

Progress in Delivering the Circular Economy Strategy, Beyond Recycling

Our circular economy strategy, *Beyond Recycling*, outlines our we commitment to transition to a circular economy in delivering our aim to become a zero waste and net zero nation by 2050. The strategy was published in 2021, at an unprecedented time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite that context, as this evidence paper shows, considerable progress has been made. This includes recycling rates having continued to increase despite the challenges faced during the pandemic, the development of the underpinning infrastructure having continued with the roll-out of re-use and repair facilities building on the continued progress on recycling, and the development and implementation of the new Workplace Recycling Regulations. Work has also continued on the areas being delivered in partnership across the four UK nations, including on the delivery of an Extended Responsibility Scheme for packaging and Deposit Return Scheme. In addition, in recognition of the progress during this period and leadership in the transition to the circular economy, Wales has been chosen this year to host the International Circular Economy Hotspot.

Circular Economy targets

In relation to the target of 70% recycling for waste from households, commercial and industrial businesses by 2025, the latest data held in each area is as follows:

- Local Authority collected municipal waste 2022-23 – 65.7%¹
- Waste-from-households 2022 – 56.7%²
- Industrial waste 2018 – 69%³
- Commercial waste 2018 – 64%⁴
- Construction and demolition waste 2019 – 93%⁵

In terms of Local Authority collected municipal waste, 2022/23 figures show four Local Authorities already at or achieving the 2024/25 target of 70%, 13 Local Authorities having exceeded the 64% minimum target, with only five having failed to reach the target.

A range of actions are being taken to further increase recycling rates and work towards the target. This includes continuing the successful model of support to Local Authorities to help them to improve their performance, consisting of the Sustainable Waste Management Grant, targeted capital funding, advice on performance improvement, and the delivery of the Be Mighty public awareness campaign. Most recently we have implemented the new Workplace Recycling Regulations⁶ requiring workplaces to keep their key recyclable materials separate and for those to be collected separately, to improve the quantity and quality of recycling from non-

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/local-authority-municipal-waste-management-april-2022-march-2023>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-waste-data/uk-statistics-on-waste>

³ <https://naturalresources.wales/media/693534/survey-of-commerical-and-industrial-waste-generated-in-wales-2018.pdf>

⁴ <https://naturalresources.wales/media/693534/survey-of-commerical-and-industrial-waste-generated-in-wales-2018.pdf>

⁵ [2019 Wales construction and demolition waste arising survey \(naturalresources.wales\)](https://naturalresources.wales/2019-Wales-construction-and-demolition-waste-arising-survey)

⁶ [Workplace recycling | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/workplace-recycling)

domestic premises. In addition, we have rolled out the provision of advice and support to businesses by Business Wales.

For the 26% overall reduction in waste target, current data estimates show total waste at 7,552,000 tonnes compared to the 2006-7 baseline of 10,553,261 tonnes, a 28.4% reduction. There is also positive progress in respect of the objective of zero waste to landfill and the 2024-25 target of landfilling less than 5% of waste produced in Wales. The latest published landfill rates being:

- Local Authority collected municipal waste – 1.6% in 2022-23⁷
- Industrial and commercial waste - 11% in 2018⁸
- Construction and demolition waste – 6% in 2019⁹

For our municipal waste it means that since devolution, the landfill rate has decreased from 95% in 1998 to 1.6%. With the Workplace Recycling Regulations now in place, it will further ensure that recyclable material is better captured for re-processing, thereby preventing that material from being landfilled. In addition, as part of the workplace recycling reforms, it includes a ban on all wood waste going to landfill which will further contribute to delivery against this target.

In relation to our target to reduce avoidable food waste there are several interventions being delivered to tackle food waste in Wales, including:

- Separate household food waste collection having been successfully rolled out by all local authorities in Wales;
- Workplaces now being required to separate food waste for collection as part of the Workplace Recycling reforms;
- Funding FareShare Cymru to expand the redistribution of surplus food to community organisations;
- Sustainability Food Clusters focus on resource efficiency and waste prevention in food and drink businesses;
- Welsh Government's [Climate Action Wales](#) campaign including tips about reducing food waste and making sustainable food choices;
- The Welsh Government funded Be Mighty¹⁰ campaign focused on food waste prevention and a Welsh Government contribution to WRAP's Love Food Hate Waste campaign; and,
- Welsh Government support for the Courtauld 2030 voluntary agreement which brings together major retailers to help consumers reduce food waste.

In addition, we are currently working with WRAP to develop the methodology to analyse and estimate food waste levels and compare them to the 2007 baseline.

⁷ <https://www.gov.wales/local-authority-municipal-waste-management-april-2022-march-2023>

⁸ <https://naturalresources.wales/media/693534/survey-of-commercial-and-industrial-waste-generated-in-wales-2018.pdf>

⁹ [2019 Wales construction and demolition waste arising survey \(naturalresources.wales\)](#)

¹⁰ [Save money and create Welsh power | Wales Recycles](#)

Overview of Actions to Deliver Beyond Recycling

In terms of Economy, innovation and market development, the objective is to support and drive innovation, develop new markets for secondary raw materials and increase supply chain resilience in Wales, recognising that to decarbonise it means the whole of the economy becoming more circular.

Within Welsh Government's core policies, *Beyond Recycling* and the imperative to move to a circular economy and the considerable opportunities for Wales in doing so are embedded across our strategies and plans. This includes *Wales innovates: creating a stronger, fairer, greener Wales*, the Welsh Government's *Manufacturing Action Plan* and the development of the *Net Zero Skills Plan*.

To support the delivery of our policies, funding has been put in place through the Circular Economy Fund for Business to help businesses adapt their processes to utilise recycled material and improve their resource efficiency and specialist support is provided by WRAP. In 2023-24, 19 businesses across Wales received funding from the CEF for business. In addition, WRAP have worked with businesses in Wales on supply chain trials which aim to increase the use of recycled materials within manufacturing.

The Circular Economy Innovation Communities (CEIC)¹¹ programme and Applied Research for Circular Solutions¹² programme run by Cardiff Met University and Swansea University also offer funding for SMEs in Wales to innovate and adopt circular business solutions.

Sustainable public sector procurement has a crucial role in supporting market development alongside improving the environmental outcomes being delivered. In implementing the commitments in *Beyond Recycling*, guidance has been developed on the Sustainable Procurement Hierarchy, early market engagement, construction, furniture, textiles, and whole life costing. In order to assess how well public sector organisations are doing in terms of sustainable procurement, the Sustainable Procurement Maturity Review has been developed which provides action plans for improvement. In addition, opportunities such as the recent Circular Economy in the Public Sector Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI)¹³, have provided an opportunity for Welsh businesses to scale up innovative circular economy solutions for the public sector.

The transition to a circular economy also brings opportunities for digital innovation, as demonstrated by the delivery of the world's first full-town Digital Deposit Return Scheme trial in Brecon. The Scan|Recycle|Reward trial tested new technology which allows householders to scan drinks containers, with the trial delivering high levels of engagement with 18,794 rewards being claimed.

¹¹ [Circular Economy | UK \(ceicwales.org.uk\)](https://ceicwales.org.uk)

¹² [Applied Research for Circular Solutions | Business Wales \(gov.wales\)](https://business.wales.gov.uk)

¹³ [Circular Economy in the Welsh Public Sector - SBRI Centre of Excellence \(sbriwales.co.uk\)](https://sbriwales.co.uk)

Recognising that to fully capitalise on the economic opportunities will require the skills to transition to a circular economy, the *Net Zero Skills Plan* consultation includes circular economy skills. This not only includes those required within the waste and resources sector, but across all sectors including manufacturing, energy and infrastructure, agriculture, and the public sector - with the transition to a circular economy being an essential element of decarbonisation in all.

In taking action to support businesses to transition, Business Wales has mainstreamed training, information, and advice to SMEs to help them adopt circular economy practices such as increasing resource efficiency. As recognised by the UK Climate Change Committee, increasing resource efficiency is a crucial element of the climate action needed this decade. Along with the Green Growth Pledge which has a strong focus on resource efficiency and circular economy principles, this support helps businesses to prevent waste and apply more circular business models. A Sustainability Business Cluster for food and drink manufacturers, which includes a food waste working group in collaboration with AMRC Cymru, alongside delivery of 'Green Skills' training to food and drink manufacturers, through the 'Sustainability Training Course' and 'Decarbonisation Workshops' is also in place. Farming Connect also provides advice on circularity on farms for the farming sector.

Our aim in building on Wales' recycling record is to build on the considerable success and progress to date by continuing to drive improvements in recycling of household, commercial, industrial, construction and demolition waste and to make Wales the world leader in recycling. The development and implementation of the Workplace Recycling Regulations is therefore another significant step forward which will further reduce the amount of waste sent to incineration and landfill, whilst crucially increasing the capture of high quality, source separated materials which can then be fed back into the Welsh economy. The Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging and Deposit Return Scheme for Drinks containers being developed will further drive progress whilst also delivering wider benefits such as tackling litter.

Our partnership working with Local Authorities, which has been so pivotal to Wales becoming a recycling nation, also continues with the continuation of the range of support alongside joint working on the reforms being developed. This includes the update of the Blueprint¹⁴ best practice to support Local Authorities in delivering beyond 70% recycling.

A key element within the circular economy strategy is the commitment to repair and reuse, recognising that it is essential to go *Beyond Recycling* if we are to become a zero waste and net zero nation. In delivering on this commitment we have taken forward a number of actions to grow and expand reuse and invest in key facilities. This includes working with Repair Café Wales to expand the network of repair cafes to 137 communities across Wales. Over 17,000 items having now been diverted from waste through their repairs. Investment into Benthg Cymru has also supported the

¹⁴ [Overview | Collection Blueprint \(collectionsblueprint.wales\)](https://collectionsblueprint.wales)

expansion of their network of ‘Libraries of Things’ to 20 sites across Wales, which has seen them lease their items 12,000 times.

We have also invested over £4million in repair and re-use projects across Wales through the Circular Economy Fund. In collaboration with local authorities and third sector partners this has supported the creation of over 50 hubs. It also means that 18 of our 22 local authorities now have at least one re-use facility located at a Recycling Centre and we are working with the remaining four to ensure full coverage. We are also funding WRAP Cymru to develop practical re-use guidance for local authorities, including good practice from across Wales.

As the infrastructure expands, we are also raising awareness via public campaigns to support behaviour change, for example through the *Climate Action Wales*¹⁵ digital hub which provides advice and signposts citizens in Wales to information about sustainable daily choices.

The actions being delivered to implement *Beyond Recycling* also include an ambitious programme of legislative reform, utilising legislation as a key lever to support progress. In addition to the new laws to implement the Workplace Recycling reforms already referred to, the first phase of bans on single use plastics came into force in October 2023 under The Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023.

The programme of legislation to implement Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging has already started, with the passage of the legislation to capture key data in preparation for the scheme. The notification of the scheme has also been submitted to the World Trade Organisation ahead of the introduction of the main statutory instrument to implement the scheme later in the year. The reforms will see those businesses which place or import packaged goods on to the UK market become responsible for the costs of collection, disposal and recycling of the packaging when it reaches the end of its intended life. The joint decision by all four governments to defer the obligations for payments for packaging from October 2024 to October 2025 has enabled additional work with business, local authorities and wider stakeholders to further refine the scheme. This will help to ensure it will effectively deliver the objectives and place the sector on a clear pathway to decarbonisation.

Whilst the delivery of the Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers has also been delayed until October 2027, the development of the legislation is underway and our recent joint [policy statement](#) highlights the significant progress that has been made by the four governments on a range of interoperability measures. The remaining issue relating to the UK’s approach to the Internal Market Act is covered within the [written statement](#), but our intention remains to implement a Deposit Return Scheme in Wales which includes glass. This was fully endorsed by the consultation undertaken jointly with the UK Government – published in January 2023 - and is

¹⁵ [Climate Action Wales \(gov.wales\)](#)

particularly important in Wales if the scheme is to be successful against our baseline recycling level.

Legislation is also being developed to introduce a mandatory digital waste tracking service to track the movement and destination of wastes. This will provide a comprehensive way to track what is happening to waste produced in the UK, which in turn will help regulation and compliance with the duty of care for waste and help tackle waste crime.

On 30 October 2023, the first phase of bans came into force under The Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023. These included bans on the supply of:

- Single-use plastic plates – this includes paper plates with a laminated plastic surface
- Single-use plastic cutlery – for example forks, spoons, knives
- Single-use plastic drinks stirrers
- Cups made of expanded or foamed extruded polystyrene.
- Takeaway food containers made of expanded or foamed extruded polystyrene
- Single-use plastic balloon sticks
- Single-use plastic-stemmed cotton buds
- Single-use plastic drinking straws – with exemptions so people who need them to eat and drink safely and independently can continue to have them.

Regulations introducing civil sanctions for the bans took effect on 1 December 2023 and we are currently working on the next phases of bans, with the aim being to introduce Phase 2 by spring 2026. This will include bans on:

- Single-use Plastic carrier bags – with exemptions including carrier bags for raw fish, meat or poultry and unpackaged food
- Polystyrene lids for cups and takeaway food containers
- Oxo-degradable plastic products.

Following a recent four-nation consultation which closed on 25 November 2023, we are also prioritising bans for wet wipes containing plastic. A Government Response to the consultation and an accompanying Written Statement was published on 22 April 2024. This outlined the next steps and confirmed there would be an 18-month transition period across the UK to allow businesses to transition to plastic free wipes and minimise waste. The Statement also highlighted our plans to introduce bans on single-use vapes. Officials are currently finalising impact assessments and drafting the regulations for these bans.

Preparedness of the waste sector and infrastructure investment

Our approach throughout has been to continue and build upon the partnership working with the waste sector that since the start of devolution has been so transformative. Our regular engagement includes meetings with the Wales Environmental Services Association (the main waste sector trade body), the events organised in Wales by the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) in

addition to engagement at the key stages during the development of our overarching strategy and supporting policies. For example, engagement with the waste sector on the new Workplace Recycling Regulations has been extensive – since the intention to bring in requirements for the separation and separate collection of key recyclables was identified as a key policy in the consultation on the 2010 waste strategy, *Towards Zero Waste* and then included in the Environment Bill White Paper in 2012-13, all the way through the consultations in 2019 and 2022, and in continuous engagement on readiness and then implementation up until today.

Investment in infrastructure is not only key to the transition to a circular economy, but fundamental to decarbonisation and of increasing importance to our economic resilience and competitiveness in a decarbonising global economy. Our approach to investment in public sector infrastructure has built upon and expanded the approach which has successfully transformed Wales into a recycling nation. This has seen Welsh Government invest over £1bn since devolution, with newer elements like the support for Local Authorities to transition to the use of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles for the collection of recycling and waste being added to the support for the implementation of the Blueprint approach.

Alongside continuing investment in public sector infrastructure, the transition to a circular economy also requires the economic infrastructure to capitalise on the significant opportunities and gain the benefit from Wales' world class collection of recycled material. Complementing the investment via the Circular Economy Fund for Business detailed above, which has benefited a number of businesses in Wales we are also supporting inward investment in key areas. For example, the new Jayplas 100,000 tonnes per annum plastic recycling plant in Swansea. Our clear vision, consistent policy and world class recycling performance making Wales a key destination for investment in circular economy innovation.