

# Annual Performance Report for the Waste Collection & Street Cleansing Service

2024/25



## **Comment from Chair of Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee**

The aim of this report is to summarise the waste collection and street cleansing service and provide details of performance for the first year of the new contract and related activities undertaken by Council teams.

Reporting is an important part of our accountability. The transparency given by regular and consistent reporting should help Council Members and the public gain a better understanding of the overall service.

The service has many different parts and is complicated. Reviews and monitoring provide the Council with management information for performance evaluation and help to identify where improvements are needed. In addition, it also provides a framework for performance comparisons between other local authorities. This report will complement the Suez (our main contractor) annual report and also the waste scrutiny review undertaken by Members in 2024/25 and published in January 2025.

I hope that you will find the contents of this report helpful and informative.

**Cllr Dolley Wooster – Chair of Committee**

## **Abbreviations**

DRS –	Deposit Return Scheme
KRP –	Kent Resource Partnership (a collaboration of local Kent local authorities)
MKWP –	Mid Kent Waste Partnership
POPs -	Persistent Organic Pollutants
RIDDOR –	The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, and Dangerous Occurrences regulations.
WCA –	Waste Collection Authority (Swale Borough Council)
WDA –	Waste Disposal Authority (Kent County Council)
WUDS -	Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating

## **Introduction**

This is the first of a new cycle of annual performance reports to be presented at Swale Environment Committee. The reporting cycle will include two reports each year. One will be an annual update on the previous full year's performance. This will be reported to Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee at a suitable time soon after Suez submit their annual report at the end of April each year. The second report will be a '*lighter touch*', mid-year update, which will be presented towards the end of each calendar year.

As this is the first of these reports under the new service, some data comparisons with the previous service provider become less relevant as new ways of working have been introduced. However, other data sets still remain very relevant. A large quantity of data has been provided to stimulate discussion with Members to determine which parameters will be key for measuring current and future performance.

Swale Borough Council are part of the Mid Kent Waste Partnership along with Ashford BC and Maidstone BC. The contract includes waste collection for all three authorities and for street cleansing in Swale and Ashford. The contract lasts for 8 years from March 2024.

As the 'Waste Collection Authority' (WCA), Swale Council are responsible for collecting '*waste*' and taking it to the specified locations as stipulated by the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA). Kent County Council (KCC) are the WDA. Although we often refer to the items that residents put out as '*waste*', it is fundamental that we stop *thinking* of many of the materials that we collect as '*waste*'. Many of these items are valuable commodities that can remain for many years within the circular economy if re-used or if collected and recycled appropriately.

The main service delivery specifications include the collection of all domestic refuse streams in Swale including recycling, refuse, food, garden, clinical and bulky items. It is also a requirement to keep the borough at a suitable level of cleanliness. This includes street cleansing as required and emptying all of the litter bins and ensuring that they do not become overfull.

The contract and supporting activities are overseen by the Environmental Services team at the Council. This can be broken down into two teams – Contract & Resources and Environmental Response.

*Please note that this report will focus on street cleansing and refuse collection performance. It will not review the end destinations for materials collected.*

## **The Contract in Numbers**

### **Waste collection in Swale for 2024/25**

Collections	Over 140,000 scheduled collections every week
Households serviced each week in Swale	66,810
Number of collection operatives and drivers in Swale	79 (31 drivers and 48 loaders)
Number of SBC owned vehicles for waste collection in Swale	28 (some additional vehicles are on hire)
Tonnes of dry recycling collected and recycled in 24/25	8,394 (9,962 tonnes collected in total).
Tonnes of residual refuse collected in 24/25	34,859
Tonnes of compostable (food & garden) in 24/25	9,190 tonnes (2,663 = food; 6,527 = garden)
No of residents on assisted collections in 24/25	1220
Total bulky collections undertaken in 2025	3183
Garden subscribers at end of 24/25	Circa 20,700 subscribers
Number of ad hoc clinical collections in 24/25	7010
% of staff for Suez that live locally	Approx 85% of staff live locally (within Swale borough)
Estimated recycling rate (tbc later in year)	35% (latest figures suggest the national average in England is 42%)

### **Street Cleansing**

Number of litter and dog bins in Swale which are serviced by Suez	1209 (plus approx. 120 litter bins on the beach fronts which are serviced by local teams)
Length of roads in Swale to be kept clean (including High Speed Roads)	1,095,404 metres (plus over 30,000 metres of footpaths and bridleways, and 69,000 square metres of car parks).
Number of vehicles for street cleansing (with some being fully electric)	13 (including 3 mechanical sweepers)
Number of street cleansing operatives and drivers	31 (12 drivers and 19 operatives)
Fly tips removed in 2024/25	1800
Offensive graffiti items removed in 24/25	19
Streets litter arisings	2,056.5 (883 tonnes of street litter arisings and 1173 tonnes highway mechanical sweepings).

### **Transition to the new contract and the waste scrutiny review.**

The early stages of the contract mobilisation were shaped by a complex mix of challenges, some anticipated and others less easily foreseen. A few of the challenges included:

- The requirement for an entirely new vehicle fleet with enhanced environmental performance. This was impacted by the ability of manufacturers to provide vehicles due to global influences such as the war in Ukraine.
- Provision of a depot and workshop – as the Council does not own its own depot, contractors were asked to source a suitable location during the tender. Suez did this but it needed substantial improvements works, which resulted in a temporary depot being used for 6 months whilst a more permanent solution was prepared. Suez invested in the new depot with improvements such as re-surfacing the yard, new offices and a refurbished vehicle repair workshop.
- An entire re-route of waste collections in order to deliver the efficiencies required to meet environmental and financial objectives.
- The re-deployment and re-training of staff from the previous contractor to the current service provider without a break in service delivery.
- The provision of new software and hardware.
- Limited waste disposal infrastructure resulted in food waste needing to be tipped at a different site to refuse and recycling.
- Recruitment pressures, higher-than-anticipated staff turnover, and sickness.
- Uncertainties regarding the future of waste collections due to the most significant legislative changes for a generation that had been announced as part of the new waste strategy [now known as *'Simpler Recycling'*].

Although disruption was to be expected due to the scale of changes that were being implemented, the unsatisfactory service lasted longer than expected. Consequently, public apologies were made to residents from the council and Suez. A cross-party member working group carried out a full scrutiny review on the contract mobilisation.

From the start of the contract and throughout the review period, council staff worked on solutions with Suez and developed a recovery plan. Service performance steadily improved. By October 2024 Suez reported to be consistently achieving 99 percent or higher for collections. The Member review worked to identify the root causes of the problems and identified lessons to be learnt.

The Member group carried out a range of workshops and interviews with staff from both the council and Suez, and reviewed feedback from more than 2,000 responses to the public survey. This work led to 23 recommendations from the group, which were discussed and agreed by the Environment and Climate Change Committee at a meeting on Wednesday 15 January.

The council will continue working with Suez to bring about the additional benefits of the new contract.

The full waste scrutiny report can be found here

<https://news.swale.gov.uk/news/waste-scrutiny-review#:~:text=The%20review%20worked%20to%20identify,responses%20to%20the%20public%20survey.>

Due to the disruption across collections, the paid for garden waste service was reviewed by the Member Waste working group. In consultation with this group and to recognise the impact the disruption made, all residents who reported two or more missed collections during the period 23 March to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025 had their subscriptions manually extended for the exact number of reports they made (ranging from 2 to 7 reported missed collections). We also automatically extended a number of customers when they called us via the call centre during the disruption. The impact of the disruption of last year will be monitored through the amount of re-subscriptions in 25/26.

As part of the new service, a decision was taken for Mid Kent partners to procure their own fleet for waste collection and street cleansing. The cost of procuring the Swale fleet was over £7M. This was a decision made by members prior to contract award as it would enhance resilience and future flexibility as well as reduce finance costs for the council. All fleet vehicles are fitted with in cab technology, CCTV and trackers. This enables better monitoring of performance and investigations.

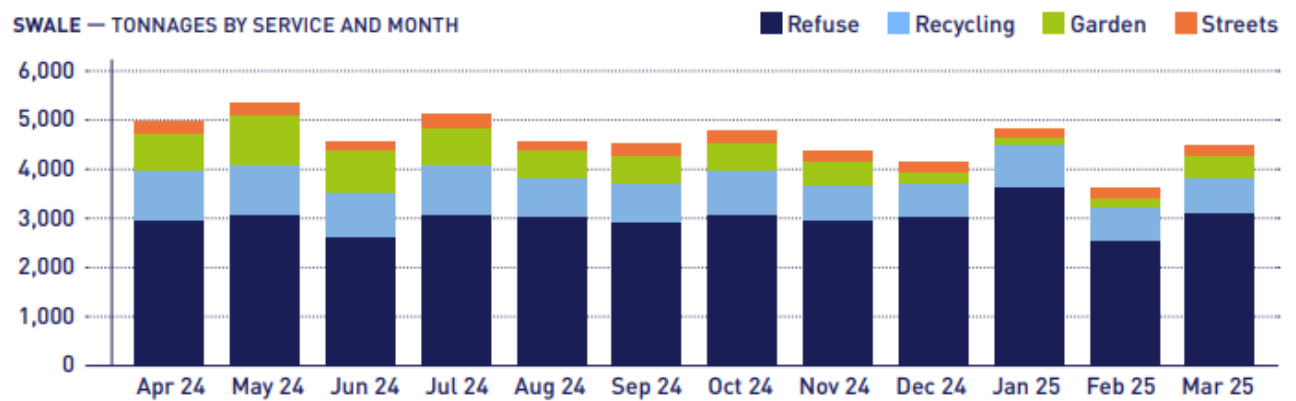
## **Performance**

### **Collections**

The start of the new service commenced with a smooth TUPE transfer of staff from the previous contractor. However, it was quickly established that the new collection rounds were not as efficient or as balanced as they should be. Consequently, several further adjustments and day changes were required to ensure the rounds were efficient and effective. Suez took this opportunity to adjust their delivery model to balance recycling and refuse services, effectively 'mirroring' collections for different streams on alternative weeks. This required the deployment of another round of recycling collections for the two streams to balance. The changes were implemented in stages, with each stage delivering better results. Consequently, the collections towards the end of the year were far improved. The most recent adjustment took place in March 2025 and it was focussed around the communal properties.

Despite the early disruptions, officers commented that the Christmas collections were some of the smoothest in recent years.

**Figure 1.1 – tonnages collected in Swale**

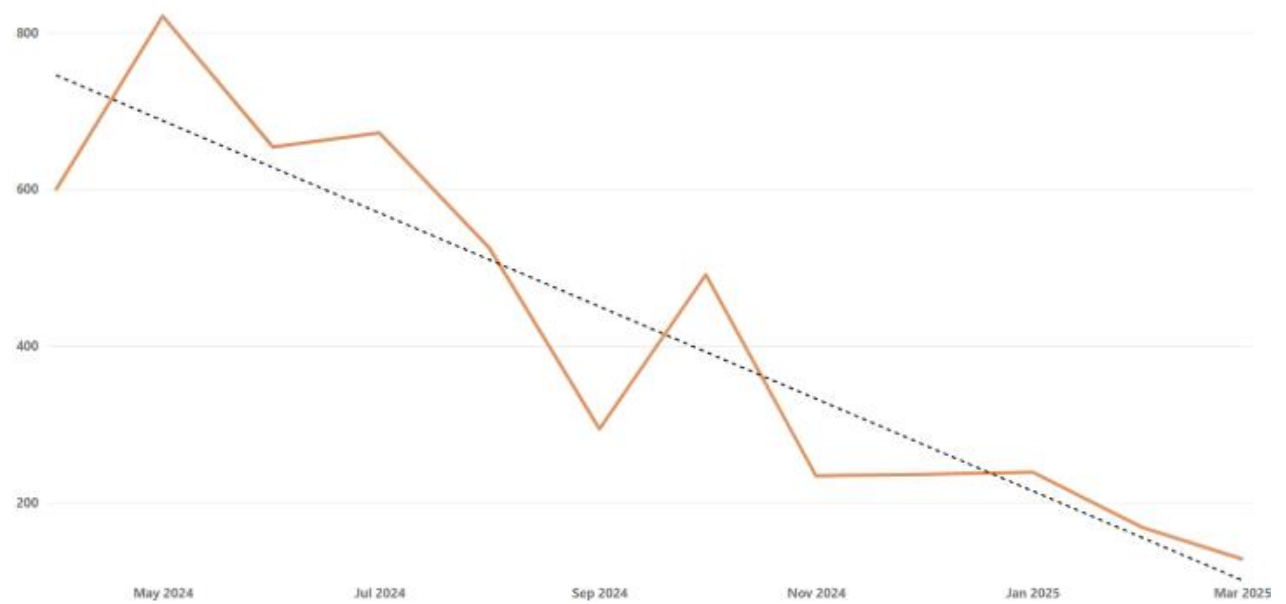


Collection performance in 24/25 has been steadily improving as the year progressed. Further controls and mechanisms continue to be implemented to drive performance improvements.

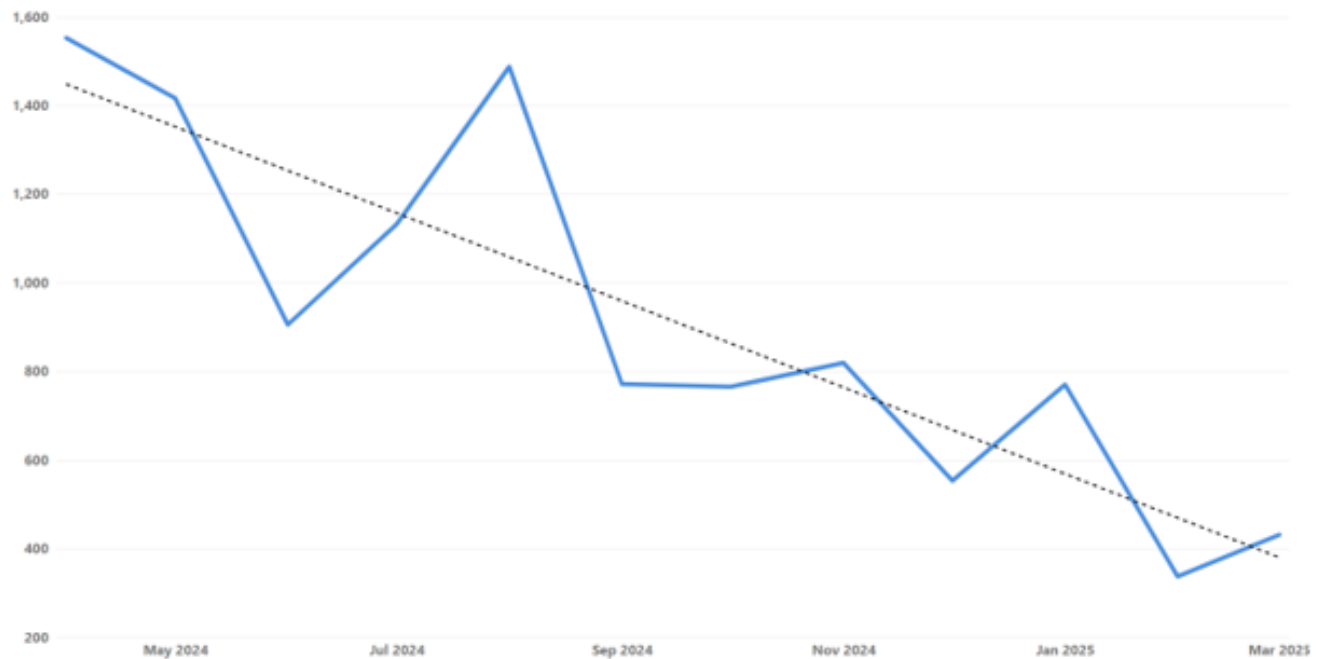
**Figure 1.2 - Refuse – total reported missed bins**



**Figure 1.3 - Food – total reported missed bins**

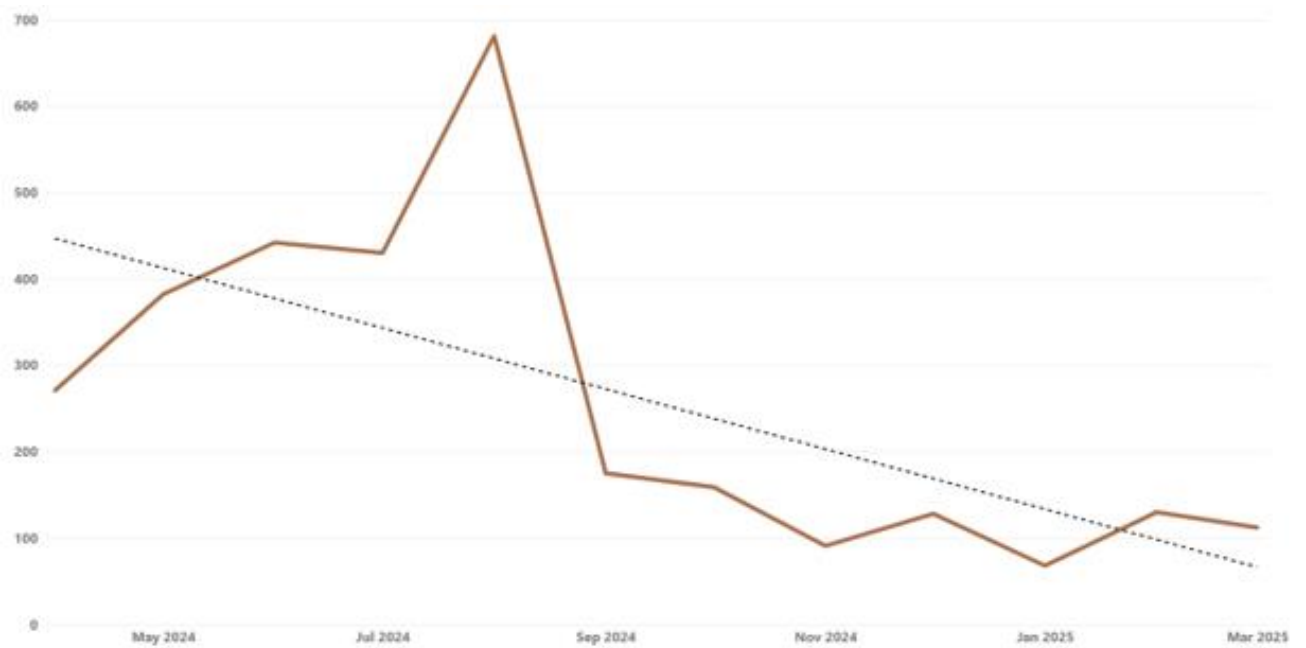


**Figure 1.4 - Recycling – total reported missed bins**

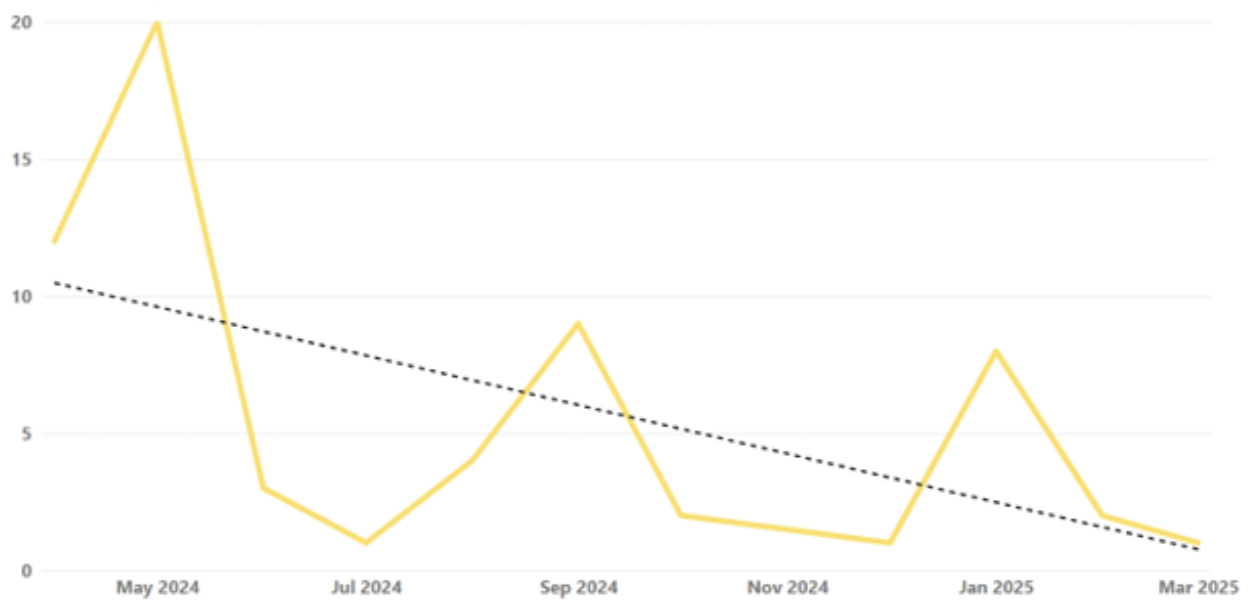




**Figure 1.5 - Garden – total reported missed bins**



**Figure 1.6 - Clinical – total reported missed bins**

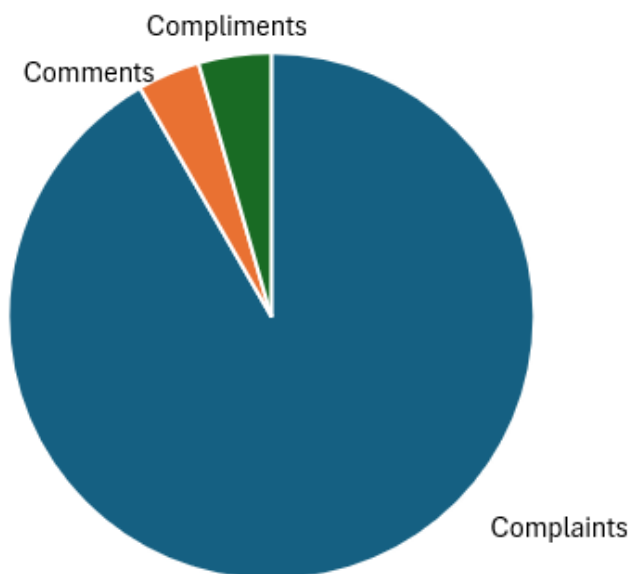


*N.B - Figures 1.2 – 1.6 include all reports made to the council of bins being missed. This includes unjustified missed bins which may later be cancelled.*

**Figure 1.7 – Number of properties with 3 reported missed collections (all waste streams)**

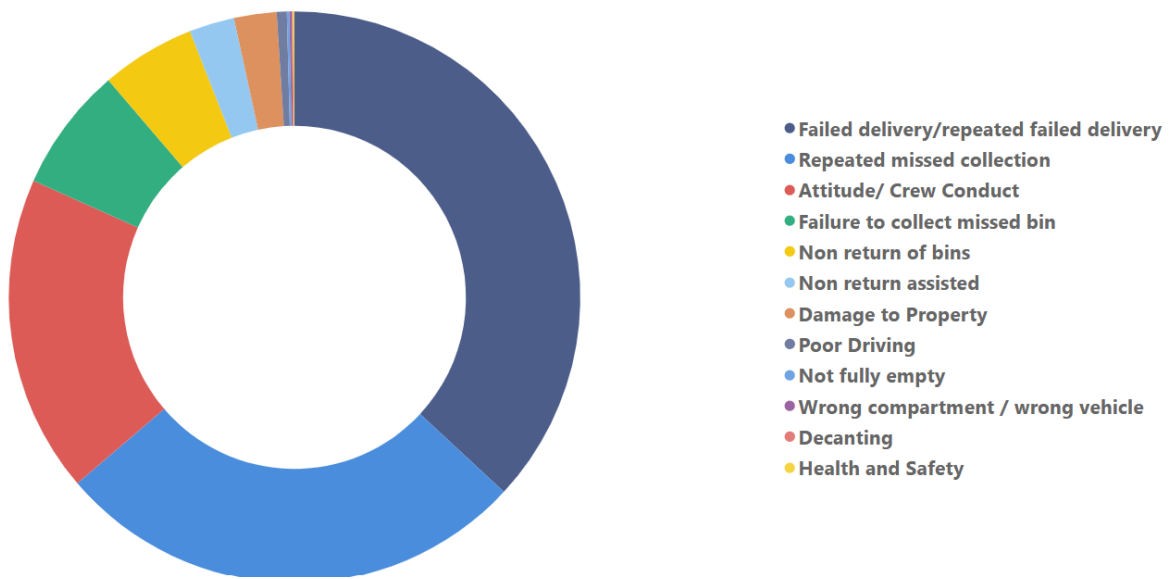


**Figure 1.8 – complaints, comments and compliments**

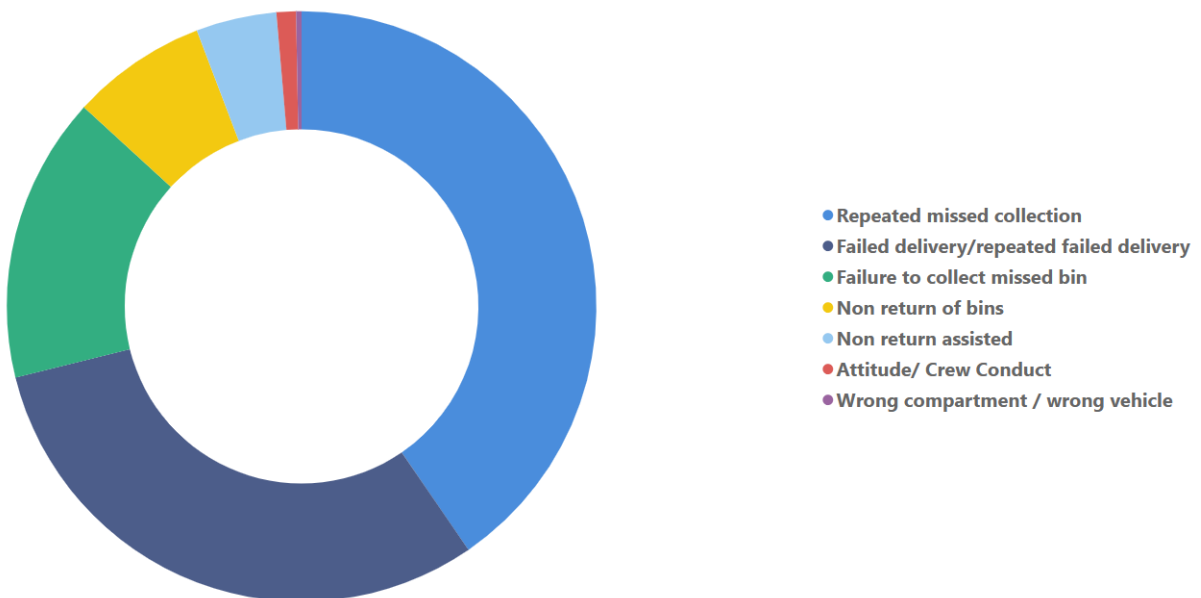


*NOTE: not all contact was allocated as complaints/ comments/ compliments for Qtrs 1 & 2.*

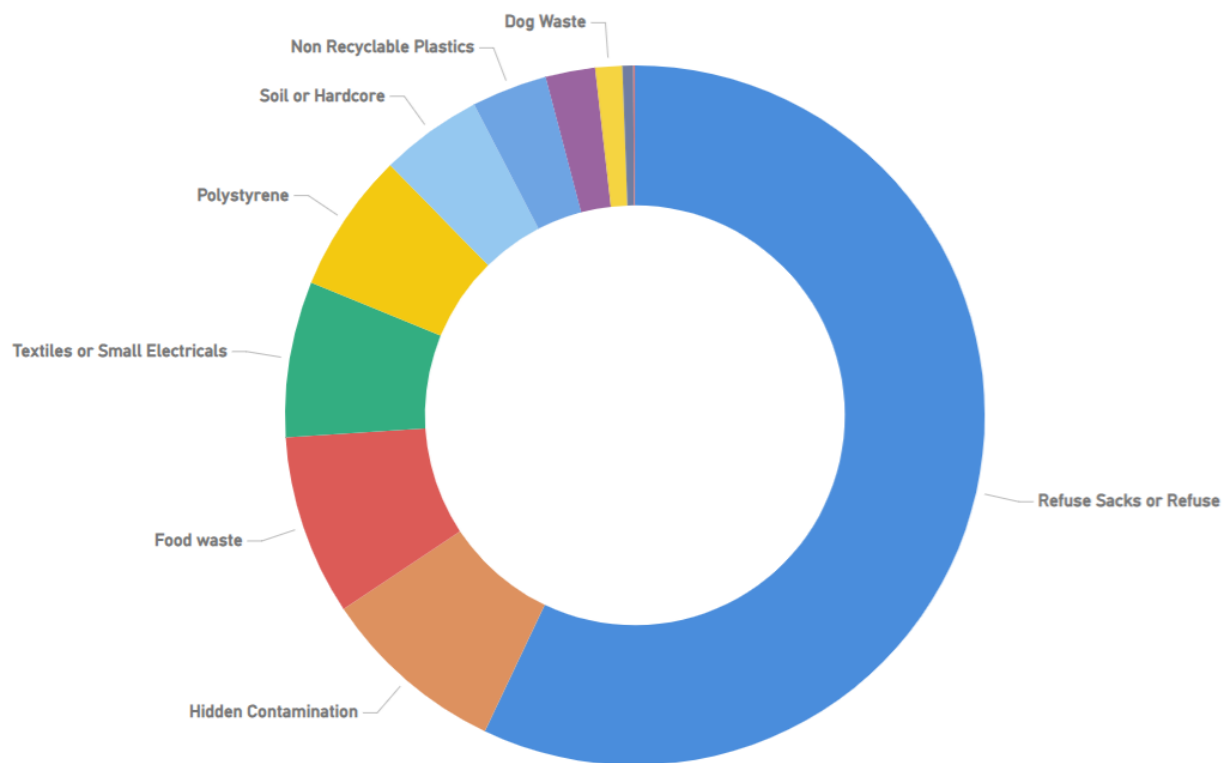
**Figure 1.9 - Complaints - Refuse and Food**



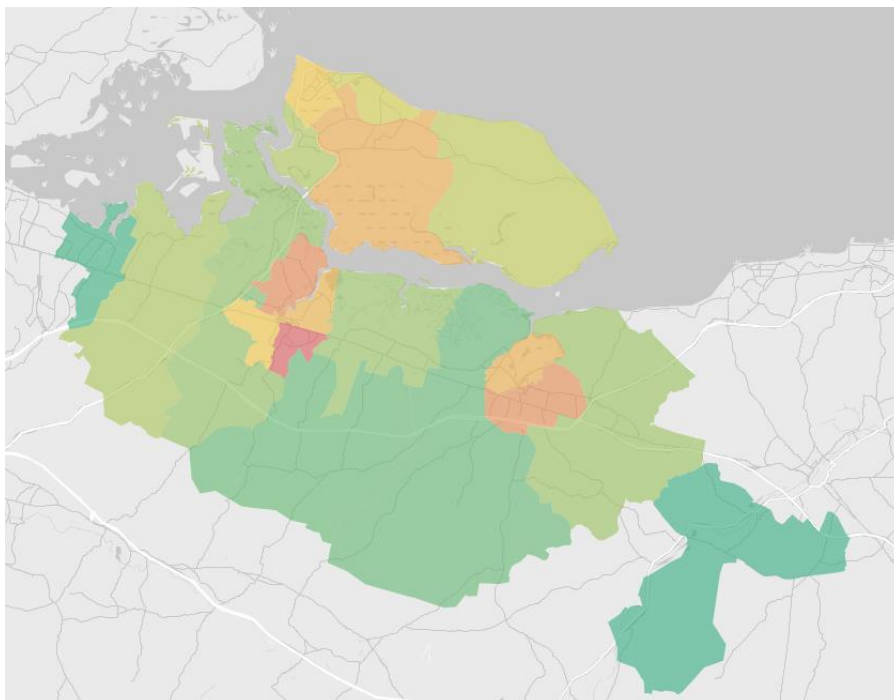
**Figure 1.10 - Complaints - Recycling**



**Figure 1.11 - Contamination in recycling bins**



**Figure 1.12** - This heat map is created from data inputted by the crews. It shows where bins have been 'locked out' for contamination. The data will become more reliable as more crews lock contaminated bins out on their handheld devices (all crews are expected to take a photograph to show the contaminants).



**Figure 1.13 – table to show recycling lost to contamination in 2024/25**

Number of lorry loads rejected at the waste transfer station for contamination in the recycling	723
Tonnes of recycling rejected for contamination	1,592

**Figure 1.14 – the contaminants that caused the rejected loads at the waste transfer station**



Sampling of recycling at the recycling plant has identified elevated levels of objectionable and prohibited materials in Swale recycling bins. Consequently, over the past two years this has resulted in an increase of whole loads being rejected at the waste transfer station in Swale. A range of measures and projects are being implemented to combat contamination such as better public awareness through social media campaigns and more thorough checks for contaminants at the point of collection. Recycling bins with contaminants will have a hanger placed on them and the bin will not be accepted until the contaminants have been removed by the resident.

**Bulky items** - Legislation came into force in 2024 that required certain waste upholstered domestic seating (WUDS) to be collected, transported and disposed off in a different way (and at a different location) to the other bulky items that are collected. This was due to these items containing persistent organic pollutants (POPs) which are used in manufacturing, often as a fire retardant. A partnership

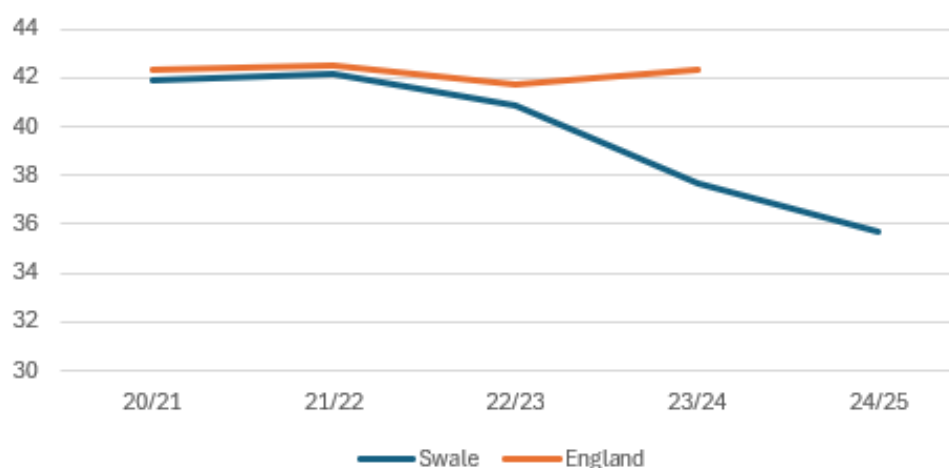
approach across the service resulted in this new requirement being implemented on time and with little impact on customers.

**Figure 1.15 - Top 10 Bulky Items Collected**

Number of Items requested (Completed Events Only)	
Type of Item	Swale
MATTRESS (SINGLE/DOUBLE/KING)	1344
SETTEE (2 SEATER)	869
SETTEE (3 SEATER)	737
CHAIR (ARM/RECLINER)	713
BED BASE (CAMP/SOFA/Z/FUTON)	638
FRIDGE/FREEZER	331
CHAIR (DECK/GARDEN/SWIVEL/OFFICE)	225
CHAIR (DINING)	172
SETTEE (4 SEATER)	169
FREEZER	162

**Recycling** – Recycling figures across the UK have plateaued in recent years which is why new legislative measures have been introduced to enhance performance and create consistency in services. The raft of new legislative measures are now commonly known as ‘Simpler Recycling’. The measures are intended to drive the UK towards targets of 60% by 2030 (by weight) and 65% by 2035. The graph below shows a recent reduction in Swale’s recycling rate. The increase in rejected recycling loads will be a contributing factor to this trend. Tackling contamination must be a main priority for Cllrs and officers in the year ahead.

**Figure 1.16 – Swale and England’s recycling rates**



*Note 1 – Swale data for 24/25 up until Feb 2025 only*

*Note 2 - The official England waste from households recycling rate was 42% in 2023/24.*

## **Street Cleansing**

Over the past year officers have focussed their efforts to ensure waste collections operated successfully. With waste collections routinely completing, the focus has now moved to street cleansing. Work has started to check data sets and integrate street cleansing operations into CORE (Suez's software system), allowing for improved scheduling, visibility, and performance monitoring across the service. Consequently, there will be more data available as 2025 unfolds.



One of the early operational improvements for street cleansing was the introduction of electric vehicles into the fleet.



It is also fair to note that Suez delivered a strong leaf clearing season with few complaints received.

## **Fly tipping**

In 2024/25, Swale BC reported 2615 fly tipping incidents. Swale Council proactively applied for and received grant funding from DEFRA to tackle behaviour change and

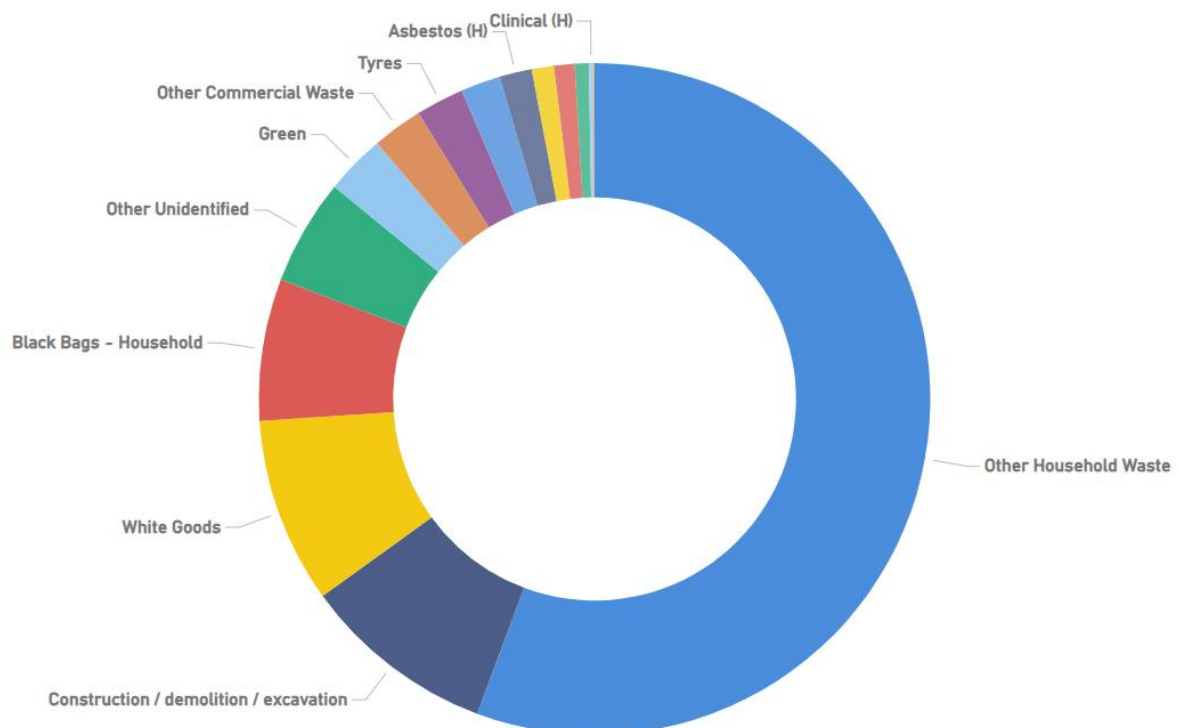
reduce fly tipping in the borough. The project included the purchase of three cameras which were deployed at fly tipping hot spots. It also included campaigns on local billboards and social media. The DEFRA grant funded Swale BC contributions to the police for 'Operation Assist' for 2024/25. This is a visible partnership where officers are tasked alongside the police to target illegal waste carriers and the prevention of fly tipping. These operations will continue into 25/26 on a bi-monthly basis.

In addition to this, officers also participated in multi-agency activities such as road stops with The Environment Agency and the DVSA. Through the Kent Resource Partnership, information, intelligence and ideas are shared to tackle illegal waste crime.

Swale Borough Council hosted the East Kent Regional waste crime practitioners meeting in Feb 2025.

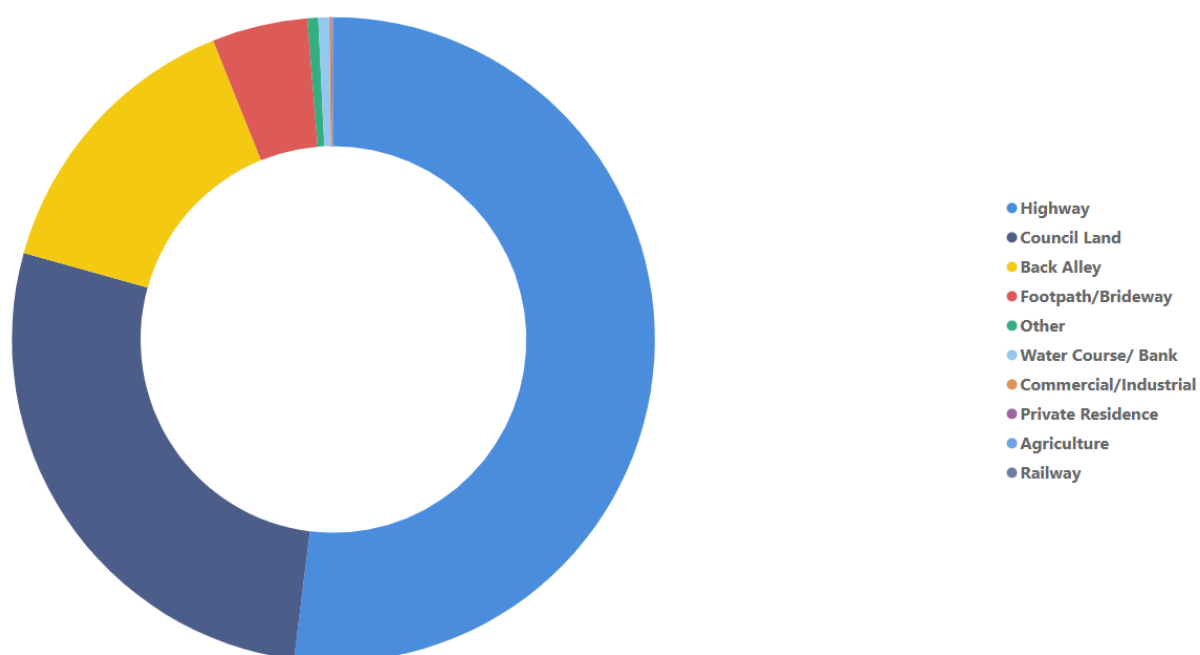
There were 21 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) issued for waste related crime such as fly tipping or duty of care offences.

**Figure 2.1 - Fly tipping - waste type**

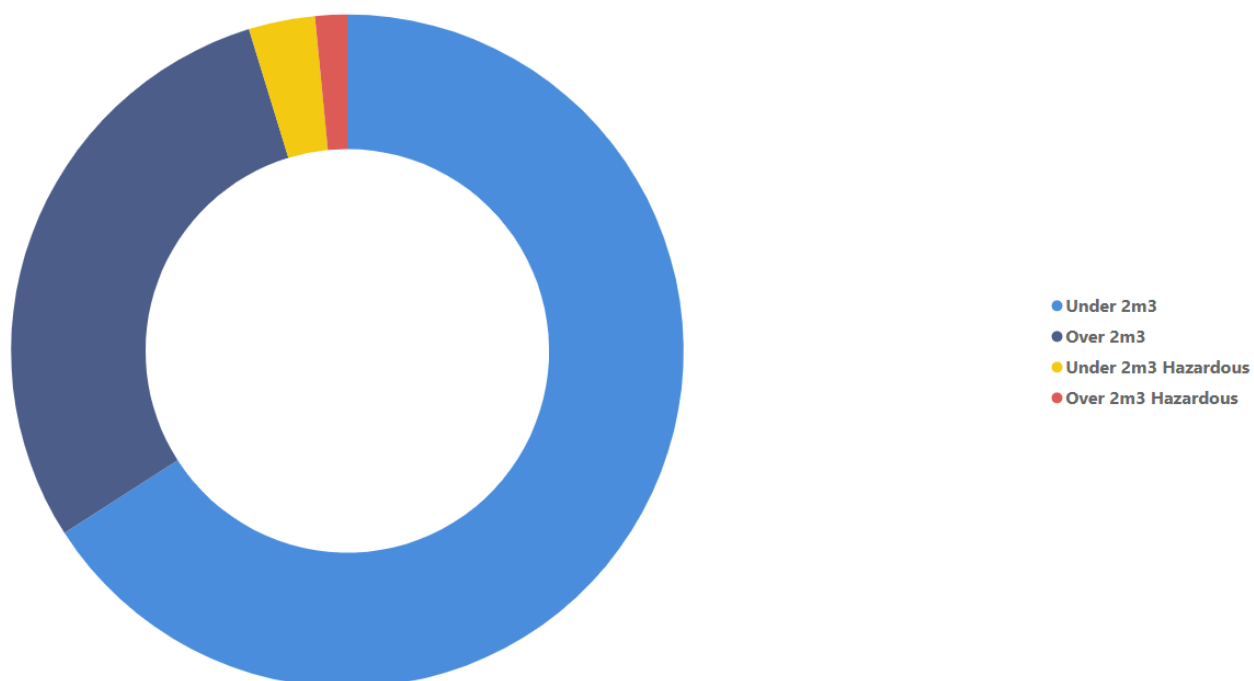




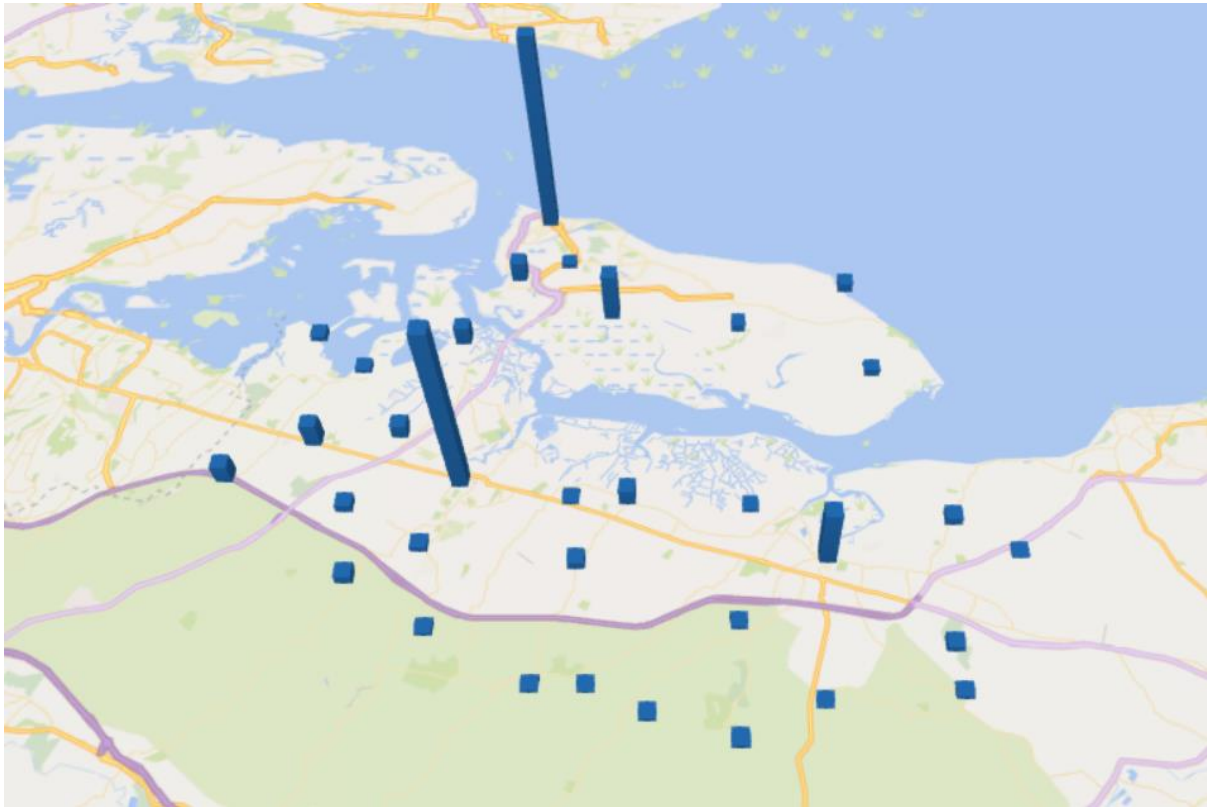
**Figure 2.2 – fly tipping - Land Type**



**Figure 2.3 - Fly Tipping- load size**



**Figure 2.4 – Fly tipping across Swale**



## **Litter and graffiti**

In 2024/25, 566 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) were issued for litter offences.

**Figure 2.5 - Number of reported overflowing Litter Bins**

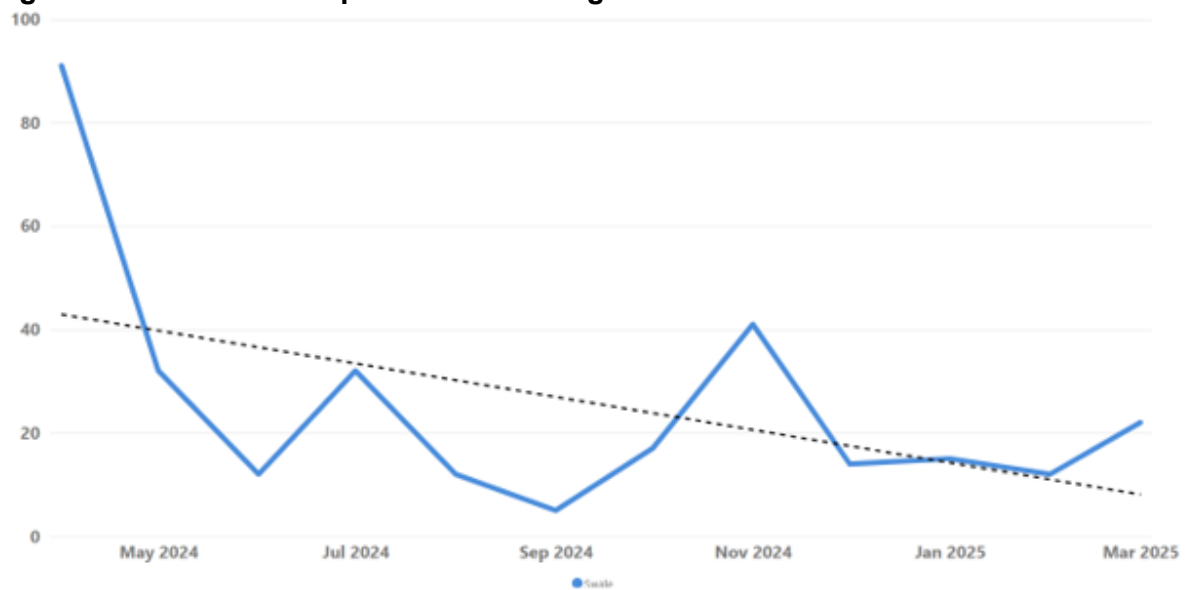


Figure 2.6 - Graffiti items removed

Number of non offensive graffiti reports	18
Number of offensive graffiti reports	19

Figure 2.7 – Dead animals reported in public areas

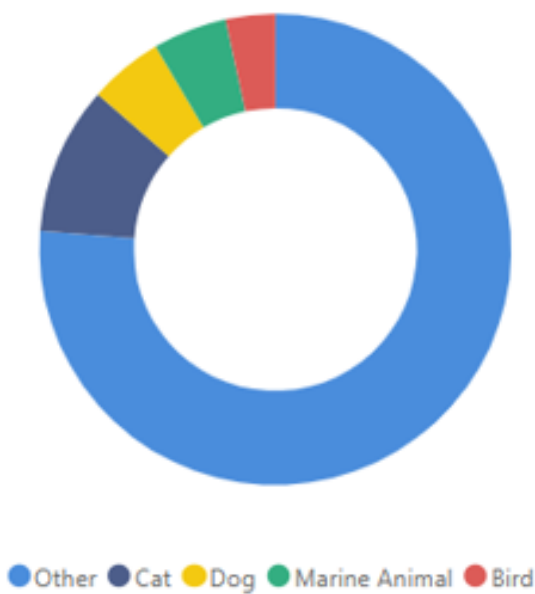
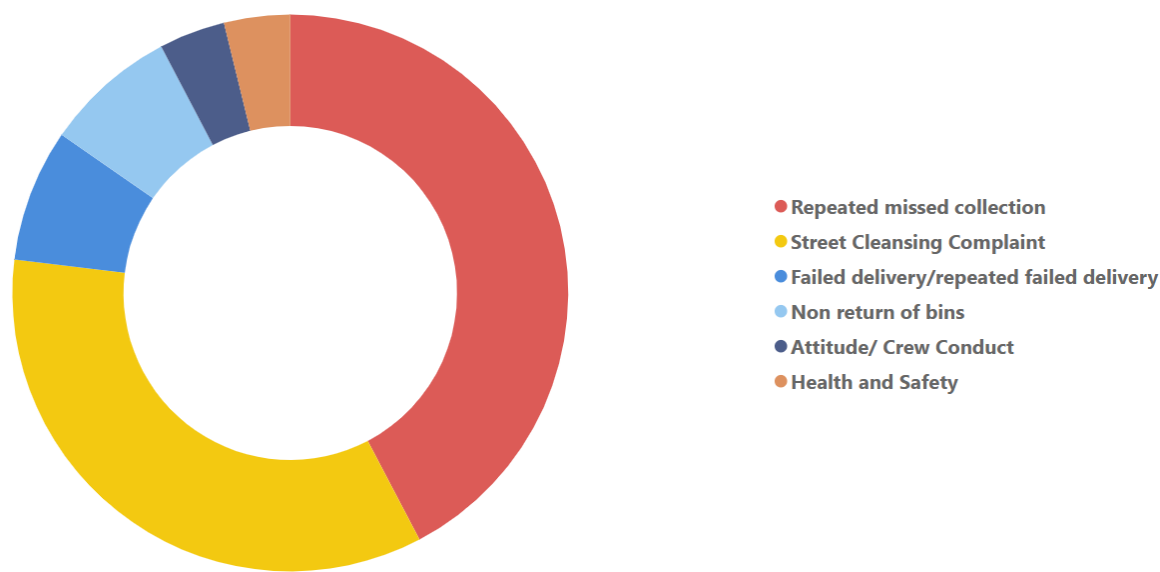


Figure 2.8 - Complaints received in 24/25 for street cleansing (27 complaints received overall)



## Health and safety

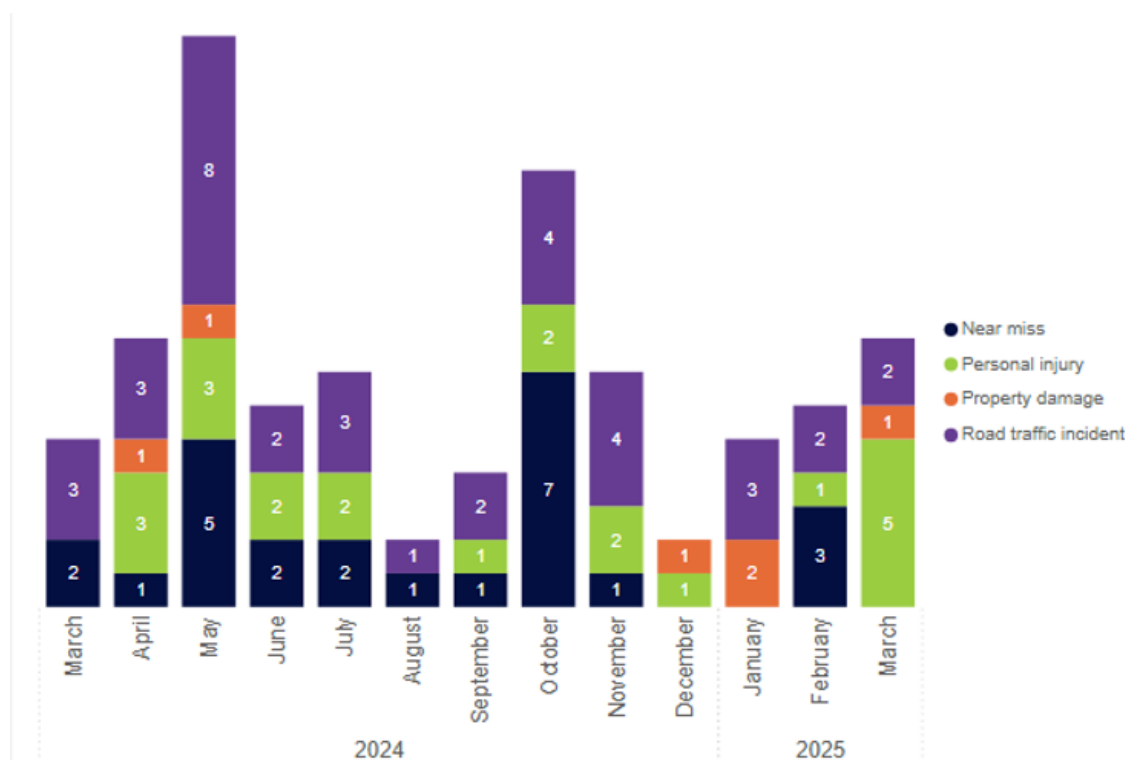
Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures suggest that across the waste industry there are an estimated 5,000 workers suffering from work-related ill health (new or long-standing). 4.2% of workers in the sector suffer from work-related ill health (new or long standing) [source - Labour Force Survey (LFS) average estimate over 2015/16 / 2023/24].

For the Mid Kent waste partnership in 2024/25, Suez reported no RIDDOR reportable incidents (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulation). RIDDOR data suggests that across the waste sector there were 1,492 non fatal injuries to employees reported by employers under RIDDOR in 2023/24. According to RIDDOR data, slips, trips and falls accounted for between 35% and 52% of non-fatal work related specified injuries (across private and public sectors working in waste) in 2024.

Although there were no RIDDOR reportable incidents in Mid Kent, Suez reported eight lost time accidents across all three boroughs and 36 personal injuries in this first Contract Year. The waste sector is a 'selected manual type' industry. These industries generally have a higher rate of work-related ill health or workplace injuries compared to all other industries.

Suez teams have proactively reported and engaged with health and safety across all boroughs in Mid Kent, with 152 near misses recorded in Year 1. In addition, Suez facilitated 602 'Safety in Mind' conversations between crews and supervisory teams, reinforcing positive behaviours, identifying areas for improvement, and embedding safety into daily routines.

**Figure 2.9 – Suez Health and Safety incidents in Swale 2024/25**



Suez advise that they continue to drive down incidents through improved processes, close supervision and a visible leadership presence.



### **Environmental benefits/ healthier communities**

All refuse vehicles are Euro VI standard and have been fitted with electric bin lifts to reduce fuel consumption. Vehicles are fitted with software that enables Suez to track driver efficiencies such as unnecessary idling and heavy braking. Although the re-routes caused problems initially, in the longer term the more efficient rounds will reduce mileage and emissions. Around 15% of street cleansing vehicles are electric.

As part of the depot infrastructure improvements, sensor lighting was installed in site cabins to minimise unnecessary energy use, and LED lighting was introduced across all workshops to lower energy consumption. Sustainability Champions were appointed at each site to lead best practices and engage colleagues in continuous environmental improvement.

In Mid-Kent, Suez are focusing on re-use practices both internally and externally. Internally, all staff received reusable water bottles during their inductions at the start of the contract in March. Internal best practice will also be consolidated with a PPE reuse initiative.

Alongside this, externally, Suez continue to explore their relationship with local charities to focus on reusing bulky waste. There will also be a focus on working with Repair Cafés and WEEE initiatives throughout Contract Year 2.

Suez operate a 'Day a Year to Volunteer' scheme. Every employee is given a paid day to support a cause close to their heart. This year Suez staff have

- volunteered at Demelza's Larkfield distribution centre and ran a schools competition for designing a storage container to reuse bulky waste.

- Hosted bake sales at each Mid Kent site to raise funds for the British Heart Foundation.
- Welcomed KMTV to join the street cleansing team in Swale, offering an inside look at the work that keeps the partnership boroughs clean.

Suez welcomed two new apprentices this year, with plans to hire 6 more over the course of Contract Year 2.

### **Contract costs for Swale in 24/25**

Waste collection (all streams including garden)	£5.77M
Street cleansing	£2.23M
Income from service charges	£1.18M income from garden services and £0.1M from bulky waste collections

### **Looking ahead for 25/26**

- Street Cleansing - a key priority is the full integration of street cleansing rounds into CORE to enable real-time data and reporting capabilities. This will include the implementation of summer working plans to optimise resources during warmer months. It will also mean we can share better data with Cllrs and residents and react quicker to issues.
- Food collections – under the government legislation changes, every domestic property must be offered a food waste collection service by March 2026. This will go hand in hand with food waste promotion projects in partnership with stakeholders. There will be a focus on providing this service to communal properties and those not on the wheeled bin scheme.
- Reduce contamination – tackle contamination in recycling bins and ensure as much recycling as possible gets placed in the recycling bins rather than the refuse bins. Work with stakeholders such as KCC and KRP to understand the issue and deliver campaigns to improve performance.
- Reduce residual waste tonnages – work with KCC and KRP to support 2025 waste composition surveys for residual and food bins in Swale and throughout Kent. Understanding composition will assist campaigns to reduce residual waste tonnages (green bins).
- Implement the requirements of Simpler Recycling – Ensure measures are taken to become an ‘efficient and effective’ organisation. Prepare for new burdens such as collecting and recycling plastic films by 2027. Plan for the new deposit return schemes (DRS) for plastic bottles and cans in England by October 2027.

- Social value – there are some exciting initiatives being developed across areas of repair and re-use. Opportunities are also being explored for more apprenticeships within the service and the creation of job skill sessions in Swale to help young people transition into meaningful employment.