



Reuse BRIEFING

Reuse

Summary

- **Reuse is an economic opportunity, not a waste management burden:** There is money to be made in reselling and restoring, and new jobs to be created from embracing reuse as an economic model. With existing infrastructure in place, such as Household Waste Recycling Centres, local authorities are well placed to initiate local reuse efforts and to educate residents on its benefit. National policy is currently focused on improving recycling rates; councils should lead on the adoption of reuse to push more waste up the hierarchy and inform future government policy.
- **There are lots of resources available to support local reuse initiatives:** Reuse spans all manner of different products and industries, from nappies to electrical goods, meaning there are lots of ways for councils to get involved. Councils can also signpost residents to the work of local organisations and informational campaigns.

Background

- **Reuse in the waste hierarchy:** The “[waste hierarchy](#)” ranks waste management options according to what is best for the environment. Reuse is the second tier of the waste hierarchy, below reduction and above recycling, recovery and disposal. Reuse, and preparation for reuse (e.g. restoring and cleaning), mean that resources will be kept in circulation for longer. This can involve many different actions such as refilling, reselling, donating, leasing, repairing, refurbishing, upcycling, or simply reusing the product.
- **Reuse will make the UK a more “[circular economy](#)”:** A more circular economy keeps materials in circulation rather than being lost as waste. Reusing materials and cutting waste will make the UK more resource efficient and secure. This should include more leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling. Research suggests that embracing the circular economy has the potential to create over [450,000 related jobs domestically](#). These jobs include specialist repairers, second hand retail, recycling operatives, procurement experts, and rental and leasing professionals.
- **How reuse can be encouraged by local authorities:** Local authorities can ensure more waste collection goes toward reuse. For example, [£1.7 billion](#) worth of plastics, food, and electronics are lost from the UK economy each year. These are three materials that local authorities either are, will be, or can become responsible for collecting. Proposed government changes to the waste collection system, including introducing a separate food waste stream and separate bin collections for certain types of recycling, could be strengthened by local reuse initiatives to refill, repair and refurbish more products.

Government policy

- **The government's new residual waste reduction target will require more reuse of resources:** The government is setting a legally-binding target under the Environment Act to reduce residual waste (excluding major mineral wastes) in kg per capita by 50% by 2042 from 2019 levels. Residual waste is the waste that is left once the recyclable waste has been separated, such as nappies, menstrual products, and used paper towels. Reusable items can reduce residual waste, so should also play a role in reaching the government target.
- **Existing and proposed government policies do not explicitly incentivise reuse at the moment:** The Government's waste and resources policies, including measures in the Environment Act, focus on increasing recycling rates and reducing the consumption of specific single-use plastic items. This includes the introduction of a deposit return scheme, banning plastic cutlery and standardising recycling collections across England. Policy mechanisms to encourage the adoption of reuse at scale are yet to be introduced in England. An opportunity to do so could be, for example, including reuse in the government's new [extended producer responsibility](#) (EPR) scheme, which places the cost burden of managing packaging waste on the manufacturer rather than the council. EPR will incentivise producers to use less packaging and ensure more is recyclable. Adding reuse into EPR will incentivise producers to also consider how packaging can be reused.

Ideas and resources


- **Integrate reuse into your existing local recycling infrastructure:** Household Waste Recycling Centres already serve as waste hubs, making the addition of reuse-related services a natural extension of the space. Many items received by these centres could quickly and easily be prepared for reuse. For example, [research](#) by WRAP has shown that 23% of the household electronic waste collected at these centres could be reused with a small amount of repair. [Suez has published a comprehensive guide](#) for local authorities who want to put reuse at the heart of their household waste recycling centres and the [LGA](#) has produced a report with ideas and case studies.
- **Not all opportunities to promote reuse cost money:** If your council does not have the resources to launch a reuse programme of its own, having a webpage that points residents in the direction of other initiatives that they can participate in will help to ensure that reuse is happening locally. For example, signposting the [British Heart Foundation](#) furniture collection service, encouraging residents to redistribute food and household items through apps such as [Olio](#), donating unwanted clothes to charity or selling through platforms such as [Vinted](#), showcasing local businesses that offer reuse and refill services, and featuring [Recycle Now's waste search bar](#). Social media awareness campaigns are another low-cost way that councils can promote reuse.
- **Make reuse a criteria for getting events licensed:** Putting reuse policies in place for the events your council hosts, and the events that some tiers of council are responsible for licensing, will ensure that you are leading by example. [City to Sea](#) has produced a guide to help councils to adopt

these policies locally. To help smaller event organisers to follow this new policy, Dorset Council has also invested in a set of 500 cups to lend to event organisers.

- **Offer a take back service for items distributed by the council:** Councils that assist in the distribution of goods to the community, such as daily living aids, do not always offer a service for these items to be taken back once they have been used. To avoid these items being left unused in homes or, worse still, sent to landfill, the council can establish a free take back service via existing community recycling centres, or other public buildings such as libraries. Subject to resources and capacity, take backs do not necessarily need to be available all year. The council could, instead, organise and promote one-off drop-off drives that take place for a set length of time in a given location. Establishing a broader “[library of things](#)” is another way to encourage reuse.
- **CEN’s webinar on reuse:** In March 2023, CEN hosted a webinar with a panel composed of a leading local councillor and industry experts to discuss the various ways to increase reuse. [Click here](#) to read a summary of the webinar and to access the recording.

Conservative case studies

- **Surrey County Council is brushing up its reuse ambition with a paint reuse scheme:** An estimated 55 million litres of paint go to waste each year in the UK. Hidden away in cupboards across the country, this paint is often fine to be used. In Surrey, tins of water-based paint that were sent to a Community Recycling Centre used to be sent for disposal. Now, the paint is redirected to county reuse shops for other residents to reuse. 10 percent of the revenue raised in these reuse shops is given to charity. For councils looking to start their own local paint reuse scheme, [Community RePaint](#), an initiative sponsored by Dulux, can help you to get started.
- **Essex County Council is offering microgrants for local refill and reuse projects:** Through its Love Essex Fund, the council is giving out microgrants of up to £500 to support local organisations, individuals, and schools with their reuse and refill projects. [Previous recipients](#) include a bike repair workshop, a mobile boutique for second-hand clothing, a local youth football club providing reusable water bottles for members, and an electronic repairs service.
- **Hertsmere Borough Council hosts clothes swapping events:** An estimated [£140 million](#) worth of clothing is sent to landfill each year in the UK despite around 95% of it being suitable for reuse or recycling. By organising swapping events for residents to exchange unwanted clothes, this council is helping to save the resources that would otherwise be needed to produce new clothes.
- **Many councils across the country now promote reusable nappies to new parents:** [Three billion disposable nappies](#) are used each year in the UK which constitutes 2-3% of all household waste. Reusable nappies are a less wasteful alternative and can save parents money in the long-term. To encourage the switch to reusable nappies, [different councils](#) have used various mechanisms including educational coffee mornings, trial packs, and [vouchers](#) to cover the cost of the purchase.

The background features a dark green field with several light green recycling symbols (three arrows forming a triangle) scattered throughout. On the right side, there are several horizontal bands of varying shades of green and yellow, separated by dark green lines. A large, light green triangle points downwards from the top right towards the center of the page.

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