

New recycling and waste collections

Questions and Answers

9 December 2025

Why is the Council changing its waste collection services?

New central Government legislation means all councils have to offer residents a wider range of home recycling options from April 2026, or soon after. This includes food waste and glass collections.

Sevenoaks District currently faces unprecedented levels of waste and low recycling rates. So, we want to give residents more convenient recycling options as this is a more cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to deal with waste disposal.

Before we took the decision to change our waste collection services, we sought residents' views. In late 2024, and into 2025, we ran the BIG Waste Conversation survey. Over 4,000 residents took part.

They told us we should reduce the environmental impact of our collection services and provide more recycling options. Most supported the introduction of wheelie bins, and glass and food waste collections.

View the survey results in full at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/bigwaste.

What are recycling rates and why are they important?

The recycling rate is the percentage of all household waste and recycling that a council collects which is sent for recycling or composting, instead of landfill or incineration.

To protect the environment, improve the economy, incentivise waste reduction, reduce landfill and improve the re-use and recycling of materials, the Government has set ever increasing recycling rate targets on local councils for decades.

The current recycling rate target for councils, including Sevenoaks District Council is 55%, rising to 65% by 2035. Many councils already exceed these targets but with a current rate of only about 38%, Sevenoaks District has some way to go.

When will the Council start collecting food waste?

We are planning to introduce weekly food waste collections for most residents from 27 April 2026. Collections will start a little later for those with communal bins.

We will provide you with containers and more information about the start date before the service begins.

In the meantime, please continue to put cooked and uncooked food waste into your general waste (black sacks).

Why can't the Council collect food waste sooner?

To collect food waste separately, we need to use specialist collection vehicles and provide suitable containers. With the significant changes to waste collection taking place across the UK, there is currently huge demand on manufacturers and long lead times for these goods. We also want to take time to implement the scheme carefully to ensure a smooth transition for residents.

How will food waste collection work?

You will be provided with a small food waste container, or 'caddy', for use in the kitchen, and a larger caddy you can keep outdoors for collections. Food waste will be collected every week from outside your home.

We will collect the food waste on one of our specialist vehicles, before delivering it to Kent County Council for disposal via a process called 'anaerobic digestion'.

Anaerobic digestion is a natural process that uses bacteria to break down organic matter producing biogas. It is a more cost-effective way to dispose of your food waste and is better for the environment.

When will I get my food waste containers?

We will publish the expected delivery date for your caddies in February or March on our website and via our social media accounts. The rollout will take several weeks through April as we will be delivering food waste containers to around 50,000 individual homes.

When we deliver the food containers, we will tell you when your first collection will take place and how to use the system, with advice on what can and can't be included in the caddies.

Some homes may get their caddies several weeks before the first collection. We will try to make sure that everyone has their caddies a week before the first collection, but this may not be possible for every home.

When should I start filling my food caddy?

We ask that you don't start filling your caddy until one week before the first collection. This is because the collection rounds are designed for a predicted volume of food waste each week and it wouldn't be fair to overload the crews during their first week.

If your caddy is late, you could store food waste for a few days in a Tupperware or other suitable container, transferring to your caddy when it arrives.

Please do not put your collection caddy out until your first collection date during the week commencing 27 April. After that we will collect them weekly.

What day and time will you collect my food waste?

We will collect your food waste every week on the same day your general waste and recycling is collected, unless we advise otherwise.

You will need to put your food waste out by 7am on your collection day.

Your food waste will be collected by a different crew with a specialist vehicle and will be collected at a different time of the day to your other waste and recycling.

As with any new service change, the learning curve for the collection crews is significant and the usual time of day of collections may change in the first month. But you should always put your food waste out by 7am on your collection day.

How will food waste collections work?

Our collection crews will drive a specialist seven-and-a-half tonne collection truck with a rear bin lift and space to carry two wheeled bins. Each truck can collect up to three tonnes of food waste.

The two loaders will move down the street unlocking food waste caddies and emptying them into a wheeled bin, putting the caddies back where they found them. When each bin is full enough, they will load them into the vehicle hopper and whenever the truck is full the driver will take them to the waste transfer station at Dunbrik in Sundridge.

How can I help make the food waste collections a success?

Use your food waste containers. View [what should and should not go in your food waste caddy](#).

Don't put food waste in your black bin. This will help ensure your black bin does not become smelly, especially during the warmer months.

How can I support the food waste collection crews to make their activity easier?

Please mark your house number on the caddy with a sticker, marker pen or paint so you can recognise it from your neighbours' caddy.

Place your caddy out by 7am on your collection day at the edge of your property, where it is clearly visible to our crew.

Make sure you only put in food waste, without contaminants, so our crews don't have to leave your caddy. View [what should and should not go in your food waste caddy](#).

Our crews have never done this activity before. Most crew members will empty over 500 caddies every day! Please be patient and supportive while the activity settles into a routine.

Why is food waste collection important?

About 30% of our District's household waste is made up of cooked and raw food by weight. Collecting food waste separately is a much more cost-effective way to dispose of your food waste and will contribute to our recycling rate. To make the scheme a big success, we need as much food waste as possible!

What will happen to my food waste after collection?

After dropping your food waste at the Dunbrik waste transfer station in Sundridge, it will travel by road to a specialist 'anaerobic digestion' plant in Kent. Anaerobic digestion is a natural process where bacteria break down the food, producing natural biogas. The gas is captured and used for cooking, electricity production and other purposes. This process also creates compost and soil conditioners used in farming.

Food put in your general waste is incinerated. The nutrients in the food are lost forever, which is worse for the environment. It is also a much more expensive way to deal with food waste.

Why is the Council planning to introduce Waste Collection Service Standards?

With so much change to our collections, it is essential to set clear expectations on both service providers and service users. The Standards are intended to keep our waste and recycling crews safe while encouraging residents to use their recycling collection services to their fullest potential. In turn, this will increase recycling rates, which is better for the environment and the public purse. Our Waste Collection Service Standards are based on best practice and similar to those used by other councils, reflecting a fair and equitable approach to service provision.

As part of the proposed Waste Collection Service Standards, why are you not allowing side waste?

In other areas, preventing side waste (black sacks left next to the wheelie bin) has encouraged residents to make the best use of their food waste caddies and recycling containers.

Residents moving from sacks to two wheeled bins may be worried that their waste won't fit in, but taking out all the recycling, including glass and cardboard as well as food waste is the simplest way to manage this issue. Squashing the remaining non-recyclable waste and minimising empty space in your bin is another method.

For residents with large families or other reasonable needs, we will provide more or larger bins on application, where they have shown they are recycling as much as they can.

Councils are also required by health and safety regulations to minimize the handling of refuse sacks. While we will still need to collect sacks in some circumstances, collection systems must aim to minimise this activity.

As part of the proposed Waste Collection Service Standards, why must wheelie bin lids be closed?

Bin lids should be closed to prevent spillage and maintain safety. If bins are overflowing, they do not tip safely, and materials can fall onto our loaders. The bin lift mechanisms and compaction hoppers on waste collection trucks are extremely dangerous if not used properly.

Further, waste crime is a growing problem in the UK as everyone will recognise the blight that is flytipping. Our crews may be asked to take a bribe for collecting extra sacks by business or trades people trying to avoid their own waste disposal responsibilities at taxpayer's expense. By refusing to take side waste, our crews are protecting themselves from potential allegations of fraud.

Why is the Council moving to alternate weekly collections for waste and recycling?

This method is used by the majority of councils in the UK and in Kent. Many residents who took part in our Big Waste Conversation survey supported this change.

Alternate weekly collections – collecting waste one week and recycling the next – is a very cost-efficient collection method. It will allow us to put more resources into collecting a greater range of recycling items from the home and providing residents with wheelie bins. It will also help pay towards modernising our collection fleet.

Based on the experience of other councils, our recycling rates will increase because recycling will be easier. This is important because there are regional and national targets for recycling, and we are not one of the better performing councils.

Recycling is also the most cost-effective way to deal with waste because it is cheaper than sending waste to the incinerator.

When will alternative weekly collections begin?

This is one of the biggest changes to Sevenoaks District Council's services in our 51-year history. To deliver the new waste collection service, we need new vehicles and wheelie bins for most homes.

Vehicle procurement times have increased since the pandemic and many other councils are making similar changes right now, so demand for new waste collection vehicles is currently very high.

We anticipate we will introduce the service in autumn 2026.

When will I get my wheelie bins?

The exact window when you will receive your two bins will be confirmed in the coming months, but a phased rollout could begin in summer 2026.

What is the size of the wheelie bins?

We are currently considering what is the best size bin to suit different residents' needs. We will provide you with more information as the project progresses.

Why can't I keep using the wheeled bin I already own?

We will provide homes (except those who use communal waste bins and hard to serve properties) with two bins.

To make the new bin collection service fair, safe and consistent for everyone, collections must be made only from Council-issued bins. Many residents currently use a wide range of different bins for their general waste —different colours, sizes, ages and makes. These cannot be used for the new collection system because:

- They may not be compatible with the lifting equipment on our collection vehicles
- Some are larger than the standard capacity, which would make the service unfair and more expensive for all residents
- Different colours and labels mean crews cannot reliably see what waste should go in which bin. This could lead to contamination and missed collections
- We cannot take responsibility for damage to private bins, especially older or non-standard ones
- The new service is designed around specific 180 litre residual and 240 litre recycling bins, which support recycling targets, safety standards and service consistency
- Emptying them puts our crews at risk of allegation of undertaking fraudulent activity.

Do I have to accept the Council bins?

Yes. To ensure the service works properly for all households, collections will only be made from the standard Council-issued bins. The new service is not optional, unless you are in a home which simply cannot store or present a wheeled bin, such as many flats above shop parades.

Can the Council take away my old bin for me?

Sorry, we cannot remove old third-party bins for several reasons:

- They are private property, not Council-owned items.
- We cannot check whether they contain waste or hazardous materials.
- Large volumes of private bins would create a significant disposal cost for the Council.
- Private bins are made of mixed plastics and cannot easily go into normal

- recycling streams.
- If we start removing them, many more would be presented, and this would quickly become unmanageable.

What can I do with my old bin?

Most plastic bins could be reused for storage, gardening, or kept as a spare for non-collection purposes.

If you prefer to dispose of it, you can take your bin to your local [Household Waste Recycling Centre](#), where it will be processed correctly or you could arrange collection through our paid-for [bulky waste collection service](#).

What if my current bin is newer or seems better than the Council bin?

We appreciate that residents have purchased their own bins in good faith.

However, to deliver a safe and consistent service across the District, we must operate with one standard type of container for all households.

When is the Council proposing to collect glass?

We will collect glass as part of the fortnightly recycling collections from autumn 2026 as soon as residents have their wheelie bins and alternate weekly collections begin. In the meantime, please continue to take your glass to one of the 40 glass recycling banks in the District.

Find your nearest glass recycling bank at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/glass.

Why are you collecting glass?

At the moment, residents are asked to take their glass to one of 40 recycling banks across the District. However, some choose not to do this and put the glass in their black sack waste. Others cannot easily transport their used glass to one of these sites.

Collecting glass from homes will be more convenient for residents and will increase the amount of glass sent for recycling, helping to improve our recycling performance.

Glass put in black sacks is sent to an energy from waste plant. Not only is this expensive, the glass does not burn to produce energy. At the end of this process, low grade glass is left, which can only be used in aggregate products. This low-grade glass does not contribute towards our recycling rates.

Properly recycled, glass bottles can easily and cheaply be remade into new glass bottles and jars again and again and again. This is much better for the environment and is also more cost effective.

The food waste starts in April and Alternate Weekly Collections in Autumn. What happens to my waste and recycling in between?

Apart from putting your food waste into your caddy for weekly collection (from 27 April 2026), nothing else will change until autumn 2026. We will continue to collect black sacks and empty the reusable sack, or take clear sacks for those exempted, every week as normal.

I live in a flat, will the changes affect me?

If you use communal recycling facilities close to your flat, nothing will change as part of this project. However, we intend to improve your recycling facilities over time, providing food and recycling collections where possible.

I use clear sacks for recycling. How will the change affect me?

We are considering how we can move most residents who currently use clear sacks to wheelie bins, but at this time, nothing has been decided. We will keep these households up to date with any plans for change as they are developed.

What will happen to my green reusable recycling bag?

We are exploring options for the alternative use of the reusable recycling sacks once residents have their wheelie bins and we move to alternate weekly waste collections. We will keep you informed of any decisions.

When will you begin textile, small electronic equipment and other small item collections from my home?

Our top priority is the introduction of home food waste collections from April 2026 and home glass collections and wheelie bins from autumn 2026.

However, we are considering what additional small items we can collect for recycling from the home and how the service could operate in future years.

We will give you advance notice of when any new small item collection service will begin and what items we can collect

Our partner, Anglo Doorstep Collections, currently offer a free collection from your doorstep of items suitable for resale in charity shops such as clothes, textiles and small electrical items. Find out about [Anglo collections](#).

How much is this costing?

The total cost is £9.05 million.

This breaks down as £6.6 million for new waste collection vehicles, £2.09 million for wheelie bins and £0.36 million for food containers.

How is the Council paying for the improvements?

The Council will receive £4.73 million from central Government to help introduce the changes.

We had already budgeted £2.45 million to replace our aging waste collection vehicles and we will save nearly £300,000 in repairs and maintenance over the next three years. This money will be used to help buy the new waste collection vehicles.

We also expect to make about £150,000 from selling the retired vehicles.

The remaining £1.4 million will be saved over future years as the new service will be more cost-effective and efficient.

Will I have a new collection day?

We know that collection day changes are not popular and always strive to keep them to a minimum.

Most residents' collection days will remain the same, but it may change for a small number of households. We will write to these households to give advance warning if their collection day is changing and when their alternate weekly waste collections will begin.

Is the Council changing the garden waste service?

The garden waste service is unaffected by these changes. We will continue to collect garden waste as we do now, every two weeks on the same day your waste and recycling is collected.

Is the Council changing the clinical waste or bulky waste services?

No, these services are unaffected by these changes.