

SUMMARY: WRAP HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES (HWRC) GUIDE

THE NATIONAL PICTURE (SECTION 2)

Nationally, HWRC recycling rates have increased significantly in recent years thanks to major efforts by local authorities, contractors and householders, and mirroring trends at the kerbside. At the same time, the overall tonnage of waste handled by HWRCs has significantly reduced. HWRCs are going through a period of adjustment to new roles and circumstances, with new recycling streams (for example, for wood, carpet, mattresses and electrical equipment) appearing either through market demand or regulation, and new opportunities for resource recovery and re-use.

This guide aims to help all managers or operators in the HWRC network to improve performance and meet or exceed the ever-higher standards required of them by the public and by law.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE (SECTIONS 3 AND 4)

The site itself

- Providing recycling facilities for a range of bulky items and materials is the most important factor in improving HWRC recycling rates.
- Targeting a wide range of small recyclables also increases recycling rates.
- Raising the recycling profile of specific waste types by using bulk containers rather than smaller ones results in more of that waste being collected.
- Clear signage around the site and on containers improves capture rates and reduces contamination levels.
- Split-level sites can improve the efficiency of high-tonnage HWRCs and increase performance.
- Efficient traffic management also helps focus recycling efforts and free up staff time.

- A re-use system (from a single container to a shop facility) positively affects recycling rates and is good PR.
- Site management
- Higher staffing levels have a positive effect on HWRC recycling rates, as do well-trained and helpful site staff.
- Segregating residual waste for use in technologies such as mechanical biological treatment (MBT) and energy from waste (EfW) must be well managed or lower recycling rates can result.
- Incentives to staff and contractors can be effective in increasing recycling rates.

Other factors

Research shows that recycling rates can be improved if:

- the range of materials that are targeted is widened;
- there is good kerbside dry-recycling coverage in the local area;
- the HWRC matches the kerbside situation; and
- there is good public awareness of the waste and recycling services available in the area.

Balancing obligations, stakeholders and financial pressures

Improving performance means balancing the factors above with statutory and regulatory compliance, changing circumstances and budgetary constraints.

AUTHORITIES' OBLIGATIONS (SECTION 5)

Local authorities must provide 'reasonably accessible' HWRCs that are 'available at all reasonable time' for residents to dispose of their household waste free of charge. Beyond this provision, authorities may charge for example, for commercial waste. They also have a duty of care to manage and transfer waste in a way that enables its safe recovery or disposal and a duty to implement the waste hierarchy in priority order. Specific waste types such as WEEE have their own regulations. In England and Wales, the Localism Act has a bearing on how the site network is managed. Scotland has specific Zero Waste Regulations. All of these are on top of authorities' general duties, such as the duty to provide equal access to services.

CONTRACTS AND MATERIALS MARKETS (SECTIONS 6)

At the same time, HWRC operations are often carried out by third parties under contract. This involves choices by the local authority on multiple issues, for example:

- Matching contracts to new conditions and targets;
- Operating outside of the confines of the contract where necessary to achieve efficiency savings;
- Designing incentives that go beyond simple tonnage targets to obtain maximum HWRC performance;
- Deciding whether to use local collectors and reprocessors or large operators; and
- Designing contracts with materials reprocessors in an unpredictable market, while maximising diversion from landfill.

MANAGING COMMERCIAL WASTE (SECTION 7)

Ineffective control of commercial input has a negative effect on HWRC recycling rates. If commercial waste remains unchecked, other measures to improve the efficiency of the site are likely to be less effective. However, blunt measures such as barriers and van bans are often ineffective, and HWRCs in England are now encouraged to accept SMEs' commercial waste, so the question is becoming one of generating income from commercial waste inputs. The new approach emphasises preventing abuse with systems such as meet-and-greet staff plus more targeted control methods such as disclaimer forms or automatic number plate recognition.

Existing HWRC sites may be in a position to accept commercial waste and this can result in savings for local authorities through fewer fly-tipping incidents, and income from charges to traders and resale of items. If this is not an option, controls may be necessary in order to ensure that commercial waste isn't taken to HWRCs.

WORKING WITH OTHERS (SECTION 8)

Other organisations are increasingly present on site at HWRCs, bringing with them an extra layer of contracts and/or subcontracts. The benefits of working with third-sector re-use or recycling organisations include their ability to supply niche solutions and to access specific funding streams (see Case Study 3: Leeds). However, there can be issues around the capacity of third-sector organisations and level of officer support needed. On a contractual level, there needs to be:

- clarity of local authority objectives;
- a strong three-way relationship between the local authority, private contractor and third-sector organisation; and
- mechanisms for quality assurance, including waste-services-specific health and safety accreditation.

MAINTAINING A COST-EFFECTIVE NETWORK (SECTION 9)

There are costs and benefits to redeveloping or closing sites (see Case Study 2: Greater Manchester). Closing sites outright is particularly contentious because:

- HWRC provision and recycling yields are linked: fewer sites tends to mean lower HWRC recycling rates;
- empirical evidence suggests that closing a site generally results in a 5–10% reduction in overall HWRC throughput (with a 5–10% reduction following opening of a new site);
- waste services, being highly visible, are seen as a barometer for council performance; and
- closures increase pressures on other sites so the associated costs must be factored in.

Alternatives to closures include: changing opening hours; introducing temporary, mobile or third-party operated sites (see Case Study 1: Suffolk); charging for some waste streams; accepting certain wastes at specific sites only; or working in partnership with other authorities to maximise economies of scale (see Case Study 6: South London).

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES (SECTION 10)

As the HWRC network evolves, it increasingly incorporates new features reflecting emerging social, environmental and technological possibilities, for example:

- innovative design, with practical features such as covered bays, viewing platforms and education centres (see Case Study 5: Cambridgeshire);
- separation of residual waste suitable for residual-waste technologies such as mechanical biological treatment (MBT) and energy from waste (EfW); and
- modern payment methods using pre-payment cards, for example, and visitor incentives such as scratchcards.

Future developments might include:

- moving to a resource-recovery park style of HWRC with, for example, DIY-materials recovery facilities;
- partnerships with private companies, such as retailers, to expand bring banks into 'mini-HWRCs';
- site design based around the waste hierarchy, with a presumption in favour of re-use or recycling; and
- diversification into sustainability-focused activities such as selling biodiesel or offering electric car charging.

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to local authorities visit**

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