

Committee: Cabinet

Date: Tuesday, 14
April 2026

Title: Implementation of Simpler Recycling and the
Environment Programme

**Portfolio
Holder:** Councillor Neil Reeve, Portfolio Holder for
Environment and Climate Change

**Report
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Services, Cat Chapman, Waste Strategy and
Policy Manager

Key decision: No

Summary

1. This report summarises recent changes and the requirements of Simpler Recycling into one document and sets out a high level action plan for its implementation. It aims for legal compliance and focuses on maximising the uptake and performance of existing services.
2. The Environment Act 2021 (the Act) is a wide ranging piece of legislation, setting legally binding targets for air quality, water, biodiversity, and waste reduction.
3. In 2024, the government launched statutory guidance called Simpler Recycling detailing the changes required by councils to comply with the Act. In time it will change the way that all councils collect and recycle waste. The aim is to create consistency across the country, where the same 'core' materials are collected for recycling by every council.
4. A range of new financial mechanisms were included within the Act, to encourage improved recycling of packaging waste.
5. In 2025 all Councils in Essex adopted the new Waste Strategy for Essex which contains commitments to move away from landfill and increase the proportion of waste recycled.
6. Uttlesford's current services are largely compliant with Simpler Recycling however several key areas need additional work:
 - a. Trade waste recycling collections must be developed
 - b. Recycling services must be introduced to all flats
 - c. Soft plastics must be collected for recycling by March 2027
 - d. A written assessment justifying comingled collections of materials must be prepared

Recommendations – UPDATE

7.

Recommendation 1 – the current service delivery model is adapted by March 2027 to allow collection of recyclable materials required by Simper Recycling from:

- Flats and communal Properties
- Commercial (trade waste) customers and non-domestic premises

Recommendation 2 – that from April 2026 the range of containers provided by the council for new build properties is extended to include internal food caddies alongside external food caddies, recycling bins and general waste bins.

Recommendation 3 – that collections of materials remain co-mingled and that officers complete the required written assessment to evidence the reasons for this by April 2026.

Recommendation 4 – that Officers are authorised to negotiate with our current recycling contractor to include soft plastics in the list of target materials for the contract.

Recommendation 5 – that Members note that officers have started the process of installing recycling facilities at flats across the district.

Recommendation 6 – that Members note that Trade waste recycling services are now available to commercial customers and officers are working to expand the service.

Financial Implications

8. The budget implications of Simpler Recycling and Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR) have been built into the 2026/27 budget and healthy provision is made for the roll out of service changes and to strengthen performance.
9. For reference, the Council received financial contributions of £1.41M for 2025/2026 and £1.18M in 2026/27 from pEPR and these amounts provide core funding for our services.
10. The details of some aspects have not been published due to commercial sensitivity.

Background Papers

11. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report:

[Waste strategy for Essex](#)

Impact

12.

Communication/Consultation	Where appropriate, changes to recycling services have been communicated to residents or businesses and feedback sought. Examples include feedback from the three behaviour change projects referred to in para 33.
Community Safety	There a no specific community safety issues associated with this report.
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	All new services will be risk assessed prior to implementation
Human Rights/Legal Implications	No specific human rights or legal implications
Sustainability	TBC
Ward-specific impacts	No specific impacts
Workforce/Workplace	2 additional temporary posts created to support the roll-out of Simpler Recycling

Situation - Simpler Recycling and the Environment Act 2021

13. Simpler Recycling is a government initiative and a key component of the Environment Act (the Act). It is designed to ensure consistent waste collection services to all households, businesses, and some non-domestic premises such as schools and public buildings. All councils have a new statutory obligation to collect and recycle the same materials, regardless of the source of the waste.
14. Most households in Uttlesford already receive a comprehensive recycling service and are able to recycle the core materials required by new regulations. However, these services must now be extended to flats and businesses. By 2027 soft plastic collections are also required. The following table sets out the requirements and timescales for compliance:

Simpler Recycling Summary of requirements and deadlines		Businesses more than 10 employees	Small businesses fewer than 10 empl	Communal properties & Flats	Households and public buildings
Material	Items included	March 2025	March 2027	March 2026	March 2026
Food Weekly	All food (pre and post prep), pet food, tea bags etc				
Dry mixed recycling	Glass (bottles and jars), metal (tins, cans, foil, aerosols), Plastic (pots, tubs, trays, cartons)				
Paper and Card	Newspaper, Magazines, cardboard, other paper (may be collected with above see p.15)				
Residual (general) waste	Non-recyclable waste, grey lidded bins				
Garden Waste	Grass clippings, leaves, twigs and prunings			N/A	
Soft Plastics	Plastic (wrapping and bags) From March 2027				

15. Simpler Recycling requires the separation of paper and cardboard from other materials but in some circumstances, Councils may choose to collect them combined with other materials. This is the case in Uttlesford. That decision must be justified on economic, environmental or technical reasons and requires a written assessment to be completed. Paragraph 51 sets out more detail on how councils are expected to justify an alternative approach to the standard set by Simpler Recycling.

Extended Producer Responsibility, Deposit Return Schemes, Plastic Tax

16. Simpler Recycling sits alongside several other mechanisms within the Environment Act, collectively they form the packaging reforms and put in place fiscal measures to improve recycling.

17. Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR) forces packaging manufacturers to contribute to the cost of recycling and disposing of some of the most common materials in our residents' bins. The financial contributions made by

manufacturers are passed to local authorities via PackUK which has been established to track and distribute funding.

18. The amount paid by packaging manufacturers varies so that manufacturers are incentivised to adopt easy to recycle packaging materials rather than difficult to recycle materials. However, as the system is weight based, there is potential for unintended consequences where readily recycled but heavy materials are swapped for lighter but more difficult to recycle materials.
19. A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) will be introduced by the government by 2028 and it is currently thought that it will apply to 'on the go' drinks bottles and cans under 500 ml packaging only. This is intended to encourage recycling and reduce littering. It is likely that a successful scheme will have an impact on the materials that the Council collects via kerbside collections, potentially changing the value of the materials collected.
20. The Plastic Tax is the final financial measure designed to make it more expensive to use virgin materials for packaging manufacture compared to recycled plastics. Simply put, the higher the percentage of recycled content used, the lower the tax liability of the producer.

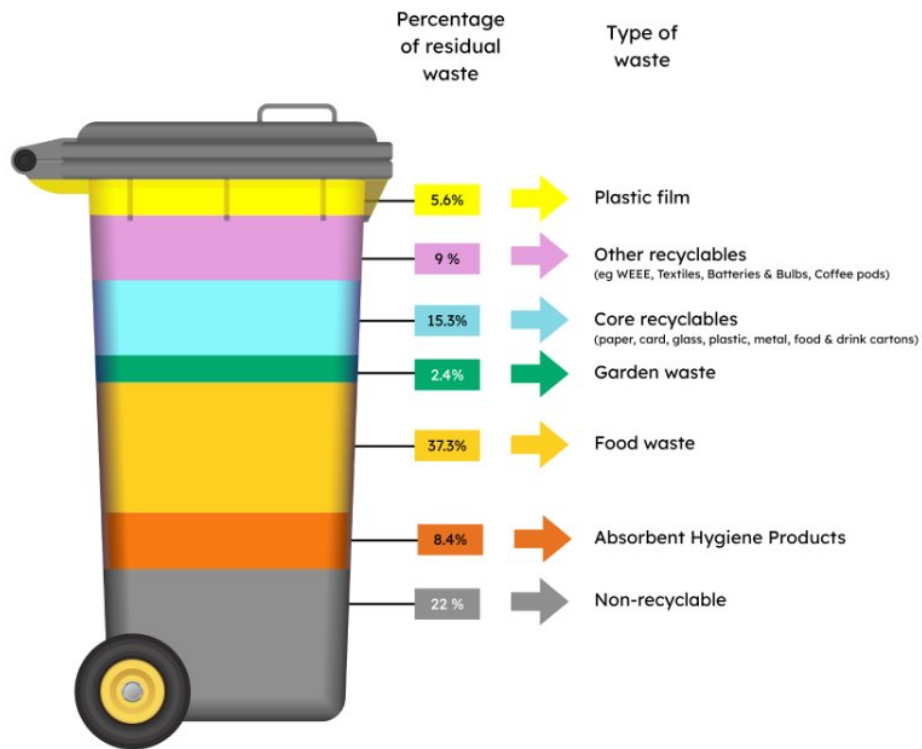
Current Service and Performance

21. Members will be familiar with the services provided to households which are summarised in the table below. These services perform well, and the council has a top quartile recycling performance. Uttlesford has the highest performance in Essex for 'dry recycling' services via our green lidded bins.

Materials	Weekly Food	Residual	Recycling All Materials	Garden Charged
Weekly food 2 Weekly Residual 2 Weekly Recycling 2 Weekly Garden 11 Rounds 3 to 4 Bins				
Yearly Collections	52	26	26	26

22. In 2024/25 Essex County Council undertook an audit of residual (general waste) bins across the county, including samples from the Uttlesford area. The diagram below (fig1) shows the amount of recyclable rubbish in an average bin (by weight) in Uttlesford. This shows that if all the services currently provided were fully utilised, our recycling rate would be closer to 78% compared to our current performance of around 50%. If we included figures from the Essex operated recycling centre in Saffron Walden, recycling levels could reach 82% for the district.
23. The results of the waste audit show that our recycling rates could be improved significantly if residents engaged better with the services currently provided. Participation in food waste recycling is lower in Uttlesford than across other parts of Essex.

Figure 1



24. There are other factors affecting our recycling performance. Recycling rates have not improved significantly over the last few years and there are a variety of reasons for this. For example, many packaging items have reduced in weight, for example cans and glass bottles have got thinner over time. Changes in consumer habits such as a shift away from printed newspapers and magazines have also had a significant impact as recycling performance is measured by weight alone.

UDC Approach to Simpler recycling and other changes

A. Member engagement

25. Simpler Recycling and other drivers, such as the Waste Strategy for Essex and plateauing recycling performance, have meant that it is prudent to give some consideration to how waste services are provided in future years.

26. To assist in this review process, two Member engagement workshops were held last year. The aim was to explain the service changes required, set out current performance challenges and seek a steer from Members on their appetite for changing service delivery, priorities and performance over the coming years.

B. Member priorities

27. At the meetings a series of polls were used to determine informal feedback. Member feedback highlights ambition and priority as

- UK leading environmental performance
- Ease of access to services

C. Options to improve recycling performance

28. The Member workshops briefly explored how recycling / environmental performance could potentially be improved. There are essentially three options:

- I. **Service change** to force behaviour changes and increased recycling for example reducing collection frequencies or container sizes
- II. **Increased enforcement** targeted against those that do not participate in recycling services correctly, for example putting the wrong items in their recycling bin
- III. **Increased communication** and support to services users to encourage

29. Several alternative operating models that have achieved higher performance were briefly explored; however, Members recognised the challenge of justifying the decision to invest significant funds in changing services in the fluid environment created by LGR. Basic modelling of different options shows that without additional containers and a different vehicle configuration it will be almost impossible to make significant changes to the way in which we collect waste. In particular, Members were concerned about the amount of space available in smaller households for recycling containers.

30. More rigorous enforcement was not widely supported and could be seen as counterproductive as generally, services are used correctly by residents.

31. Other than the need to meet the requirements of simpler recycling there is no significant driver for changing the current service model.

E. Behaviour Change Projects 2025

32. Members were updated about trials undertaken in 2025 to introduce food recycling from flats or encourage participation in our services. These trials highlight that with communication from the Council, residents can be encouraged to recycle and engage with services.

33. Historically the council has not provided indoor food caddies for residents, which may explain lower participation in food recycling services in Uttlesford, compared with other Councils in Essex. It is proposed that for new build homes, an internal caddy is added to the list of containers provided alongside a 'welcome pack' explaining how to use our services. This could be supported by physical site visits after residents have moved in.

Conclusions – Service delivery and priorities

38. Following feedback from the member workshops and research it is concluded that the best approach to implement Simpler Recycling is to focus on optimising existing services and improve communication with residents.
39. Local Government Reorganisation will present a degree of uncertainty until the Government's 'Minded to' decision is announced. Any changes to the service delivery model should ideally be aligned to potential partners in a future Unitary Authority.

Recommendation 1 – the current service delivery model is adapted to allow collection of materials required by Simper Recycling from:

- Flats and communal Properties
- Commercial (trade waste) customers and non-domestic premises

Recommendation 2 – that the range of containers provided by the council for new build properties is extended to include, internal food caddies alongside external food caddies, green and grey lidded bins.

Future action and Environment Programme

39. Elsewhere on the agenda, Cabinet have been briefed on The Corporate Programme.
40. In recognition of the scale of changes within Environmental services, which are not limited to Simpler Recycling but include changes with Environmental Health, a specific programme has been created to manage change required within the services.
41. The emerging programme structure includes:
- I. People
 - II. Process & technology
 - III. Recycling and waste
 - IV. Environmental Health
 - V. Grounds & Street Services
41. In November 2025, the Corporate Management Team were provided with an overview of the programme and agreed to set aside a package of funding to support delivery of the organisation's response to Simpler Recycling. The majority of this funding will be used to create capacity within the service to deliver the identified changes, and recruitment to identified roles is well advanced.
42. The programme will be supported with dedicated resource from the Transformation and Projects Service. Programme management resource is expected to be in-post in Spring 2026, following which the detailed programme design will be agreed by The Corporate Programme Board.

Collections of Soft Plastics

43. Officers have met with N+P, our current recycling contractor that currently collect, sort and market material from UDC collections. N+P are currently planning on expanding their recycling facility to ensure their customers are able to collect and recycle soft plastics by the Simpler Recycling deadline of March 2027. At present, it is not clear as to whether the material will need to be presented within our green lidded bins or in a separate sack. In either case they will be co-collected, meaning in the same compartment of the lorry.
44. Officers are currently evaluating the likely impact of collecting additional materials via our recycling service. Budget provision has been made for potential purchase and distribution of single use plastic sacks.
45. Budget has also been made available to create some temporary capacity in our waste team to help introduce this new service to residents. This was recently approved as part of the 2026/27 budget.

Recommendation 3 – that collections of materials remain co-mingled and that officers complete the required written assessments to evidence the reasons for this.

Recommendation 4 – Officers are authorised to negotiate with our current recycling contractor to include soft plastics in the list of target materials for the contract.

Recycling from flats and communal properties

46. Experience from UDC trials and from other areas suggests that rolling out recycling services to flats will be a slow process. This is because each block of flats will need to be assessed to ensure the appropriate containers are installed and will require consultation with Managing Agents and leaseholders. To support this work, an additional temporary post has been created and funding included within the 2026/27 budget alongside additional budget for containers and promotional materials.
47. Individual flats will be provided with small indoor caddies and food waste sacks alongside external food recycling bins and other recycling bins. The exact bins will depend on the nature of the site. Trials highlighted the need for good communications, signage and increased efforts by leaseholders to maintain bins stores.

Recommendation 5 – Members note that officers have started the process of installing recycling facilities at flats across the district.

Commercial/Trade waste recycling services

48. Members will be aware that larger businesses within the district are already obliged to recycle. UDC trade waste customers have been offered recycling services and a good percentage of them have adopted recycling services. The council already has a Trade Waste Officer who is responsible for

managing the customer base and for organising services. This is a statutory service that the council is obliged to offer, although businesses are able to use any operator for collection and disposal of their trade waste.

49. Budget provision has been made for the purchase of additional containers for trade waste recycling, although over time this expenditure will be offset by trade waste charges. Trade recycling charges have been established and will be monitored over the coming months.
50. Charges have been set so that customers can reduce their residual/general waste requirement against recycling containers. It should not cost customers more to recycle.

Recommendation 6 – to note that Trade waste recycling services are now available to commercial customers and officers are working to expand the service.

Written Assessment for commingled collections TEEP

51. Under Simpler Recycling, authorities collecting paper and cardboard commingled with other dry recyclables must complete a written assessment to explain why separate collection is not either technically or economically practicable, or where it has no significant environmental benefit.
52. UDC's current collection service has been in place since 2012, with the addition of kerbside waste electricals last year. Under the Waste England and Wales Regulations 2011, Regulation 13 required separate collection of glass, metal, paper and plastic for recycling. In accordance with this legislation, it was possible for authorities to continue to collect items together, provided they could demonstrate that separate collections were not technically, economically or environmentally practicable. This was demonstrated via a TEEP assessment.
53. Uttlesford's last TEEP assessment was created in April 2016, which clearly demonstrated that the current single-pass service was the most technically, economically and environmentally practicable collection methodology for the district. Since the last TEEP assessment, a report prepared for Uttlesford by Circulogic has reviewed the current collection methodology and concluded that this is still the most technically, economically, and environmentally practicable option.
54. On this basis, this will be used to complete the required written assessment.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Ability to obtain additional containers, at budgeted prices.	2	2	A watching brief is being kept on material prices and availability of stock.
Staff capacity to deliver changes	2	3	Programme management will monitor progress and additional staff resources identified

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.