
Three-Weekly Refuse Waste Collections Progress Update

Committee considering report:	Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee:	17 March 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Report Author:	Daniel Warne

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update the Scrutiny Committee on the early performance and impacts of the move to three-weekly refuse (black bin) collections, outlining how the service change is progressing following implementation in September 2025.
- 1.2 The report summarises initial operational outcomes, financial performance, environmental benefits, and resident engagement activity, providing assurance that the change is functioning as intended and remains aligned with the objectives set out in the Council's Waste Management Strategy 2025–2032.
- 1.3 It also highlights emerging risks, lessons learned and areas requiring continued focus, enabling Scrutiny to review progress, offer necessary challenge, and consider any further actions that may support the continued successful delivery and long-term sustainability of this change.
- 1.4 Recommendations and feedback obtained from Scrutiny will be considered and, wherever practicable, used to inform the continuous improvement of the Council's waste management services.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee notes the effects of the move to 3 weekly refuse collections and to provide any relevant comments, as required.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	Expected efficiencies in year one (part year) of £288,000 (compared to original estimate of £150,000), increasing in year

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	two, due to reduced waste being sent to landfill and Energy from Waste.			
Human Resource:	There are no direct HR implications. The change increased the demand on the Waste team and Customer Services. However, the peak demand period has been passed, and the service is transitioning to embedding the change and BAU.			
Legal:	There are no direct Legal implications because of this report.			
Risk Management:	<p>The main risk identified:</p> <p>Initial public resistance when the change to the collection frequency of refuse bins was announced and then implemented. This risk has been suitably managed through continued stakeholder engagement, effective communications, suitable resourcing of relevant Council teams and mitigation activity as required.</p>			
Property:	There are no direct property implications because of this report.			
Policy:	<p>The change in refuse bin collection frequency relates to the Council’s policy to be Net Zero by 2030 and is aligned with the measures set out in the Council’s Waste Management Strategy (2025 – 2032).</p> <p>It also links to national Waste and Resource Strategy measures including ‘Simpler Recycling’, extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging, and the deposit return scheme (DRS). It also links to the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) which will see energy from waste facilities included within ETS from 2028.</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				

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<p>A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p>		x		<p>This report does not require a decision. An EqIA was completed ahead of implementation as part of the specific project.</p>
<p>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p>		x		<p>This report does not require a decision. An EqIA was completed ahead of implementation as part of the specific project.</p>
<p>Environmental Impact:</p>	x			<p>The change in refuse bin collection frequency will have a positive impact on the environment as it will increase our recycling rate, reduce waste generation by householders, and can help reduce associated carbon emissions. Early results indicate these expected improvements are being achieved.</p>
<p>Health Impact:</p>		x		<p>This proposal has already been implemented and is expected to have a neutral impact on health.</p>
<p>ICT Impact:</p>		x		<p>This proposal has already been implemented; there has been no impact in ICT.</p>
<p>Digital Services Impact:</p>		x		<p>This proposal has already been implemented; associated actions have already been completed.</p>

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Council Strategy Priorities:	x			<p>Implementation of the reduction in refuse bin collection frequency will have a positive impact in supporting the Council priority of Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency by helping to achieve the Council's Net Zero ambitions.</p> <p>This will be supporting this priority by increasing recycling rates, encouraging waste minimisation and reducing carbon emissions.</p>
Core Business:		x		Not applicable.
Data Impact:		x		At this stage it is not envisaged that there will be any significant data impact associated with the implementation of the waste management strategy.

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Several activities have been carried out focused on consultation and engagement as part of the Waste Management Strategy and project implementation, including:</p> <p><u>Waste Management Strategy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Scrutiny Committee 17 July 2024- Environment Advisory Group (EAG) Open Forum updates- Three workshops with members (held on 6 March 2023, 13 March 2023 and 3 July 2023) to gather feedback and foster dialogue.- A public workshop held with residents (on 23 May 2023) to gain valuable community perspectives.- Public consultation 25 September – 6 November 2024. <p><u>Project Implementation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Two bin hanger deliveries and one direct mail to all kerbside properties ahead of the change. These bin hangers had relevant information about the change and what householders were to expect.– E-newsletters and social media updates– Numerous drop-in sessions across the district at local libraires, markets and schools.
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 Three-weekly black-bin collections were implemented on 22 September 2025 as part of the revised waste-collection model, designed to improve recycling performance, reduce refuse waste, and support the long-term sustainability of the waste service. Residents in the Council area enjoy weekly separate food-waste collections, fortnightly recycling and an opt-in garden-waste service. They also have access to two Household Waste Recycling Centres and 9 Mini Recycling Centres and our chargeable bulky waste collection service.
- 4.2 Early results from the first three full months (October – December 2025) demonstrate strong progress. Compared to the same time period last year black-bin waste reduced by 15% (1,049 tonnes), dry recycling increased by 6%

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(199 tonnes), and food-waste recycling improved by 22% (260 tonnes). Total waste fell by 162 tonnes, equivalent to 2.3 kg less waste per household.

- 4.3 Importantly, there is no evidence of significant displacement of waste to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). HWRC tonnages have risen slightly, but this increase is small compared to the substantial reductions seen at the kerbside.
- 4.4 Fly-tipping has not increased and has instead shown a small 5% decrease, compared to the same time period last year.
- 4.5 The waste team have delivered 60 drop-in outreach sessions so far in 2025/26, engaging more than 1,500 residents across libraries, markets, and schools.
- 4.6 Applications for extra black-bin capacity increased significantly following the announcement of the service change in May 2025, with 2,372 requests in 2025/26 to date, compared with 574 in the whole of 2024/25. Of these, 750 applications have been approved, up from 253 the previous year.
- 4.7 While reports of missed collections increased during the early adjustment period (524 reports from Oct–Dec 2025/26 compared to 161 in the same period of 2024/25), this still represents only 0.20% of all kerbside refuse collections made in Q3. numbers have fallen month-on-month as crews and residents are adapting to the new schedule.
- 4.8 The increase in missed collections has not resulted in additional operating costs, and because collections run sequentially from one day to the next in close geographic proximity, there has been minimal environmental impact from vehicle movements. Overall, the change is expected to reduce distance travelled by waste collection trucks by 9,700 miles per annum.
- 4.9 Financial performance is strong, and although the full details are still being worked out, the service is expected to exceed its £150k savings target, with total benefits for 2025/26 projected at around £280k (accounting for implementation costs), rising to approximately £488k in 2026/27.
- 4.10 Based on Q3 performance, if the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) had applied to Energy-from-Waste (EfW) facilities during this period, our costs would have been around £50,000 lower compared with the same period last year.

5 Supporting Information

1. Rationale for Change

- 5.2 Before implementation, analysis showed that a significant proportion of black-bin contents was recyclable materials (42%) and could have been diverted through existing weekly or fortnightly services. West Berkshire's relatively high per-head waste generation levels reinforced the need for a new approach, particularly in anticipation of future cost pressures such as carbon-related charges at Energy-from-Waste facilities expected from 2028.

2. Early Performance and Waste Movement

5.3 The first quarter of service data demonstrates a clear improvement in waste outcomes, compared with the same period in the preceding year:

- 15% reduction in black-bin waste (1,049 tonnes).
- 6% increase in dry recycling (199 tonnes).
- 22% increase in food-waste recycling (260 tonnes).
- 1% reduction in overall waste (162 tonnes).

5.4 Crucially, there has been no corresponding shift of waste from kerbside collections to HWRCs. While HWRC usage has risen, the increase is marginal and significantly outweighed by the reductions at the kerbside. Fly-tipping levels have remained stable, with a 5% reduction, indicating the change has not at this stage had a negative impact on responsible disposal behaviours.

3. Resident Support and Engagement

5.5 To support residents through the transition, the Council delivered a substantial programme of engagement, including:

- 60 outreach sessions at libraries, markets, and schools.
- Over 1,500 attendees receiving direct guidance.
- Free replacement and additional recycling containers.
- Additional black-bin capacity for eligible households.

5.6 Demand for additional capacity rose sharply when the service change was announced, with 2,372 applications in 2025/26, compared with 574 the previous year. Of these, 750 applications were approved (compared to 253 in 2024/25), reflecting both increased awareness of the scheme and households adjusting to the new frequency.

4. Operational Performance

5.7 As expected with any major service change, missed-collection reports increased during the early adjustment period:

- 524 reports (Sept–Dec 2025/26) vs. 161 (Sept–Dec 2024/25).

5.8 However, these figures have improved each month as crews and residents have become familiar with the new schedule.

5.9 Operational efficiency and service quality has been maintained throughout. On the limited occasions that issues have arisen e.g. due to missed collections or vehicle breakdown, the Council and the waste contractor have worked together to promptly resolve them.

6 Other options considered

6.1 The decision to move to three-weekly refuse collections was originally made as part of the adoption of the Waste Management Strategy 2025–2032, during

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which a range of alternative models were reviewed. This paper focuses only on reporting progress since implementation, rather than re-evaluating previously considered options. No new options have been assessed as part of this progress update.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The introduction of three-weekly black-bin collections is delivering encouraging early results and performing as intended. Refuse waste has decreased significantly, recycling levels continue to rise, and overall waste generation has fallen. HWRC use is stable relative to kerbside reductions, a 5% drop in fly-tipping, and decreasing missed-collection reports as the system beds in. It has to be noted though that we are still very early in the change journey and continued focus on customer engagement and operational delivery is required if the initial benefits are to be embedded and sustained.
- 7.2 Resident engagement has been high, demonstrated by more than 1,500 attendees at community events and a substantial rise in applications for additional bin capacity. This indicates awareness, adaptation, and active participation from households across the district.
- 7.3 Operationally, the service is running efficiently, with no unexpected additional cost and a positive environmental impact. Financial performance is strong, and although commercially sensitive details must be handled carefully, projections indicate the service will exceed its £150k savings target, with £280k forecast for 2025/26 and £488k projected for 2026/27.
- 7.4 Overall, the early evidence shows that the three-weekly collection model is likely to be a successful, sustainable, and responsible approach that supports both the Council's Waste Management Strategy 2025–2032 and the long-term needs of West Berkshire residents.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equity Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B – Slide Deck – Three Weekly Black Bin Collections – Update
- 8.3 Appendix C – Summary of selected outcomes

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

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West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE

March 2023

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Section 1: Summary details

<p>Directorate and Service Area</p>	<p>Place, Waste</p>
<p>What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).</p>	<p>Early impact and progress of changing general refuse collection from households from once every two weeks, to once every three weeks.</p>
<p>Is this a new or existing function or policy?</p>	<p>Existing function, policy change.</p>
<p>Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).</p>	<p>The general refuse (black bin) collection service changed from fortnightly to three-weekly collections on the 22 September 2025, as part of the Council’s Waste Management Strategy 2025-2032.</p> <p>The change involved all households receiving kerbside collections but not those who have shared communal bin.</p> <p>Positive impacts associated with this change include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of the recycling services the Council provide; • Environmental benefits through waste reduction and reduced carbon emissions; and • Cost savings for the Council, helping to achieve more value for money for ratepayers and to maintain other essential services provided by the Council. <p>Negative impacts (which the Waste team have effectively mitigated) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased difficulty for larger-than-typical households that generate higher volumes of waste. • Challenges for selected residents with medical needs, such as those requiring incontinence products, who may need additional support.

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	<p>The recent change does not discriminate against any particular demographic. However, certain householders have received additional support from the Council to adapt to this change. Suitable mitigation measures taken by the Council to assist residents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offering additional general waste capacity (e.g. larger bins) for eligible households;• Continuing to provide medical waste collections for eligible households; and• Providing enhanced service communications and waste reduction support to residents (e.g. Real Nappy give-aways and cash-back scheme, updates in our newsletters and on social media channels, targeted media campaigns and ongoing advice provision to customers). <p>English councils like Bracknell Forest, East Devon, Stratford-on-Avon, North and East Hertfordshire have successfully adopted similar changes, and achieved higher recycling rates and cost efficiencies. More English authorities such as East and Mid Suffolk, Cheshire East, South Gloucestershire are due to make a similar change in 2026. The Council's officers have continued to engage with peers in council areas who have already implemented this change to learn lessons, which can be used to enhance our implementation approach. Officers are reasonably confident that the identified mitigation measures will help ensure fairness and accessibility for all affected groups.</p>
Completed By	Daniel Warne
Authorised By	Kofi Adu-Gyamfi, Service Lead – Climate Change
Date of Assessment	11/2/2026

Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p>Context / Background</p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>The Council’s shift from fortnightly to three-weekly refuse collections is part of resource efficiency measures set out in the Waste Management Strategy 2025-2032. This change aligns with national waste reduction policies and aims to significantly increase recycling rates, reduce waste generation and associated disposal costs, and support help achieve better environmental outcomes. Reductions in waste generation and improved waste management will also result in reduced carbon emissions and contribute to the achievement of the Council’s aspiration to get to Net Zero by 2030.</p>
<p>Proposals</p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>The recent change has resulted in kerbside refuse collections switching from fortnightly to three-weekly on 22 September 2025, while maintaining food waste and dry recycling collections at their current frequency. Refuse collections from communal properties have also remained at their current weekly frequency.</p> <p>This approach was chosen as it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduces residual waste by encouraging recycling (42% of black bin waste is potentially recyclable).• Ensures sufficient bin capacity, West Berkshire was providing the highest in Berkshire (120 litres (l) per week), reducing to 80l per week is in line with comparable authorities. For example, Bracknell Forest currently provides their residents with a general waste bin capacity of 80l per week.• Mitigates financial risks, reducing exposure to £1.4m in potential annual UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) costs. The ETS costs are expected to come in from c. 2028.• Aligns with national waste policies for increasing recycling and reducing avoidable waste generation. It will also support the Council’s Net Zero by 2030 goal, and is aligned with the Council’s priority of Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergencies. <p>Our change implementation follows proven success from other UK councils, where three-weekly collections increased recycling rates and delivered improved VfM and service efficiency.</p>

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Evidence / Intelligence

List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.

Increased Participation: A participation survey undertaken by officers in October and November 2025 identified an increase in properties presenting food waste at the kerbside for recycling, from 49% in March 2025 to 65.5% during the latest survey. With 36% of properties presenting black bins for collection still having space within the bin.

Waste flow data: Early results from the first three full months (October – December 2025) demonstrate strong progress. Compared to the same time period last year, black-bin waste reduced by 15% (1,049 tonnes), dry recycling increased by 6% (199 tonnes), and food-waste recycling improved by 22% (260 tonnes). Total waste fell by 162 tonnes, equivalent to 2.3 kg less waste per household. There is no evidence of significant displacement of waste to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). HWRC tonnages have risen slightly, but this increase is small compared to the substantial reductions seen at the kerbside.

Impact on environment: Comparing October – December 2025 to the same time period in 2024 we have not seen an increase in reports of litter or fly tipping.

Extra black bin capacity: We saw demand for additional capacity rise sharply when the service change was announced, with 2,372 applications in 2025/26, compared with 574 the previous year. Of these, 750 applications were approved (compared to 253 in 2024/25), reflecting both increased awareness of the scheme and households adjusting to the new frequency.

Additional Recycling containers: Since the announcement of the frequency change, we have seen a spike in requests for recycling container compared to previous years. 22,000 containers were delivered between April and December 2025, a 57% increase compared to the same period in 2024.

Waste Composition Analysis: Our last survey completed in May 2025 demonstrated that 42% of black bin contents could be recycled via the kerbside service. A subsequent survey is planned for June 2026.

External technical advisors: Modelling undertaken by Eunomia Research & Consulting demonstrates that this is the best practicable environmental option. The change is expected to increase our recycling rate by at least 5%.

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Capacity Comparison: West Berkshire provided the highest black bin capacity per household in Berkshire at 120l per week, compared to the regional average of 85l per week. This proposal reduced capacity to 80l per week,

Environmental Goals: The change is aligned with the Council's Net Zero by 2030 target, and the need to divert waste from incineration and landfill.

Legislative Changes: The UK ETS will extend to Energy from Waste (EfW) facilities by 2028, adding c. £1.4 million in annual costs onto the Council's expenditure unless more waste is avoided or recycled.

Financial Savings: £288,000 (compared to original estimate of £150,000) for 2025/26, increasing in year two, due to reduced waste being sent to landfill and Energy from Waste.

Proven Success Elsewhere: Councils like Bracknell, East Devon, and Stratford-on-Avon have adopted similar changes, seeing higher recycling rates and cost efficiencies.

Consultation response: During a public consultation undertaken between September and November 2024 before the change was approved and implemented, 47% of respondents reported having space in their black bin on collection day, even before the recent expansion of kerbside plastic recycling to include plastic pots, tubs and trays.

Whilst majority of respondents indicated they would like to keep the existing collection frequency, 52% of respondents stated that their household could manage if non-recyclable (black bin) waste was collected every three weeks, out of that group of respondents, half stated '*maybe, although it might be challenging at certain times of the year*'.

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Alternatives considered / rejected

Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.

Alternatives considered and rejected include (“✓” denotes a potentially positive outcome; and “✗” denotes a potentially negative outcome):

1. Four-Weekly Refuse Collections

- ✓ Would further improve recycling rates and reduce carbon emissions by encouraging even greater waste reduction.
- ✓ Aligns with national sustainability goals and would result in greater cost savings over time.
- ✗ Likely to be impractical for many residents, particularly larger households and those with medical waste needs.
- ✗ High risk of non-compliance, leading to increased fly-tipping or waste contamination.
- ✗ Public resistance likely to be significantly higher, making implementation and enforcement more challenging.

2. Changing Bin Size Instead of Collection Frequency

- ✓ Reducing black bin size to e.g. 180l and still collecting the waste fortnightly would limit residual waste capacity, driving better recycling behaviours while maintaining fortnightly collections.
- ✗ High financial cost—estimated at £2 million+ to replace bins across all households.
- ✗ Operational challenges, including the logistics of replacing over 60,000 bins.
- ✗ Would not provide the same financial or carbon savings as reducing collection frequency.

3. Doing Nothing (Retaining Fortnightly Collections)

- ✗ Misses the opportunity to improve recycling rates, with 42% of black bin contents currently recyclable via kerbside services.
- ✗ West Berkshire’s waste generation remains high (427kg per person), making waste reduction efforts essential.
- ✗ Other councils adopting three-weekly collections have seen recycling increase, demonstrating that inaction would leave West Berkshire behind.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✘ Fails to address key financial pressures, particularly the £1.4m annual cost from the upcoming UK Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) expansion.
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Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

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Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	No change from the current situation as the Council provides Assisted Collections to selected householders who are unable to physically present their bins for collection.			
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

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Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
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Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Areas of deprivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Displaced communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Care experienced people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Armed Forces Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	
Person Responsible for Review	
Authorised By	

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