Household Recycling Code of Practice

Scottish Government Consultation

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland.
For information only: England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

1 Executive Summary

The Scottish Government is consulting on proposals for a new statutory Household Recycling Code of Practice, intended to establish a more consistent approach to household waste and recycling services across Scotland. The proposed Code will set out the standards expected of local authorities in delivering household recycling collections, aiming to improve recycling rates, reducing residual waste and supporting Scotland's transition towards a circular economy.

The consultation forms part of the Scottish Government's wider ambitions under the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024, the Circular Economy and Waste Route Map, and its Circular Economy Strategy. The proposals seek to make services simpler and more accessible for households, while improving the quality and quantity of materials collected for recycling.

Key proposals include establishing a common set of core recyclable materials, moving towards a minimum twin-stream approach to dry recycling collections, reducing residual waste capacity, strengthening food waste collection arrangements, and improving consistency in waste receptacle colours and recycling communications. The Code also considers accessibility, workforce training and safety, contamination management, and the circumstances in which local authorities may require flexibility in delivering services.

The Scottish Government is seeking views from local authorities and other stakeholders to help shape the final Code before it is published and brought into force. Responses are due by **Thursday 21 January 2027**.

Click here for further information and to submit your response.

Click here to read the full report.

2 Overview

The proposed Household Recycling Code of Practice forms part of the Scottish Government's wider programme to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy, in which resources are kept in use for longer and waste is minimised. The Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 provides

the legislative foundation for the Code, which is also identified as a priority action within the Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030.

The Code is intended to build on Scotland's existing Household Recycling Charter and voluntary Code of Practice, introduced in 2015. Although these measures have helped improve consistency in household recycling services, significant differences remain between local authority areas in the materials collected, collection methods, receptacles, food and garden waste provision, and residual waste capacity. Household recycling rates also vary considerably, ranging from 18.2% to 56.5% across Scottish local authorities in 2025.

The Scottish Government believes that greater consistency could make recycling easier for residents, improve participation, reduce contamination, and increase the quantity and quality of materials recovered. The proposed Code therefore establishes a national framework of expected standards for local authorities delivering household waste and recycling collections. All 32 Scottish local authorities have contributed to its development through a co-design process involving government, industry and other stakeholders.

Once finalised, the Code will be statutory. Under the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024, local authorities will have a duty to set out, through their Integrated Waste Management Plans (IWMPs), how they intend to carry out the functions described in the Code. Where existing services do not align with its standards, councils should explain the reasons and identify any planned actions towards alignment where appropriate.

2.1 Proposed changes to household recycling services

A central proposal is the establishment of a common set of core recyclable materials that households should be able to recycle through local authority services. These include paper and card, plastics (including plastic film), metals, glass, food waste, and food/drink cartons. The inclusion of flexible plastics and plastic film is particularly notable, as these materials have not routinely been collected by most Scottish councils due to for example the financial costs and limited end-markets, despite forming a significant proportion of household plastic packaging.

The Code also proposes a minimum twin-stream approach to dry recycling, separating paper and cardboard from containers such as plastics, metals and cartons. Glass can be collected separately, alongside the container stream, or through bring-bank facilities where authorities can demonstrate equivalent collection quantities and quality. The intention is to improve material quality and reduce contamination, while allowing councils some discretion over collection arrangements.

For residual waste, the Code proposes a maximum effective weekly capacity per household, with 60 litres suggested as the preferred standard. The consultation invites views on whether this should instead be set at 70 or 80 litres. It does not prescribe the specific bin sizes or collection frequencies, allowing authorities to achieve the recommended capacity through flexible service arrangements. Exemptions would also be expected for households with additional needs, such as larger families or those generating unavoidable waste for medical reasons. Communal properties

and households using shared bins would not be subject to the proposed restriction.

The Code also addresses food and garden waste collections. The proposals recommend separate food waste collections, preferably weekly and at least fortnightly, although combined food and garden waste collections would remain acceptable where they do not reduce the quantity of food waste captured. The Scottish Government is also considering extending food waste collections to rural small towns currently covered by the rural exemption. For garden waste, authorities are expected to provide a collection service, while retaining discretion over whether this is free or subscription based. The Code also recommends promoting home and community composting.

2.2 Operational guidance and implications for local authorities

Alongside the proposed service standards, the Code includes operational guidance on recycling communications, standardised waste receptacle colours, accessibility, staff training and safety, and contamination management. Local authorities would be expected to maintain a communications strategy, providing residents with clear and accessible information through appropriate channels. The guidance also recognises the importance of ensuring services accommodate different household needs and that collection staff receive suitable training and support.

The proposed changes will have varying implications depending on the extent to which individual councils already align with the standards. Some authorities may need to adapt collection vehicles, provide additional containers, modify collection routes, or invest in waste transfer and waste treatment infrastructure. Changes to residual waste capacity and food waste provision could also affect staffing, operational arrangements and contracts.

The Scottish Government's modelling estimates that implementing the Code could require approximately £78 million in upfront capital expenditure, primarily for vehicles and new bins. However, the consultation notes that annual local authority operating costs are projected to decrease by between £5 million and £12 million, depending largely on garden waste charging arrangements. A further £24-32 million could be required for changes to waste transfer stations. The overall package is modelled to increase Scotland's household recycling rate by 2.4 to 2.9 percentage points and reduce annual carbon emissions by approximately 50,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide.

The Scottish Government proposes to fund changes required to bring services into alignment with the Code. Efficient and effective costs associated with packaging waste are also expected to be covered through Extended Producer Responsibility payments, although actual costs will depend on existing local authority arrangements and infrastructure.

Importantly, the Code recognises that some flexibility will be necessary where requirements are not technically, economically or environmentally practical (TEEP test). This will be particularly relevant for rural and island communities, communal properties and areas facing specific infrastructure or accessibility constraints. The consultation seeks views on whether a TEEP test provides an appropriate mechanism for authorities to demonstrate where flexibility is required.

3 Consultation Questions

Topic	Questions
Core Materials	2
Dry Recyclable Waste Collections	3
Residual Waste Capacity	5
Organics (Food Waste)	5
Organics (Garden Waste)	4
Communications	2
Operational Guidance	8
Options to Go Further	3
Other	1
About You	8
Evaluation	2

The consultation questions are available in full below:

The draft code of practice contains all of the relevant information for this consultation. You may find it useful to read or refer to while responding.

1. Do you agree with the proposals for core materials and the materials advised to be accepted and not accepted for collection?
   Yes; No

2. What are the reasons for this view?

3. Do you agree with the recommended separation of dry recyclable waste to be a minimum of "twin-stream", separating fibres (paper and cardboard) from containers (plastic including plastic film, metals and cartons)?
   Yes; No

4. Do you agree with the approaches set out for glass collections?
   Yes; No

5. What are the reasons for your views on arrangements set out for dry recyclable waste?

6. What effective weekly capacity for residual waste should the Code of Practice specify?
   60 litres; 70 litres; 80 litres; No restriction; Other (please explain in Q7)

7. Please explain your answer to Question 6.

8. Should the Code of Practice specify the frequency of residual waste collections?
   Yes; No

9. If you answered yes to Question 8, what should the frequency of residual waste collections be set at and why?

10. Are there any property types or household needs that local authorities should provide additional flexibility to with regard to residual waste capacity restrictions?

11. Do you agree that the Code should permit food waste and garden waste to be collected in one container (co-mingled collection system)?
    Yes; No

12. How frequently should food waste collections be provided?
    Weekly; Fortnightly; Other

13. Do you agree that food waste collections should be provided to all households in Urban-Rural Classification areas 1-4?
    Yes; No

14. Please explain your answers to questions 11, 12, and 13.

15. Are there circumstances where a local authority should not be expected to provide a food waste collection service? Examples may include rural and island locations; properties with severe access restraints, or other circumstances.

16. Do you agree that local authorities should offer garden waste collections service for households with private outdoor space, subject to exemptions and flexibilities set out in the Code of Practice?
    Yes; No

17. Do you agree that local authorities should retain discretion to determine whether garden waste collections are provided free of charge or on a paid subscription basis?
    Yes; No

18. Please explain your answers to questions 16 and 17.

19. Are there circumstances where a local authority should not be expected to provide a garden waste collection service? Examples may include rural and island locations, areas with very low demand, and situations where alternative arrangements are already available.

20. Do you agree that communications recommendations should form part of the Code of Practice?

21. How should local authorities AND national government communicate with householders to promote positive recycling and waste behaviours and how should this be reflected in the Code of Practice?

22. Do you agree with the proposal to recommend standard waste receptacle colours?
    Yes; No

23. Do you agree with the colours proposed for waste receptacles?
    Yes; No

24. Do you have any comment on the proposal to recommend standard waste receptacle colours?

25. Do you agree with the accessibility provisions in the Code of Practice?
    Yes; No

26. Do you agree with the staff training and safety provisions in the Code of Practice?
    Yes; No

27. Please explain your answers to questions 25 and 26.

28. Do you agree that a "TEEP test" to consider if the approach proposed in the Code is Technically, Economically, and/or Environmentally Practicable supports local authorities in assessing delivery of the previsions in the Code of Practice?
    Yes; No

29. Please explain your answer to question 28.

30. Should the Code of Practice set out best practice relating to management of the following:
    Batteries and small waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE);
    Mattresses and furniture;
    Textiles;
    Preparation for reuse facilities at household waste recycling centres

31. Please explain your answer to question 30.

32. Are there any other materials, approaches or best practices that should be included in the Code of Practice for materials not discussed within the Code that should be included?

33. Do you have any other comments in relation to the household recycling Code of Practice consultation?

4 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the Scottish Government's efforts to improve consistency in household recycling services and support Scotland's transition towards a circular economy. Establishing clearer national expectations has the potential to make recycling easier for households, improve the quality of collected materials and support better environmental outcomes.

However, the successful implementation of the Code will depend on recognising the considerable differences in how local authorities deliver waste and recycling services. Councils operate across diverse geographical areas, housing types and population demographics, meaning that a consistent national framework must retain sufficient flexibility to accommodate local

circumstances. This is particularly important for rural and island communities where collection distances, infrastructure availability and population density can present distinct operational challenges.

The financial implications also require careful consideration. Although the Scottish Government's modelling anticipates reductions in ongoing operating costs, the upfront investment required for vehicles, containers and supporting infrastructure could be substantial. APSE argues that funding arrangements should be transparent, sufficient and reflective of the actual costs incurred by individual authorities. The proposed relationship with Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding will also need to provide councils with confidence that the resources required to deliver the expected improvements will be available.

APSE also stresses the importance of engaging residents and supporting positive behavioural change. Changes to collection arrangements, particularly restrictions on residual waste capacity, will require clear and sustained communication. Local authorities will have an important role in explaining new requirements, encouraging participation, and addressing contamination, but this will be required to be supported by consistent national messaging and appropriate resources.

Finally, continued partnership working between Scottish Government and local government will be essential as the Code progresses towards implementation. The involvement of all 32 councils in the co-design process is welcome, and their operational experience should remain central to decisions about the final standards and supporting guidance. The TEEP approach will also need to provide a meaningful and proportionate mechanism for recognising circumstances where particular requirements cannot reasonably be delivered.

APSE encourages its members to engage with the consultation and highlight both the opportunities and practical challenges associated with the proposed changes. The final Code should provide an ambitious framework for improving recycling performance while recognising local circumstances, supporting effective service delivery, and ensuring that councils have the financial and operational capacity to meet its expectations.

5 How can APSE help?

Discussions on the way forward with recycling rates and the sharing of best practice continue to take place in APSE Scotland's Waste and Recycling Network with the latest meeting taking place on Friday 27 November, click here to register to attend. All of our network meetings are free to attend for APSE members, with previous presentations available online here and upcoming meetings listed here.

APSE has continued to ensure its members have been kept up to date with developments and progress of the Code of Practice with regular presentations from Scottish Government and APSE local authority members of the co-design working group. With presentations at both the May Scottish Fleet, Waste and Grounds event and the recent APSE Scotland Waste and Recycling Network in Dundee.

All APSE members can access the APSE Scotland network, which provides updates, information, and opportunities to engage with colleagues across local government in Scotland. Members can keep up to date with regional activities, events, policy developments, and networking opportunities by visiting the Scotland members' area. You can access the network using this link: APSE Scotland

David Hinds,
Research and Information Officer
dhinds@apse.org.uk

Louise Melville,
Principal Policy Lead (Scotland)
lmelville@apse.org.uk

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all in-person meetings end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Recycling and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.

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

Carbon Literate Organisation Platinum

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™ We invest in people Gold

NEW MUNICIPALISM
Delivering for local people and local economies