

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 9 MAY 2019

HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING RATE UPDATE REPORT

Report by Director for Planning and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the report and support the communications planned for 2019/20**

Executive Summary

2. At the March 2019 Performance Scrutiny meeting, the Quarter 3 Business Management and Monitoring Report 2018-19 reported that the status of the 'proportion of household waste reused, recycled or composted' had moved from Green to Amber. Our target is a 60% recycling and composting rate, and the report projected an end of year outturn of 58.58%.
3. This report explores the reasons for the this and notes the decline in recycling rates in the county is a trend that has been mirrored nationally. Despite this, in 2017/18 Oxfordshire was the top ranked County Council Waste Disposal Authority in the county.
4. Nationally the government have produced the Resources and Waste Strategy (RaWS) and four associated consultations which the county and districts are jointly responding to.
5. Oxfordshire Local Authorities are also working together to address the immediate issue of stagnating recycling rates including the development of Oxfordshire's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and increased communication to residents to reduce contamination.

Introduction

6. The Quarter 3 Business Management and Monitoring Report 2018-19 reported that the status of the 'Proportion of household waste reused, recycled or composted' had moved from Green to Amber. Our target is a 60% recycling and composting rate, and the report projected an end of year outturn of 58.58%.
7. While slightly under our target, this recycling and composting rate is still amongst the very best in England. In 2017/18 Oxfordshire had a recycling rate of 57.2% and was the top ranked County Council Waste Disposal Authority (CCWDA) in the country.

8. Nationally recycling rates have stalled, and in some places started to decline, and Oxfordshire’s experience is in line with this national picture. This report details some of the issues, and the action that we are taking to address them.

Current reuse, recycling and composting rates

9. In a two-tier waste authorities the District and City Councils are responsible for providing a kerbside waste collection service, and the County Council are responsible for providing waste disposal services and Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). In Oxfordshire the District and City councils make their own arrangements to manage the dry recycling they collect at the kerbside (paper, card, glass etc) and use County Council contracts to recycle their food and green waste, and to dispose of any non-recyclable waste at the Energy Recovery Facility at Ardley.
10. Oxfordshire has had the highest reuse, recycling and composting rate of any CCWDA for 7 years running (some Unitaries have higher recycling and composting rates). Early introduction of household food waste collections and adoption of easy to use co-mingled recycling collections helped Oxfordshire reach the top spot with 57.2%, but other authorities are now catching us up and the gap is reducing. This year Buckinghamshire County Council is at 56.6% and Cambridgeshire County Council at 54.8%.
11. As well as including waste collected from the HWRCs, Oxfordshire County Council’s rate includes all the household recycling and composting collected by the city and district councils who are also performing very well in the league tables (Table 1). Three of the five authorities are in the top 10 Waste Collection Authorities in the country, and when compared to other City Councils, Oxford City is in the top 3. (Recycling in a city has different challenges – there is far less green waste to collect for composting than in a rural authority, and with a large student population Oxford City has a population turnover of around 25% each year requiring repeated, intensive communications.)

Table 1: Recycling and composting rates

Authority	% Reuse, recycling or composting rate	Position in league table 2017/18	Position in league table 2016/17
Disposal Only Authorities			
Oxfordshire County Council	57.2%	1	1
Collection Only Authorities			
Cherwell District Council	55.6%	25	23
Oxford City District Council	50.8%	50	66

South Oxfordshire District Council	63%	1 (joint)	2
Vale of White Horse District Council	60.4%	7	4
West Oxfordshire District Council	59.6%	10	3

13. A misclassification error has been identified with Vale of White Horse quarter four returns for garden waste which has impacted on their overall result. The correct reuse, recycling and composting rate for 2017/18 was 62.36% not 60.4% as reported. This would have resulted in Vale of White Horse being fourth in the WCA league table. This error has been reported to Defra and while they have a policy of not correcting data at this stage they have stated they will make the revision in time for the next release of data in November 2019. This will also raise the county recycling rate to 57.6%

Challenges to improving recycling and composting rates

14. There are a number of factors impacting Oxfordshire's recycling rates:
- a. Nationally recycling rates have stagnated, and for the first time in 2016 they fell. Changes in legislation impacted the recycling rates of all local authorities and a lack of national policy and focus combined with the impact of austerity meant councils across the country had focused their attentions elsewhere. Residents have also become increasingly confused with the wide range of materials use by manufacturers that they needed to correctly identify for recycling which combined with less communications from the councils has had a detrimental impact.
 - b. In January 2018 the Chinese Government introduced new import rules for certain types of waste. This has led to the UK needing to seek new markets to send our recyclables to, and an increased pressure to ensure that these materials are free from contamination. This has had a direct impact on the tonnage of materials 'rejected' from recycling plants and needing to be sent for disposal.
 - c. Consumer habits are also changing – many now source their news through online channels rather than reading a paper, reducing the amount of paper sent for recycling. Improving technology means lighter packaging materials (such as thinner glass bottles and jars) or new ways of packaging products (such as refills sold in laminated pouches). These have been highly successful in reducing transport costs (and associated carbon impacts), but also reduce the tonnage of material sent for recycling. Unfortunately, in some cases the new packaging is not recyclable at all and adds to residual waste tonnages.
 - d. Green waste tonnages fluctuate from year to year as they are highly dependent on the weather and this can have a significant impact on our countywide recycling rates. Summer 2018 was exceptionally hot and

dry, and this reduced the amount of green waste sent for composting by 1497t. If composting tonnages had been similar to 2017, this would have increased our countywide recycling rates to 59.11%

Actions underway to address the issues

National Action:

15. In December 2018, a national Resources and Waste Strategy (RaWS) was released. The Strategy is bold and ambitious and has the potential to transform the waste industry, and the involvement of local authorities in managing waste. Government is keen to preserve our stock of material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving towards a circular economy.
16. In February 2019 the Government followed up RaWS by releasing 4 consultations (detail provided in Appendix 1). The Government hope that, once implemented, these will work together to ensure manufactures produce products made of recycled content, that are able to be recycled, and that they cover the costs of managing the materials at the end of their life. These drivers will incentivise local recycling and manufacturing markets to develop and reduce our reliance on sending waste overseas. Local Authority (LA) collections will be altered so that a consistent range of materials are collected, in a consistent way. LA will receive funding from manufacturers to cover some of our costs. Policies are expected to start in 2023.
17. While these proposals have the potential to dramatically reduce the environmental impact of the waste we as a country produce, it will change the LA role in the process. If material is removed from our control, our recycling rates may fall (while the national recycling rate rises). The changes also have the potential to increase our costs; it has been stated that Government will cover the cost of new burdens on LA, and funding from product manufactures should also reach LA, but the exact implications of this are not yet known.
18. We are working through the consultations as a county, to assess their impact and formulate our responses. We are also linked in with the National Association of Waste Disposal Officers (NAWDO), Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC), Association of Directors for Environment, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP) and the Local Government Association (LGA) to ensure that LA interests and concerns are represented.

Local Action:

19. Oxfordshire Local Authorities are working together to address the immediate issue of stagnating recycling rates, and the longer-term changes proposed:
 - a. Oxfordshire's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) has been agreed by The Oxfordshire Environment Partnership (OEP) and is currently in the process of being adopted by all partners. The

strategy sets out how we will work together over the next 5 years to reduce waste arisings and increase recycling rates. It includes ambitious recycling and composting targets of 65% by 2025.

- b. At the March 2019 meeting of the OEP all authorities agreed to jointly fund a Partnership Officer post. This role will help us to implement the JMWMS and navigate the changes that the RaWS changes will bring. It will investigate the potential of closer partnership working, joint contracts and sharing savings.
- c. Communications to residents have been increased to focus on reducing contamination rates and increasing recycling. Examples include a successful 'Recycle week' campaign in September 18 focusing on plastics; seasonal promotions focused on recycling pumpkin waste and Christmas leftovers; door knocking which has increased food waste tonnages; recycling wheels and other literature have been issued to help residents place materials in the correct bin; removing as many old 360 litre residual bins and replacing them with 180 litre wherever possible; using clear sided bins in flats to reduce contamination and increase accountability; and supporting the 'Great British Spring Clean'.
- d. Councils are also focused on helping residents to reduce the amount of waste being produced in the first place. We have established a reuse scheme at Dix Pit HWRC; In response to growing interest in using washable nappies we have established 2 new trial kit holders in the county and provided extra trial kits to those with a long waiting list; we have supported 'Refill' across the county, increasing the number of places where residents can fill up water bottles; Through the Community Action Group Project we have established community fridges in a number of locations and provided training to others interested in establishing them; run very successful repair cafes across the county to keep electricals in use for longer and supported the establishment of a 'library of things' so that residents can borrow items they only need occasionally rather than purchasing them.

20. We are currently planning communications for 2019/20 and anticipate that alongside continued efforts to reduce recycling contamination we will carry out campaigns on food waste recycling and fly tipping. Major events planned for this year include the 'Oxfordshire Reuses' event during Oxfordshire Green week (8-16 June 2019), as well as continued talks to community groups and schools.

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Annex 1:

EPR, DRS, Consistency and Plastic Packaging Tax Consultations

This briefing outlines the contents of four consultations released in February 2019 that were highlighted in the Resources and Waste Strategy published in December 2018. The consultations cover:

- Consistent collections including food waste and free garden waste
- Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging and the concept of full net cost recovery for local authorities
- Deposit Return Scheme (beverage containers) for the UK
- Taxing plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content

All four consultations run for 12 weeks with a closing date of 12 May for the plastic packaging tax one and 13 May for the other three. Over 300 questions are asked across the 4 consultations. The consultations are seeking opinions on principals rather than detail, and while impact assessments have been produced for each, it is not yet possible to work out the exact implications and costs or benefits for individual authorities.

Officers from all Oxfordshire Authorities are coordinating to develop responses to the four consultations with the aim of submitting one response on behalf of all of us, as well as individual responses.

Subject to the outcome of these consultations there will be further consultations in late 2019 or early 2020 on the detail of proposals, regulatory changes to implement these measures and supporting guidance.

The Government has again stated that Local Authorities would receive funding to cover any additional burdens placed on them resulting from legislative change.

Summary of Consistency Consultation

This consultation is concerned with having consistent collections and recycling to improve the quantity and quality of municipal waste recycled in England. It directly impacts on local authority waste collections and is looking at proposals for all waste collection authorities to:

- collect the same core set of dry recyclable materials from households (plastic bottles and plastic pots tubs and trays, glass packaging (bottles and jars), paper and card, and metal packaging). Views are being sought on whether cartons, flexible plastics and black plastics should also be included.
- have separate weekly food waste collections from households

Other measures that are also contained within the consultation are:

- whether waste collection authorities should provide a free garden waste collection service for households with gardens
- how to achieve greater separation of dry materials in collections, especially paper and glass to improve the quality of dry recyclables collected from households (should recycling collections be comingled, 2 stream (separate glass) or multistream.
- having standardised bin colours for waste and recycling
- whether statutory guidance on minimum service standards for waste and recycling services should be introduced, including collection frequency
- how to develop non-binding performance indicators to support local authorities to deliver high quality and quantity in recycling and waste management
- how to support joint working between local authorities on waste;
- alternatives to weight-based targets;

It is hoped that the measures in this consultation and the others will help achieve a recycling rate of 65% by 2035.

Following legislation there is a stated expectation that local authorities would transition to consistency at the point of next contract renewal or whenever is the cheapest to do so. There is a recognition that there needs to be enough lead time for industry and local authorities to plan and adapt their services, and for existing market barriers to have been addressed. It is still expected all local authorities would adopt consistency at the earliest opportunity.

Summary of Packaging ERP Consultation

The proposals being covered in this consultation are concerned with reforms to the packaging waste regulations and explore:

1. The definition of full net cost recovery and approaches to recovering full net costs from producers
2. Incentives to encourage producers to design and use packaging that can be recycled
3. The businesses that would be obligated under a packaging extended producer responsibility system
4. Producer funding is used to pay local authorities for the collection and management of household packaging waste and to support the collection for recycling of household-like packaging arising in the commercial waste
5. Mandatory labelling on all packaging to indicate if it is recyclable or not
6. New packaging waste recycling targets for 2025 and 2030, and interim targets for 2021 and 2022
7. Alternative models for the organisation and governance of a future packaging extended producer responsibility system
8. Measures to strengthen compliance monitoring and enforcement including for packaging waste that is exported for recycling

Principles of EPR

The following principles are highlighted in the consultation:

1. Businesses will bear the full net cost of managing the packaging they handle or place on the market at end of life.
2. Fees raised from obligated businesses will be used to support the management of packaging waste and the achievement of agreed targets and outcomes. Local authorities will be expected to meet any minimum service standards for the household collection service they provide
3. All packaging should be labelled as recyclable or not recyclable to make it easier for people to recycle and dispose of packaging waste

Full Net Cost Recovery

The proposed definition of full net cost covers:

- Collection, transport, sorting, treatment, recycling or disposing of any 'in scope' packaging
- Providing information to consumers on recycling packaging waste and anti-littering
- Clean up of littered and fly-tipped packaging items
- The collection, collation and reporting of relevant packaging and waste management data (including litter and fly-tipping)

The income obtained from the sale of recyclable materials would be netted off.

Summary of DRS Consultation

This consultation seeks views on proposals to introduce a DRS for drinks containers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, whilst recognising that any DRS should form part of a coherent system across the UK.

Options

There are two options being considered in the consultation.

- **'all-in' model**, would not place any restrictions on the size of drinks containers in-scope of a DRS. This would target a large amount of drinks beverages placed on the market.
- **'on-the-go' model**, would restrict the drinks containers in-scope to those less than 750ml in size and sold in single format containers. This model would target drinks beverages most often sold for consumption outside of the home (while 'on-the-go').
- An alternative to introducing a DRS would be for all drinks containers to be captured under a reformed packaging producer responsibility system.

This consultation proposes that beverages sold in PET, HDPE, plastic bottles, steel and aluminium cans, and glass bottles should be included. Views are sought on whether disposable cups, cartons, pouches, and energy gel sachets should be included.

It is proposed to include all soft drinks (including water and juices), alcoholic drinks and drinks containing milk and plant-based drinks e.g. smoothies, milkshakes, ready-to-drink coffee, flavoured milk and yoghurt drinks. The intention is to exclude drinks containers containing milk from a DRS, including soya and other plant type milks.

The consultation does not give stated preference for how much the deposit should be and asks for suggestions.

As this will potentially remove valuable materials from the LA waste stream the consultation states that:

'We are considering a funding formula whereby local authorities could be paid the deposit amount on drinks containers by the DMO without having to physically return them via a designated return point. Local authorities could then use this money for the benefit of the environment, or other wider priorities.'

Summary of Plastic Packaging Tax Consultation

The Government is planning to tax plastic packaging that contains less than 30% recycled material to stimulate end markets for plastic and promoted better design of packaging.

The consultation includes several specific questions on:

- defining products within the scope of the tax,
- setting a threshold for recycled plastic content
- the approach to rates
- the precise point at which the tax is charged and who will be liable to pay
- how to minimise administrative burdens for the smallest operators and/or low volumes of production or import
- the treatment of imports and exports
- promoting compliance and preventing opportunities for tax avoidance or evasion
- how business can demonstrate the recycled content of their products in a robust way

This consultation has the least direct impact on Local Authorities, but it is hoped that by stimulating a market for recycled plastics, the materials that we collect will have a viable, stable, UK based outlet.