

Briefing Note to the Environment & Communities Scrutiny  
Committee on 11 January 2017

Improving the county's recycling rates.



Gloucestershire County Council has worked closely with each District Council over many years to ensure the effective development of recycling and waste collection services in all their forms; kerbside collection, bring banks, Household Recycling Centres and other special collections. As a member of the Gloucestershire Waste Partnership, comprising all seven authorities, the County Council along with all District/Boroughs adopted the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy in 2007. This provided the blueprint for service development and closer partnership relations.

The Joint Waste Committee (with a membership of Cotswold District Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council) further this work in a more formal partnership structure with a single Joint Waste Team. An annual business plan with a three year horizon sets the work programme and addresses the current and future challenges of maintaining and improving services.

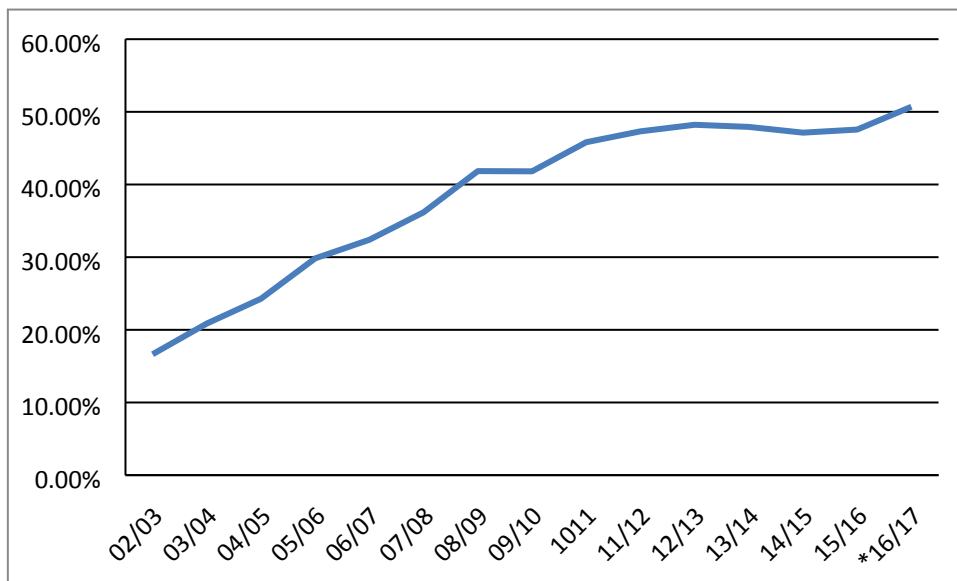
Between 2002 and 2016 large step changes in recycling performance at each authority have been achieved through:

- the introduction of comprehensive recycling schemes
- weekly food waste collections
- reduced residual waste collection frequency
- Separate, chargeable garden waste collections.

In November 2016 Stroud became the last of the districts in Gloucestershire to introduce food waste, this following the initial introduction of garden waste collections in February 2016.

Recycling rates have risen from 16% in 2002/3 and is forecast to exceed 50% for the first time in 2016/17 (see figures 1 & 2). Note that the combined recycling rate for the 5 Joint Waste Committee authorities excluding Stroud and Gloucester is forecast to reach the target 53% in 2016/17.

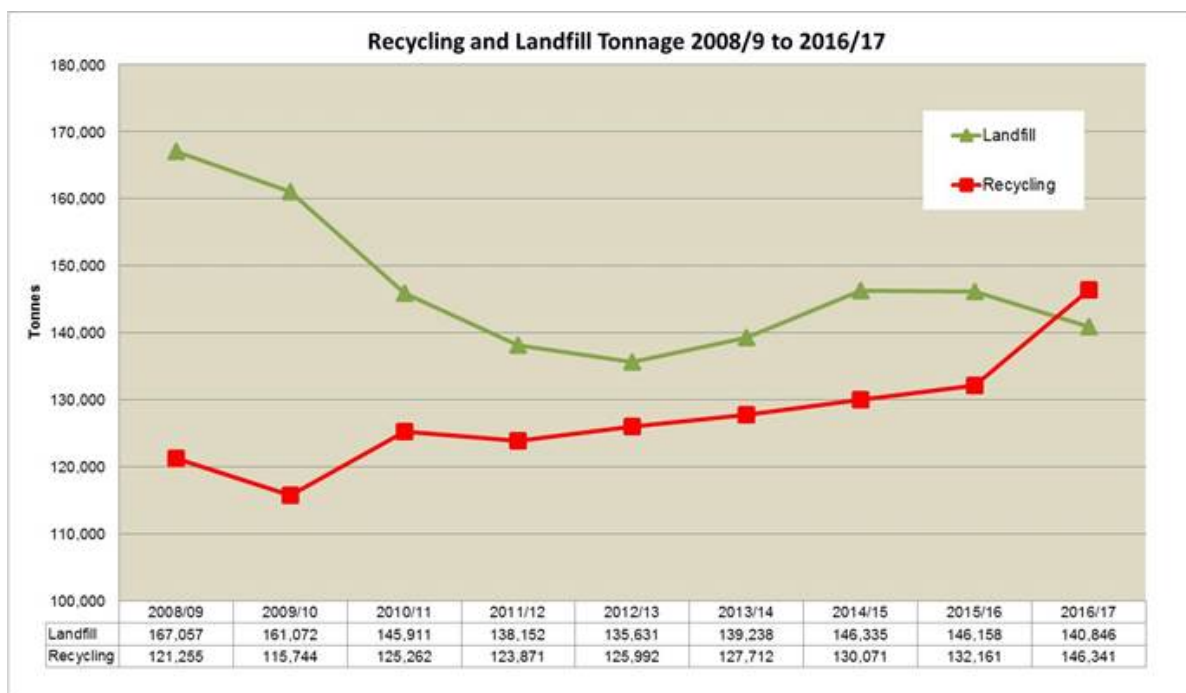
Figure 1: County Recycling Rate from 2002 to 2017



\* 2016/17 recycling is a forecast based upon year to date performance.

In 2016/17 for the first time in Gloucestershire the total weight of material composted or recycled will exceed the amount of residual waste.

Figure 2 – Recycling and Landfill Tonnage 2008/9 to 2016/17



The County Council continues to financially support every district through:

- Recycling credits – a statutory national scheme which supports recycling collection schemes. DCs receive £53 per tonne from the county council which represents around half the cost of disposal that would otherwise have been incurred.

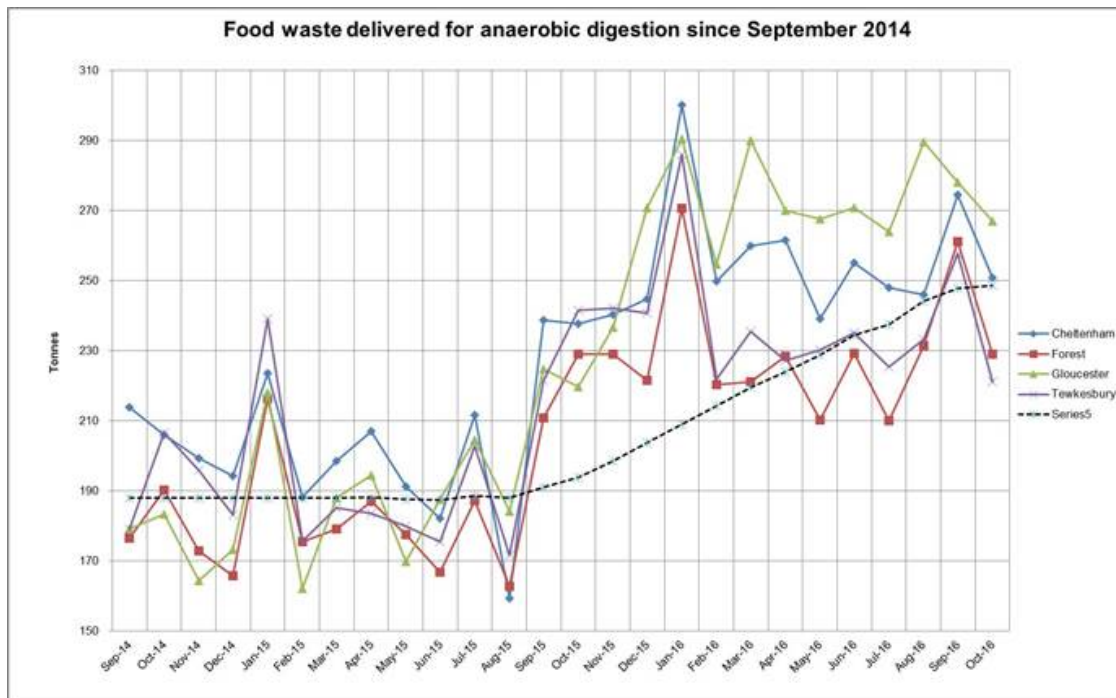
- A performance-based incentive payment, unique to Gloucestershire. This was originally an incentive to encourage DCs to collect food waste separately and essentially continues to reward the reduction of residual waste on a per household basis.

All collection services now have the ability to collect over 70% of waste (by weight) for recycling, but the actual recycling rate is constrained by the levels of public participation in the services.

Efforts to boost participation levels have been made using a range of communication tactics and this will continue to play a vital role in maintaining performance levels.

A county-wide food waste recycling initiative in 2015 involved placing “No Food Waste” messages on residual waste bins has resulted in the recycling of over 20% more food waste compared to the previous year.

Figure 3



Early indications are that the introduction of food waste in Stroud in November has been very popular which is further boosting the amount delivered / diverted from landfill by over 300t per month.

### Socio economic factors

The composition of waste changes over time impacting on the materials available for recycling and their subsequent contribution to recycling rates.

Light-weighting of glass bottles and jars has reduced the amount of glass being used. For example soft drinks manufacturer Britvic has reduced the average weight of a glass bottle by 23% in recent years. This is a wholly positive move in terms of sustainability but has a negative impact on the recycling rate.

Newspaper readership continues to decline reducing the amount of paper in circulation. Paper (predominantly newspaper and magazines) has historically been a major component of any kerbside scheme. Similarly the volume of junk mail has reduced as on line advertising has increased.

On the other side of the coin the increase in internet shopping has increased the amount of cardboard coming into households

New houses generally have smaller gardens which will reduce the amount of garden waste per household over time.

Smaller households (another trend) tend to generate more waste per person than larger households

Bring banks have historically provided a major outlet for recyclable materials, but these have generally reduced in number as kerbside schemes have become more comprehensive. Banks were easy to use by the commercial sector (a classic example being glass banks located in pub car parks) and this historically distorted and overstated the true *household* recycling rate. Commercial waste operators now have to offer recycling services to businesses which has provided many with a legitimate outlet for such materials.

Nationally and internationally there is also a significant difference between urban and rural areas in terms of participation in recycling. Urban areas have a greater number of harder-to-service properties e.g. flats, and a more transient population e.g. students. It is therefore reasonable to expect that areas such as Cotswold, Tewkesbury, Stroud and Forest of Dean will continue to recycle more than Cheltenham and Gloucester.

Examples of (isolated) European municipalities are often cited as examples of what is possible with recycling rates of up to 80% quoted. In all cases these areas are able to impose a charge on residual waste by either tonnage or volume. This tends to drive good recycling behaviour but is neither legal nor a favoured policy proposition in the UK.

The Joint Waste Team continues to promote waste reduction in a number of key areas such as the use of real nappies, home composting and food waste avoidance. These schemes are important in raising awareness and sometimes dovetail with national promotions but tend to be expensive on a per tonne basis and only have limited impact in terms of material diversion once enthusiastic adopters have been reached.

### **Service Change opportunities and targeted interventions**

It is recognised that householders engage and respond most effectively at times of service change providing as they do a prompt for householders to develop new routines.

All Gloucestershire authorities have implemented more than one major service change. In the past year this has included

- Introduction of kerbside plastic bottles and cardboard in the Forest of Dean
- Introduction of food waste collections fortnightly residual waste and separate garden waste collections in Stroud.

This not only has a positive impact upon the capture of new target materials, but also has a significant knock-on benefit in encouraging the recycling of other materials. Such 'point of change' events will continue to play a part in driving future performance, but given that most collection services now offer comprehensive recycling opportunities, there will be an emphasis on encouraging householders to make the most of these services.

Examples of potential opportunities for the Joint Waste Committee:

- Further restricting residual waste disposal capacity with the introduction of smaller bins (Cotswold have a trial identified in the partnership business plan, and the partnership will be studying the effect of the new 140ltr bins being introduced across Stroud).
- The stronger and more effective enforcement of excess waste policies and the removal of unapproved additional residual waste bins from households (Forest of Dean use in-cab technology in their fleet of collection vehicles to identify excess waste producers, and have developed a system of targeted communications and further assistance for those householders who don't recycle).
- The consideration of further reducing the frequency of residual waste collections (Cheltenham have recently consulted the public on options which included three weekly collections of residual waste). While Cheltenham have not taken this route, the number of local authorities are switching or considering switching to 3 or 4 weekly residual waste collections is rising with Somerset last month agreeing to switch to this system county wide starting next autumn. A similar pattern is emerging compared to the early 2000s when fortnightly residual waste started to be taken up. Generally Authorities in the South East and South West of England were the early adopters of what is now the predominant frequency. Currently 14 local authorities have already adopted of 3-4 weekly refuse collection, most clustered in mid-Scotland, Greater Manchester and Wales.

In the pursuit of more diversion, the Joint Waste Committee will need to at least give consideration to such opportunities if they are demonstrated to be effective, acceptable and deliverable.

Some approaches may not however be effective, for example we have in the past undertaken two DEFRA funded trials to test the effectiveness of householder Rewards & Incentives (an approach that was favoured by DCLG during the coalition administration), and with over 40 different schemes tested, found that they were not effective at driving significant change.

The Joint Waste Committee will continue to pursue, recommend and implement new approaches to improve recycling rates.

However in the absence of overriding new national policy proposals, caution over more capacity restriction, and the cost constraints of adding more materials into the kerbside collection system, the most effective further improvements are likely to come about from taking a firm but fair line with householders who are not using the existing systems effectively. This will be more targeted and resource intensive but has been effective in Gloucester City where adopted.

Steve Read  
Head of Service  
Joint Waste Team