

Simpler recycling collections and tougher regulation to reform the waste system

To: ALL APSE main contacts (England)

1. Executive Summary

Following on from the government's announcement on the 21st of October 2023 regarding waste reforms and the introduction of Simpler Recycling collections, the new Labour government on the 29 November 2024 announced a new default requirement for most households and workplaces under the Simpler Recycling collections reforms. This has been done to simplify the rules and make recycling easier for people in England, which the government suggest will stimulate growth and maximise environmental benefits.

2. Key points

The new policy statement sets out the government's approach to delivering Simpler Recycling in England, subject to spending review outcomes.

The government's aim, is for Simpler Recycling to enable consistent, more streamlined collections from all households, businesses and relevant non-domestic premises (such as schools and hospitals). The approach is, the government suggests, to ensure the same set of materials are collected everywhere in England. The reforms will reduce confusion, ending the 'postcode lottery' of bin collections, which will help ensure the correct materials are captured for recycling.

The new default requirement for most households and workplaces includes four containers for:

- Residual (non-recyclable) waste
- Food waste (mixed with garden waste if appropriate)
- Paper and card
- All other dry recyclable materials (plastic, metal and glass)

The waste streams can be collected in container types, including bags, bins or stackable boxes.

Councils and other waste collectors will still have the flexibility to make the best choices to suit local need. The idea is to recycle the same materials across England whether at home, work or school, ensuring that everything that can be collected for household recycling is collected in every region.

The government has published [guidance for local authorities and other waste collectors](#) to support decision-making regarding the co-collection of paper and card with other dry recyclable materials.

The policy has stated that through Simpler Recycling, all householders will receive a comprehensive and consistent set of waste and recycling services and will enable householders to recycle as much waste as possible and to frequently dispose of bad-smelling food waste, which will be collected from all households at least weekly.

It is recognised that as recycling services are expanded and improved, local authorities may want to review residual waste services to ensure they are providing best value for money in line with local need and local authorities to continue to provide services to a reasonable standard.

Defra has published [guidance on household waste collections](#) to ensure that local authorities consider certain factors when they review services, to ensure that reasonable standards are maintained

Supporting circular economy strategy

The government is committed to moving towards a zero waste, circular economy and re building a circular economy strategy and a series of sector-based roadmaps for reform. With the Simpler Recycling in England alongside [Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging](#) and the containers, being steps to meeting the strategy.

Simpler Recycling aims to ensure there is more recycled material in the products we buy, and that high quality recycled material can be sourced domestically, enabling packaging circularity in the UK.

Updated position on co-collection of recyclable waste streams

- **Updated position on co-collecting food and garden waste.**

To maximise flexibility for local authorities and households, the government are introducing an exemption to allow the co-collection of food and garden waste. The guidance states there is no evidence that this would affect their ability to be recycled or composted, since the materials can always be processed through in-vessel composting when mixed.

- **Plan for co-collecting dry materials**

By default, paper and card should be separately collected from all other dry materials so their potential to be recycled is not reduced.

- **All other dry materials may be co-collected**

Local flexibility to co-collect paper and card with other dry materials remains where separate collection is technically or economically impracticable, or provides no significant environmental benefit. Waste collectors will need to produce a short written assessment explaining their decision. This is a link to the [guidance for waste collectors and a template](#) that can be used for this assessment.

If local authorities and other waste collectors want to offer more separate containers for different types of materials, they will be able to do so without completing a written assessment.

Guidance on residual waste collections

Local authorities are already legally required to deliver waste collection services to all households in their area. A weekly food waste collection is already mandated under the Environment Act 2021. Waste collection authorities determine the appropriate approach to residual waste and dry recycling collections in their area.

The [guidance on household waste collections](#) advises local authorities to ensure the following outcomes:

- households receive reasonable residual waste collections (local authorities should consider additional services for particular needs, such as households with medical needs)
- there will be no build-up of bad-smelling waste at kerbside
- changes to collections do not lead to an increase in fly-tipping of residual waste

3. When will the changes apply?

The government will deliver these reforms to previously announced timelines, subject to the outcomes of the forthcoming Spending Review.

The implementation timelines for Simpler Recycling are as previously announced:

- By 31 March 2025, businesses and relevant non-domestic premises in England will need to arrange for the collection of the core recyclable waste streams, with the exception of garden waste (glass, metal, plastic, paper and card, and food waste).
- Micro-firms (businesses with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees) will be temporarily exempt from this requirement. They will have until 31 March 2027 to arrange for recycling of core recyclable waste streams.
- By 31 March 2026, local authorities will be required to collect the core recyclable waste streams from all households in England. This includes introducing weekly food waste collections for most homes, unless a transitional arrangement

applies.

- By 31 March 2027, kerbside plastic film collections from businesses and relevant non-domestic premises, and households will be introduced.

Secondary legislation implementing the policy updates will be laid in December 2024, subject to parliamentary process.

Confirmed position on timeline for micro-firms implementation.

This will proceed with the exemption which means that micro-firms will have until 31 March 2027 to comply with requirements. This provides a realistic timeline for those businesses with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees to make the necessary changes. We recognise there are challenges to these businesses to transition. We will provide advice and support to assist them in complying with the requirements.

4. Next steps

Policies relating to exemptions from the existing legislation are subject to parliamentary approval.

Key upcoming milestones for Simpler Recycling:

- December 2024: lay regulations to confirm exemptions in legislation, subject to parliamentary procedure.
- By end of financial year 2024 to 2025: delivery of transitional resource new burdens funding to local authorities for weekly food waste collections for households

Once this announcement has been made, the government has said they will work with the sector and provide further guidance and tools to support preparation for Simpler Recycling implementation dates, with a particular focus on the 31 March 2025 deadline for businesses and relevant non-domestic premises.

5. APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the policy update and clarifications provided and is pleased to see that comments made by APSE and its member councils have been taken on board with councils now having the flexibility to decide on how to collect waste from properties within the areas they serve, retaining the ability to decide on the frequency of their residual waste collections.

The requirement for a twin-stream approach can improve the quality of materials, however the separate collection of paper and card within certain cases will require additional resource and time for implementation and the potential impact on local authorities that currently collect co-mingle

materials, cannot be overlooked.

With the right support local authorities will be able to supply solutions that increased recycling rates. The Simpler Recycling policy is a positive move towards creating a more sustainable waste management system in England. However, its success will depend on adequate funding/investment, clear communication, and ongoing collaboration between local councils, businesses, and the public.

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