

# Waste less, recycle more proposals

## Supporting information

## Waste less, recycle more

We are proposing some changes to our recycling and waste collection services. The purpose of these changes is to:

- Make it easier for people to recycle more,
- Reduce the carbon footprint of waste in South Gloucestershire, and
- Reduce our costs, so that our funding covers the cost of delivering the service.

Over the next three years, we want to roll out a weekly collection of flexible plastics for recycling to all households with a kerbside collection and introduce further measures which make it easier for you to recycle more of what you currently throw away. Once you're recycling more and creating more space in your black bin, we then want to consider how often black bins for non-recyclable waste are collected, looking at options for a three or four weekly collection.

We have successfully adopted this dual approach before. In 2017 and 2018 we switched to weekly recycling collections and introduced smaller black bins. The weekly collections made it easier for people to recycle more and they found they no longer needed so much space in their black bins. This led to an increase in our recycling rate from 51.9% to 59.9% and reduced how much it costs us to provide the service.

Rolling out a flexible plastics recycling collection service across all households and making it easier to recycle food waste presents an opportunity to make a similar positive impact again.

## The case for recycling

Not recycling your empty cereal box means more trees and forests need to be cut down to produce new cardboard. Not separating out your plastic bottle from your general rubbish means that will likely be burnt – releasing carbon into the atmosphere – instead of being used to make new plastic packaging. We've all seen the photos of huge piles of dumped plastic water bottles, and we've watched the nature programmes telling us about the dangers to fish and dolphins when microplastics end up in rivers and seas.

The environmental case for recycling is undeniable. If we can increase our recycling rate, we can:

- conserve more of the world's finite natural resources,
- protect wildlife and eco-systems,
- save energy, and
- cut carbon emissions.

We operate a very successful recycling collection service which means residents can recycle most of their household waste including food waste, from home. In South Gloucestershire, we currently recycle 59.9% of our waste - the second highest rate out of all UK unitary councils. But this increase has recently stalled, and we know many of you want to do more. We want to make it easier for you.

### Making it easier for you to recycle

Flexible plastics, things like bags, wrappers, and packets, currently take up the most space in black bins, around 27% by volume of the average black bin. Food waste is another big contributor, at around 12% of volume. We want to make it easier for you to take these out

of your black bin. We also know that many other recyclable materials are ending up in black bins – mainly because you're unsure what can and can't be recycled. We want to make this easier for you too.

### **Helping you do more: a weekly collection of plastic bags and wrapping**

We are currently trialling collecting flexible plastics from 1,955 households at the kerbside each week. The trial is helping us to understand how we can best roll out flexible plastic collections to every household that receives kerbside collections by the end of 2025. This would help residents recycle even more from home and make a huge difference to the amount of waste that ends up in the black bin.

### **Helping you do more: making it less unpleasant recycling the dinner your child has turned their nose up to**

You can already recycle food waste and you've told us that you want to recycle, but it's expensive to buy biodegradable bags and it's disgusting when those bags rip and spill mouldy food everywhere. We adjusted how we collect and recycle food waste so you can store your apple core or your child's rejected cottage pie in any plastic bag, making it cheaper and less messy to recycle food waste.

### **Helping you do more: being clearer about what you can and can't recycle**

You've told us it can be confusing knowing what you can and can't recycle – especially when different councils deal with different recycled materials in different ways. We can't control what or how they recycle in Bristol, Bath or Bishops Cleeve, but as part of our action plan, we are looking at developing a new tool which would help you quickly find out whether an item should go in your green recycling box or food bin, or if it still needs to go in the black bin. In the meantime, we can recommend the recyclenow website, which works out based on where you live, what is the easiest way to recycle various household items.

## **The financial imperative**

Put simply, it currently costs us more to collect and process waste and recycling than we receive in funding. And as our costs escalate, the gap is getting wider – an unsustainable position.

We need to find ways to close an expected annual shortfall of between £2.7million and £4.7million. Increasing recycling volumes and reducing the amount we spend on processing black bin waste will make the largest difference\*.

As technology evolves, the cost of recycling many items is falling and at the same time we're rightly being charged more to burn rubbish or dump it in landfill. It's cheaper for the council to process a tonne of recycled material than it is to deal with that same weight of black bin waste. And that's before we consider the cost – for us and for future generations – to mitigate against and repair the damage being done to our environment. When we throw recyclable materials in the black bin, we're wasting money dumping or burning things which could and should be turned back into new items.

\* These measures alone will not cover the full financial shortfall and so we will need to do more to balance the books. One of the ways we plan to do this is to raise the charges for our green waste subscription service to a level which covers its costs. You can provide feedback on this change through our annual budget consultation.

## **Why aren't we covering our costs?**

The proportion of your council tax which is spent on waste services is relatively small. The council plays a crucial role in providing care for the elderly and supporting the most vulnerable young people in our society and therefore a high percentage of your council tax helps to pay for that. Waste and recycling services receive approximately 6.6% of the Council tax, which for a household living in a band D property paying £1,752.11 in council tax, works out at around £116.17 per year.

And the costs of providing the service are likely to rise in the future. Recent inflation has increased our costs significantly and a tax is under consideration which would make it more expensive to use Energy from Waste (incineration) facilities. With no other options for black bin waste disposal, this will add to the day-to-day cost of the waste service.

Burying our heads in the sand is not an option. If we do not reduce the costs of providing the service, we will need to fund the shortfalls from other sources, including higher increases to council tax.

## **How and when might the changes be implemented?**

We are planning ahead to prevent more significant problems down the line.

In drawing up these plans, we have conducted focus groups with residents to understand the potential impacts for different groups. We've involved a wide range of residents to ensure we hear different perspectives, especially those who we think will find these changes most difficult: large households, pet-owners, parents with babies and young children, families with teenagers, people with illnesses and disabilities who have larger volumes of clinical/medical waste, and those living in house-shares.

Our research has confirmed that by increasing what they recycle from the home, most people would be able to effectively manage their waste with a reduced frequency collection service. But we know this wouldn't be easy for everyone, for example if you live in a house with six or more people, or if you have children in nappies, it would be harder. If the proposals go ahead, we've got plans for how we'll support these groups.

If approved, we would first introduce the new flexible plastics collection service and other changes to help you recycle more (we're planning to collect flexible plastics from every household by 2025). This would allow you to get used to having extra free space in your black bin. Then, when you're comfortable knowing what goes where, we're proposing to reduce the frequency of black bin collections in 2026.

## **How can I have my say?**

These are big changes and so we want to hear what you think.

We know from the conversations we've already had that some people may initially find it difficult to imagine how they might manage should the changes go ahead. But we think others will recognise the potential financial and environmental benefits.

Whatever your views, you can complete our consultation to share your feedback.