

Birmingham City Council

Report to Cabinet

Tuesday 9th December 2025



Title:	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WASTE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME
Lead Member:	Councillor Majid Mahmood – Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment
Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee:	Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Has this report been shared with the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair?	Yes
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Authorised by:	Richard Brooks, Executive Director, City Operations
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes Forward Plan Reference: 015805/2025
Reason(s) why not included on the Forward Plan and confirm who has authorised it to be considered:	Not Applicable
Is this a Late Report?	Yes
Reason(s) why Late and confirm who has authorised it to be considered:	This report has been delayed due to the complexity of the issues and the need to seek further financial and operational advice relating to the recommendations. A decision is now required without delay to ensure the most timely delivery of service improvements and financial benefits.

The Leader and the Managing Director have authorised this report to be considered

Is this decision eligible for 'call in?'

Yes

If 'call-in' has been dis-applied, please provide reason(s) and confirm who has authorised:

Not Applicable

Wards:

All Wards

Does this report contain exempt or confidential information?

Yes

Exempt Information

Exempt Appendix A is exempt from disclosure by virtue of the following Paragraphs of schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 as amended:

1. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).
2. Information relating to any consultation or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connections with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holder under, the authority.
3. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out a series of options regarding the future implementation of waste services across the city. It sets out the key decisions, risks and opportunities that will guide future waste redesign activity.
- 1.2 Birmingham's residents need and deserve a better waste service. The City Council provides essential waste collection services to a population of over 1.14 million residents and serves approximately 470,000 residential properties across the city. Our customers deserve a reliable, high-quality service that supports responsible and sustainable household waste management.
- 1.3 The Council is required to comply with new legislation relating to both recycling and the collection of Food Waste. This includes the new Simpler Recycling legislation and the Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme to improve recycling performance.
- 1.4 The Waste Service must also improve efficiency and productivity and deliver savings that support the Council's financial recovery.
- 1.5 There have been longstanding issues and challenges with Birmingham's waste services. Even prior to the current industrial action, Birmingham's recycling rate at 23% was among the lowest of any unitary authority in the country. In 24/25 residents registered a total of 121,437 missed bin collections. The service was operating aged vehicles, used inadequate technology, and generated a high volume of complaints from customers. This service required major improvement.
- 1.6 To address these concerns the Council planned a comprehensive transformation of the waste service. Prior to industrial action this was on track for implementation from April 2025. The industrial dispute has required the council to prioritise maintaining the safety of the city over the past year and has delayed the planned transformation. At present the Council is running a contingency waste operation which aims to ensure one collection each week from all residential properties in Birmingham. This residual collection includes waste and organic fractions which would otherwise have been collected separately through the suspended recycling and garden waste services. We acknowledge the impact this has had on residents, many of whom have continued to support the sustainability of the city through taking their waste to our household waste recycling centres.
- 1.7 Despite the industrial action, the Council has continued to plan and where possible deliver improvements in the waste service and has implemented significant elements of the new service model.
 - 1.7.1 The council has successfully procured and commissioned 151 new vehicles to deliver waste and recycling services. These vehicles have all been branded and are fitted with new in-cab technology to support better management of the service and a better customer experience. New 360-degree cameras on the vehicles improve operational safety for crews,

residents and other highway users, and live operational data feeds support service delivery and efficiency.

- 1.7.2 In readiness for the new waste service rollout, over 1100 new routes and rounds have been developed using the latest Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) using up to date live data and established with realistic productivity and performance levels.
 - 1.7.3 The council has acquired over 1 million new dry recycling and food waste containers for residents, which are currently in storage pending the start of the new rollout in June 2026.
 - 1.7.4 Refuse collection workers have been provided with new uniforms to reflect the professional culture and image the city is now trying to create, and to ensure the workforce have appropriate personal protective equipment for their safety.
 - 1.7.5 The contingency arrangements are now operating at higher levels of productivity than the service was prior to industrial action. We acknowledge that many properties still do not have a sufficiently regular and reliable service. However, reported missed bins and complaints are now lower than before the strike began.
- 1.8 The Council now needs to commit to a timetable for implementing the full waste transformation programme, including the reintroduction of recycling, a new food waste service, and alternate weekly collections of residual waste. Residents deserve clarity and certainty and to be supported in their efforts to manage household waste responsibly across the city.
 - 1.9 A new approach to service management will support the service rollout and the culture change associated with the new service redesign. When the permanent employees return there will be a series of activities supporting their successful reintegration, in line with the new waste target operating model and culture. A programme of staff training and standard-setting for all employees, staff and managers will underpin the operational delivery requirements of the new services.
 - 1.10 The council has sought to resolve the waste dispute in the interest of the city and its residents. Despite the council making offers to Unite and negotiating in good faith, it has not been possible to do so up to this point. This paper therefore presents options for implementing the full transformation of the waste service regardless of whether industrial action continues. If industrial action continues then an alternative separate workforce for food waste will need to be established.
 - 1.11 The new services will represent a major change for households across the city in terms of how they manage waste. This is a vital step towards improving the overall sustainability of the city as well as reducing the cost of waste collection and treatment. We will support these changes with an extensive programme of

resident communications and engagement, and with pilots of the new approach across the city to learn lessons ahead of the full roll out.

- 1.12 The transformation of the waste service is already underway. Extensive planning and preparation has already taken place. Further planning and preparation by officers will continue immediately on the basis of the option agreed from this paper. The first priority must remain to keep the city safe. However, the waste service will also seek to continue delivering incremental improvements for residents on the way to the proposed June 2026 implementation date for the full new model.

2 COMMISSIONERS' REVIEW

- 2.1 Residents need, deserve, and have been promised a transformed waste service, one that is reliable, high-quality, and supports responsible and sustainable household waste management. For too long, the service has been expensive, inefficient, and characterised by low productivity and poor customer satisfaction. The Council must be steadfast in acknowledging this history of underperformance; it has established the baseline for improvement and this underlines the necessity of the significant transformation now required.
- 2.2 The transformation programme presents a critical opportunity to deliver both improved outcomes for residents and the financial efficiencies essential to the Council's recovery. Commissioners have consistently supported the Council's ambition to deliver a comprehensive redesign of the waste service and, despite the challenges posed by industrial action, have worked with officers to develop a fully resourced plan capable of delivering the required transformation and savings.
- 2.3 The previous poor performance of the service, illustrated clearly in paragraph 4.6, reinforces the need for a fundamentally different approach. The level of disruption experienced by residents since the industrial action commenced has been substantial and unacceptable. Nonetheless, contingency arrangements, which must remain flexible and adaptable to the situation, have operated at higher levels of productivity than the service delivered prior to industrial action. It is therefore essential that the service does not revert to outdated working practices that resulted in high levels of missed collections, excessive complaints, and low recycling rates.
- 2.4 Birmingham City Council must now put in place the structures, workforce model, technology, the performance management framework, and leadership required to deliver a reliable and resilient waste service. The transformation of waste services is a cornerstone of Birmingham's improvement and recovery. Successful implementation and sustained performance will be vital to rebuilding resident trust and confidence.
- 2.5 Commissioners welcome the Council's commitment to a clear timetable and phased plan for delivering the full transformation programme, including the

reintroduction of recycling, the roll-out of a new food-waste service, and the shift to alternate-weekly residual waste collections. The risks are set out clearly in the report, but they must now be actively managed and mitigated. This will require a whole-Council approach with cross-departmental alignment and shared ownership of delivery.

- 2.6 Commissioners support the implementation of Option 2, which provides time to mitigate risks while maintaining the commitment to full transformation, even if industrial action continues. This includes preparing, as necessary, for the establishment of a separate workforce to deliver the new food-waste service. The introduction of Bartec in-cab technology is strongly welcomed, and its full functionality must be used to support operational efficiency, real-time reporting, performance management and improved customer insight.
- 2.7 The Council recognises that the new service model will mean changes in the way residents have to manage their household waste, and this is especially challenging given the disruption they have experienced since January 2025. A comprehensive and targeted programme of resident communication and engagement is therefore essential. Testing the new service approach in different neighbourhoods and using lessons learned to refine processes before full roll-out will be critical to successful implementation from June 2026.
- 2.8 None of the delivery options are without risk, and a service change of this scale will inevitably face implementation challenges. The transformation must therefore be managed with rigorous planning, strong governance, sustained communication, and well-designed mitigations. With disciplined delivery and whole-organisation commitment, the reward for the disruption residents have experienced will be a modern, efficient, effective waste service that meets industry standards achieved elsewhere.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 3.1 **Agrees** to support **Option 2: implement the roll out of the new waste services and transformation plan from June 2026 – Post May bank holidays. If industrial action continues then Cabinet agrees that an alternative separate workforce for food waste can be established.**
- 3.2 **Notes** the financial implications of the options set out in the confidential exempt appendix and **approves** the additional expenditure identified that is required to stand up a food waste service. This funding will be confirmed as part of the 2026/27 budget process and underwritten from Strategic Reserves.
- 3.3 **Notes** that the rollout of the new waste technology (Bartec System) commenced in November 2025 to improve data and performance collection for waste services and to provide an updated customer experience for residents through the customer contact centre in Spring 2026.

3.4 **Notes** the key financial, human resource, reputational and legislative risks and impacts associated with the options presented.

4 Key Information – Next Steps

4.1 Following the Cabinet decision, work will start immediately to build on the preparation to date and ensure that new services will be successfully implemented by June 2026.

4.2 Since the publication of the Environment Act (2021) the Council committed to reviewing its waste strategy so that future arrangements were reflective of the legislative changes.

4.3 The new legislation will require the council to meet a recycling target of 65% by 2035 and a 50% reduction in residual waste by 2042. This will require a significant focus on citizen behaviour change and enhanced service quality, alongside the introduction and use of technology to deliver this increased performance.

4.4 Under the current contingency arrangements for waste collection, Birmingham’s recycling rate is approximately 14% in Q2 2025/26. This level is dependent on residents bringing materials to the Household Waste and Recycling Centres. Even before industrial action Birmingham’s recycling rate at 23% was among the lowest of any unitary authority in the country.

4.5 The latest Q2 2025/26 reported missed bin collection performance figures show a marked improvement in the levels of reported missed collections over the last year.

4.6 After significant initial disruption in the earlier stages of the strike, the contingency arrangements have operated efficiently in delivering the service during industrial action. Levels of complaints and reported missed bins are now lower than before the strike began.

KPI Measure	June 2024	June 2025	2025 Percentage Improvement
Tonnes collected per Full Time Employee	54.48	66.87	+22.74%
Missed bins per 100,000 collections	659.69	311.46	+52.78%

Table 1: Waste Performance Metrics June 2024-June 2025

4.7 The service changes linked to the planned transformation (as set out in this report) will see recycling rates in the city exceed 30%. This will be achieved through a move from weekly to fortnightly residual waste collections, the introduction of a second 180 litre wheeled bin for paper and cardboard collected on a fortnightly frequency, and a new weekly food waste service, alongside

extensive communications, and support for changed waste management behaviour by households.

- 4.8 The service intends to run a food waste trial pilot scheme to evaluate the rollout of food waste collections from March 2026. The pilot will include trial food waste collections for up to 10,000 households. The design of the trial scheme is currently being developed, and further information will be shared in the new year. A food waste trial communications pack is also being prepared for residents.
- 4.9 Effective performance management of the service is a key element of the waste transformation programme. Following implementation of the new services, a culture of embedded performance management and high-performance expectations will need to be sustained. The motivation to strive for and sustain high service performance should be grounded in a sense of pride and professionalism, which should feature across the service, in recruitment, staff induction, individual performance management, ongoing training and development, management and leadership assessment, service performance benchmarks and resident and business campaigns.
- 4.10 This service is amongst the most visible universal service that every citizen and many businesses receive from the Council. Every member of staff must be committed to restoring pride in service delivery and performance and most importantly, there must be an understanding of how this service affects the daily lives of its residents and reflects the sense of "Pride in Place" that the city deserves. The service has already made significant steps towards this new approach including through better use of data, the introduction of new vehicles and technology that support performance, and changes and improvements to the management of the service.

5 Current Service Provision

- 5.1 At present the Council is running a contingency waste operation which aims to ensure one collection each week from all residential properties in Birmingham. This residual collection includes waste and organic fractions which would otherwise have been collected separately through the suspended recycling and garden waste services.

6 New Service Provision

6.1 The graphic (Figure 1.0 below) sets out the proposed new key services for residents, which include:

- A new weekly food waste collection, collected in an external 23-litre food waste caddy and an internal 7-litre caddy for the home.
- A fortnightly collection of dry recycling, collected in 240 litre blue lidded wheeled bin, (for plastics, cans, and glass) and a new 180 litre green lidded wheeled bin, (for paper and cardboard).

6.1.1 A fortnightly collection of non-recyclable residual waste, collected in a 180-litre grey wheeled bin. Officers are currently developing a new waste receptacle (container) policy to ensure that households with larger families are provided with suitably sized containers.

6.1.2 It is estimated that around 70% of the kerbside properties will be suitable for the new services. Alternative provision will be made for other properties which will include collections on a different frequency and alternative containerisation.

6.1.3 An extensive communication plan is being developed for the rollout of the new waste collection services and will be finalised in line with the decision from this paper. Recycling videos will be prepared for social media and community websites and will be shared in Spring 2026. The updated communication leaflets and media will provide detailed information for residents on what the service changes will be, when they will be implemented and how they can fully participate.



Figure 1.0: what residents will receive.

- 6.2 Further work will continue in the coming months to develop the Bartec in-cab technology. The capture of improved collection data will provide improved customer intelligence and integration with the customer contact centre in Spring 2026, to improve reporting for the public.

7 Delivery Options

- 7.1 A series of delivery options have been considered as part of the waste transformation programme. They are:
- 7.2 **Option 1: Begin phased implementation of all new services in Quarter 4 of the 25/26 financial year.**
- 7.3 **Option 2: Implement the roll out of the new waste services and transformation plan from June 2026 – Post May bank holidays. If industrial action continues then Cabinet agrees that an alternative separate workforce for food waste can be established.**
- 7.4 **Option 3: Do nothing.**
- 7.5 These options are heavily impacted by the following considerations:
- The Environment Act – Simpler Recycling Legislation.
 - The impacts of the on-going industrial action and industrial relations issues.
 - Service implementation and rollout considerations.
 - Resident Experience and engagement.
- 7.6 The suggested delivery options reflect the complexities associated with balancing each of these critical considerations.

8 Environment Act (2021)

- 8.1 In October 2023, Defra wrote to all local authorities to advise on proposed waste reforms as part of the Environment Act (2021) – Waste Reforms Simpler Recycling. [Simpler Recycling in England: policy update - GOV.UK](#)
- 8.2 In summary, these reforms include:
- By 31st March 2026 – local authorities will be required to collect the following recyclable waste streams from all households in England: paper and card, plastic, metal, glass, food waste, and garden waste, excluding plastic film.
 - By 31st March 2026 - All local authorities are required to introduce a free, weekly food waste collection for households, except where a specific transitional arrangement has been agreed to allow longer for implementation. Local authorities will be required to collect garden waste, where requested, and can continue to choose to charge for this service.
 - Further kerbside recycling of plastic film will be required by 2027.

- 8.3 All local authorities were provided with up front funding from DEFRA for the purchase of vehicles and receptacles to meet the rollout requirements by March 2026. The Council moved swiftly to ensure that this procurement was undertaken and new vehicles and containers for all households are currently being stored at various locations pending agreement on a start date for the implementation of the new services. Due to the on-going industrial action, the implementation of other key waste transformation activities has been paused.
- 8.4 Officers have been and continue to be in discussion with DEFRA regarding a dispensation around the roll out of food waste by 31st March 2026. Whilst it may be possible to obtain an exemption from DEFRA to delay the introduction of food waste, this has not been provided to date.
- 8.5 A verbal update will be given by officers at the meeting if any further responses are received after the publication of this report. It is important to note that the council understands the position from DEFRA with regards to this deadline, however any decision that is taken would need to be mindful of the industrial relations, customer, and service risks that the council faces at this time.
- 8.6 In addition, there is also a financial risk associated with any delays to implementation, which may involve the government levying a financial penalty for failure to meet the food waste implementation deadline date of April 2026. At this stage it is unknown as to what this financial quantum may be as this is yet to be shared with local authorities.

9 Implementation and Rollout of new waste services.

- 9.1 All future delivery timelines and options share common features, regardless of the timing of their implementation. These include:
- The current industrial action presents major challenges to implementing large scale service changes as the current contingent service is reliant on temporary agency labour and contractors.
 - The implementation of the new services will be phased and based on a depot-by-depot deployment (across the three Birmingham waste collection depots). This phased approach allows the mobilisation team to focus on one area within the city at a time. This area-based approach ensures that targeted communications are developed around the resident and specific wards. This also provides an efficient approach for the delivery of the new containers ensuring around 20,000 customers are transitioning into the new services in 2-week blocks.
 - Initial roll out is to kerbside properties only, with multiple occupancy and flats above shops to follow. The additional 130,000 multiple occupancy properties and flats above shops will be on a subsequent timeline, likely to extend to Quarter 4 in 2026/27. This population can be broken down into a subset which reflect 25,000 flats above shops and 105,000 high rise and multiple occupancy premises.

- 9.2 Work has commenced to establish recycling and food waste solutions for multi occupancy properties. The demographics, layout, and storage available in these locations does mean that the solutions will not be a one size fits all. A desktop exercise will be undertaken initially, using best practice from across the industry which will then be followed up with dedicated site visits.
- 9.3 The overall timeline for implementing all the new waste services will take approximately 12 months starting from June 2026. There will be a three-month initial implementation phase followed by a nine-month roll-out and reintegration of services. The first three months will focus on workforce mobilisation alongside comprehensive resident communications and engagement.

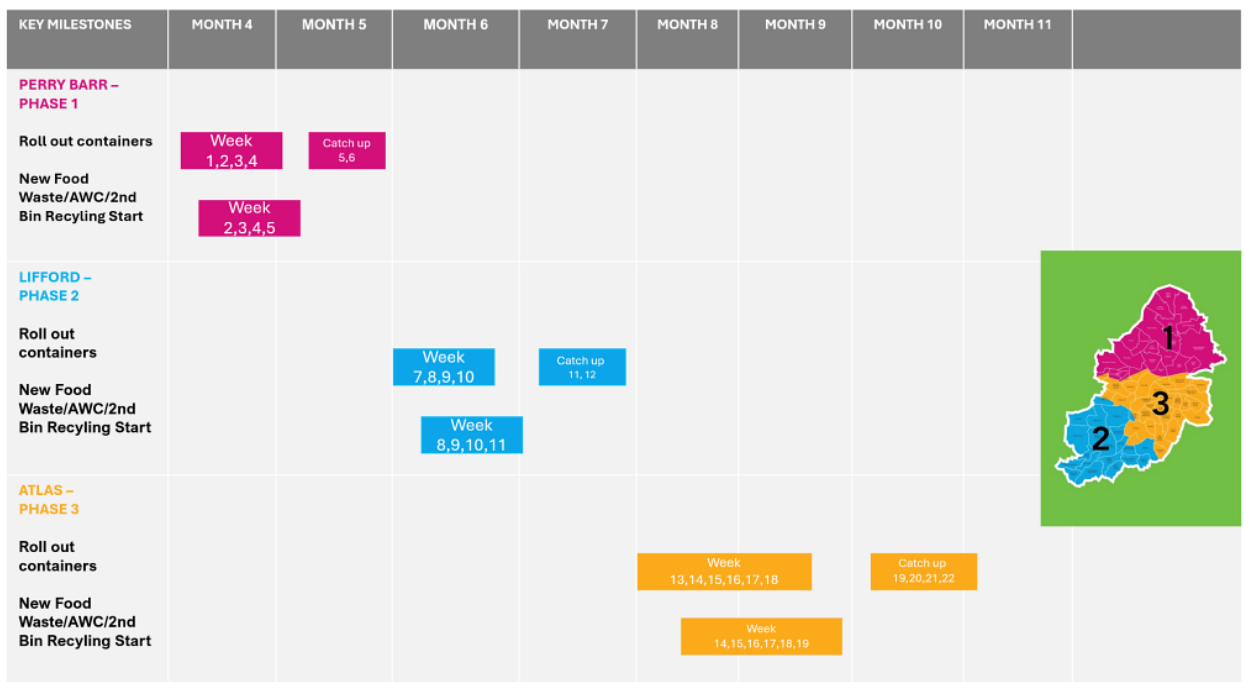


Figure 2.0: High level 12 month roll out plan months 4-12, phased implementation across Perry Barr, Lifford, and Atlas Waste depots / areas of Birmingham.

- 9.4 Extensive communication and engagement with residents and communities will be required to support behaviour change and rebuild confidence in the council around the reliability of this essential service.
- 9.5 Key communications will include:
- The separation of food waste and maximising uptake and participation in respect of the new recycling services being offered. This will include the new container options and collection frequencies.
 - Promotion of the benefits around further separation of recycling and using the increased container capacity for paper and card and dry mixed recycling.
- 9.5.1 The resident engagement programme will be supported by a dedicated outreach team that will be funded from the new Extended Producer

Responsibilities (EPR) funding of £15.2 million that the council has received from government for 25/26.

10 Ongoing Industrial Action

- 10.1 Whilst there has been progress made in relation to the rollout work to date, the waste transformation programme has been significantly delayed by industrial action. These delays have had, and continue to have a significant financial impact, including through direct additional costs, lost income for charged services, and foregone savings (these are set out in the Finance section within the attached confidential Appendix).
- 10.2 Despite the council making offers to Unite and negotiating in good faith, it has not been possible to resolve the dispute up to this point (27 November 2025).
- 10.3 The dispute initially focused on the removal of the Grade 3 Waste Recycling Collection Officer role which ceased on the 6th of January 2025; however, the dispute widened to include the impact of the removal of the Grade 4 Driver Team Leader role (DTL). Unite's most recent mandate for industrial action was obtained via a ballot in November and expires 16th May 2026. Both the former Grade 3 WRCO role and the former Grade 4 Driver Team Leader role no longer exist following service changes and restructuring within the Waste Service. These changes have been lawfully implemented and have followed the proper process of consultation.
- 10.4 The fifth in a series of ballot notifications from Unite as part of their ongoing IA was received on 21 October 2025, the reason for ballot has continued to vary and, on this occasion, stated: 'The employer's restructuring of the Fleet and Waste Department without meaningful consultation.' The sought after mandate was successfully secured by Unite on 17 November for action to continue up to a further six months until 16 May 2026.
- 10.5 The entire waste collection (employed) workforce who are represented by Unite are currently undertaking continuous industrial action. Around 26 employed workers represented by other Unions are not participating in strike action and continue to work. Many former employees of the Waste Service have left the council during the industrial dispute, and the number of striking workers has reduced significantly.
- 10.6 On the 17th November 2025 Unite also indicated that Unite members engaged in the provision of services to BCC waste services via the Jobs and Talent agency would commence industrial action on 1st December 2025. The council is committed to maintaining the safety of the city. The contingency arrangements put in place will continue to be monitored and updated should this be required.

10.7 The contingency service deployed provides a single weekly collection of residual waste. The contingency service is being operated through working permanent staff and agency workers (who are being utilised to the same extent as prior to the commencement of industrial action).

11 Delivery Options

11.1 This report is asking members to approve a preferred option for the implementation of the new waste services to meet the requirements set out in the new Environment Act.

11.2 The key options for consideration are:

- **Option 1: Begin phased implementation of all new services by the end of Quarter 4 of the 25/26 financial year.**
- **Option 2: Implement the roll out of the new waste services and transformation plan from June 2026 – Post May bank holidays. If industrial action continues then Cabinet agrees that an alternative separate workforce for food waste can be established**
- **Option 3: Do nothing.**

Option 1

11.3 The implementation of Option 1 during Quarter 4 of this financial year would be extremely challenging to deliver. The introduction of new services during ongoing industrial action poses additional complexity and risk to the council.

11.4 The People Services section of this report details the impacts and risks associated with the on-going industrial action. This is set out in Section 14 of the report.

11.5 Any service rollout in Quarter 4 of this financial year would be limited to the new food waste service. This would require a minimum of a three to four-month lead in period as the new service would require a new operational depot to be set up, a new Operators licence to operate the fleet and a separate management team would need to be engaged to manage the service.

11.6 The introduction of a new service in Quarter 4 of the 25/26 financial year will leave a much shorter lead in time for comprehensive resident and community engagement. The success of any new service delivery is heavily dependent on the ease by which residents understand and can engage fully in the new services available.

11.7 There is an additional risk of confusion surrounding the Option 1 rollout as it is being decoupled from the dry recycling service which would remain suspended. The need for more intense communication activity and resources would be required, potentially adding a further financial burden.

- 11.8 Implementing this option would mean the rollout of food waste would start (but not be completed) before the 31st March 2026. Full implementation would need to be rolled out on a phased approach across the city following selected trial pilot schemes.
- 11.9 The containers required for the rollout of any of the new services are currently in storage but would be required to be delivered in advance of the new service start.
- 11.10 The Council uses a specialist company to undertake this container delivery work, and they require slots to be booked months in advance. The same company is also undertaking rollouts for many other local authorities in the country who are all working to the DEFRA deadline of 31st March 2026.
- 11.11 It should also be noted that the supply chain provider does not have the capacity to deliver these containers in Quarter 4. Once a decision is taken on the preferred options for the implementation of the new waste services, then officers will immediately enter negotiations with the company to confirm a delivery slot.
- 11.12 At present the financial projections allow for one roll out of all new containers. If the container deliveries were split, for example food waste containers were rolled out on a different timeline to the other new containers, then the council will need to consider the costs and pressures associated with a double roll out. The cost of a double rollout will be in the order of an additional £1million.
- 11.13 The introduction of new frontline services during the winter months may increase service/operational risks due to inclement weather and shorter working days.
- 11.14 The entire waste collection (employed) workforce who are represented by Unite are currently undertaking continuous industrial action. The current mandate for industrial action concludes on the 16th May 2026.
- 11.15 If an agency workforce was stood up to deliver just the new food waste service, then this would be an entirely new and separate workforce and organisation related to the new service only.
- 11.16 This would require the engagement of over 100 temporary staff who would be employed on a phased basis throughout the food waste service rollout.
- 11.17 Once industrial action concludes, and the permanent workforce are reintegrated back into the workplace a longer-term plan for the staffing arrangements for the food waste service would be put in place.
- 11.18 The returning employees will need to successfully complete their re-training in new working practices and associated technology across all the waste services including residual, recycling, garden waste, food, and ancillary waste operations.

Option 2

- 11.19 Option 2 would see the introduction of all new waste services (including food waste) implemented through a phased rollout from June 2026. If industrial action continues then Cabinet agrees that an alternative separate workforce for food waste can be established.
- 11.20 If industrial action concludes in a timely manner, then our substantive workforce would be responsible for delivering the waste and recycling arrangements, and new employees would be required to mobilise the new food waste collection service.
- 11.21 Depending on the timing of a return to work and the reintegration process for our substantive workforce, additional agency staff may be required to mobilise the new food waste service partly or fully. If industrial action continues then an alternative separate workforce for food waste will be required.
- 11.22 At present, the entire waste collection (employed) workforce who are represented by Unite are currently undertaking continuous industrial action. The current mandate for industrial action concludes on the 16th of May 2026.
- 11.23 A lead in period of a minimum of 3 to 4 months from June 2026 would be required to re-integrate and re-train the permanent workforce before they could be fully utilised.
- 11.24 Even assuming the conclusion of industrial action, this service change will still present a series of challenging delivery considerations and risks for the council, not least the continuing management of the returning workers to work alongside staff who have continued to work during the strike.
- 11.25 Specialist support is currently being procured to support the reintegration of the workforce who have been inactive in the workplace for the last nine months.
- 11.26 Regardless of when new services are introduced, there will be a need for a comprehensive reset of workforce culture and behaviours, to deliver the requirements of the new waste service and improve customer standards.
- 11.27 Consideration was given to the start of the new service rollout in May but was discounted due to the double bank holidays over this period and the confusion this may cause for residents.
- 11.28 The new service for food waste can be mobilised from existing depots. There would be no additional costs associated with the rollout of containers, as these would be completed in one pass rather than two separate deliveries.
- 11.29 The introduction of new services during the summer months would be undertaken during a period of longer working days and there is a longer lead in period for the delivery of a comprehensive engagement and communications plan for residents and communities.

- 11.30 The existing agency and permanent workforce that are not currently participating in industrial action would continue to deliver the residual and dry recycling service from June 2026.
- 11.31 If a new workforce is required to deliver the new food waste service, then this would be a separate workforce related to the new food waste service only. This workforce would be managed by a separate management team that would also need to be stood up. This would require a minimum of a three to four-month lead in period.
- 11.32 This option requires the engagement of temporary staff who would be engaged on a phased basis throughout the food waste service rollout.
- 11.33 Once industrial action concludes and the permanent workforce are reintegrated back into the workplace, the longer-term staffing arrangements for delivery of the new food waste service can be made.
- 11.34 The returning employees will need to have successfully completed their re-training in new working practices and associated technology.
- 11.35 Despite the industrial action, the Council has continued to plan and where possible deliver improvements in the waste service and has implemented significant elements of the new service model. This includes the successful procurement of 151 new vehicles and the acquisition of over 1 million new recycling containers to deliver waste and recycling services. New in-cab technology has been implemented to support better management of the service with real time reporting and improved performance management and customer insight.
- 11.36 Extensive communication and engagement with residents and communities will start in early 2026 to support behaviour change and rebuild confidence in the council around the reliability of this essential service. This will be supported by a dedicated engagement team as set out in Section 9 of the report.
- 11.37 Refuse collection workers have been provided with new uniforms to reflect the professional culture and image the city is now trying to create, and to ensure the workforce have appropriate personal protective equipment for their safety.
- 11.38 Work to build on the actions undertaken to successfully deliver the waste transformation across the city will continue through to June 2026. This will include a food waste pilot scheme for approximately 10,000 households that is currently being developed for March 2026 across neighbourhoods where lessons learnt will provide an opportunity to refine processes to ensure a full successful rollout later in the year.

Option 3

- 11.39 **Option 3 represents the status quo or Do-Nothing Option.** This option carries significant financial, reputational and customer service disadvantages.
- 11.40 This option fails to deliver any service improvements for residents as well as impacting on the Council's ability to make service efficiencies and provide value for money waste services. This option would also fail to address overall recycling performance and would not meet the legislative requirements around Simpler Recycling and the Extended Producer Responsibilities. Residents deserve clarity and certainty and to be supported in their efforts to manage household waste responsibly across the city. This option will not provide this. It is not recommended that members approve Option 3.
- 11.41 Options 2 and 3 fail to meet the deadline date set by DEFRA for the implementation of the new weekly food waste service. However, Option 2 provides the greatest certainty about the date of implementation of the new services, regardless of the state of industrial action. It would represent the council's best efforts to comply with all relevant legislation and deliver improved waste services to residents including recycling and food waste collection. Discussions remain on-going between officers and DEFRA, seeking the potential to agree a dispensation to start the Food Waste scheme later in 2026, due to the on-going industrial action.
- 11.42 This blended approach maximises certainty about the timing of implementation on new services whilst leaving open the possibility of using the council's substantive workforce.
- 11.43 Each of the above options delivers a separate set of impacts regarding the financial implications of each rollout timeline. The impact on the Medium-Term Financial Plan will depend on the date of the conclusion of industrial action and the introduction date of the new services.
- 11.44 The full financial impacts of all three options are set out in the Finance and Best value Section in the attached confidential Appendix.
- 11.45 All the risks and implications regarding the people and workforce issues are set out in more detail in the people and legal sections of the report.
- 11.46 Whichever of the above options are approved; the Waste Service team will continue to prepare for the new service implementation and will pursue other incremental service improvements. These will include, where possible and dependent on the maintenance of safe contingency arrangements across the city, improvements in the regularity and dependability of household collections, and the investigation of wider options to reinstate recycling and green waste as soon as reasonably practicable.

12 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 12.1 None of the suggested delivery options are without risk, and any introduction of new services or service changes on the scale of Birmingham's waste collection operation is likely to encounter implementation challenges. The size and scale of the change is significant, and the implementation timeline considering staff reintegration and roll out will take a combined period of at least 12 months.
- 12.2 The current industrial action presents major challenges to implementing large scale service changes. It has already increased the complexity of day-to-day operations and brings with it potential reputational, financial, and service risks to the council.
- 12.3 The Street Scene leadership team is currently managing both the contingency arrangements that keep the city safe, and a wide range of workforce and legal issues across the waste and street scene services. The introduction of new services in the next few months would have a significant impact on the senior leadership capacity to manage these multiple actions effectively.
- 12.4 Officers are in continuing dialogue with DEFRA regarding a dispensation around the legislative requirement to roll out food waste collections by 31st March 2026. At present no dispensation has been agreed.
- 12.5 There is also a financial risk associated with any delays around the implementation of food waste by 31st March 2026. If this deadline is missed, then the government may levy a financial penalty for failure to meet the food waste implementation deadline. At this stage it is unknown as to what this financial quantum may be as this is yet to be shared with local authorities.
- 12.6 It is important to note that the council has been actively working to try to meet the March deadline, however this has been impacted by the on-going industrial action. The suggested options presented to members identify this risk, alongside the on-going industrial relations, customer, and service risks that the council would need to consider.
- 12.7 The council has received confirmation of its allocation of funding from the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme. This is £15.2 million for 25/26 and 26/27. We have had assurance our funding will not be reduced for failing to hit our performance targets, but there remains a slight risk that future year's allocations could be reduced for poor performance.
- 12.8 There are also a range of Industrial Relations considerations.
- The existence of ongoing industrial action in the run up to the waste service transformation may impact on the attention required by management to service the implementation of the new revised Waste and recycling services.
 - If the council seeks to setup a new agency workforce to deliver the new food waste service this may be negatively received, although this is only

intended to be a temporary arrangement necessitated by continuing industrial action.

- 12.9 Delays to the implementation of the new waste services impacts on residents, Businesses and communities and customer confidence. The diminution of the recycling services leads to less choice for residents and continues to have a material impact on the council's recycling performance. This has also impacted the council's carbon ambitions and environmental benefits from increased recycling.
- 12.10 The risks associated with the financial impacts relating to the individual service delivery options are set out in the confidential Appendix attached.

13 Consultation

- 13.1 The changes to working practices will be a matter of ongoing consultation with the trade unions.

14 IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Finance and Best Value

- 14.1 The budget for the delivery of waste services in 2025/26 is £72m. As reported in the monitoring report the industrial dispute is having a significant impact on the budgetary position, including the ability to deliver transformation savings and collect income. City Operations overall are projecting to overspend by £13m after the use of £14m reserves to offset the direct and one of costs associated with the waste dispute in the first six months of the financial year.
- 14.2 The income foregone during this financial year amounts to £5.3m.
- 14.3 The full financial analysis of each option is set out in the confidential Appendix.

Legal

- 14.4 The ability for the Council to deliver the Waste Transformation Programme and the identified options vary depending on the position in relation to the ongoing industrial action.
- 14.5 Whilst the industrial dispute is ongoing, the Council is limited in how it can engage new individuals to undertake the existing waste service. Regulation 7 of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2003 means it would be an offence for an employment agency to engage workers to undertake work being carried out by striking staff.
- 14.6 If industrial action continues beyond a date which means that the new services run by permanent staff cannot be mobilised by June 2026, then the report is

seeking agreement to the stand up of a separate temporary workforce to undertake the new food waste service.

14.7 For the Council to introduce the new food waste collection services, it must run a new service which is separate to the current residual waste collection service (run by different managers, with different vehicles and in no way work which would have been covered by those on strike). This separately run service would fall outside of the scope of Regulation 7.

14.8 The Council must also be mindful that late compliance with government targets on waste collection/recycling could lead to legal challenge. This is an important reason why Option 3, “do nothing” is not a recommended option. The Council must be taking steps to achieve compliance, even with industrial action making this more complicated.

Equalities

14.9 The proposed solution supports equality of outcomes across the city. The waste dispute is having a more negative impact in more disadvantaged areas, and proceeding with transformation will help address this inequality.

Procurement

14.10 If there is a need to engage temporary or agency staff, this would need to be undertaken within the appropriate legal boundaries surrounding industrial action as set out in the legal section of this report.

14.11 Depending on the option selected, the need to purchase any additional resources would require compliance with the council’s relevant standing orders.

People Services

14.12 The ongoing Waste dispute continues, and a further Unite ballot has successfully secured a further mandate to continue industrial action until 16 May 2026.

14.13 The implementation and rollout of new services whilst industrial action remains on-going create risks including:

- Impacting already sensitive industrial relations.
- The potential to prolong industrial action and make the reintegration of a returning workforce with agency staff a greater challenge.

14.14 There will be a series of activities surrounding the reintegration of the permanent workforce to ensure that we create a sustainable long-term workforce, in line with the new target operating model.

14.15 As set out in the legal section above, the early implementation of the Waste Transformation services utilising agency staff is considered to be lawful.

Climate Change, Nature, and Net Zero

- 14.16 Earlier implementation of food waste collection, and re-implementation of recycling, are desirable from the perspective of sustainability and net zero.

Corporate Parenting

- 14.17 There are no corporate parenting issues set out in this report.

15 APPENDICES

- 15.1 Exempt Appendix A

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 16.1 [Environment Act \(2021\)](#)
- 16.2 [Improvement and Recovery Plan \(IRP\)](#)
- 16.3 Medium Term Financial Plan
- 16.4 012969/2024 Street Scene Transformation Programme Procurement Cabinet Report July 2024 (parts a-c)
- 16.5 013257/2024 Additional Recycling Container Procurement Cabinet Report September 2024