

Simpler recycling collections and tougher regulation to reform waste system

To: ALL APSE main contacts (England)

1 Executive Summary

On the 21st of October the government announced further reforms to household and business bin collections with a further crackdown on unscrupulous waste carriers also announced. The government suggests such changes will boost recycling rates and protect the environment.

2 Key points

The government's aim is for the simpler approach to recycling to help people across England be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school, putting an end to confusion over what can and can't be recycled in different parts of the country.

The announcement also confirmed weekly collections of food waste will also be introduced for most households across England by 2026, with the intention of this being that 'smelly waste' is not waiting weeks for collection and cutting food waste heading to landfill. The government suggests that this move will stop a trend towards three- or four-weekly bin collections seen in some local authorities across the UK.

New exemptions are designed to ensure that waste collectors will be able to collect dry recyclables together, in the same bin or bag, and collect organic waste together, to reduce the number of bins required.

As was previously confirmed by the Prime Minister, the new plans for simpler recycling will make sure that households will not need an excessive number of bins. Though APSE must once again emphasise that there was never a proposal to compel households to have seven

bins as was misleadingly announced.

The government suggest that the reforms should bring in a more convenient and practical system which prevents councils from being hit with extra complexity, while making sure all local authorities collect the required recyclable waste streams: glass; metal; plastic; paper and card; food waste; and garden waste.

This, it is argued, will also means manufacturers can design packaging and know it can be recycled across the nation, ensuring there is more recycled material in the products we buy and allowing the UK recycling industry to grow.

3 Where will the changes apply?

The plans will apply to all homes in England, including flats. Similar measures will apply to non-household municipal premises, and will also include businesses, hospitals, schools and universities.

4 Regulatory measures and digital waste tracking

The plans will be supported by a major new effort to clamp down on untrustworthy waste operators and ensure that waste ends up where it's supposed to be. This includes increasing background checks for firms who move or trade waste, to make it harder for rogue operators to find work and easier for regulators to act against criminals.

Plans to overhaul the current system for tracking how waste is handled will also improve the way data is currently collected, strengthening regulators' abilities to detect waste crime through a new system for digital waste tracking which will record information from the point it is produced to the point it is disposed of – giving them the evidence they need to hold criminals to account.

5 Other measures

The package announced builds on wider efforts to increase recycling and reduce waste. New restrictions on single-use plastic plates, trays, bowls, cutlery, balloon sticks, expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers came into force on 1 October in order to reduce plastic pollution and keep streets clean. The government are also moving forward with the implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers and Extended Producer Responsibility scheme (dates to be confirmed) for packaging to boost recycling and clamp down on plastic pollution and litter.

6 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the new announcements with councils best set to decide how to collect a consistent set of materials for their areas. The simpler recycling statement is a step forward to improving the quantity and quality of materials that are collected. The announcements should help to make planning and waste operations more efficient for local authorities, packaging producers, and waste managers.

However, there remains uncertainty on a number of key areas of policy. The Deposit Return Scheme in Scotland, which is now effectively suspended, is a case in point of the practical difficulties which are faced in implementing wide-scale changes. Similarly, the Extended Producer Responsibility Regulations (EPR) for packaging fees have been deferred for 1 year. Fees were due to start in October 2024 but will now start in October 2025. This has led to retail groups complaining that proposed regulations for EPR are unclear and do not explain how the scheme administrator would allocate fees.

Similarly, some industry analysts have argued that if EPR proved to be a success, then DRS for drinks containers might become unnecessary through improved recycling rates and consistency in collections, allowing materials to continue to be collected at the kerbside. From a local authority perspective however, there are equally concerns that the EPR scheme administrator would have powers to withhold payments from local authorities based on performance, and issue local authorities with improvement notices. This appears to be a significant leap in regulatory powers for the scheme administrator given the original purpose of EPR was to ensure the cost of packaging, within the waste stream, was to transfer from councils to producers.

There are also concerns on a number of definitions which could have unintended consequences, for example in the definitions of food packaging waste, and exemptions for compostables.

Therefore, whilst overall the announcements provide some level of certainty major policy areas of DRS and EPR are still creating concerns amongst local authorities. Whilst local councils of course support all endeavours to reduce waste and improve recycling, resources do not always follow need. The local authority waste sector has faced its own pressures with fuel inflation, hitting collections, labour cost increases and workforce shortages, particularly RCV driver shortages.

Finally, APSE rejects the arguments made by the Government that changes to 3 and 4 weekly collections should be discouraged. This is not borne out by the evidence which suggests that such measures can help to minimise residual waste and improve recycling. Moreover, this can prove to be a very efficient way of organising collections. This is supported by data and

analysis provided through [APSE's performance networks service for waste and recycling.](#)

With the right support local authorities will be able to supply solutions that increased recycling rates. However long-term decisions on how to improve services for residents and help with the move towards net zero need to be supported with well-thought through regulatory measures that recognise the core role of local authority waste and recycling services.

Abi Ademiluyi

Principal Advisor

Email: AAdemiluyi@apse.org.uk

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Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
fax: 0161 772 1811
web: www.apse.org.uk

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