

MDA No.: 1386

Title: Too Good to Waste

1. Executive Summary

1.1 At the Environment Committee meeting on 15 November 2021 the Committee resolved that:

Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with the Deputy Chairman and party Group Lead Members, to agree any output arising from the meeting.

1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members and the Deputy Chairman, the Chair agreed the Committee's report *Too Good to Waste* to the Mayor of London, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

2. Decision

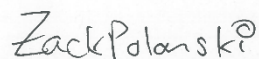
2.1 **That the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, agree the Committee's report Too Good to Waste, as attached at Appendix 1.**

Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

Signature:



Printed Name:

Zack Polanski AM

Date:

15 March 2022

3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority

Background and proposed next steps:

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chairs, on 12 November 2021 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the report *Too Good to Waste* will be formally noted at the Environment Committee's next appropriate meeting.

Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:

Signature (Committee Services): F.Bywaters

Printed Name: Fiona Bywaters

Date: 15 March 2022

Telephone Number: 07825028318

Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required


Printed Name:

Date:

Telephone Number:

Legal Implications:

The Chair of the Environment Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): 

Printed Name: Emma Strain, Monitoring Officer

Date: 10 March 2022

Telephone Number: 07971101375

Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:

- Tony Devenish AM (Deputy Chairman)
- Léonie Cooper AM
- Hina Bokhari AM

4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral:

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive Information:

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

Lead Officer / Author

Signature:




Printed Name: Ana Maria Noguera

Job Title: Senior Policy Advisor

Date: 15 March 2022

Telephone Number: 07894954256

Countersigned by Executive Director:

Signature: 

Printed Name: Helen Ewen

Date: 15 March 2022

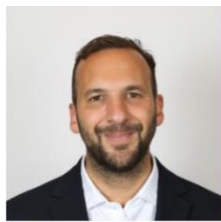
Telephone Number: 07729108986

An aerial photograph of a city street, overlaid with a green map of the same area. The map shows a grid of streets and a central green area. Several people are walking on the street, their shadows cast on the ground. The overall color scheme is dominated by green.

Too Good to Waste
Environment Committee

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Environment Committee



Zack Polanski AM
(Chair)
Greens



Emma Best AM
Conservatives



Hina Bokhari AM
Liberal Democrats



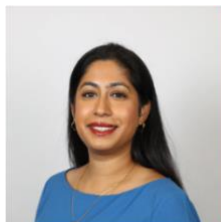
Leonie Cooper AM
Labour



Tony Devenish AM
(Deputy Chairman)
Conservatives



Joanne McCartney AM
Labour



Sakina Sheikh AM
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Foreword



Zack Polanski AM

Chair of the Environment Committee

Our planet is facing a climate emergency and we must both mitigate and adapt to the challenges this brings. This includes adopting a circular economy, that should see a massive reduction in waste. And whilst recycling undoubtedly has a role to play, our primary focus must be on bringing down our consumption levels.

This report follows a detailed panel investigation into London’s waste and a circular economy conducted in November 2021. I thank both the panel for giving us their expertise and my predecessors and fellow committee members who have been striving to highlight the importance of an equitable, modern approach to waste management in London.

Our waste is the by-product of everything we consume and use and reveals so much about our day to day lives. It runs throughout the food we eat to the products that support the businesses and services we rely on. Following two tumultuous years for Londoners during the pandemic, our living habits have altered, changing drastically the what and where of our consumption.

This report follows on from the committee’s report in 2018 “Wasting London’s Future.” Since the publication of this report, the Mayor and London’s councils have made significant effort in initiatives that may help reduce over consumption and make better use of our waste - there is still much work to be done though and there’s an urgency that’s necessary. We will investigate these areas in varying detail throughout the report.

And although ultimately national government regulations dictate what can be done with our waste - particularly domestic waste - this report focuses on the fact that most waste collection is devolved to London and its boroughs. There’s an opportunity here for London to lead the way.

These following recommendations represent the consensus view taken by the Environment Committee on how to improve waste collection in our capital. However, they should be understood in the broader context of our efforts to pursue net-zero. A circular economic

model that sees very little waste disposed of, and instead favours reduction, repairing, reuse, recycling and recovery of goods. This is fundamentally important in our efforts to tackle the climate crisis. We should be mindful of the impact our waste products have on the wider environment and the city we call home.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Mayor, ReLondon, and Waste authorities in London should have a range of targets to reduce waste produced and for recycling. They should review these targets to consider more detailed Reduction and Recycling Plans, set in the context of shifting from a linear economy with waste regeneration, to prioritise a circular economy model with a focus on reusing, repairing and recycling. New targets should work towards an overall reduction in waste produced in London, with a year-by-year aim for specific forms of waste management.

Recommendation 2

London needs more support to build a comprehensive network of repair facilities and projects. While there have been good starts made with grants given to some groups, there is not yet a reliable network of repair facilities that Londoners can easily access. The Mayor should maintain a database of repair facilities on the GLA website and could connect this 'repair network' to schools and colleges to promote employment opportunities and help students gain skills to repair electronics, clothing and other items such as bikes.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should lobby government and housing developers to support higher standards for recycling in flatted developments in national planning policy, whilst ensuring adequate facilities are included in plans for housing funded directly from the Mayor's budget. The standards set out in ReLondon's Recycling Package can be further used as a guide for advice and design as a base for new housing developments; and the Mayor could make further emphasis when approving local planning decisions to require better-planned facilities for recycling and waste collection, including food waste.

Recommendation 4

The Mayor and ReLondon should work with local authorities to identify areas where non-domestic food waste collection could be improved, building on the food waste trial in Southwark¹. Given concerns about the rising cost of living, there should be particular focus on work to bring hospitality businesses in close contact with local charities where some food could go to good use.

¹ Mayor of London, [ADD2548 Food hub pilot with Hubbub and London Borough of Southwark](#), 10 February 2022

Recommendation 5

Having made it clear that he doesn't support new incineration capacity, the Mayor should support policies that reduce waste overall and thus reduce the amount of waste that is burned in incinerators in London. In order that the impacts of incineration can be minimised, use of incineration should be avoided, with the circular economy and wider changes in consumption adopted in London to reduce waste production.

Recommendation 6

The Mayor should encourage small businesses to prevent waste and consume less – for instance, avoiding food waste and unnecessary packaging, and using materials that can be both reusable and recyclable. Further incentives could be explored with local councils, for instance by working with local business improvement districts (BIDs),² where businesses come together and vote to apply a local levy to fund investment decisions in the local environment. The standards set out in ReLondon's Recycling Package can be used as a guide for advice and design as a base for new investment by London's BIDs.

Background

London is a very large conurbation, much larger than most of its counterparts in Europe.³ It produces vast amounts of waste that require processing. The main destinations for London's bulk waste are recycling; incineration where a limited amount of energy may be deemed to be recovered to generate electricity and/or heat buildings; and landfill. Waste collection in the capital is organised in several different ways.

The capital covers 33 local authorities including the City of London, each of which collects waste differently. For instance, several councils organise waste collections through private contracts administered by an umbrella partnership of multiple boroughs. Examples include the North London Waste Authority (which covers Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney,

² GLA, [About Business Improvement Districts](#)

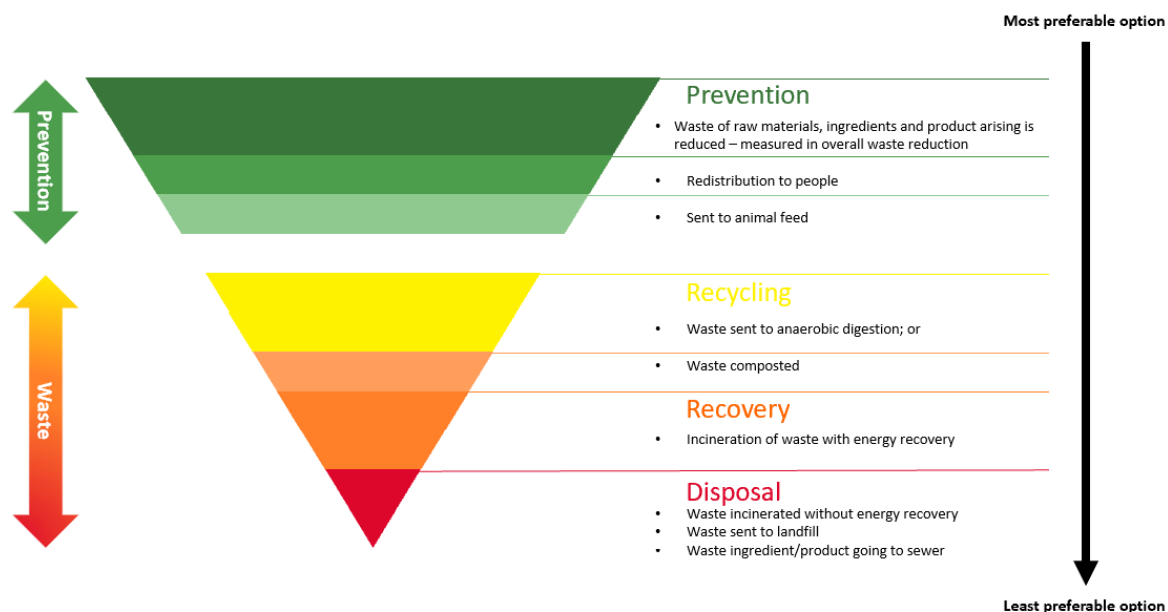
³ Euostat, [Statistics on European cities](#)

Haringey, Islington, Waltham Forest)⁴ and the South London Waste Partnership (Merton, Sutton, Kingston and Croydon).⁵

Waste collection can vary within boroughs, with some private rental accommodation so far unable to provide facilities for the collection of food waste. Some have a high density of rented, flatted accommodation without the space to effectively organise food waste using standard approaches, making collection difficult. In 2019-20, although London sent the smallest proportion of local authority waste to landfill (2.7 per cent) in England, it also sent the largest proportion of the total local authority-collected waste to incineration at 63.3 per cent (2.3 million tonnes).⁶

The UK’s waste management is administered according to a central waste hierarchy, approved by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in 2021 (figure 1).⁷ This prioritises prevention, ranking management options according to environmental impact. Reuse and recycling are prioritised in the hierarchy, as they provide some useful by-products as a result of the disposal process. Similarly, incineration – whilst not preferred overall – is considered by the Government to be preferable to disposal through, for example, landfill, if it can provide energy through recovery.

Figure 1 – DEFRA waste hierarchy



Source: DEFRA

However, no singular form of waste processing can fulfil London’s vast waste-processing needs. Following the emergence of the Covid-19 global pandemic, the UK government issued

⁴ North London Waste Authority, [About us](#)

⁵ South London Waste Partnership, [Homepage](#)

⁶ DEFRA, [Statistics on waste managed by local authorities in England in 2019/20](#), March 2021.

⁷ DEFRA, [Waste Management Plan for England](#), 27 January 2021

restrictions on people's lives, encouraging them to stay at home in order to fight the virus. As a result of the changes to our lives, some people have become more accustomed to working from home. There is also evidence that the proportion of online shopping increased following these lockdown orders in England.⁸ These behavioural changes may have had an impact on the way people interact with their waste collection, shifting a proportion of waste to households. More research may be needed to assess the true impact of the pandemic, examining if the significant growth in food deliveries and home-working resulted in an increase in overall consumption and waste production or just altered the balance between settings.

A strategy that pursues a 'circular' economy, incorporating a culture of preventing waste, as well as reusing, recycling and repairing, can offer a solution for the increased amount of waste in the capital.

What can the Mayor do?

The Mayor's powers are limited. Local authorities have direct oversight over their waste policies, which will in turn comply with national regulations. The Mayor's remit only covers London's waste authorities, meaning it is domestic and business waste that is collected. Commercial waste, for instance from construction,⁹ is outside of his control and primarily organised through commercial waste contractors.¹⁰

In May 2018 the Mayor released his London Environment Strategy (LES), detailing how he planned to tackle issues affecting London's environment such as air quality, climate adaptation and waste.¹¹ In time, the Mayor has outlined how the city should move to a circular economy model where as little waste as possible is disposed of; and, instead, as much as possible is reused, and organic products are processed to produce useful energy such as heat, with minimal emissions.

It included the pledge to:

*"Make London a zero-waste city. By 2026 no biodegradable or recyclable waste will be sent to landfill and by 2030, 65 per cent of London's municipal waste will be recycled."*¹²

Nearly four years on, how close is the capital to achieving these aims?

⁸ ONS, [Internet sales as a percentage of total retail sales](#), 18 February 2022

⁹ UK Government, [Dispose of business or commercial waste](#)

¹⁰ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

¹¹ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

¹² GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

London's waste today

London's waste disposal has changed considerably over recent decades, but there are stark gaps where much more improvement could be made. Only 33 per cent of London's local authority-collected waste is currently recycled – the lowest of any region in the UK (the England average is 43.8 per cent).¹³ However, use of landfill is low by national standards and recycling rates have seen the fastest increase nationally. London faces many specific challenges to achieving improved waste prevention, recycling and recovery, as set out in the LES.¹⁴ There are 32 boroughs, plus the City of London (waste authorities), providing different waste and recycling collection services. Each local authority has to provide a Reduction and Recycling Plan covering the period 2018 to 2022, which sets out how each London borough will work towards the objectives of the LES.

On average, 50 per cent of London's population live in flats: in some boroughs this is as high as 80 per cent.¹⁵ Flats often have a lack of easily accessible and/or sufficient storage space for recycling, and can be expensive for local authorities to service. Covid-19 has meant an increase in domestic waste consumption as a much higher proportion of people worked from home, changing consumption habits. There has also been an increase in online sales,¹⁶ which may have driven more packaging use.

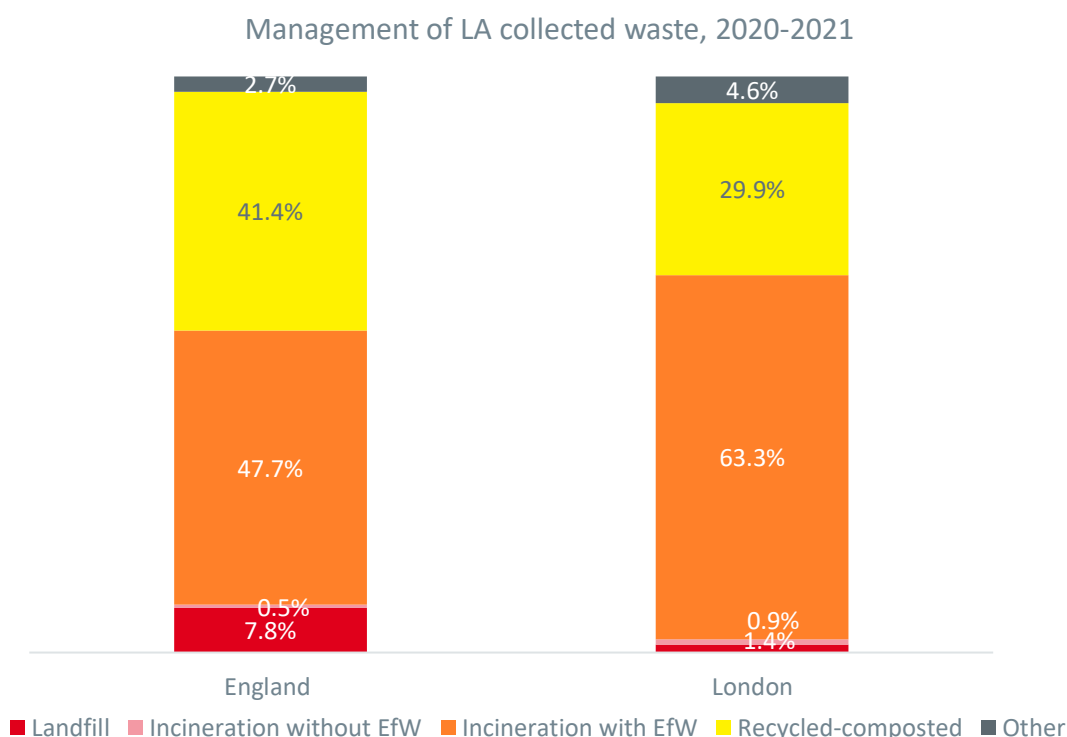
¹³ GLA, [LES: One year on report](#), December 2019; and GLA, [LES Second progress report: 2019-2021](#), September 2021

¹⁴ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

¹⁵ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

¹⁶ ONS, [Internet sales as a percentage of total retail sales](#), 18 February 2022

Figure 2 – Local authority waste collection



Source: DEFRA¹⁷

Moving London towards a circular economy

In time, the Mayor has outlined how the city should move to a circular economy model where as little waste as possible is disposed of; and, instead as much as possible is reused, and organic products are processed to produce useful energy such as heat, with minimal emissions.

Repair and reuse can be a vital part of the effort to reduce consumption, waste and London’s reliance on products that produce emissions elsewhere. It can also save Londoners money in a city with a large population, as demonstrated by the rise of ‘freecycle’ groups and some charities distributing unwanted electronics and furniture. A circular economy model could potentially reduce the amount of waste going to landfill and incineration, as it is instead being used or converted.

ReLondon (formerly London Waste and Recycling Board or LWARB) is the partnership between the Mayor of London and London’s boroughs, with the aim of encourage a transition to a low-carbon, circular economy. ReLondon has estimated that taking a circular-economy approach could reduce waste by up to 60 per cent.¹⁸ As part of its ‘repair week’,¹⁹ ReLondon

¹⁷ EfW = energy from waste

¹⁸ ReLondon (formerly LWARB), [Circular Economy Effects on Waste Production in London](#), 14 June 2017

¹⁹ ReLondon. [Gen Z Londoners ‘flip the script’ ahead of the capital’s first ever Repair Week](#), 7 October 2020

surveyed Londoners on their waste, recycling and repairing habits in October 2020. The survey found that 40 per cent of Londoners were not confident making common household repairs, but this is changing.²⁰ It also found that 80 per cent of Londoners aged 18-34 had repaired items including clothing, furniture or bicycles in the past year.

Recommendation 1

The Mayor, ReLondon, and Waste authorities in London should have a range of targets to reduce waste produced and for recycling. They should review these targets to consider more detailed Reduction and Recycling Plans, set in the context of shifting from a linear economy with waste regeneration, to prioritise a circular economy model with a focus on reusing, repairing and recycling. New targets should work towards an overall reduction in waste produced in London, with a year-by-year aim for specific forms of waste management.

Prevention

The repair and reuse of existing goods can be just as beneficial to the reduction of waste as recycling, whilst reducing overall consumption through prevention of unnecessary disposal. Disposing of a product, even if it is recycled, can mean the loss of something that is still usable; this is particularly the case for clothes, electricals and furniture. Prevention is a vital part of shifting London towards a circular economy model.

The pandemic forced the closure of schools, with children being schooled at home. This required children to have access to computer technology; families without access to laptops and tablets had to rely on help from elsewhere. Several charities throughout the capital were set up to distribute food and other goods including unwanted tablets and laptops. These include the Dons Local Action Group²¹ in South West London; Tech Inclusion UK in Tower Hamlets;²² and Lambeth Tech Aid.²³

There are, therefore, existing networks to build on for recirculating a much bigger proportion of value-added products (e.g. phones or bikes) in the capital's economy, with these products having been fixed or had their usability maintained.

²⁰ ReLondon. [Gen Z Londoners 'flip the script' ahead of the capital's first ever Repair Week](#), 7 October 2020

²² Tech Inclusion UK, [Homepage](#)

²³ Lambeth Tech Aid, [Donate your device](#)

There are also models to learn from. Though a smaller city than London, Vienna has several repair and reuse facilities that provide information on where to access skills for fixing certain items. There is also a repair network, run by a non-profit organisation that provides information on repair services in the city.²⁴ A city such as London could be doing more to help people overcome the barriers that make repair and reuse costly, when compared with the option of disposal and repurchase – for instance, it could improve access to repair services, and advertise them more clearly. There is also potential for improving the skills of Londoners to repair goods themselves, as shown by ReLondon’s research.

Recommendation 2

London needs more support to build a comprehensive network of repair facilities and projects. While there have been good starts made with grants given to some groups, there is not yet a reliable network of repair facilities that Londoners can easily access. The Mayor should maintain a database of repair facilities on the GLA website and could connect this ‘repair network’ to schools and colleges to promote employment opportunities and help students gain skills to repair electronics, clothing and other items such as bikes.

Recycling

Recycling rates have stagnated. As an overall percentage of waste management, it has hovered around 30 per cent from 2014-15 through to 2019-20.²⁵ Only 33 per cent of London’s local authority-collected waste is currently recycled, consistently below the national average (figure 3) and the lowest of any region in the UK. However, as illustrated by figure 3, this varies across the 33 London authorities, though there tend to be lower rates of recycling in inner London as more properties are flatted, making recycling more challenging. The Mayor released a report in January 2020 through ReLondon in response to the London Assembly’s Environment Committee recommendations regarding recycling set out in the 2018 report, “Wasting London’s Future”,²⁶ which focused on flatted properties.²⁷ It recommended following a set of standards designed to make recycling more accessible for those living in flats. The Flats Recycling Package requires clear signage and advice, and good design to make recycling more convenient and less likely to promote overflowing bins.²⁸

²⁴ European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, [Repair Network Vienna](#)

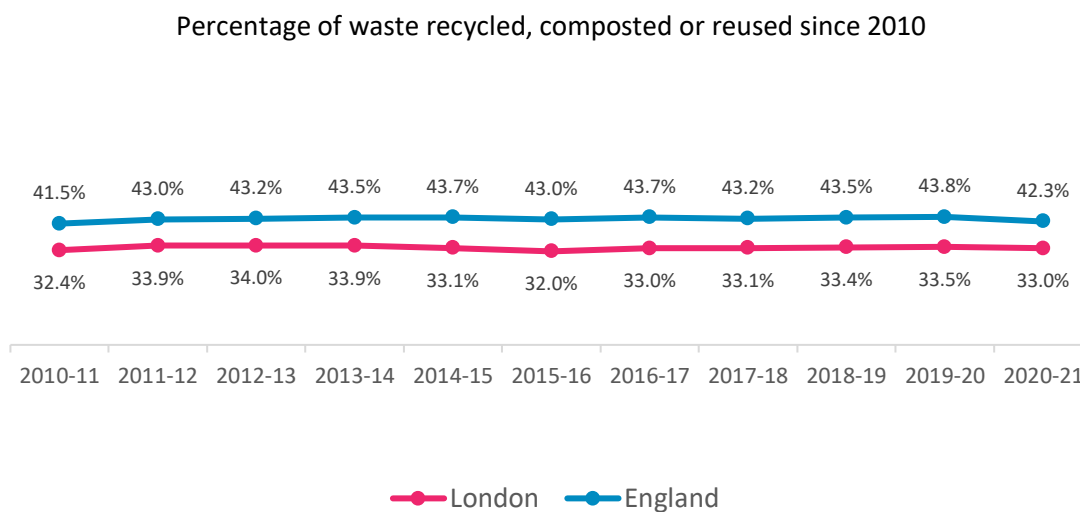
²⁵ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

²⁶ GLA, [Wasting London’s Future](#), March 2018

²⁷ LWARB (now ReLondon), [Making Recycling work for people in flats](#), January 2020

²⁸ LWARB (now ReLondon), [Making Recycling work for people in flats](#), January 2020

Figure 3 – National recycling rates



Source: DEFRA, local authority-collected waste statistics – local authority data, 2020-21

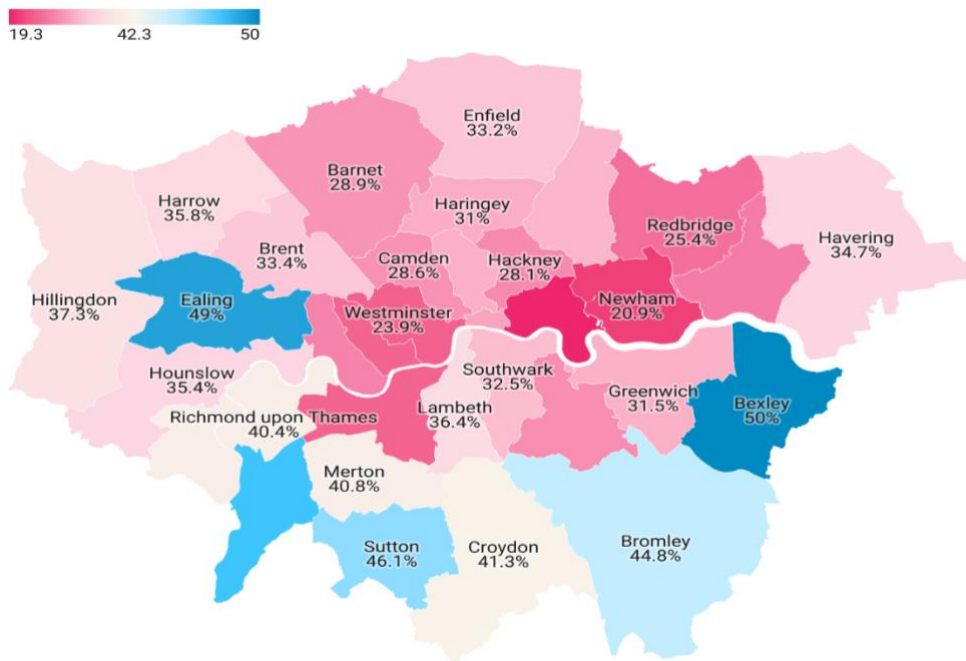
Each year, Londoners buy around 1.2 billion single-use plastic bottles, and only one-third of plastics are recycled at home. The Mayor launched a campaign to reopen and invest in public water fountains, following an Environment Committee investigation into single-use plastics in the capital.

Some businesses might produce larger quantities of recyclable waste (and food waste) such as supermarkets or takeaway outlets. However, in many cases the facilities they have for disposal will be packed into smaller spaces and shared with other outlets. This limited space makes it harder for businesses to separate out their waste for recycling.

Businesses produce vast amounts of waste, yet there is no requirement for London boroughs to collect businesses recycling.²⁹ Nor are businesses required to recycle. If we look at the hospitality sector, for instance, glass bottles, takeaway boxes and food waste are examples of the types of waste produced in large volumes that could be recycled or processed, but may end up going to landfill or incineration.

²⁹ LWARB (now ReLondon), [Making Recycling work for people in flats](#), January 2020

Figure 4. London borough recycling rates



Source: DEFRA: Local authority-collected waste statistics. Map data, Crown Copyright and database right 2018. Created with Datawrapper

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should lobby government and housing developers to support higher standards for recycling in flatted developments in national planning policy, whilst ensuring adequate facilities are included in plans for housing funded directly from the Mayor’s budget. The standards set out in ReLondon’s Recycling Package can be further used as a guide for advice and design as a base for new housing developments; and the Mayor could make further emphasis when approving local planning decisions to require better-planned facilities for recycling and waste collection, including food waste.

Food waste

In the LES, the Mayor set out the aim that by 2030 food waste per head would see a 50 per cent cut in the capital. Food waste isn't collected from every home uniformly across the capital. London produces around 1.5 million to 1.75 million tonnes of food waste a year, with an annual value of £2.55 billion.³⁰ Most food waste goes to landfill or incineration, producing around 250,000 tonnes of CO₂e emissions,³¹ although some of this is offset through capturing heat and producing electricity.

It is also costly for households. In 2020, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimated that wasted food costs households around £700 per year.³² Wandsworth has recently conducted a food waste trial³³ to assess options for collection as it looks to its next waste contract in 2024. Neighbouring Merton collects food waste, even though both boroughs form part of the South London Waste Partnership. Twenty-four boroughs now offer food waste collections to all kerbside properties, up from 23 in 2016. Nine boroughs do not currently offer this: Barking and Dagenham; Barnet; Hammersmith and Fulham; Havering; Kensington and Chelsea; Newham; Redbridge; Wandsworth; and Westminster.³⁴ However, of these, only those who form the East London Waste Authority (ELWA)³⁵ have not begun trials. Contractual and technological constraints within ELWA's disposal contract mean the potential for food waste collections services is severely limited.³⁶

Attitudes to food waste have changed over time. In London, initiatives such as Oddbox³⁷ (through which subscribers purchase a box of fruit and vegetables that there were unsold due to insufficient demand and size or shape can be delivered direct to Londoners) have become popular ways for people to save money and reduce waste. However, such services are only easy to access for those with reliable incomes and space to store food themselves. There has been an increase in food bank usage³⁸ building on donations from the public; and, during the Covid-19 lockdowns, a proliferation of 'mutual aid' groups helping people on low incomes to access food. These have encouraged the donation of people's unwanted food, or food that would otherwise go to waste.

³⁰ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

³¹ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

³² WRAP, [Food waste falls by 7% per person in three years](#), spring 2016

³³ London Borough of Wandsworth, [Council launches pilot food waste collection scheme](#), 10 August 2021

³⁴ Mayor's Question Time, [Food \(3\)](#), 9 September 2021

³⁵ Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge

³⁶ Mayor's Question Time, [Food \(3\)](#), 9 September 2021

³⁷ Oddbox, [How Oddbox works](#).

³⁸ Trussell Trust, [End of Year Stats](#), April 2021

ReLondon is currently running a three-year project to demonstrate how a circular food economy in the capital may work. The Food Flagship Initiative³⁹ includes a number of demonstration projects to “design and deliver interventions and evidence-based policies to reduce consumption-based emissions from food”. The project is also accompanied by a set of standards that encourage the use of sustainable food production and storage practices based on internationally recognised schemes.

Recommendation 4

The Mayor and ReLondon should work with local authorities to identify areas where non-domestic food waste collection could be improved, building on the food waste trial in Southwark⁴⁰. Given concerns about the rising cost of living, there should be particular focus on work to bring hospitality businesses in close contact with local charities where some food could go to good use.

Recovery

Incineration is a regular form of waste disposal used in Europe where concerns have been raised that overcapacity of waste incineration could hamper the development of the circular economy⁴¹. The Mayor has said he will oppose new incineration capacity in London.⁴²

London burns over half of its waste for energy, sending the largest proportion of the total local authority-collected waste to incineration at 63.3 per cent (2.3 million tonnes).⁴³ In the hierarchy of disposal,⁴⁴ incineration is often seen by waste management as preferable to landfill as it can at least create energy through heating.⁴⁵ Therefore, this uses less space in the ground. Additionally, because the by-products (heat and emissions) can be captured and used elsewhere, it is preferable to landfill, which creates the problem of leachate when water

³⁹ ReLondon, [Food Flagship Initiative](#), August 2021

⁴⁰ Mayor of London, [ADD2548 Food hub pilot with Hubbub and London Borough of Southwark](#), 10 February 2022

⁴¹ Zero Waste Europe, [The EU is clear: Waste-To-Energy incineration has no place in the sustainability agenda](#), 26 May 2021

⁴² Mayor’s Question Time, [Edmonton Incinerator](#), 11 June 2021

⁴³ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

⁴⁴ UK Government, [Guidance on Applying the Waste Hierarchy](#), 15 June 2011.

⁴⁵ Unearthed (Greenpeace), [UK waste incinerators three times more likely to be in poorer areas](#), July 2020

transports soluble chemicals, potentially spreading throughout the wider environment and affecting water supplies.⁴⁶

Not all London boroughs approach incineration in the same way; access to facilities varies. According to Unearthed,⁴⁷ incinerators tend to be placed in industrial areas but are generally three times more likely to be in poorer areas.⁴⁸

In April 2020, Air Quality Consultants, on behalf of the GLA, published a report that looked at the health impacts of incinerators, or ‘energy from waste’ (EfW) facilities.⁴⁹ Conducting a thorough literature review of 35 research papers published in the prior five years, the report concluded that “any potential health risks associated with direct emissions from modern, effectively managed and regulated EfWs in London are exceedingly low.”

However, the study also looked in detail at the five incinerators in London, modelling dispersion of particulate matter and nitrogen oxides, based on on-site emissions data recorded by the Environment Agency where possible. The dispersion model results have been combined with published demographic information (2017/2018), and with exposure-response coefficients published by Defra in 2019, in order to calculate the number of deaths brought forward by emissions from the five facilities. The study found that concentration of both were higher closer to the facilities. The study found that “in total, 15 deaths of London residents per year are calculated to be attributable to emissions of nitrogen oxides and particulate matter from the five EfW facilities.”⁵⁰

Whilst incinerators produce some power – the recovery of energy is low compared to the energy used to create what is burned, this combined with emissions means they remain an imperfect solution for waste disposal. The destruction of potentially usable products should be supplanted by other methods of reuse, and the move to a wider circular economy.

Recommendation 5

Having made it clear that he doesn’t support new incineration capacity, the Mayor should support policies that reduce waste overall and thus reduce the amount of waste that is burned in incinerators in London. In order that the impacts of incineration can be minimised, use of incineration should be avoided, with the circular economy and wider changes in consumption adopted in London to reduce waste production.

⁴⁶ Unearthed (Greenpeace), [UK waste incinerators three times more likely to be in poorer areas](#), July 2020

⁴⁷ Unearthed (Greenpeace), [UK waste incinerators three times more likely to be in poorer areas](#), July 2020

⁴⁸ Unearthed (Greenpeace), [UK waste incinerators three times more likely to be in poorer areas](#), July 2020

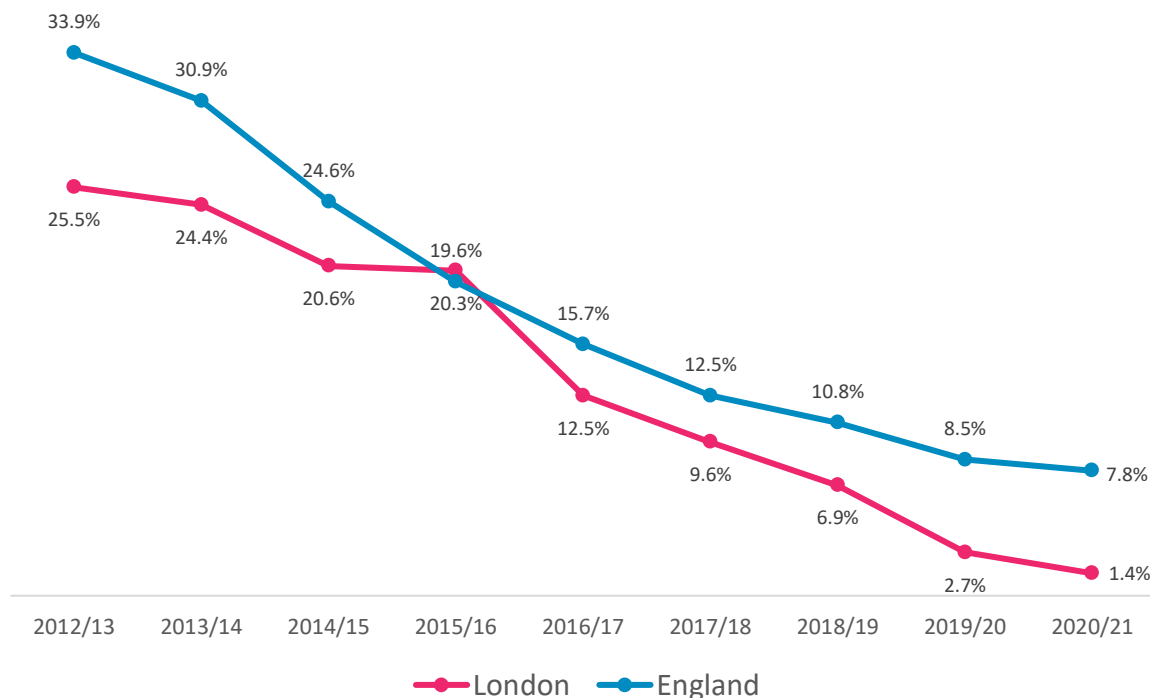
⁴⁹ Air Quality Consultants on behalf of GLA, [Health Effects due to Emissions from Energy from Waste Plant in London](#), May 2020

⁵⁰ Air Quality Consultants on behalf of GLA, [Health Effects due to Emissions from Energy from Waste Plant in London](#), May 2020

Disposal

Local authorities in London collected 99,000 metric tons of waste that was sent to landfills in the year ending 31 March 2020.⁵¹ Some progress has been made, over recent years, in reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill: the proportion dropped 7 per cent between 2019 and 2020. This has followed an overall decrease in the amount of waste sent to landfill from 65 per cent in 2006 to 12 per cent in 2016 (figure 5).⁵² However, as of 2018, the capacity of landfills accepting London’s waste was expected to run out by 2026; London’s waste bill was also in excess of £2 billion a year, and rising.⁵³ Though landfill is the destination of only 2.7 per cent⁵⁴ of London’s waste (the lowest proportion in England when it comes to local authorities), this is still cause for concern. Although the Mayor aims to cease use of landfill eventually, the required combination of cultural change and policy will unlikely be sufficient to meet this target by 2026.

Figure 5: percentage of waste sent to landfill since 2012



⁵¹ Statista, [Volumes of waste by local authority by landfill](#), 26 April 2021

⁵² GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

⁵³ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

⁵⁴ GLA, [LES](#), May 2018

Source: DEFRA, local authority-collected waste statistics – local authority data, 2020-21

Though current levels of landfill are low, and the biggest concern remains avoiding the creation of future landfill sites, the problems associated with landfill are complex. Historical landfill could be storing up future problems from old waste. In 2011, the Government published advice on how to manage landfill sites considering the issues associated with chemical seepage and emissions.⁵⁵ These can include a range of more dangerous by-products such as chemicals, bacteria, acid gases and methane, along with particulates (very small plastic or carbon particles that can damage lungs and internal organs, relating to engine pollution and certain plastic products such as car tyres). That report built on earlier work by the government in 2004, as well as research by the Royal Society, and concluded that there was no significant danger in living close to a landfill site, due to regulations in place. Regardless, landfill is a wasteful form of disposal and London's capacity to store it is diminishing.

Recommendation 6

The Mayor should encourage small businesses to prevent waste and consume less – for instance, avoiding food waste and unnecessary packaging, and using materials that can be both reusable and recyclable. Further incentives could be explored with local councils, for instance by working with local business improvement districts (BIDs),⁵⁶ where businesses come together and vote to apply a local levy to fund investment decisions in the local environment. The standards set out in ReLondon's Recycling Package can be used as a guide for advice and design as a base for new investment by London's BIDs.

⁵⁵ Health Protection Agency, [Impact on Health of Emissions from Landfill Sites](#), July 2011

⁵⁶ GLA, [About Business Improvement Districts](#)

Other formats and languages

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