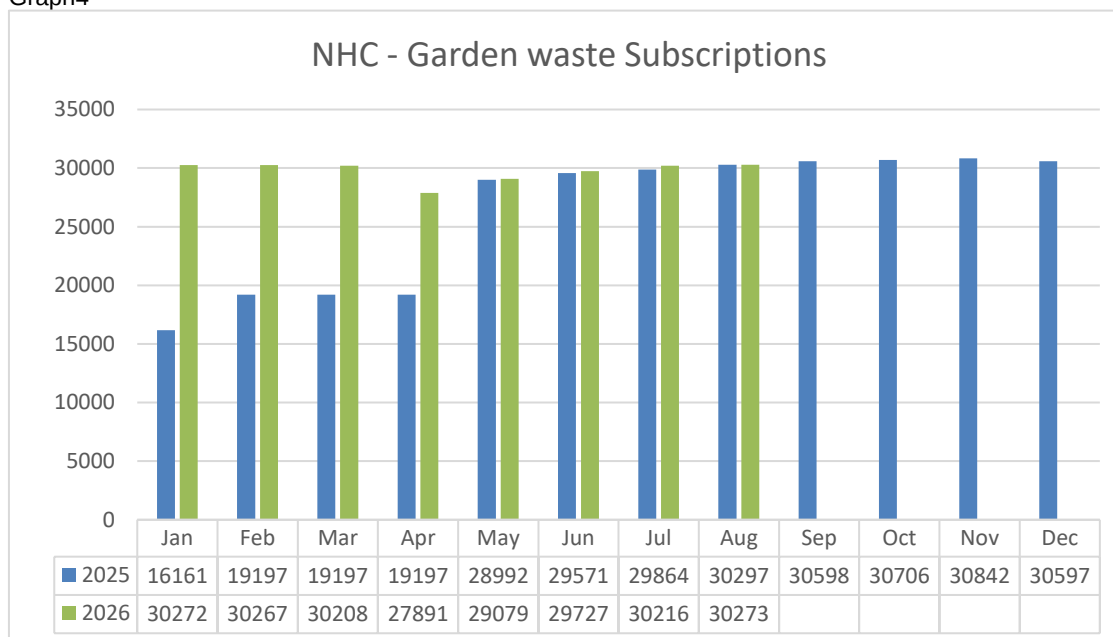
Year to date figures for 2026/27 indicate some recovery in composting tonnages compared with the same period in 2025/26. However, the current dry weather conditions may continue to affect garden waste generation during the remainder of the year and performance will therefore continue to be monitored closely

Taken together, the data demonstrates that whilst resident participation in the garden waste service has remained strong, the amount of garden waste being presented for collection has reduced. Although missed collection performance has experienced periodic peaks associated with seasonal demand and the annual subscription cycle, the overall trend since April has been one of improvement. This highlights the significant influence that weather conditions can have on composting performance and reinforces the need to consider environmental factors alongside service participation when assessing performance against targets.

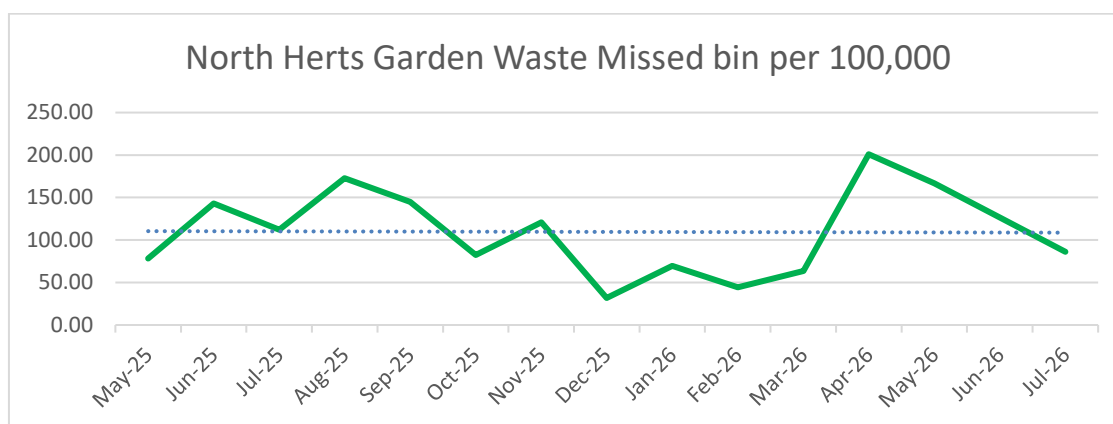
Graph 3



Graph4



Graph 4a



3.3 RECYCLING PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT OF SERVICE CHANGES

3.3.1 Background

The recycling rate increased from 57.11% in 2024/25 to 58.88% in 2025/26, representing an increase of 1.77 percentage points. Enhanced recycling services were introduced in August 2025 to support the Government's Simpler Recycling requirements and further improve recycling performance across North Hertfordshire. One of the key objectives of the service changes was to support continued improvement in recycling performance and move towards a recycling rate in excess of 60%. The service changes included:

- Inclusion of soft plastics within recycling collections.
- Increased recycling capacity for paper and cardboard.
- Introduction of three-weekly residual waste collections.
- Continued promotion of weekly food waste collections.

The aim was to encourage positive recycling behaviours, increase recycling participation and reduce residual waste.

3.3.2 Impact

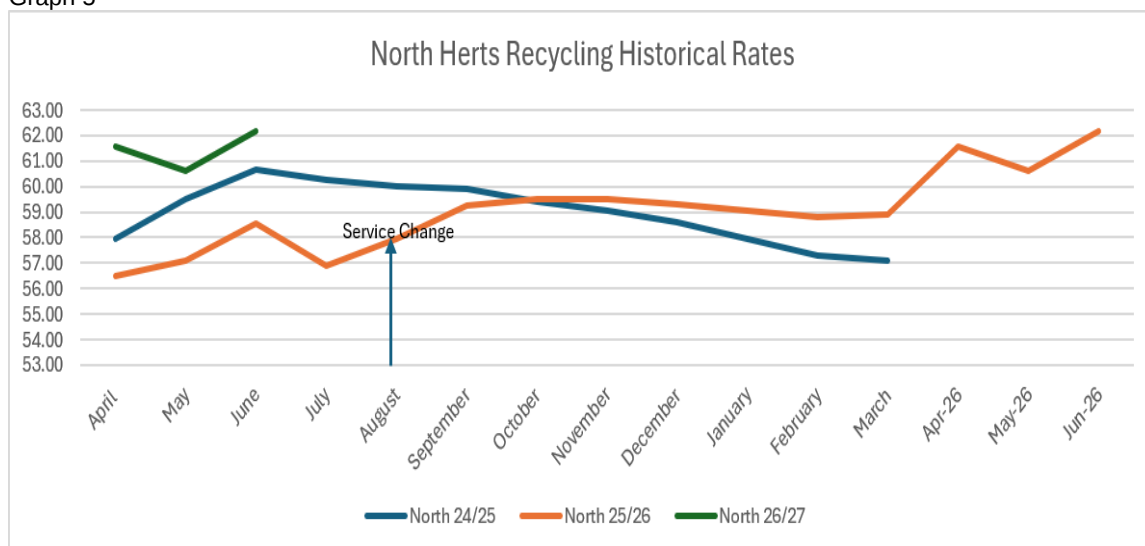
Whilst the service changes have increased opportunities for residents to recycle, the full impact was not reflected within the 2025/26 annual recycling rate, as the new arrangements were only operational for eight months of the reporting year. As shown in Graph 5, recycling performance improved during the year, however the annual figure captures a transition period during which new collection arrangements and resident behaviours were still becoming established.

Several factors influence recycling rates:

- Recycling performance is measured by weight rather than volume.
- Soft plastics increase recycling volume but contribute relatively little to tonnage.
- Behavioural changes take time to become fully embedded.
- Food waste tonnages have increased but remain below anticipated levels.
- Due to the newly introduced Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR), manufacturers are producing more increasingly lightweight packing materials, reducing tonnage despite increased recycling activity.
- Seasonal variations continue to affect waste composition and recycling performance.

Waste composition analysis also identified that significant quantities of food waste remain in residual waste streams, indicating additional opportunities to improve capture rates.

Graph 5



3.3.3 Actions Taken

The Shared Waste Service has implemented and continues to develop a programme of improvement activities including:

- Undertaking waste composition analysis to identify recyclable materials remaining within residual waste.
- Monitoring participation levels across recycling, food waste and garden waste services.
- Delivering targeted communications to improve recycling behaviours and tackle contamination.
- Developing a specific food waste recycling campaign to increase participation and capture rates.
- Monitoring the long-term impact of service changes and behavioural trends.
- Regularly reviewing performance data, contamination levels and material capture rates.
- Working with Veolia to identify opportunities for further service improvements.

3.3.4 Lessons Learnt

Key lessons identified include:

- Changes in recycling behaviour take time to become fully established.
- Recycling rates measured solely by tonnage do not always reflect increases in recycling participation.
- Waste reduction initiatives can have a positive environmental outcome whilst affecting recycling tonnage performance.
- Regular waste composition analysis is essential to identify missed recycling opportunities.
- Targeted communications remain critical in supporting behaviour change and increasing participation.
- Long-term trends provide a more meaningful assessment of performance than short-term fluctuations.

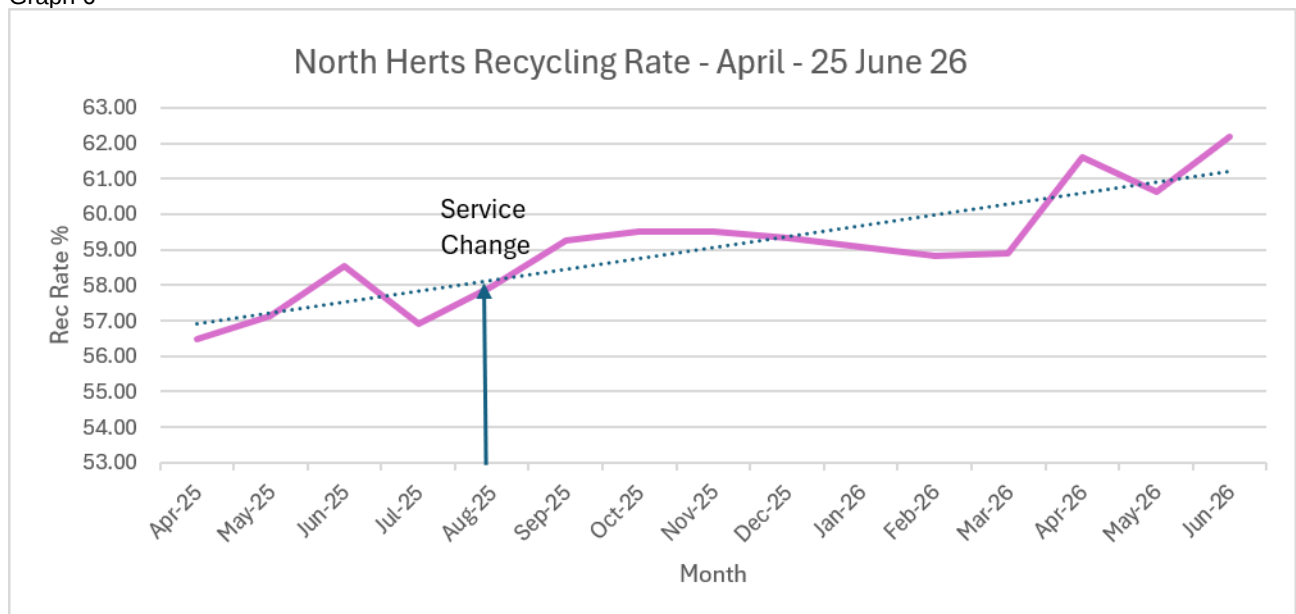
3.3.5 Current Position

The enhanced recycling service has increased the range of materials accepted for recycling and improved overall recycling capacity available to residents.

Whilst the annual recycling rate for 2025/26 increased to 58.88%, this figure includes four months of performance under the previous service arrangements and therefore does not fully reflect the impact of the enhanced recycling service introduced in August 2025. More recent performance data demonstrates a continuing upward trend.

As shown in Graph 6, the rolling recycling rate has now exceeded 62%, compared with 57.11% in 2024/25, representing an increase of just over 5 percentage points. This suggests that the benefits of the enhanced recycling service and three weekly residual waste collections are continuing to be realised as resident behaviours adapt and participation in recycling services increases.

Graph 6



3.3.6 Factors Affecting Recycling Performance

Recycling performance is influenced by a number of factors and changes in service provision do not always lead to an immediate increase in the reported recycling rate. Recycling is measured by tonnage rather than volume, meaning that some materials, such as soft plastics, can increase recycling participation without significantly increasing overall performance. In addition, behaviour change takes time to become fully established following major service changes, and recent waste composition analysis indicates that further opportunities remain to increase food waste capture.

Recycling performance can also fluctuate throughout the year due to seasonal factors, particularly changes in garden waste tonnages. Garden waste makes a significant contribution to overall recycling performance and is heavily influenced by weather conditions, rainfall levels and the growing season. As demonstrated in the composting section of this report, the prolonged dry weather experienced during 2025/26 resulted in lower garden waste arisings and reduced composting tonnages. Consequently, annual recycling performance should be considered alongside seasonal and environmental factors, particularly where garden waste forms a significant proportion of the recycling stream

3.3.7 Future Action Plan

To further improve recycling performance and maximise the benefits of the service changes introduced in 2025, the Shared Waste Service has already started to undertake a programme of ongoing monitoring and targeted interventions.

Key actions include:

Waste Composition Analysis

The findings from recent waste composition analysis will be used to identify materials that continue to be disposed of incorrectly within the residual waste stream and other collection streams. Particular focus will be placed on food waste, where analysis has identified opportunities to increase capture through the dedicated food waste collection service.

Participation Monitoring

Ongoing monitoring of participation levels across recycling, food waste and garden waste services will be undertaken to identify trends, areas of lower engagement and opportunities for improvement. This information will be used to target support and communications where participation levels are below expectations.

Targeted Communications and Behaviour Change Campaigns

A programme of targeted communications will be delivered to address contamination issues and improve the capture of recyclable materials. This will include a specific food waste recycling campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the service, promoting correct use of food waste caddies and encouraging residents to divert more food waste from the residual waste stream.

3.4 **MISSED COLLECTIONS**

3.4.1 Background

The mobilisation and implementation period of the major service change presented a number of operational challenges, including redesigned collection rounds, route optimisation activity and the integration of new collection arrangements. This contributed to an increase in missed collection reports during the early stages of the service rollout.

3.4.2 Impact

A temporary increase in missed collection reports was experienced during the early stages of service implementation.

Contributing factors included:

- Mobilisation of a new waste collection contract.
- Introduction of redesigned collection rounds.
- Route optimisation activity.
- Data and service configuration issues.
- Recruitment and training of new crew members.
- Increased resident awareness and reporting following the move to three-weekly residual waste collections.
- Residents may be less willing to wait until their next scheduled collection to report an issue due to the longer interval between collections, resulting in a higher proportion of missed collections being formally reported than under the previous service model.

These factors contributed to increased missed collection reports during the bedding-in period.

3.4.3 Actions Taken

The Shared Waste Service and Veolia worked together to address these issues through the implementation of a range of corrective measures, including:

- Targeted analysis of recurring missed collection locations to identify root causes and implement permanent corrective measures.
- Increased monitoring of rounds performing above the missed collection target, with intervention plans agreed where performance falls short of expected standards.
- Enhanced use of in-cab technology and exception reporting to identify and resolve missed collections more quickly.
- Monthly joint performance review meetings with Veolia, supported by weekly monitoring of missed collection performance and targeted action plans for rounds performing below target.
- Enhanced crew training and support.
- Improvements to operational processes and service scheduling.
- Investigation and resolution of repeat service failures. (Hotspot list)
- Enhanced communications with residents through the waste collection app and digital channels.

3.4.4 Lessons Learnt

Key lessons identified include:

- Major service changes require enhanced monitoring during mobilisation and implementation periods.
- Accurate property and service data are critical to maintaining collection reliability.
- Workforce resilience and early recruitment are essential when introducing significant service changes.
- Route optimisation should continue beyond implementation to address emerging operational issues.
- Real-time operational data improves the speed of issue identification and resolution.
- Resident communications play an important role in managing expectations and supporting service improvements.
- Early intervention at repeat problem locations prevents recurring service issues.

- Changes to collection frequency can influence customer reporting behaviour and should be considered when comparing performance data with historic service models.

3.4.5 Current position

Missed collection performance has improved significantly since the mobilisation period.

Graph 7 highlights a pronounced spike in missed collections during August and September 2025, with performance peaking at approximately 177 missed bins per 100,000 collections in August. This coincided with the introduction of the new waste and recycling contract, redesigned collection rounds and the transition to three-weekly residual waste collections. Whilst a further increase was recorded in November 2025 as operational arrangements continued to be refined, the overall pattern since mobilisation has been one of sustained improvement.

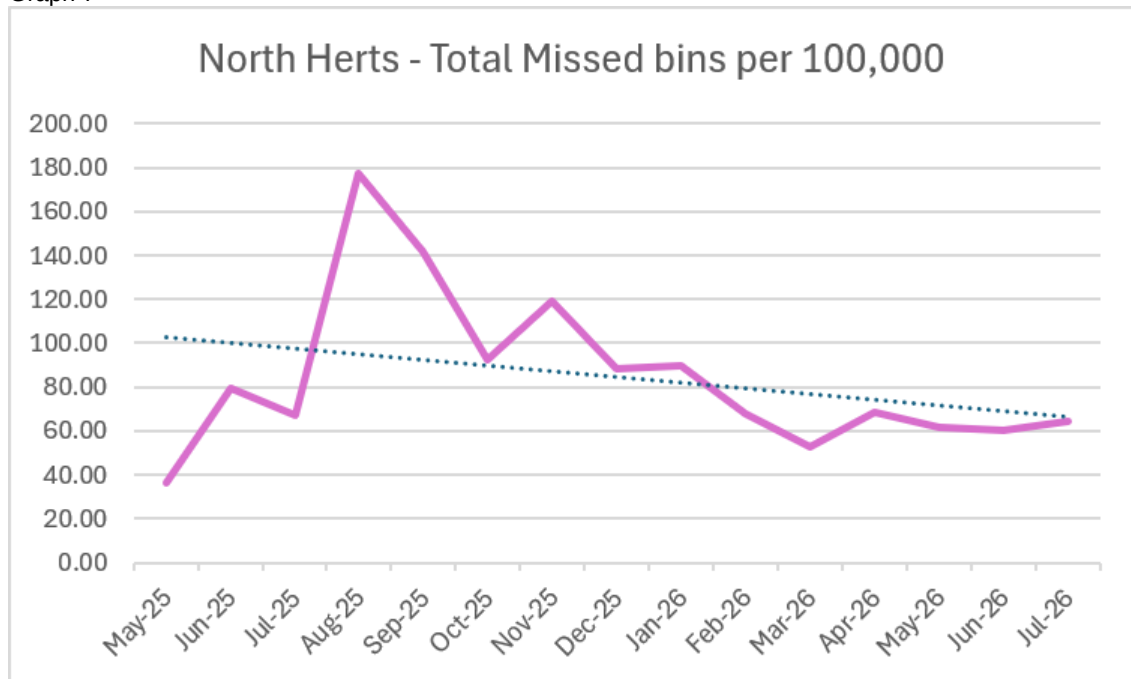
Following a programme of route optimisation, staff recruitment, enhanced crew training and ongoing performance monitoring, missed collection reports have reduced steadily throughout 2026. The trend demonstrates that the operational issues associated with mobilisation have largely been resolved and that service performance has stabilised.

The trend line shown in Graph 7 indicates a clear downward trajectory across the reporting period, demonstrating that the corrective actions implemented by the Shared Waste Service and Veolia have delivered sustained improvements in collection reliability. Missed collections reduced from a peak of approximately 177 per 100,000 collections in August 2025 to approximately 64 per 100,000 collections by July 2026, a reduction of around 64%. Whilst performance remains above the Council's target of 55 missed collections per 100,000 collections, the majority of elevated performance occurred during the mobilisation and bedding-in period between August 2025 and January 2026, with a clear improvement evident thereafter.

It is also important to recognise that the introduction of three-weekly residual waste collections may have influenced resident reporting behaviour. Where residents may previously have waited until the next collection cycle to resolve an issue informally, the longer interval between collections can increase the likelihood that missed collections are reported through formal channels. This provides greater visibility of service failures and customer experience but may also contribute to higher reported missed collection figures compared with historic performance.

Overall, the data demonstrates that missed collections were largely concentrated during the mobilisation and bedding-in period and that the actions taken by the Shared Waste Service and Veolia have resulted in sustained improvements in service reliability. The graph shows that performance has transitioned from an initial period of volatility to a more stable and consistent position, with monthly missed collection rates now significantly below those experienced during the early months of contract mobilisation.

Graph 7



4 CONCLUSION

The introduction of the new waste and recycling contract, enhanced recycling services and three weekly residual waste collections represented one of the most significant service transformations undertaken by the Shared Waste Service in recent years. Whilst the scale of these changes created a number of operational challenges during mobilisation, performance has continued to improve as the service has matured.

Issues experienced at a small number of communal developments were investigated and resolved through detailed data validation, site visits, capacity assessments and revised collection arrangements. Performance data demonstrates that these interventions have been successful, with communal missed collections reducing significantly and service performance returning to expected levels.

Household composting performance has continued to be influenced by external factors, particularly prolonged dry weather and reduced garden growth. Whilst composting tonnages remain below previous levels, stable garden waste subscription levels demonstrate continued resident engagement with the service. Graph 4a also shows that although missed garden waste collections increased following the annual subscription renewal period in April 2026, performance has improved steadily since then as operational improvements have been implemented and embedded.

Recycling performance has improved following the service changes, with the annual recycling rate increasing from 57.11% in 2024/25 to 58.88% in 2025/26. More recent rolling performance now exceeds 62%, demonstrating that the benefits of enhanced recycling capacity, expanded material streams and behavioural change are continuing to be realised.

Missed collection performance has improved significantly since the mobilisation period, supported by route optimisation, workforce development, enhanced operational monitoring and ongoing contract management. The data demonstrates that the majority of issues experienced immediately following implementation have been addressed and service reliability has improved accordingly.

The Shared Waste Service will continue to work closely with Veolia, residents and stakeholders to build on these improvements through ongoing performance monitoring, targeted communications, waste composition analysis and evidence led service development. This will ensure the service continues to improve recycling performance, reduce waste and deliver a reliable, efficient and customer-focused service for residents.

5. APPENDICES

5.1 None.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS

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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.