

Appendix A - Bin colour selection to support recognition and compliance

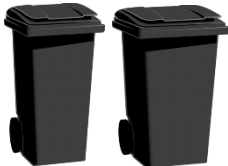
Background and overview

The Council currently operates a source-segregated kerbside recycling collection service, providing households with red recycling boxes and reusable blue and yellow bags. However, as part of a review of the service which commenced in spring 2023, and Central Government's 'Simpler Recycling' policy requirements, in November 2026 the Council will begin transitioning from the current source-segregated recycling system to a twin bin recycling system.

This is the biggest change to the service since household recycling collections were introduced in 2002. Therefore, selecting the right lid colours for the new twin recycling bins is fundamental, ensuring a smooth transition. It will help to sustain recycling performance, and it should promote higher participation and compliance by residents.

Current containers and bins used by Waste Services

Container type, colour, and size	Materials accepted
 55 litre red box	• Plastic pots, tubs, and trays • Aluminium cans • Steel tins • Clean foil • Empty aerosol canisters
 55 litre red box	• Glass bottles and jars
 73 litre reusable yellow bag	• Cardboard and brown paper
 31 litre reusable blue bag	• Paper • Newspapers • Magazines • Envelopes • Catalogues
 240 litre brown-lidded bin with black body or 240 litre brown-lidded bin with green body	• Compostable garden waste ○ Shrub prunings ○ Garden plants, dead flowers, and weeds ○ Hedge trimmings and grass cuttings ○ Leaves ○ Small tree branches (under 6" thick)

 180 litre and 240 litre black-lidded bins	General waste
 240 litre, 360 litre and 1100 litre green bins	Trade waste and recycling bins provided to businesses and organisations across the district
 240 litre yellow bins	Recycling bins provided for events across the district

Recycling bins used by the other Leicestershire councils

As illustrated in the table below, there is no universal colour used for the co-mingled/mixed recycling bins provided by the other six councils in Leicestershire.

Council	Body colour	Lid colour	Size (litres)
Blaby District Council	Green	Green	240l, can opt for a 140l
Charnwood Borough Council	Green	Green	240l
Harborough District Council	Black	Blue	240l
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council	Black	Blue	240l
Melton Borough Council	Brown	Brown	240l
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council	Green	Brown	240l, can opt for a 140l

Criteria determining the colour for the new recycling bins

1. Use of the new recycling bins by residents

Familiarity and positive behaviour

Adopting lid colours that broadly align with the existing household recycling collection service encourages successful recycling due to the following reasons:

- Easier transition from the existing and bags and boxes to wheeled bins. Residents are not required to learn new colours for different recycling materials, reducing the risk of residents placing the wrong material in the wrong bin.

- Using a black bin body with a strong contrasting lid colour means it will indicate the bin is used for recycling.
- Grayscale colours, such as black or grey can indicate that a bin is used for general waste. The current bin used for general waste has a black body and lid. Over time, the lid can become bleached by sunlight, causing it to fade to grey, as seen in the accompanying image.



Research shows recycling performance improves when lid colours are consistent, bold, and recognisable, reducing decision-making effort by residents. The Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) is a non-governmental organisation that supports local authorities to implement and maintain waste and recycling collections, which are derived from central government legislation and policy requirements, such as 'Simpler Recycling'. WRAP emphasises clear, contrasting and bold colours to improve recycling performance and help reduce contamination.

Visual impairment and colour vision deficiency

Research from the Colour Blind Awareness organisation has found approximately 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women in the UK are affected by colour vision deficiency, also known as colour blindness.

Advice and guidance for people with visual impairments from Colour Blind Awareness and the Royal National Institute of Blind People highlights:

- Contrast is more important than colour alone
- Bright, saturated colours on dark backgrounds are most visibly reliable
- Orange, blue and yellow provide stronger differentiation than red and green combinations, which are problematic for many colour blind users.

Therefore, a black bin body with an orange, red, or blue lid provides high contrast, aiding identification by residents who have:

- Partial sight loss
- Age-related sight loss
- Colour vision deficiency (colour blindness).

Use of bins in low light conditions

Bold and high contrast bin lid colours play an important role in supporting effective recycling, particularly in poor lighting conditions. Highly visible colours (for example, blue, green, orange or red) provide strong visual contrast against low light backgrounds, enabling residents to help easily identify what material goes into each bin. This is important as residents can use recycling bins during:

- Early mornings
- Evenings
- In poorly lit bin stores or alleyways
- In poorer lighting conditions during winter months.

2. Use of the new recycling bins by waste operatives

Operational visibility

Waste collection operatives regularly operate:

- Before dawn
- During winter months
- In poor weather conditions
- In poorly lit bin stores or alleyways.

Bold and high contrast bin lid colours assist operatives when working at pace or in adverse conditions, allowing them to quickly identify bins, and the contents contained within them. This ensures the bins are loaded into the correct compartment on the recycling collection vehicle, reducing the risk of accidental contamination.

Familiarity and anticipation of contents inside recycling bins

Adopting lid colours that broadly align with the existing household recycling collection service, supports successful collections due to the following reasons:

- Operatives build quick visual recognition of the bins
- The contents of a bin are anticipated before loading onto the vehicle, reducing the risk of contamination and vehicle loads being rejected and sent to incineration.
- Missed collections are reduced, as operatives are less likely to fail to empty a bin when its intended use is clearly understood.

3. Best practice

WRAP advice

The Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) is a non-governmental organisation that supports local authorities to implement and maintain waste and recycling collections, which are derived from central government legislation and policy requirements, such as 'Simpler Recycling'. WRAP does not mandate a single national colour scheme for recycling bins, but consistently advocates:

- Clear visual consistency
- Distinct colours between material streams
- Use of colour in combination with labels or printed icons on bins.

WRAP's material stream iconography is designed to work alongside coloured containers, particularly where black or grey bin bodies are used.

Overall, WRAP and industry guidance promotes bold and high contrast bin lid colours to differentiate between waste streams, minimising operational challenges when operatives are emptying bins.

Best practice amongst other councils

A number of councils operating a twin bin recycling system use:

- Orange or red-lidded bins for plastics, cans, tins and glass
- Blue-lidded bins for paper and cardboard.

Councils which use these colours include Aberdeenshire Council and Milton Keynes City Council.

4. The matrix below confirms blue, orange, and red would be the most suitable colours to use for the lids on recycling bins.

Criteria & suitability	Blue	Orange	Red	Green	Yellow	Brown	Purple	Grey	Black
Resident use	Yes, a blue-lidded bin with a black body is currently used for communal households	Yes	Yes	No (used for trade waste bins)	No, used for event bins and clinical waste containers	No, used for garden waste bins	No, not a bold or contrasting colour	No, not a bold or contrasting colour	No, used for general waste bins
Waste operative use	Yes	Yes	Yes	No, used for trade waste bins	No, used for event bins and clinical waste containers	No, used for garden waste bins	No, not a bold or contrasting colour	No, could be confused with general waste	No, not a bold or contrasting colour
Best practice (WRAP and other councils)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No, normally indicates clinical waste	No, not a bold or contrasting colour	No, not a bold or contrasting colour	No, not a bold or contrasting colour	No, not a bold or contrasting colour
Overall rating and suitability	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No

5. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the information set out in this report, it is recommended a blue-lidded bin is adopted for cardboard and paper, reflecting established resident familiarity when using blue bags in households for recycling paper (excluding communal properties). Also, a blue-lidded bin with a black body is currently used by communal properties for paper. Visually, a blue lid provides a clear, high contrast colour when used with a black bin body.

It is recommended an orange-lidded bin with a black body is adopted for cans, tins, plastics and glass. Orange provides strong visibility and contrast, performing well for residents and operatives, especially in low light conditions.

Although, residents associate red with the Council's existing recycling boxes for cans, tins, plastics and glass, an orange lid is recommended in preference to a red-lidded wheeled bin. During the transition period, both the red boxes and the new twin wheeled bins will operate in parallel across the district. The introduction of a red-lidded bin during the roll out could create confusion amongst residents, as essentially two red plastic containers would be in operation and used at the same time.