

Council's Change to the Grey Bins

We are grateful to the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities, who has provided a very useful explanation of the reasoning behind waste bin collection, and to Mark Heaps (WADRA) for his help.

Rationale behind the change to grey bins, research, cost.

RBC undergoes a regular waste auditing process, whereby grey bin contents for a representative sample of Reading households are sampled. The most recent audit before the launch of the food waste scheme took place in 2019. As you will see from the attached 'binographic', this found that on average only 32% of the contents of the average grey bin by weight was waste that could not easily be recycled by existing means. 41% was food waste and the remainder were recyclable items that should have been in the red bin, or taken to bring banks or Smallmead. So 68% of what was in the grey bins should not have been in there, but the reduction in bin size was by 42%, not by 68% for three reasons : firstly, 140l is a standard size that had been used in Reading (and across the country) for many years, and that therefore could be switched to without adapting the vehicles; secondly, because the audit is conducted by weight but bin size is in volume, so a larger bin than is indicated by weight gives leeway for larger, light items; and thirdly, because the council recognises that the audit, despite being designed to be as representative as possible, is an average and therefore some households will have had more than 32% genuine landfill waste in their grey bins.

As mentioned above, 140l bins are industry standard and were already in use in Reading without causing safety problems.

Decision to change to smaller bins – as part of the planning process for the food waste service RBC officers took advice and learning from other councils that already offered food waste collections. The consensus from this was that take up of the food waste service was considerably lower where residual (grey) bin capacity was not reduced. Processing food waste via anaerobic digester constitutes a considerable financial saving (as well as the environmental benefits) over sending it to landfill, so the business case for the service required at least 1kg of food waste per household per week. The advice from other authorities was that this would only be achievable if households' residual capacity was reduced to divert food waste to the food waste service.

There is more information about the process running up to the decision to bring in food waste collections and reduce the size of the residual bins, including costings, here [Committee Report Writing - Supermodel Report - 2015 \(reading.gov.uk\)](#) (That link looks a little odd – in case it doesn't work the report you want is item 31 here [Agenda for Policy Committee on Thursday, 26th September, 2019, 6.30 pm - Reading Borough Council](#))

There have been slight changes to the programme since that report, mostly due to the pandemic. The process was overseen by a cross-party task & finish group and regular reports have been brought to the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure (HNL) committee since the 2019 Policy committee decision. HNL reports and recordings can be found here [Browse meetings - Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee - Reading Borough Council](#)

Flytipping,

Reading does monitor flytipping. These figures are reported in various places, including to the Joint Waste Disposal Board, where Reading's rates are presented alongside Wokingham and Bracknell. In the report on this link the JWDB was considering whether there was any evidence of the booking system at Smallmead impacting flytipping rates ([Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Joint Waste Disposal Board, 07/09/2021 09:30 \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#)). You will note that Bracknell's reported rate is lower than that for Reading or Wokingham. I have queried this and it appears to be the result of a difference in recording rather than evidence of Bracknell having less flytipping than the other authorities. I was asked a question about flytipping and smaller bins at full council last year [COUNCIL MEETING \(reading.gov.uk\)](#)

In November 2019 RBC launched a specialist Recycling and Enforcement team to tackle flytipping. The work of this team is reported to HNL and via the council's news page [800 fixed penalty notices in two years highlights council's tough stance on fly-tipping and littering \(reading.gov.uk\)](#)

Many of the littered items in the photograph included with your email are recyclable so the flytippers' ability to dispose of them will not have been impacted by the switch to 140l residual bins, as they should have been disposed of via the red bins.

Provision for larger households / special cases / access to Smallmead.

I live in a household of six (two adults, three teenagers, one primary school-aged child). We were in one of the early adopter schemes for food waste so have had a 140l residual bin for 16 months, and gone through two Christmases with it. Because of the size of the household our previous grey bin was 360l, not the standard 240l, so we have had a greater than average reduction in our residual waste capacity. We have had no difficulties managing with the 140l bin, and have not had to take advantage of the excess waste collection at Christmas (bin crews will take one extra black bin bag of waste per property during the first residual collection after Christmas). We do, however, have and need, two recycling bins. Every household is entitled to a second red bin (or a larger, 360l red bin) and a second food waste bin. These can be ordered free of charge on the RBC website [Order a bin or bag - Reading Borough Council](#). Crews will also accept excess recycling presented in a cardboard box or paper bag alongside the red bin (with the proviso that they cannot accept this in very wet weather, as the recycling facility cannot process wet cardboard). Households with five or more adults are entitled to additional residual capacity. Households with two or more children in nappies are given a free sack collection in addition to their 140l bin. There is a free clinical waste collection for Households with clinical waste to dispose of. Details of all the available provisions are here [Household Waste Collection Service Standards - Reading Borough Council](#) .

Residents who are not automatically eligible for extra residual capacity but who are struggling to manage with the 140l bin are encouraged to have a bin audit. This is booked via the 'order a bin or bag' link above and involves a visit from a member of the Recycling and Enforcement team who will attend the property, look through the bins with the resident, and discuss their waste and capacity needs. Often, these audits reveal that the resident was not aware of the full range of items that should go in the red bin and once their waste is sorted properly the 140l residual bin is sufficient, but the R&E officers have the authority to issue extra residual capacity and will do so when merited. There is no intention to have residents driving residual waste to Smallmead, and there should be no need for it if residents who are struggling have their waste audited. To assist residents to sort their waste

correctly there is a waste sort function on the free re3cyclopedia app, information on the RBC and re3 websites [re3 Recycling Collections \(fccenvironment.co.uk\)](http://fccenvironment.co.uk) and literature on recycling was distributed when residents were informed of the roll-out.

As an additional aid to residents, Reading's Councillors have included provision for free bulky waste collections in the budget [New Budget Includes Millions More on New Road Surfaces in Reading](#)