

WASTE STRATEGY: CONSISTENCY IN COLLECTIONS BRIEFING

Report of the Director of Place Management

CONSISTENCY IN HOUSEHOLD AND BUSINESS RECYCLING IN ENGLAND

Introduction/Background

As part of the Government's progress on implementing the English Resources and Waste Strategy it has published a second consultation on consistency in household and business recycling in England. The proposals contained therein – if implemented as described – have the potential to significantly change household and business waste management.

This briefing note outlines the proposals within the consultation and summarises the potential impacts for Greater Manchester. This consultation sits alongside those for:

- The National Waste Prevention Plan;
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Packaging; and
- A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).

Consistency in Collections Summary

The Government expects the measures set out in the consultation could help to:

- Increase the quantity and quality of household and business recycling;
- Make recycling easier for householders and support comprehensive waste and recycling collections through establishing minimum service standards;
- Give confidence to packaging producers that an increased amount of quality recyclable material will be collected and returned to secondary materials markets;
- Improve investor confidence and help increase UK-based recycling capacity and minimise dependence on overseas export markets for recycling;
- Ensure an increased amount of separately collected food waste and garden waste can be recycled through anaerobic digestion and composting;
- Improve estimates for future recycling and residual waste treatment infrastructure;
- Ensure only what is necessary is sent for energy recovery or landfill helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and
- Significantly increase job creation in collection implementation, promotion and management of the new services.

The Government wants England to recycle more and improve resource efficiency. In achieving these aims the Government believes householders want consistent, reliable and easily understandable waste collection services. Building on the first consultation, the second makes a number of proposals across the spectrum of collections.

The Collection of Dry Recycling from Households

The Government wants to provide clarity on what dry recycling should be collected – these ‘core materials’ are proposed to be:

- Plastics including pots, tubs and trays (PTTs), plastic ‘films’ and ‘flexible’ packaging;
- Metal packaging (aluminium and steel cans), aerosol cans and foil/foil trays;
- Mixed paper and card;
- Glass bottles and jars; and
- Cartons (mixed with plastics stream).

These should be collected separately from households to improve quantity and quality and should be collected from at least October 2023 to coincide with the first payments from the EPR system. Plastics films will be delayed until 2026/27 so that a number of operational challenges can be addressed.

Implications for collections across Greater Manchester (putting separate collection aside for the moment) include:

- The addition of PTTs would be welcomed by the public but would require modification to our materials recycling facility – this may not be achieved by October 2023 and would require investment;
- Cartons – we currently collect these with paper and card so wouldn’t be an addition but would require an exemption from collecting with the plastics stream; and
- Plastic films – DEFRA is seeking views on how these should be collected as very few authorities collect films and flexible packaging at the kerbside.

Separate Weekly Collection of Food Waste

The Government is clear on wanting food waste collected separately on a weekly basis from 2023/24. However, collected food waste mixed with garden waste on a weekly basis may be something we can demonstrate is the better option for Greater Manchester. Implications of weekly separate food waste collections across Greater Manchester include:

- Significant increase in fleet numbers - many district depots would struggle to accommodate this growth. There would also be an increase in vehicle emissions as well as a contribution to congestion across the conurbation;
- If we are required to collect food waste separately from garden waste households would require an additional set of containers; and
- Our biowaste treatment contracts are set to expire at the end of March 2026 – this provides time to develop our strategy for biowaste from 2026.

Garden Waste Collection

The Government was keen to see every household access free garden waste collections reversing any existing chargeable services but this was not universally supported. Further views are being sought but if implemented this proposal would have no impact on garden waste collections across GM but perhaps limit future changes.

The Separate Collection of Recyclable from Households

In the first instance the Government wishes to see plastics, fibres, glass and metals all collected separately (add to that food waste, garden waste and non-recyclable waste that is seven waste streams). However, mixing plastic and metal or glass and metal may be acceptable.

It is recognised that this level of separate collection may not be technically, environmentally and economically practicable in all cases. A process of demonstrating why separate collections are not practicable is proposed with assessments reviewed by the Environment Agency. Grounds suggested for not providing separate collections could include:

- Technical practicability – the impact of housing stock (e.g. flats, HMOs, student accommodation), rurality, availability of suitable containers, storage of containers at properties, and storage in existing waste infrastructure;
- Economic practicability - local authorities will need to demonstrate that their specific financial costs (caused by their local circumstances) makes it significantly more expensive to have separate collections based on technical grounds;
- Environmental practicability - local authorities will need to make the case that separate collection is of no significant environment benefit based on, for example greenhouse gas emissions, reject tonnages, lifts per vehicle and journey length.

Implications for Collections across Greater Manchester

In considering these three grounds for exception to separate collection to some extent the economic argument cannot be applied. The EPR regime is going to pay local authorities for the “effective and efficient” collection of packaging and the weekly collection of food waste will be financially supported by the Government’s new burdens payments. However, there are concerns about the scope of these payments fully capturing increased costs.

On technical practicability – Greater Manchester’s diverse and challenging housing stock does not lend itself for the introduction of a number of new waste containers. Additionally, separate collection requires more vehicles and as mentioned previously the councils do not have the depot space to accommodate an increased fleet.

On environmental practicability – it is interesting the test is ‘no significant environmental benefit’ of adopting separate collections. The research Wood has undertaken for the GMCA has demonstrated that on a carbon metric having weekly kerbside sort collections reduces carbon by less than 2% across the whole waste system compared to our current service.

It should be noted that the consultation is silent on the issue of health and safety. For several years the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been looking closely at waste collection. Initially it was the transition from sack collections to wheeled bins but now it focuses on the use of recycling boxes and the hand sorting of materials (generating manual handling, laceration and noise hazards). Our response made reference to this and it is understood DEFRA is consulting with the HSE on how health and safety can fit into assessments.

Minimum Service Standards

The Government will mandate the weekly collection of food waste and is considering the recommendation of minimum service standards of alternate weekly collection of residual waste subject to affordability and value for money.

Non-Household Municipal Collections

The Environment Bill which (the legislative vehicle that implements the proposed changes) also applies to non-domestic premises that produce household waste (e.g. schools and hospitals) and businesses producing commercial waste. Effectively these premises will be required to have the same level of recycling collections as households (a threshold of generation may be set for the collection of food waste). Waste collection companies (including local authorities) will have to provide suitable services.

Funding

The funding of changes is said to be coming from two sources:

- the Government's new burdens 'budget' to cover the costs of implementing weekly food waste collections; and
- the packaging EPR payments for the collection of packaging for recycling or disposal. As these payments will be based on modelling it is not known as yet whether they will fully fund the collections they cover.

In both cases the scope of the payments is not clear. Some guidance was provided in the EPR consultation but more clarity is needed.

Timescale for Implementation

The Government would like to see changes implemented from 2023 (even if only adding PTTs to plastics). However, it is recognised that one of the big barriers to change is contractual. The Government does not want to foot the bill for the impacts of changing services mid-contract term so will accept the phased introduction of changes until around 2031 where applicable.

Next steps

During the Autumn we will be taking awareness raising reports to Members and senior officers. Support will be provided to districts if they require it for their own internal awareness raising.

When the Government publishes its response to the consultations we will get a steer on the future direction. There will be further consultations on statutory guidance and minimum service standards probably into 2022.

When we have an indication we can start work on our own household waste management strategy and start to investigate how we manage biowaste in the future.

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Mark Glynn on telephone number Tel: 0161-474-3700 or alternatively email mark.glynn@stockport.gov.uk