

## **The Waste Management Plan for England - January 2021**

This briefing provides a summary of the recently published Government Waste Management Plan for England which provides an analysis of waste management in England.

The briefing will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for waste management in all of its aspects including; strategic planning, waste collection and waste infrastructure management and waste awareness promotion.

Although specifically relevant to English local authorities its content will be of interest to all UK authorities.

### **Key Issues:**

- The Waste Management Plan for England is an analysis of the current waste management situation in England. The plan does not introduce new policies or change how waste is managed in England. Its aim is to bring current waste management policies together under one national plan,
- The goal of government is to maximise the value of the resources used, minimise the waste created and in doing so avoid emissions from the waste sector, driving the wider UK towards the target of net zero emissions by 2050.
- The briefing note will summarise those elements of the plan which APSE feels will have the most immediacy to local authority waste managers and officers, but will also signpost other areas within the plan which will have a wider interest such as strategic waste plans and waste infrastructure.
- APSE has provided regular updates via briefing notes, advisory groups, seminars etc. on the introduction and progress of the wide range of waste legislation which is currently being passed by government, This briefing note, on the updated Waste Management Plan, is the latest in this long line of legislator documents.

## Background

The **25 Year Environment Plan** aims to protect our natural world and leave it in a healthier state for the next generation. It includes commitments to double resource productivity by 2050 and to minimise waste, reuse materials as much as possible, and manage materials at the end of their life to minimise their impact on the environment.

It intends to do this by moving away from the current linear economic model of take, make, use, throw, towards a more circular economy which keeps resources in use for longer so that we can extract maximum value from them as well as minimising the waste we create and therefore avoid emissions from the waste sector, driving us towards the government's target of net zero emissions by 2050.

The **Resources and Waste Strategy** published in 2018 contains five strategic ambitions:

- to work towards eliminating food waste to landfill;
- to double resource productivity;
- to work towards ensuring all plastic packaging placed on the market is recyclable, reusable or compostable;
- to eliminate avoidable waste of all kinds; and
- to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

It sets the framework that will help government, businesses and the public to play their part in reducing the impact of our consumption and the resulting waste on the environment.

Speaking about the plan **Rebecca Pow, Environment Minister stated;**

*'During the lifetime of this Waste Management Plan, we will see significant changes in the way we manage our waste going further to improve recycling rates. Effective waste management can reduce carbon emissions from the waste sector contributing to government's net zero target and a green recovery. Together with the Resources and Waste Strategy, this Plan will play its part in embedding sustainable thinking around waste management and bringing about a real step change in how we consume resources, protecting the planet's natural capital for the benefit of us all – both now and in generations to come'*

## Waste Strategies and Plans – the context

**The Resources and Waste Strategy** sets out a vision and a number of policies to move to a more circular economy, such as waste prevention through policies to support reuse, repair and remanufacture activities.

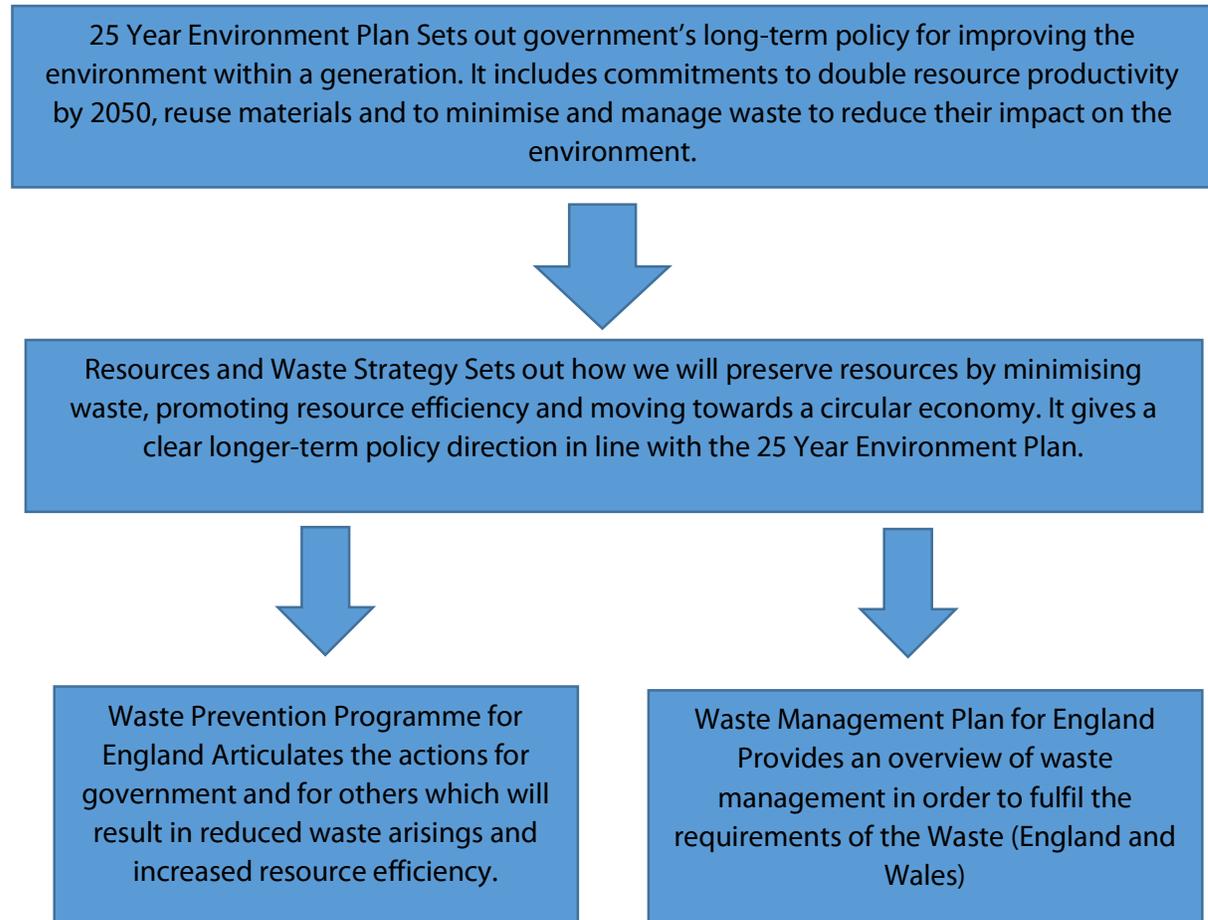
The **Waste Management Plan for England (2021)** the subject of this briefing note, focuses on waste arisings and their management.

It is a high-level, non-site specific document which provides an analysis of the current waste management situation in England and evaluates how the Plan will support implementation of the objectives and provisions of the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011.

It will be supplemented by a **Waste Prevention Programme for England**. This will set out government plans for preventing products and materials from becoming waste, including:

greater reuse, repair and remanufacture supported by action to ensure better design to enable this to be done more easily.

### **Relationship between the Waste Management Plan for England and other waste policy documents**



The 2021 Waste Management Plan for England supersedes the previous waste management plan for England and it provides an overview of waste management in England. The full plan details can be found at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/955897/waste-management-plan-for-england-2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955897/waste-management-plan-for-england-2021.pdf)

### **Wastes covered by the Waste Management Plan**

Within the definition of waste, waste streams are employed to categorise particular types of waste which may be produced by individuals or organisations. Primarily these are:

1. Household waste and commercial waste of a nature similar to household waste
2. Industrial (including agricultural) and other commercial waste

3. Industrial waste - construction and demolition waste

4. Hazardous waste

The Waste Management Plan does not apply to certain wastes covered by other legislation, such as radioactive waste, mining waste, animal by-products and waste waters.

### **Progress to date**

Significant progress has been made in reducing the impact of England's waste arisings. In 2000/20001 only 12% of all local authority managed waste was recycled or composted in England compared to 42.7% in 2018. During the same period, the proportion of local authority waste sent to landfill fell from 79.0% to 10.8%. Positive shifts, such as these, have been driven by a combination of regulatory, policy and financial measures such as recycling targets, landfill tax, and targeted financial support.

### **Managing waste further up the waste hierarchy.**

The waste hierarchy, which ranks options for waste management, has also driven some progress towards better use of our resources. Priority goes to preventing the creation of waste in the first place, followed by preparing waste for reuse; to recycling, and then recovery. Disposal – in landfill for example – is regarded as the worst option. To date England has increased its rates of recovery and recycling and generated much more energy from waste. The focus has been on moving up the waste hierarchy, to minimise the amount of waste produce by improving resource efficiency and keeping products in circulation longer so that they do not become waste.

### **Prevention**

The Resources and Waste Strategy sets out government ambitions for maximising the value of resources and minimising the waste created by moving towards a circular economy. It sets out how reusing products preserves the energy and materials embedded in them during their production and how adopting a 'lifecycle' approach requires us to focus not just on managing waste responsibly, but on **preventing its creation** in the first place. It places a stronger emphasis on sustainable production, emphasising that we need to rethink how we design and make products in order to be more efficient in the way we use our stock of natural resources.

### **Preparing for reuse**

Government is developing proposals for encouraging the **reuse of products** and ensuring that the purchase of sustainable goods and reusing them becomes embedded into our way of life. It includes proposals and actions to make it easier for people and organisations to buy products that are better designed to be re-usable or upgradable, with longer lives and lower environmental impacts. Government has highlighted that for "various reasons", the benefits of reusing products e.g. after remanufacture or reconditioning, are currently not fully realised at present. Some of these reasons are said to include uncertainty about quality, lack of information and high costs when collections are inconsistent.

It is intended to elaborate on future proposals and actions under in the revised Waste Prevention Programme.

### **Improving recycling quality**

The government has been working with local authorities to increase the frequency and quality of waste collections and make it easier to recycle. The government supports comprehensive and frequent rubbish and recycling collections. In 2018, 44.7% of the waste collected from households was recycled, reused or composted. This equates to 394kg of waste generation per person per year, of which 176kg was recycled, composted or reused. However, still more needs to be done, therefore in February 2019 the government published a consultation on measures to increase recycling from households and businesses to support the achievement of a 65% recycling target for municipal waste by 2035. The government published a summary of its response to the consultation in July 2019.

This states that, the government will introduce measures for England to **increase household recycling** by:

- requiring all local authorities to collect a consistent set of dry materials from households in England;
- to collect food waste separately from all households on a weekly basis; and
- to arrange for separate garden waste collection.

These measures are expected to increase recycling from households from current levels to **65% by 2035**.

The government supports local authorities in improving quality and quantity of recycling and has taken a range of further measures to support better quality recycling including:

- An establishment or undertaking that waste paper, metal, plastic or glass should be collected by way of **separate collection**.
- Every waste collection authority, when making arrangements for the collection of waste paper, metal, plastic and glass, should ensure that those arrangements are by way of separate collections.

These duties apply where separate collection is necessary to ensure that waste undergoes preparing for re-use, recycling or other recovery operations and to facilitate or improve preparing for re-use, recycling or recovery, unless that

- collecting waste together results in;
- output of comparable quality,
- separate collection does not deliver the best environmental outcome,
- separate collection is not technically feasible or would entail disproportionate economic costs.

Government has also written to relevant local authority bodies and industry bodies to highlight the risks of glass shards contaminating paper in **mixed collections** and reducing the value of mixed glass overall and to remind operators to give careful consideration to legal obligations when considering comingled collections, especially if glass is included.

Despite these actions, quality has not improved significantly with many local authorities following comingled collections and not separating glass from other materials as recommended

Government therefore wants to help local authorities improve the quality of what is collected for recycling so that its value can also increase. As part of the consultation on consistency in recycling they propose to clarify the requirements of separate collection in law to make these clearer for local authorities and waste operators to follow. They also propose to provide statutory guidance to help with decision making on separate collection and when local authorities should carry out an assessment of the feasibility or otherwise of separately collected recyclable materials.

Following the consultation, government has set out requirements for separate collection of recyclable waste streams in the Environment Bill. This will be supported by statutory guidance and further regulations which will be consulted upon in 2021. The statutory guidance will help waste collectors to meet their duties in relation to separate collection

Operators of **materials recovery facilities** (MRFs) are now required to sample comingled recycling received for sorting, and to report on the levels of contamination recorded for both input and output streams and publishing this sampling data quarterly to provide transparency on the performance of MRF.

### **Separate collection of bio-waste**

The government has a range of measures to encourage the separate collection of bio-waste in England, which is often environmentally the best solution. However, currently, the decision to offer a separate collection of food or garden waste is for local authorities, taking into account local circumstances including logistics, characteristics of the area, and providing the services local people want. Almost all local authorities collect garden waste separately and about 50% collect food waste either on its own or with garden waste, providing quality feedstocks for anaerobic digestion and composting. The government continues to support anaerobic digestion (AD) as the most effective way to treat separately collected food waste to produce energy and bio-fertiliser.

Following on from the consultation on consistency in Spring 2019, government is legislating through the Environment Bill, to **require weekly separate food waste collection from households in England**. In addition, the Environment Bill would also require waste collection authorities to **separately collect garden waste from households**.

In the consultation, there was a range of views on the provision of **free garden waste collections**. Government will therefore give further consideration to the costs and benefits of this measure before making a final decision on whether a free minimum service for garden waste collection should be required, or whether charging should remain a matter for local decision making.

Government has introduced measures to help consumers to be able to recycle the materials they use and dispose of them in the most environmentally sensitive ways. This includes consulting on the introduction of a **deposit return scheme** in England for single-use drinks containers.

Government have also consulted on increasing the successful 5p **plastic bag charge** to 10p and extending the scheme to small retailers. Government will extend the single-use carrier bag charge to all businesses in England and increase the minimum mandatory charge from 5p to 10p. The extension and increase of the charge will enter into force in 2021

### **Treating other wastes**

**Residual waste** generally refers to the waste collected from households or businesses in a black bag or wheelie bin. The government supports **efficient energy recovery** from residual waste – energy from waste is generally the best management option for waste that cannot be reused or recycled in terms of environmental impact and getting value from the waste as a resource. It plays an important role in diverting waste from landfill.

Government also recognises there is an ongoing role for **landfill** in managing waste, particularly for inert waste that cannot be prevented, recovered or recycled, but that its use should be minimised as much as possible.” Such materials, include some hazardous wastes, certain process residues, and waste for which the alternatives to landfill are not justified on cost or environmental and resource efficiency grounds.

### **Covering the costs**

Government has published a Green Finance Strategy which sets out a clear framework for how investment will be increased in key clean growth and environmental sectors. The Resources and Waste Strategy will unlock the increased investment needed in infrastructure to support delivery of those policies and ambitions around financing green investment.

Work to improve waste data will support the Green Finance Strategy’s ambitions. This will enable resources to be kept in use for longer and prevent waste occurring in the first place, and to develop and enhance domestic reprocessing infrastructure, particularly recycling. It welcomes continued further market investment in residual waste treatment infrastructure, particularly where this links up with local heat users or heat networks. The

Strategy commits to ensuring that local authorities are **resourced to meet new net costs arising from the policies in the Strategy**, including up front-transition costs and ongoing operational costs.

Through the Resources and Waste Strategy government has committed to increasing municipal recycling rates from households and from businesses and other establishments that produce waste similar to household waste. Government further consulted on the policy to have greater consistency in recycling in 2019 and included provisions for legislation in the Environment Bill. These reforms will see changes in the collection infrastructure needed for both local authorities and businesses, in particular for the collection and treatment of food waste from businesses and households and garden waste from households.

Government has recognised that where new burdens arise from new statutory duties on local authorities', **government should pay the net costs of these burdens**.

The policies that are summarised in The Waste Management Plan for England are designed to achieve the aims of the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 and the Resources and Waste Strategy. These are:

- to protect the environment and human health by preventing or reducing the generation of waste, the adverse impacts of its generation and management of waste and
- reducing overall impacts of resource use and improving the efficiency of such use.

It is envisaged that the policies will directly affect the extent, nature and treatment of waste streams in the future. Government expect that this will include a continuing reduction in the amount of waste sent to landfill and an increase in the products and material that are reused, recycled or recovered.

### **Measuring success**

In the Resources and Waste Strategy, Government published an indicator framework to be used for monitoring progress against Resource and Waste Strategy policies and commitments.

The framework consists of a breadth of indicators to help government assess progress in increasing resource productivity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, lessening the amount of waste produced and that sent to landfill and increasing recycling.

The government has committed to regularly publishing progress against the indicators and reviewing them on a regular basis to ensure they continue to report progress in the right areas and to ultimately evaluate the success of its waste policies.

### **APSE Comment**

APSE welcomes the Waste Management Plan for England with its aim of reducing the amount of waste we as a country produce and the proposals to re-use, recycle, compost

and gain the maximum benefits from waste to energy whilst limiting the use of landfill as a waste disposal option.

Again improving recycling quality and the wider opportunities to recycle is a welcome proposal and the fact this is tempered with the ability to maintain mixed collections if they can be proved to offer the same quality of materials will be welcome by many local authorities.

The onus will undoubtedly be placed on local authorities to make the Plan's proposals work, but the fact Government has recognised the need to meet any additional costs associated with delivering improved or additional waste management practices will allow councils to have a greater chance of success.

It is critical that Government continues to support the better management of waste, as not only will it allow successes to be used as best practice, but the environmental benefits will be a major factor in alleviating the problems caused by carbon emissions, land and air pollution and threats to biodiversity.

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