

Waste: Household Recycling

December 2017

Key findings

- London needs to recycle much more of its waste. Recycling rates have broadly stayed the same for several years and it will be difficult to meet the recycling targets set out in the Mayor's draft Environment Strategy if certain issues are ignored.
- Many of the recycling quick wins have already been achieved in London – a number of boroughs provide a full kerbside recycling service and waste authorities have done much to improve their processes already.
- The Mayor has set out a number of policies to increase household recycling in his draft Environment Strategy. But, from the evidence we have heard, we think that further measures will be needed.
- More waste will have to be recycled from London's flats. In particular, all boroughs should provide segregated food waste collection from all dwellings, including flats – this not only encourages people to waste less food (and therefore save money), it also increases recycling and reduces the amount sent to landfill and energy from waste incinerators – saving taxpayers money.
- Households will need further encouragement to recycle. Measures such as limiting bin sizes, reducing the frequency of residual waste collections, and fines for households that don't recycle may have a role to play. All measures must be considered urgently.*



The Household Recycling report forms part of a larger investigation into waste management. The committee published a report looking at the circular economy in London in September, and will publish a report on energy from waste in early 2018. All three topics will become part of a final report that will be launched in spring 2018. If you have any questions, please contact environment.committee@london.gov.uk

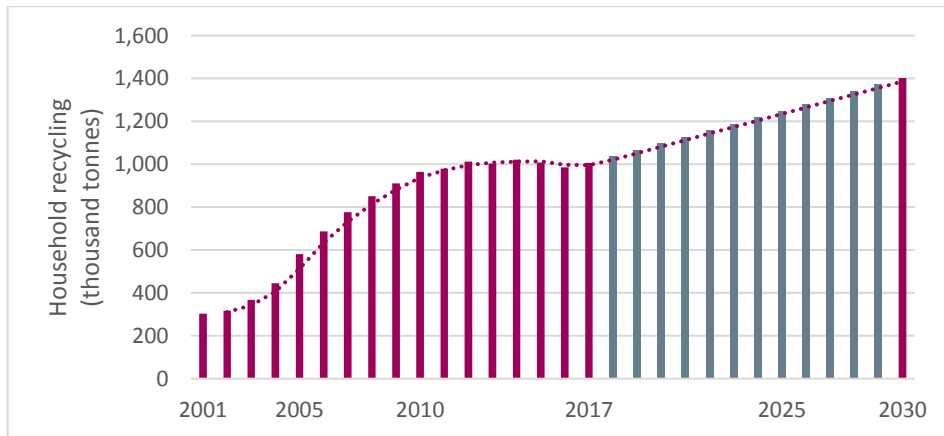
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Household Recycling in London

Not enough household waste is being recycled in London. London's recycling rate has broadly stayed the same for several years and continues to lag behind the national average – despite increasing kerbside recycling services, awareness raising and advancements in waste management technology.

Diagram 1: Households will need to continually increase their recycling to reach Mayoral targets of 42 per cent¹



As well as being bad for the environment, this is costing London financially. In our previous waste management report, we explored how increasing waste and dropping recycling rates will affect London's

economic growth.² As the cost of sending waste to landfill increases, taxpayers will end up footing the bill if recycling rates don't improve.

The average London household recycling rate must increase by almost a third by 2030 if the Mayor's overall recycling target is to be met. The Mayor has set a headline target of 65 per cent of London's waste to be recycled by 2030, mirroring the target set out in the EU Waste Framework Directive. To achieve this, the average London household recycling rate must increase from 33 per cent to 42 per cent. For individual households, this means increasing recycling by a third – an extra 57kg per year.³ Currently, only six boroughs recycle this proportion of household waste, and the evidence we heard suggests that currently, it will be extremely difficult to reach the Mayor's target by 2030.

Diagram 2: Every year, each London household will need to recycle an extra 57kg, the equivalent to either...⁴



4000 aluminium cans



2000 plastic milk cartons



2000 Christmas cards

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Waste contractors believe that the “the low hanging fruit” of recycling has already been picked. Many households willing to recycle already do so and there have already been major advances in collection methodology, sorting technology and material processing. The Joint Waste Disposal Authorities (representing East, North, West London and Western Riverside waste authorities) said that “further increases are only observed when structural changes are made to collection services”.⁵

Many boroughs already provide a comprehensive household recycling service. For example, Camden already recycles the six main waste streams, provides weekly food waste collections and gives incentives to its residents for recycling in the form of ‘Green Points’ which can be used in local businesses. Yet Camden’s recycling rate is just 27 per cent.⁶

The Mayor’s draft Environment Strategy sets out a number of measures which aim to increase household recycling, that we broadly support:

- Increasing the number of homes that receive a separate food waste collection service. Ealing reportedly saves between £1.7 and £2.3 million a year by transferring dry recyclable and food waste recycling out of residual waste.⁷ According to The Waste and Resources Action Programme’s 2017 report on waste disposal gate fees, anaerobic digestion fees were £26 per tonne, compared to £32 per tonne for landfill gate fees (excluding landfill tax).⁸
- Ensuring that all kerbside serviced properties receive a collection of the six main dry recycling materials (glass, cans, paper, card, plastic

bottled and mixed plastics). We were told that this provision, alongside food waste, was “absolutely critical” to achieving the Mayor’s recycling targets.⁹ Standardising the type of recyclate collected will also improve the quality of recycled material.

- Power of direction to ensure general conformity. Waste authorities are expected to notify the Mayor when tendering for waste contracts. This gives the Mayor a clear opportunity to influence and ensure that the final waste contract is in general conformity with the Environment Strategy.
- Supporting efforts to increase recycling from flats. Currently 50 per cent of London’s housing stock is flats, making an effective recycling service in this housing type imperative to increasing recycling in London overall.¹⁰ The London Waste and Recycling Board (LWARB) Flats Taskforce is considering the challenges of recycling in flats and is currently piloting a range of schemes to address these. The findings will be used to inform better recycling in flats for housing providers and waste management companies.

However, we do not think that these measures will be enough to drive the significant increase in household recycling that is required, and further action is needed in two key areas: recycling from flats, and encouraging households by providing London-wide consistency and standardisation.

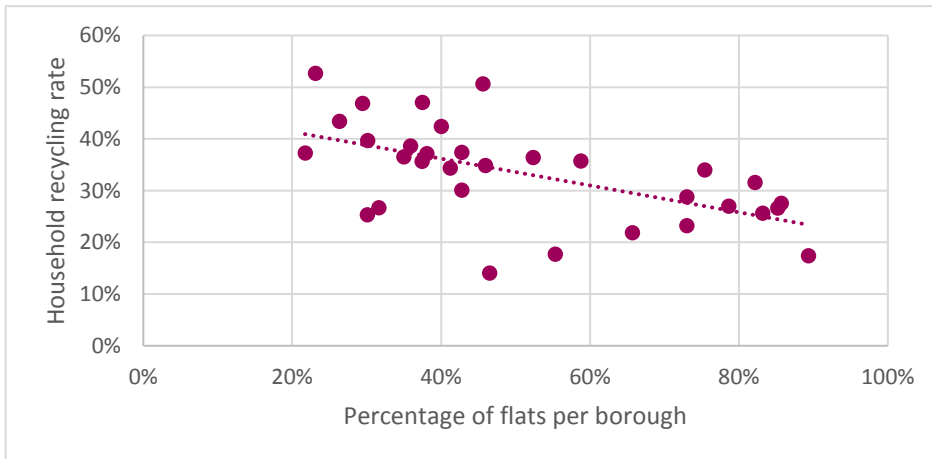
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Recycling more from flats

A greater focus on collections from flats is required if the Mayor's targets are to be met. There is a clear link between housing density and recycling rates, as the chart below shows.

Diagram 3: Boroughs with more flats tend to have lower recycling rates¹¹



According to the London Waste and Recycling Board, there will need to be a 40 per cent uplift of recycling in flats if the Mayor's overall recycling target is to be met by 2030.¹² But increasing recycling in flats is notoriously difficult: WRAP found that a flat recycling service yields 50 per cent less recycling than average low-rise properties.¹³

Space inside and outside of flats was flagged as an obstacle to increasing recycling. Councils have found it difficult to get residents to separate waste where they do not have space for multiple bins in the home or on the doorstep. However, greater housing density means fewer trips for waste collectors, meaning lower costs per tonne. Bearing in mind that food waste makes up nearly 20 per cent of London's total waste, it is crucial that all boroughs collect this from flats.¹⁴ Yet fewer than half of boroughs offer a separate food waste service for flats, including some of the most densely populated boroughs.

While the Mayor wants waste authorities to provide all kerbside properties with six dry recycling streams and separate food waste collections by 2020, he has merely asked them to "look to provide this to flats where feasible".¹⁵ We think this lacks ambition and ask the Mayor to think again, especially considering the ongoing increase in flats as a housing type in London.

The Mayor is keen to increase recycling in flats but further action is needed if we are to encourage London's growing population to recycle. Support for, and funding of, waste authorities who are working towards increased recycling is included in the draft Environment Strategy. The Mayor also intends to seek further funding through LWARB, however the draft Strategy doesn't state how much this is and from whom. The London Plan offers the opportunity to address recycling capacity in new developments and could ensure that London's homes are equipped with adequate recycling provisions.

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Encouraging households

Due to London's transient population, increased consistency of recycling systems is required. Nearly a third of households in the private rented sector have moved in the last year.¹⁶ This makes engagement with recycling services challenging, especially as there is not a single recycling system in London: each time someone moves to a different borough they are expected to learn a different recycling system. Veolia, a waste management company which provides waste services to 40 per cent of Londoners, said "London-wide co-ordination with regard to recycling and separation of recyclates should be encouraged".¹⁷

Restricting residual waste, either through capacity or reducing the frequency of collections, is proven to increase recycling. Currently, most London boroughs still collect residual waste on a weekly basis. But when residents are provided with smaller bins or less frequent collections, they are 'nudged' into recycling more of their residual waste. Ealing saw recycling increase from 43 to 51 per cent when it changed from weekly to fortnightly collections of residual waste.¹⁸

The use of fines can increase recycling and reduce contamination. Previously, the option of fining residents was readily available to local councils and many found that it had a positive effect on recycling rates. By adopting a compulsory approach to recycling, Harrow increased its recycling rate from 27 to 46 per cent.¹⁹ However, following the

Deregulation Act 2015, this process has been made lengthy, resource intensive and ultimately less cost-effective. Of course, fines are controversial and would require a major programme of public engagement. But it has previously received cross-party support among London boroughs, and the Mayor has a role to play in exploring how this could be introduced across London.

Recycling in Milan

Milan's municipal recycling rate is 54 per cent, having increased by nearly 20 percentage points since 2011. Recycling rates increased following the introduction of enforcement activities and a separate food waste collection service, among other incentives.

Density has not been a barrier to increasing recycling in Milan – a city where 80 per cent of the 1.3 million habitants live in high rise buildings. Dry recyclates are collected once a week and food waste twice a week.

Fines have been put in place to help reduce contamination and maximise recycling. A dedicated crew of inspectors perform visual checks before collection and give fines for impurities, such as plastics in the food waste.

Extensive communication and education campaigns were key to the programme's success. At the start, residents were provided with a 10 litre vented kitchen bin along with a roll of 25 compostable bags. The programme has been a major success, with 90 per cent of residents involved satisfied with the new collection scheme.²⁰

Endnotes

*The Conservative Group add that targeted fines led by the local authorities are to be considered, taking into consideration vulnerable people who may not be able to recycle.

¹ DEFRA (2017) *Local authority collected waste management – annual results 2016-17*, available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results> [accessed on 20/12/17]

² London Assembly Environment Committee (2017) *Waste: The Circular Economy*, available online at <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/london-assembly/london-assembly-publications/waste-circular-economy> [accessed on 20/12/17]

³ GLA calculation from 2016-17 *Waste Data Flow*, N191 and N192 indicators and [GLA population estimates](#) to 2030

⁴ GLA calculation from 2019-17 *Waste Data Flow*, N191 and N192 indicators and [GLA population estimates](#) to 2030 and weight of [aluminium cans](#), [plastic milk cartons](#) and [greeting cards](#)

⁵ Evidence submitted to the investigation by the Joint Waste Disposal Authorities

⁶ DEFRA (2017) *Local authority collected waste management – annual results 2016-17*, available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results> [accessed on 20/12/17]

⁷ Evidence from Councillor Bassam Mahfouz, meeting of the Environment Committee, 9 November 2017

⁸ WRAP (2017) *Gate fees report 2017: Comparing the costs of waste treatment options*, available online at

<http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/WRAP%20Gate%20Fees%202017%20Infographic.pdf> [accessed on 30/10/17]

⁹ Evidence from Antony Buchan, meeting of the Environment Committee, 9 November 2017

¹⁰ Greater London Authority (2017) *The London Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2017 – Part of the London Plan evidence based*, available online at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2017_london_strategic_housing_land_availability_assessment_0.pdf accessed on [20/12/2017]

¹¹ DEFRA (2017) *Local authority collected waste management – annual results 2016-17*, available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results> [accessed on 20/12/17]

¹² Evidence from Antony Buchan, meeting of the Environment Committee, 9 November 2017

¹³ Evidence provided by Resource London and LWARB Flats and Recycling Programme Evaluation Report (2013) available online at <http://www.lwarb.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Flats-Programme-Report-final.pdf> [accessed on 20/12/17]

¹⁴ Mayor of London (2017) *Draft London Environment Strategy*, available online at <https://www.london.gov.uk/WHAT-WE-DO/environment/environment-publications/draft-london-environment-strategy> [accessed on 20/12/17]

¹⁵ Mayor of London (2017) *Draft London Environment Strategy*, available online at <https://www.london.gov.uk/WHAT-WE-DO/environment/environment-publications/draft-london-environment-strategy> [accessed on 20/12/17]

¹⁶ London Assembly Housing Committee (2016), *At Home with Renting – Improving security for London’s private renters*, London, London Assembly

¹⁷ Evidence submitted to the investigation by Veolia

¹⁸ Evidence from Resource London

¹⁹ London Assembly Environment Committee, (2011) *Carrots and Sticks – A review of waste financial reward and compulsory recycling schemes*, London, London Assembly

²⁰ Milano Recycle City, (2016) *Food waste recycling: the case study of Milan – Milano Recycle City*, available online at https://issuu.com/giorgioghiringhelli/docs/food_waste_recycling_the_case_study [accessed on 30/10/17]