

The background features a dark green field with several light green recycling symbols (triangles with arrows) scattered throughout. A large, light green recycling symbol is positioned in the lower-left quadrant. A horizontal band of a lighter green color runs across the middle of the page, behind the title text. The title 'Recycling' is in a large, white, serif font, and 'BRIEFING' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it.

# Recycling BRIEFING

## Recycling

### Summary

- **Recycling rates across England have plateaued in recent years:** Our recycling rate has remained at around 44% on average for several years, with consumers finding the current system confusing, despite wanting to engage with it.
- **The Environment Act contains new measures to improve local recycling:** Measures include consistent collection rules across local authorities in England and via which waste stream, as well as labelling requirements to clearly show a product's recyclability.
- **There are lots of resources available to support you to improve local recycling rates:** From partnering with local businesses and neighbouring councils, to making sure bins are accessible and easy to use, there are lots of ways for local councillors to improve their local recycling rates beyond the requirements in the Environment Act.

### Background

- **Recycling in the waste hierarchy:** The “[waste hierarchy](#)” ranks waste management options according to what is best for the environment. Recycling is the middle tier of the waste hierarchy, below reduction and reuse and above recovery and disposal. Where waste is unavoidable, it must be managed in the most efficient way possible and for many materials, that means recycling.
- **Plastic consumption:** Five million tonnes of plastic are [estimated](#) to be used every year in the UK, with nearly half of this figure being packaging. UK consumers [go through](#) an estimated 13 billion plastic drinks bottles, 9 million drinks cans and 5 billion glass bottles per year. To curb the demand for virgin plastics, we must create a strong supply of recycled plastics for manufacturers.
- **Recycling rates in England:** [Recycling rates in England](#) have improved since the turn of the century, rising from around 11% to nearly 45% for waste from households, though progress has recently stalled. The [latest Defra figures](#) show the official England ‘waste from households’ recycling rate was 44.0% in 2020, down from 45.5% in 2019.
- **Recycling can be confusing:** Households can find collection arrangements confusing. Confusion leads to contamination of the waste streams which costs councils money. In 2019-20, [525,000 tonnes](#) of household recycling in England was rejected from recycling plants, reducing the quality and profitability of recycling. A good quality collection service, properly explained, will help to capture more environmentally and economically valuable material, and improve the quality and quantity of materials.

## Government policy

- **The Environment Act 2021** made a series of proposals to improve the recycling system in England, although some are awaiting further legislation to put them into effect. Relevant proposals include introducing:
  - **Consistent rules for recycling** across England including a core set of consistent materials for recycling, which will help households to understand what can and cannot be collected. There are also proposals to split the recycling waste stream into separate collections, including a separate food waste collection. The rules will provide detail on what local authorities need to collect, although it is highly unlikely to include any requirement for the colour and type of receptacle. A formal timeline for these changes is yet to be laid out.
  - **Mandatory recycling labelling requirements** for packaging to help reduce confusion for consumers about what can and cannot be recycled. Producers will be required to label packaging using the Recycle Now mark and relevant wording (Recycle/Do Not Recycle). All packaging types (except for plastic films and flexibles) will be required to be labelled by 31 March 2026. Plastic films and flexibles will be required by 31 March 2027. The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) will be the enforcement body responsible for the monitoring and enforcement of the labelling requirements. All compostable and biodegradable packaging will be required to be given the 'do not recycle' label until there is evidence it can be collected and composted separately.
  - **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** for manufacturers and producers to pay the full net cost of managing specified products and materials at the end of life. EPR will be implemented in a 'phased manner' from 2024, rather than 2023, focusing on payments for household packaging waste and packaging in street bins managed by Local Authorities. The payment levels will be determined from 1st April 2024. Full implementation, with a full hierarchy of fees relating to recyclability, will be introduced from 2025.
  - **A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)** will require consumers to pay a small deposit for drinks containers which they can reclaim if they return it to a reverse vending machine. DRS is set to begin in England in October 2025 and will be an all-in system that accepts PET bottles and steel and aluminium cans of various sizes (50ml – 3l). Glass bottles will not be included in the English scheme but will be included in Wales and Scotland. The fee in the UK is likely to be 20p on any obligated container. Local authorities and where relevant, waste operators, can participate in the DRS by separating out containers and redeeming their deposit.

## Resources

- **Design for ‘on-the-go’ recycling:** In a world of commuter coffees, the use of on-the-go packaging options has never been greater. But less than half of local authorities currently have on-street recycling systems. [#InTheLoop](#) is a campaign led by Hubbub that provides a step-by-step guide for local authorities to strategically introduce on-street recycling options.
- **Celebrate Recycle Week:** Each Autumn, there is an annual [Recycle Week](#) campaign which provides lots of resources, including a social media toolkit, to help you to celebrate too. The campaign is an excellent focal point that you can use to raise awareness and share information with residents about the recycling system.
- **Make use of WRAP’s wealth of information and resources:** WRAP provides many resources in the form of [reports](#), [webinars](#), [best practice guides](#), campaign ideas, and funding. They also have dedicated team members who focus on local authorities and regularly run collaborative projects and trials with councils across the country.
- **CEN’s webinar on boosting local recycling rates:** In October 2022, CEN hosted a webinar with a panel composed of a leading local councillor and industry experts to discuss the various ways to boost recycling rates, such as thinking about bin design and availability. [Click here](#) to read a summary of the webinar and to access the recording.

## Conservative [case studies](#) for boosting recycling rates:

- **Bromley Council is looking beyond plastic:** Electrical waste is the world’s [fastest-growing waste stream](#) with the average [person in the UK producing 24kg](#) of e-waste every year. In 2019 Bromley Council introduced a weekly kerbside collection for small electrical items (e.g. kettles, hairdryers), household batteries and textiles to help increase local e-waste recycling rates.
- **The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) partnered on a whimsical communication campaign:** Partnering with Hubbub and Innocent Smoothies, RBKC ran a campaign entitled “[Recycling’s Most Wanted](#)” to help inform residents of items they can and cannot recycling, with a focus on particularly confusing items such as pizza boxes. The project included newly designed recycling bags and trucks for further ad space.
- **Wandsworth Council works with local schools to engage school children about waste management:** The education programme includes visits to the local recycling centre with hands-on activities, workshops and their ‘Recycle at School’ programme to raise students’ understanding of why effective waste management is important.
- **Councils across Staffordshire are working together to save money and deliver a more efficient service:** The [Staffordshire Sustainability Board](#) comprises 10 councils from across the county that come together to achieve higher recycling rates, reduced contamination rates, and run communication campaigns for local residents.



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