

A framework for

greater consistency in household recycling in England



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Foreword



Marcus Gover

WRAP Chief Executive Officer &
Chair of the Greater Consistency
Advisory Group

Recycling has been a success story for the UK over the last 15 years and it is now an industry which employs over 100,000 people. When WRAP started, household recycling rates were less than 10% but today it is a way of life. This success is down to all those involved in supplying goods to the market, collecting waste for recycling and reprocessing it into new products.

Building on that success has been more difficult in recent years and the recycling rate in England has not grown as fast as it did in earlier years. We believe that a more consistent approach to the recyclability of goods and packaging and the way we recycle in England could help to reverse this recent trend.

By pooling the wealth of experience on recycling from local authorities with the insight from manufacturers, retailers and recyclers we have developed a framework for future recycling that offers the opportunity to increase recycling, improve the quality of recycled

materials, save money and offer a good service to householders in England.

The framework is derived from a joint vision that has been developed and reviewed by cross-sector advisory and working groups over the last year. It is not just about local authority collections but about the entire life-cycle of the goods we buy, use and dispose of. It identifies which materials it makes sense for every household in England to be able to recycle at home. It takes the best from the rich variety of collection systems we currently have and recommends a framework based on just three approaches. It offers greater consistency but still makes space for local authorities to tailor collection systems to their local needs.

It is a vision where, by 2025, packaging is designed to be recyclable (where practical and environmentally beneficial) and labelled clearly to indicate whether it can be recycled or not. It is a vision where every household in England can recycle a common set of dry recyclable materials and food waste, collected in one of three different ways.

We are not expecting this to happen overnight and we do understand the financial pressures that local authorities and businesses are facing at the moment. However, we can start moving towards the vision. Adopting a consistent group of materials to collect at the kerbside could be achieved with little overall increase in cost, and in some cases provide an opportunity for savings. Changes could follow as services come up for review. The evidence and analysis for this is in the [business case document](#). WRAP is here to help local authorities look at the business case for change locally.

We have come a long way by working together over the last year on this and I would like to thank all those who have helped for the valuable contribution that they have made.

It is only by joining together that we can now realise the benefits of the vision and I look forward to working with all those involved to do that.

Greater consistency in household recycling

Brands, retailers and manufacturers



Packaging is designed to be recyclable, where practical and environmentally beneficial, and is labelled clearly to indicate whether it can be recycled or not*

Householders



Householders recycle a common set of materials and food waste*

Local authorities and waste management companies



Materials and food waste are collected and separated cost effectively in one of three ways

Reprocessors



Materials are reprocessed back into new products/packaging and, in the case of food waste, energy and nutrients are recovered

* The materials are paper, card, plastic bottles, plastic pots, tubs and trays, glass, metal packaging and cartons.

Introduction

This document outlines the opportunities for greater consistency in household recycling in England, and sets out an ambitious voluntary framework for taking it forward to 2025.

Its development has been informed by an expert advisory group of leading figures from the sector. The vision is backed up by a robust evidence base and analysis that draws on the work of WRAP and other organisations and considers the views of consumers as expressed through various consumer surveys. Drawing all this together presents a compelling case for change.

The Framework has been developed within the current policy, regulatory and administrative context and action is voluntary. It takes account of current waste composition, service provision and technology, and provides flexibility to accommodate different local contexts. It will be kept under review in the light of any future changes in public and environmental policy.

Achieving the vision will involve the collective action of brands, retailers and manufacturers, local government, waste management companies and reprocessors. It is important that the responsibility for change and resulting benefits are shared fairly.

Advisory group members

Advisory Committee on Packaging

Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association

Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport

British Retail Consortium

Chartered Institution of Wastes Management

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Department for Communities and Local Government

Environmental Services Association

Food and Drink Federation

Green Alliance

Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee

Local Government Association

London Waste and Recycling Board/Resource London

National Association of Waste Disposal Officers

Recycling Association

Resource Association

WRAP

Why greater consistency?

The household recycling rate has more than quadrupled over the past decade. This is as a result of an expansion in recycling and food waste collection services by local authorities and industry investment in new sorting and processing infrastructure.

The key benefits to be delivered



Recycling has become an everyday activity for many households. We now need to build on this progress and make the next step change in recycling performance in order to realise fully the value of materials within a more circular economy. This means making it easier for households to recycle more; making it more cost effective for councils and others to provide services; and improving the quantity and quality of materials available to industry.

Greater consistency can contribute to this and bring a number of key benefits nationally. The benefits are calculated over an eight year period 2018 to 2025 and are cumulative:

- The potential for an additional 11.6 million tonnes of materials and food waste to be collected for recycling, adding 7 percentage points to the national household waste recycling rate;
- The potential to yield up to £478 million more from the sale of recovered materials;

- The potential to yield up to 8 million tonnes of organic fertiliser to the agri-food sector, with a nutrient value of £30 million;
- The potential to generate £280 million in renewable energy sales;
- The delivery of higher quality materials for recycling due to less non-target materials in the recycling stream, more effective sorting, and cleaner materials as food waste is collected separately. This will contribute to reduced costs to local authorities. It will also mean less cost to UK reprocessors of removing contamination prior to reprocessing materials by up to £33 million;
- Councils have worked hard over recent years to deliver a better deal for local taxpayers, while public satisfaction with services has been maintained and recycling increased. The analysis indicates there is the potential for financial benefit to local government through more effective service design, increased diversion

of waste from disposal and additional revenue from the sale of recyclables. The level of benefit depends on how services rationalise around the framework proposed as individual authorities consider their current arrangements, local priorities and opportunities to make service changes. The analysis indicates that overall the vision for household collections can be achieved whilst delivering a financial benefit of up to £408 million over eight years. There is also the potential for further savings through joint working between authorities. However, delivering this level of financial benefit would be challenging, particularly at a time of increasing budget pressures, and it may be difficult for some authorities to realise the benefits modelled; and

- Improved environmental outcomes, with the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 5.1 million tonnes CO₂(eq).

Greater consistency explained

1. All households to be able to recycle the same core set of materials

Enabling all households to recycle a core set of materials will help address confusion, meaning that householders recycle more of the right materials on every occasion; and contamination is reduced.

The following eight material types make up around 60% of waste (residual and recyclables) collected from households:

Plastic bottles

Plastic packaging – pots, tubs and trays

Metal packaging – cans, aerosols and foil

Glass bottles and jars

Paper

Card

Food and drink cartons

Food waste

Food waste makes up **30%** of the residual waste stream, and collecting it separately for recycling has environmental and financial benefits.

2. Fewer collection and sorting systems

Rationalising the range of collection approaches and how materials are presented for collection by householders offers a number of key benefits.

Extensive research and industry engagement has been undertaken to identify three collection systems. The key factors considered were cost and performance, material quality, and householder satisfaction and engagement, as well as compliance with legal requirements. There are examples of each system operating in different local contexts, and each can be tailored for both low rise (kerbside collected) and flatted properties.

A note on legal compliance: The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011, as amended in 2012 requires waste collection authorities to separately collect paper, plastics, glass and metals. The collection of these materials either co-mingled or two-stream may be compliant only if it can be demonstrated that separate collection is not necessary to achieve good quality recyclables, or is not technically, environmentally or economically practical.

In each system food waste is collected weekly and separate from both residual and garden waste. Evidence shows that separate weekly collections of food waste capture significantly more food waste than mixed food and garden waste collections.

The frequency of recycling and residual waste collections, the containers provided (bins, boxes or sacks) and their capacity will depend on local circumstances and housing types. However, dry recycling capacity should be equivalent to a minimum of 120 litres per week. Evidence indicates that recycling services perform better and services are more cost effective when residual waste capacity is restricted to a maximum equivalent of 120 litres per week. Fortnightly residual waste collections are more cost effective than weekly collections.

A note on garden waste: Collection of garden waste either at kerbside or at household waste recycling centres for composting is widespread. Separate garden waste collection services are provided at the discretion of local authorities, for which a charge can be made. Householders are also encouraged to compost their garden waste at home.

3. A common container colour system

An association of colours and containers has been identified as the next step in public engagement, simplifying both national and local communications further and offering the potential to reduce procurement costs.

Adoption of a national colour scheme for containers is considered a long-term aspiration as some container types are designed to last for several years so replacement timescales vary.

A container colour scheme for residual, recycling, food and garden wastes which local authorities and others can transition to over time will be considered as part of ongoing work under the Framework.

Greater consistency explained

Each system varies in its performance against the key factors considered as outlined in the underpinning evidence and analysis.

Multi-stream with separate food:

Household plastic packaging, metals (cans, aerosols and foil) and cartons

Glass containers and card*

Paper

Food waste separate

Two-stream (fibres separate) with separate food:

Household plastic packaging, metals, glass and cartons collected as one stream

Paper and card collected as one stream

Food waste separate

Co-mingled with separate food:

All dry mixed recyclables collected as one stream (co-mingled)**

Food waste separate

Multi-stream with separate food



Minimum of 120 litres collected weekly



Two-stream (fibres separate) with separate food



Minimum equivalent of 120 litres weekly



Co-mingled with separate food



Minimum equivalent of 120 litres weekly



*Glass and card would be presented in the same box but separated into different compartments on the vehicle. In flatted properties card and paper could be collected together. Glass would be collected as a separate stream.

** The advice from reprocessors is that glass and paper are collected separately to maintain material quality.

Achieving the vision

A 5 point action plan

Greater consistency in household recycling will only be achieved through collaborative action. A number of initiatives have already been identified, and working groups set up to take these forward. Each group will begin to report on activities by spring 2017.

1

All packaging placed on the market to be sortable and recyclable unless there are strong practical and environmental reasons for it not to be; and this packaging is to be labelled with meaningful consumer information to indicate whether it can or cannot be recycled.

ACTION: An industry-led working group will:

- Identify the opportunities to remove those elements of packaging that hinder the recycling process, taking into account practicalities and total environmental impact;

- Identify opportunities to rationalise packaging formats (in particular plastic packaging) to those that are recyclable and for which there is a steady market; and
- Encourage the implementation of proven measures to improve the sorting of packaging to enable more effective recycling.

Brands and retailers not currently using the widely recognised On Pack Recycling Label labelling scheme are strongly encouraged to adopt this labelling on all packaging placed on the UK market.

2

All householders are able to confidently and accurately place out for collection a common set of materials and food waste for recycling.

ACTION: An industry-led working group in association with [Recycle Now](#) will:

- Investigate the opportunities that greater consistency brings to inspiring householders to recycle more; and

- Consider innovative communications to provide uniform messages about more consistent services.

WRAP will:

- Consult local government and industry regarding the costs and benefits of introducing a national container colour scheme.

3

Recyclable materials to be collected and sorted cost effectively for onward reprocessing using one of three systems.

ACTION: WRAP will:

- Support six groups of local authorities to evaluate the local business case for adopting the consistency framework; and
- Develop an ongoing programme of support for local authorities considering changes to their service provision.

Local authority organisations, working with WRAP, will:

- Identify the information, evidence and tools that would be helpful to local authorities when evaluating the local business case;
- Consider standard contract documentation for collection services and joint working; and
- Identify and develop new documentation as required.

An industry-led working group will:

- Explore the implications of increasing the quantity and types of materials collected for recycling on materials sorting and reprocessing capacity.

Achieving the vision

A 5 point action plan

4

The domestic reprocessing sector to be supported through the supply of materials of the required quality and quantity. All reprocessors to turn the collected materials back into products/packaging, or in the case of food waste, energy and fertiliser.

ACTION: Industry to ensure that actions are joined up (where appropriate) with those identified in other industry action plans to improve the capture and quality of materials for recycling, including:

- [Plastics Industry Recycling Action Plan](#); and
- [Food Waste Recycling Action Plan](#).

ACTION: WRAP, working with industry, will:

- Establish clear guidelines on specific items that can and cannot be presented for recycling and how to present them e.g. lids on/lids off and rinsed.

5

Potential policy and regulatory barriers that might affect the delivery of greater consistency in household recycling to be identified and addressed.

ACTION: Defra, with input from industry and local government, will:

- Map current and proposed regulations and policies that might impact upon achieving greater consistency;
- Develop a shared understanding of implications and risks and/or benefits arising from these regulations and policies; and
- Agree possible actions/options for removing barriers or enhancing benefits as necessary.

Brands, retailers and manufacturers, local authorities, waste management companies and reprocessors, either working individually or in collaboration, are asked to consider the benefits and decide how they can take action to support the vision.

Progress and the need for further work will be kept under review. It is also important that the framework is reviewed from time to time and evolves to ensure it remains progressive and future proof.

The advisory group will be responsible for this.



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