



The countryside charity  
London

Working for a greener city

A More  
Natural  
Capital

## London Boroughs Recycling Scorecard

July 2024

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## 1. Summary

Last year, London's household waste 'recycling rate' (the proportion of waste sent for recycling or composting) was the worst in England at 33%. This year, the rate remains unchanged at 33% but London is now the second lowest because the North East's rate has reduced from 34% to 31%.

London's rate is now lower than it was ten years ago. It was at its highest in 2012/13 when it reached 34% but has since stagnated and even fallen slightly to 33%.

**Within London there are very big variations between boroughs.**

- Recycling: Tower Hamlets has the lowest recycling rate at 18%, Bromley has the highest at 49% (this is the % of household waste sent for recycling or composting in 2022-23).
- Kg waste collected per person: Lambeth collected the least total amount of waste per person at 215kg and Havering the most at 390kg (this is the total waste collected per person, whether it is sent for composting, recycling or disposal).
- Kg waste sent for disposal per person: Westminster sent the most household waste per person (291kg) for disposal. Ealing sent the least (116kg).

**Ealing tops the Scorecard with both low kg of waste sent for disposal per person and a high recycling rate. Westminster is at the bottom of the table.**

Many boroughs already provide the collection services needed to deliver high recycling rates and promote waste reduction. There is plenty of room for improvement. However, the key problem is collection systems are not being used optimally. Boroughs should therefore set a target of 50% of household waste sent for recycling or composting by 2030 and an interim target of 40% by 2026 and take the following action:

1. communicate more effectively with residents about what they are required to do
2. use enforcement powers for persistent misuse of the recycling services (boroughs usually already have enforcement policies but they are not necessarily applied effectively)
3. where not already doing so, roll out separate food waste collections and more consistent collection services (glass, mixed plastics, paper, card, tins, cans).

Boroughs which already have high recycling rates should set a target of 60% and lead the way to achieving it.

## 2. Recycling 50% of London's household waste by 2030

Household waste is a significant element of Local Authority Collected Waste (LACW) which in turn is a significant element of 'municipal waste'. The London Mayor has not set a specific target for *household waste* recycling, however a 50% *Local Authority Collected Waste* recycling target is set for waste authorities and the London Mayor expects London to achieve an overall 65% *municipal waste* recycling rate (by weight) by 2030. See definitions opposite. Despite these targets, **there has been no improvement in London's household waste recycling rate since the target was set in 2018 and the rate is now languishing at 33%. It is also the lowest rate in England.**

In line with the Mayor's strategy, therefore, **London boroughs should adopt a target for 50% of household waste sent for recycling or composting by 2030 and an interim target of 40% by 2026.** Boroughs which already have high recycling rates should set a target of 60% and lead the way to achieving it. Boroughs should also adopt a target to reduce the kg of household waste collected per person (excluding garden waste), particularly those boroughs with very high rates.

**To support these targets, the A More Natural Capital coalition will publish an annual London Boroughs Recycling Scorecard so residents and councillors can see clearly how they are doing and identify areas for improvement.** The first Recycling Scorecard was published in 2023. The 2024 Scorecard is set out below using 2022-23 data in early 2024.

### DEFINITIONS

**Municipal waste** is household waste or business waste that is similar in composition irrespective of who collects or disposes of it. This includes waste from shops, offices, charities, schools and government buildings

**Local Authority Collected Waste (LACW)** refers to all waste in the possession or control of waste authorities. This includes waste collected from households and businesses. This is a subset of municipal waste.

**Household waste** is waste collected from households by the council's in-house service or its contractor. This is a subset of LACW.

This year we have adjusted the Scorecard so a borough's final scores is derived from both:

- % of household waste sent for recycling/composting (higher being better)
- Kg of household waste per person sent for disposal (lower being better)

## 3. Comparing recycling rates

### 3a. London boroughs' household waste collection responsibilities

Boroughs collect waste for recycling and disposal. They then take it to

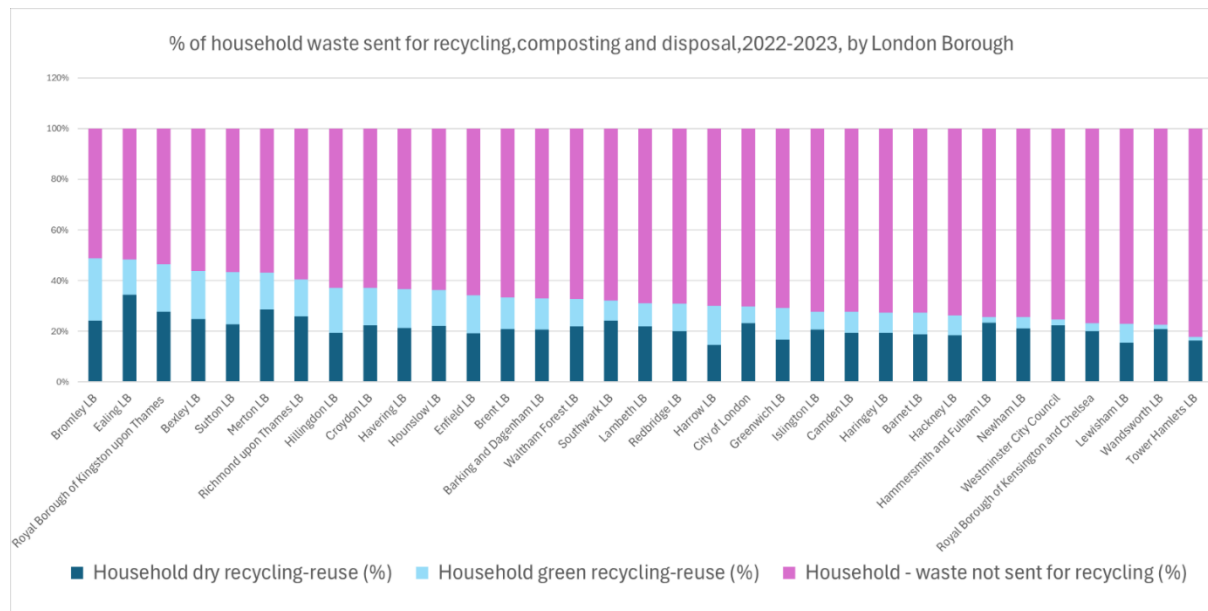
- an incinerator or landfill site
- a sorting facility, where recyclable materials are sorted (then sent on to a reprocessor), or
- direct to a reprocessor e.g. paper mill; composting/digestion facility for garden/food waste.

In London, twelve boroughs both collect and dispose of waste. There are also four, statutory, sub-regional partnerships, which are responsible for disposing of the waste collected by their members. These joint waste disposal authorities are East London Waste Authority (ELWA), North London Waste Authority (NLWA), Western Riverside Waste Authority (WRWA) and the West London Waste Authority (WLWA). Four boroughs have formed a voluntary waste partnership, the South London Waste Partnership.

### 3b. 2022/23 London boroughs' recycling rates

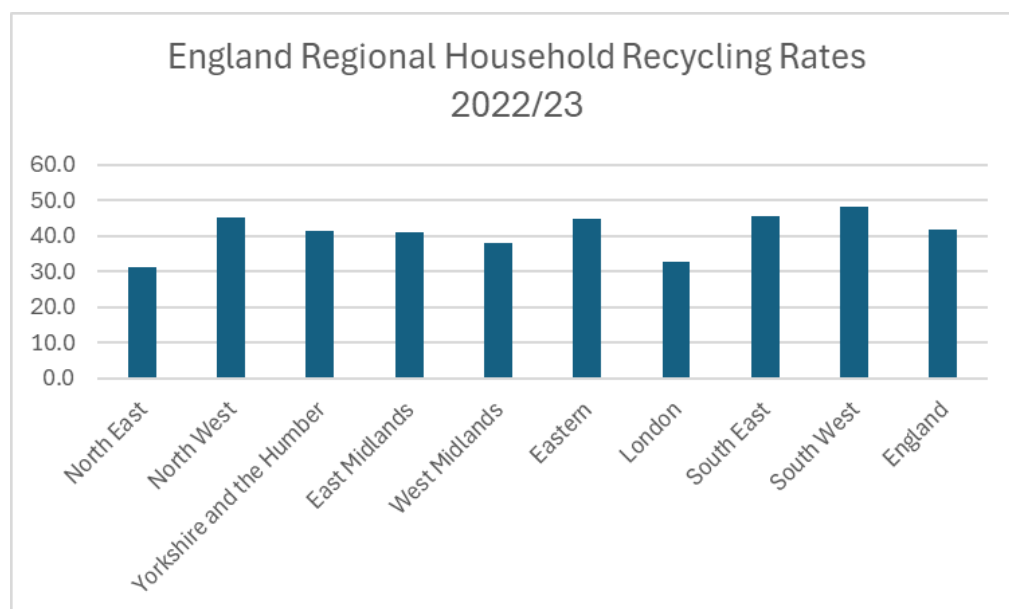
In 2020-21, Bexley had the highest recycling rate at 50% and so sent the lowest proportion of waste for disposal (landfill or incineration). Tower Hamlets had the lowest proportion recycling rate at 19% and so sent the highest proportion of waste for disposal.

Just looking at 'dry recyclables' (i.e. not including food waste or garden waste) the highest rates were in Ealing (34%), Merton (29%) and Kingston (28%) and the lowest in Harrow / Lewisham (both 15% and Tower Hamlets (16%).



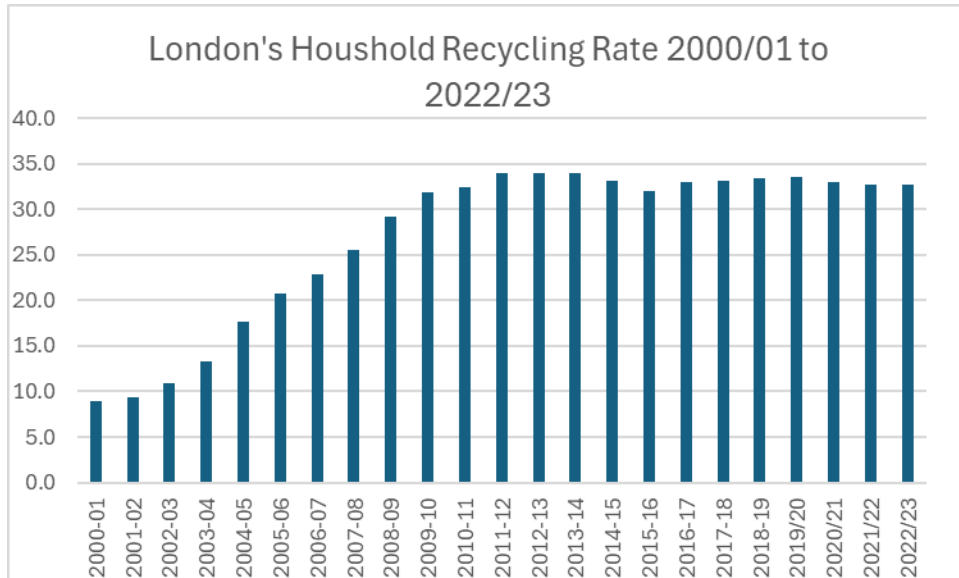
### 3c. London's household waste recycling rate (the proportion of waste sent for recycling or composting) is the lowest in the country along with the North East.

The region with the highest household waste recycling rate in 2022/23 was the South West at 49%. London's recycling rate is second lowest at 33%. This rate remains unchanged from 2021/22.



**3d. London’s recycling rate is now worse than it was ten years ago and showing no signs of improving.**

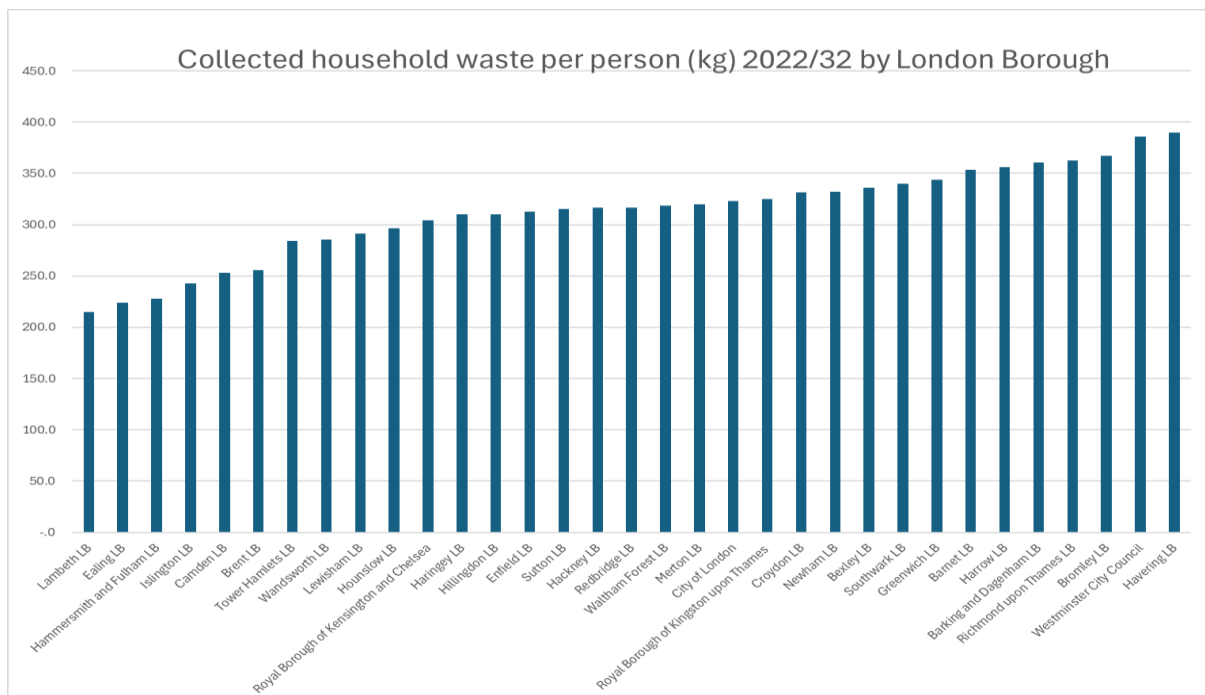
London’s recycling rate was at its highest in 2012/13 when it reached 34% but has since stagnated and even fallen slightly to 33%.



**4. Kg of waste collected per person / sent for disposal per person**

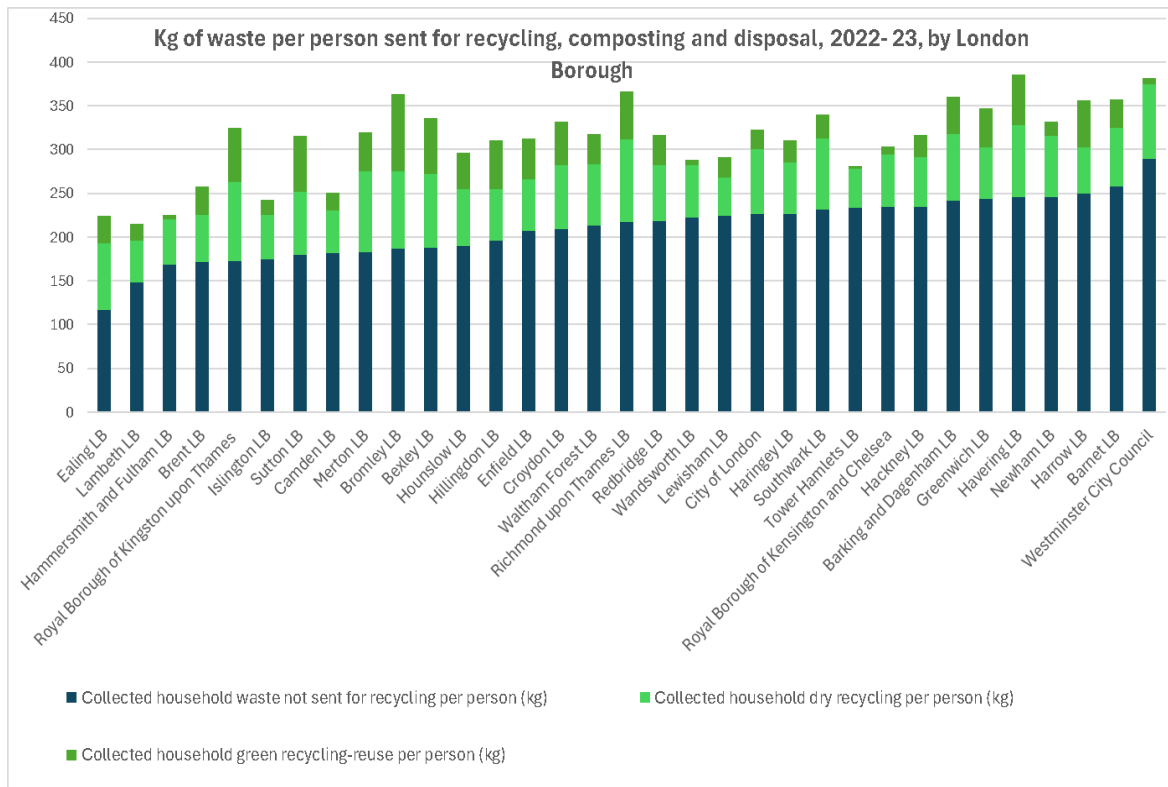
**4a. There are large differences in the overall amounts of waste collected per person**

The lowest amount of waste collected *per person* was 215kg in Lambeth and the highest in Havering at 390kg per person. This is the *total* amount of waste collected per person immaterial of whether it was sent for recycling, composting or disposal. This chart demonstrates that sustainable waste re-use and waste reduction are as important as recycling and composting.



**4b. There are also very large variations in the amount of waste sent for disposal *per person* (i.e. not recycled or composted).** The graph below shows Kg of household waste collected per person sent for recycling, composting or disposal. This is ordered from the lowest to the highest kg of waste not recycled or composted (blue) i.e. sent for disposal.

Westminster sent the most household waste per person (291kg) for disposal. Ealing sent the least (116kg). The boroughs sending the least kg household waste for disposal *per person* were Ealing, Lambeth, Hammersmith & Fulham, Brent and Kingston. The boroughs sending the highest kg per person for disposal were Westminster, Barnet, Harrow, Newham and Havering.



## 5. Final scores

Rank		Rank		Final score	OVER-ALL RANK
	% household waste sent for recycling or composting 2022/23 by London borough		Kg household waste sent for disposal per person 2022/23 by London borough	(sum of ranks)	
2	Ealing LB	1	Ealing LB	3	1
3	Kingston upon Thames	5	Kingston upon Thames	8	2
1	Bromley LB	10	Bromley LB	11	3
5	Sutton LB	7	Sutton LB	12	4
4	Bexley LB	11	Bexley LB	15	5
6	Merton LB	9	Merton LB	15	6
13	Brent LB	4	Brent LB	17	7
17	Lambeth LB	2	Lambeth LB	19	8
8	Hillingdon LB	13	Hillingdon LB	21	9
11	Hounslow LB	12	Hounslow LB	23	10
9	Croydon LB	15	Croydon LB	24	11
7	Richmond upon Thames LB	17	Richmond upon Thames LB	24	12
12	Enfield LB	14	Enfield LB	26	13
22	Islington LB	6	Islington LB	28	14
27	Hammersmith and Fulham LB	3	Hammersmith and Fulham LB	30	15
23	Camden LB	8	Camden LB	31	16
15	Waltham Forest LB	16	Waltham Forest LB	31	17
18	Redbridge LB	18	Redbridge LB	36	18
10	Havering LB	29	Havering LB	39	19
16	Southwark LB	23	Southwark LB	39	20
14	Barking and Dagenham LB	27	Barking and Dagenham LB	41	21
20	City of London	21	City of London	41	22
24	Haringey LB	22	Haringey LB	46	23
21	Greenwich LB	28	Greenwich LB	49	24
19	Harrow LB	31	Harrow LB	50	25
31	Lewisham LB	20	Lewisham LB	51	26
32	Wandsworth LB	19	Wandsworth LB	51	27
26	Hackney LB	26	Hackney LB	52	28
30	Kensington and Chelsea	25	Kensington and Chelsea	55	29
25	Barnet LB	32	Barnet LB	57	30
33	Tower Hamlets LB	24	Tower Hamlets LB	57	31
28	Newham LB	30	Newham LB	58	32
29	Westminster City Council	33	Westminster City Council	62	33

1st quartile	2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile	3 <sup>rd</sup> quartile	4 <sup>th</sup> quartile
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## 6. Delivering change

### Communications are key: invest to save

Many boroughs already provide the collection services needed to deliver high recycling rates and promote waste reduction. There is plenty of room for improvement. However, the key problem is that collection systems are not being used optimally. Where boroughs are offering recycling collections, but householders are still putting most of their waste in the bin (whether it's recyclable or not) – this has a big negative impact on cost efficiency.

Most properties are now served with kerbside collection of 'dry' recyclable materials (paper, plastics, glass, metals) and residual waste (non-recyclable rubbish). Many also now have food waste collections. Some receive garden waste collections. Collections are 'free' to the householder though are of course paid for via taxation and household waste management.

As a general rule, the more waste sent for recycling or composting, the lower the overall costs. This is because, if recycling increases, councils can reduce the frequency of residual (non-recyclable) collections (fewer collections = lower costs) and also because paying for waste disposal is generally more expensive than sending waste for recycling or composting.

Evidence shows the most effective way to ensure householders recycle properly is to communicate effectively and enforce if necessary. Communications should be a fundamental part of the council's waste management system and, in terms of budget, it should be seen as an invest-to-save measure. However, this is one aspect of waste management which is frequently neglected to the point that householders may receive no direct communication at all about what is expected and certainly there will be no sanctions for persistent non-recyclers.

### More broadly: how to increase recycling rates

On the whole, the collection infrastructure for recycling is already in place in London, however problems linked to both service design and communication with households, as well as a lack of incentive to participate, mean it is not being used optimally. In some areas, collection infrastructure needs to be improved, for example extended to include food waste collections where these are not already in place. Sorting facilities (usually called a Materials Recycling Facility or MRF) may not be adequate or the bags of mixed recycling sent to them may be too contaminated to sort effectively.

### To increase the amount of household waste sent for recycling and composting in London, boroughs should take the following action:

1. Offer separate collection services for dry recyclables and food waste, in line with the consistency agenda. The scope of recyclables collected should be well-aligned to account for transient populations (people moving in and out of or around London).
2. Ensure multi-household schemes (i.e. for blocks of flats) are adequately specified and housed in appropriate spaces and are serviced by managers of facilities who are tasked with supporting proper use of recycling systems by residents.

**Enforcement policies are standard but are not necessarily applied effectively.** Islington Council example policy: *"If someone is not using their recycling and food waste service an advisor may visit to make sure they have everything they need to recycle, and to answer any questions. Although recycling advisors can issue fines, they will only do so as a last resort if they are sure that someone has all the information and containers they need to recycle, and are deliberately not recycling."*

[Islington Council: Compulsory recycling | Islington Council](#)



3. Invest in ongoing, multi-channel communications to ensure people are well-informed as to how they should separate all recyclable waste.
4. Use enforcement powers for persistent misuse of the recycling services.
5. Ensure sorting systems are effective and, where dry recyclable materials are collected mixed but contamination continues, use feedback from the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) to adapt collection systems and communications to improve materials capture.
6. Reduce the frequency of residual (non-recyclable) waste collections.
7. Ensure that sorting for separately collected materials are equipped to deal with the (expected increasing) range of recyclable plastics
8. Consider implementing sorting systems to deal with mixed waste to ensure that additional plastics and metals are captured for recycling. This would also support efforts to de-fossilise the carbon content of waste combusted at London's incineration facilities.
9. Set clear targets for improvement to the borough recycling rate.

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CPRE London and the *More Natural Capital* coalition  
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#### References

Data - [Local authority collected waste management - annual results - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results) (see table entitled Local authority collected waste generation annual results 2022/23 (England and regions) and local authority data annual results 2022/23)

[Communications Guidance | WRAP](#)

[Recycling - Who Really Leads the World? \(Issue 2\) - Eunomia](#)

[Guide to Improving Waste Management in the Domestic Rented Sector - Eunomia](#)