



## London Boroughs Recycling Scorecard 2023

March 2023

### Summary and introduction

Household waste is a significant element of Local Authority Collected Waste which in turn is a significant element of 'municipal waste'. In 2018 the London Mayor set recycling targets of 50% of *Local Authority Collected Waste* and 65% *municipal waste* by 2030.

Despite these targets, national data released on 24 March 2023<sup>1</sup> showed there has been no improvement in London's household waste recycling rate for ten years. It was at its highest in 2012/13, when it reached 34%, but has since stagnated and even fallen slightly to 33%. It is the lowest recycling rate in the country, comparing poorly to the highest regional rate of 49%.

London boroughs are responsible for household waste management. To promote action, the *A More Natural Capital* coalition<sup>2</sup> is publishing, in this report, a 'London Boroughs Recycling Scorecard', so councils and their residents can see clearly how they are doing and identify areas for improvement. The 2023 Scorecard (p3/p10) sets out the recently published 2021/22 data. The coalition aims to publish updates annually to show where progress is, or is not, being made.

In the 2023 Scorecard, Bromley tops the table at 49% of waste recycled. Tower Hamlets sits at the bottom at 20%.

Many boroughs provide the comprehensive recycling services needed to deliver high recycling rates, including food waste collections. But not all do. More problematic is that not all Londoners are using the services 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [ENV18 - Local authority collected waste: annual results tables \(Historical\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [A More Natural Capital - CPRE London](#)

## 1. 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.** Initially boroughs will be ranked according to their household waste recycling rate. The first Scorecard is set out below (see 2b) using [2021-22 data](#) published 24 March 2023.

In future years, depending on resources and availability of data, the Scorecard may be adjusted to create a metric based on a number of indicators:

- % of sent for recycling/composting (not sent for disposal)
- % of households with separate food waste collections
- % of households with appropriate collection services for dry recyclables (glass, mixed plastics, paper, card, tins, cans)
- Kg of waste *per person* sent for disposal

## 2. Comparing London borough recycling rates

### 2a. London boroughs are responsible for waste collection.

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 for paper, or composting or digestion facility for garden or 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

### DEFINITIONS

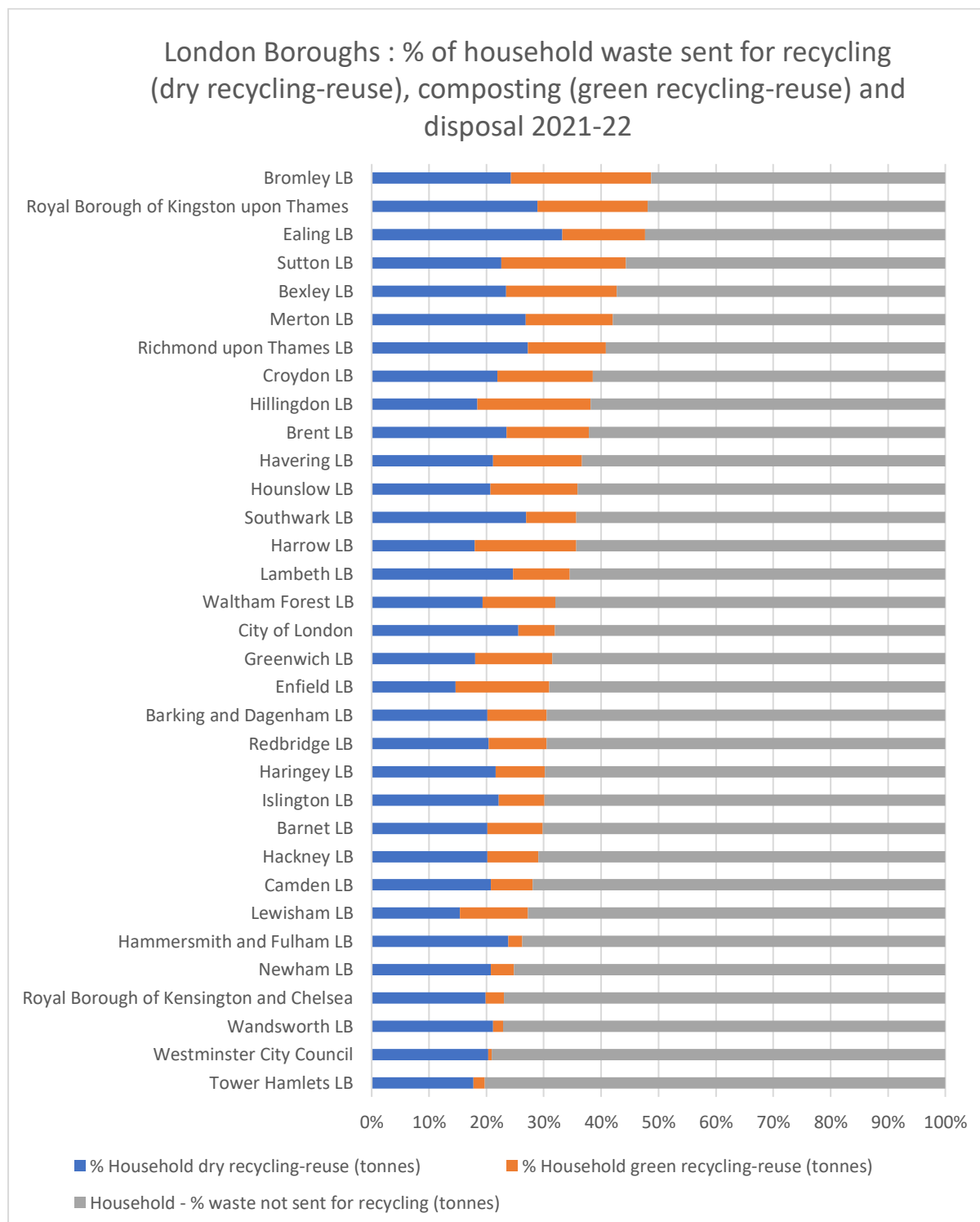
**Municipal waste** is household waste or business waste that is similar in composition irrespective of who collects or disposes of it. This includes waste from shops, offices, charities, schools and government buildings

**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.

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.

**2b. 2023 London Boroughs Recycling Scorecard (see also Table 5 p10)**



Some boroughs need to do more than others but all boroughs need to do more. In 2021-22:

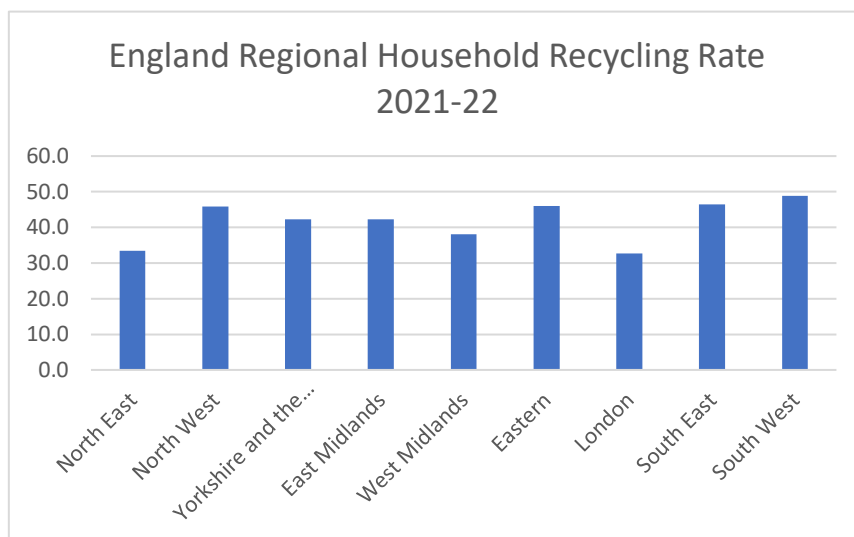
- Bromley had the highest total (dry + green)<sup>3</sup> recycling rate at 49% and so sent the lowest proportion of waste for disposal (landfill or incineration). Tower Hamlets had the lowest rate at 20% and so sent the highest proportion of waste for disposal.

<sup>3</sup> Dry recyclable materials = paper, plastic, metal, glass. Green recyclable materials = food and garden waste.

- The boroughs with the highest recycling rates in 2021-22 were Bromley, Kingston, Ealing, Sutton and Bexley. The boroughs with the lowest rates were Tower Hamlets, Westminster, Wandsworth, Kensington & Chelsea and Newham.
- Additionally, seven boroughs reported 'dry recycling-reuse' rates under 20%. These were Tower Hamlets, Lewisham, Enfield, Greenwich, Waltham Forest, Harrow and Hillingdon.
- On a positive note, Redbridge and Brent were among the 20 local authorities in England with the largest increase in recycling rate over the previous year, see Annex Table 1 p7 / Annex Graph p9.
- However, there are no London boroughs in the top 20 local authorities with the highest recycling rates in England, see Annex Table 2 p7.

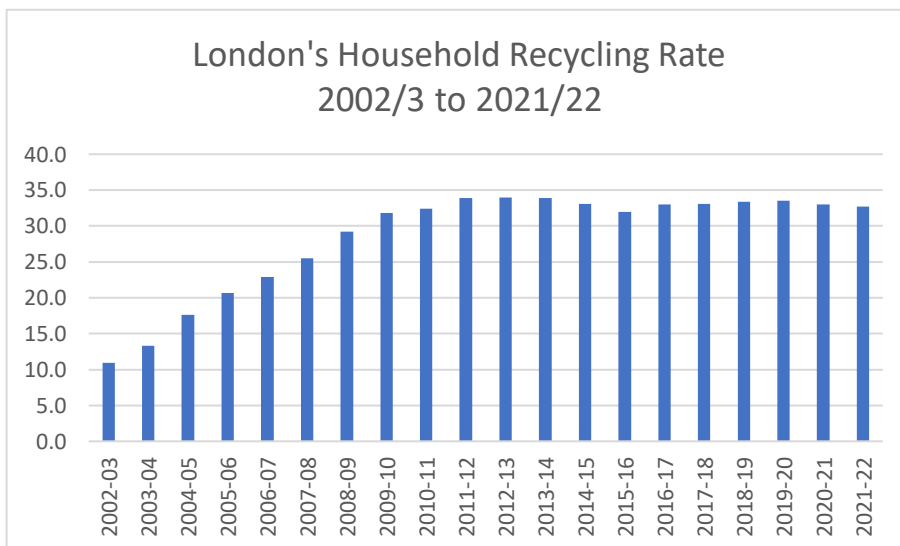
**London's household waste recycling rate (the proportion of waste sent for recycling or composting) is the lowest in the country.**

The region with the highest household waste recycling rate in 2021/22 was the South West at 49%. London was the lowest at 33%.



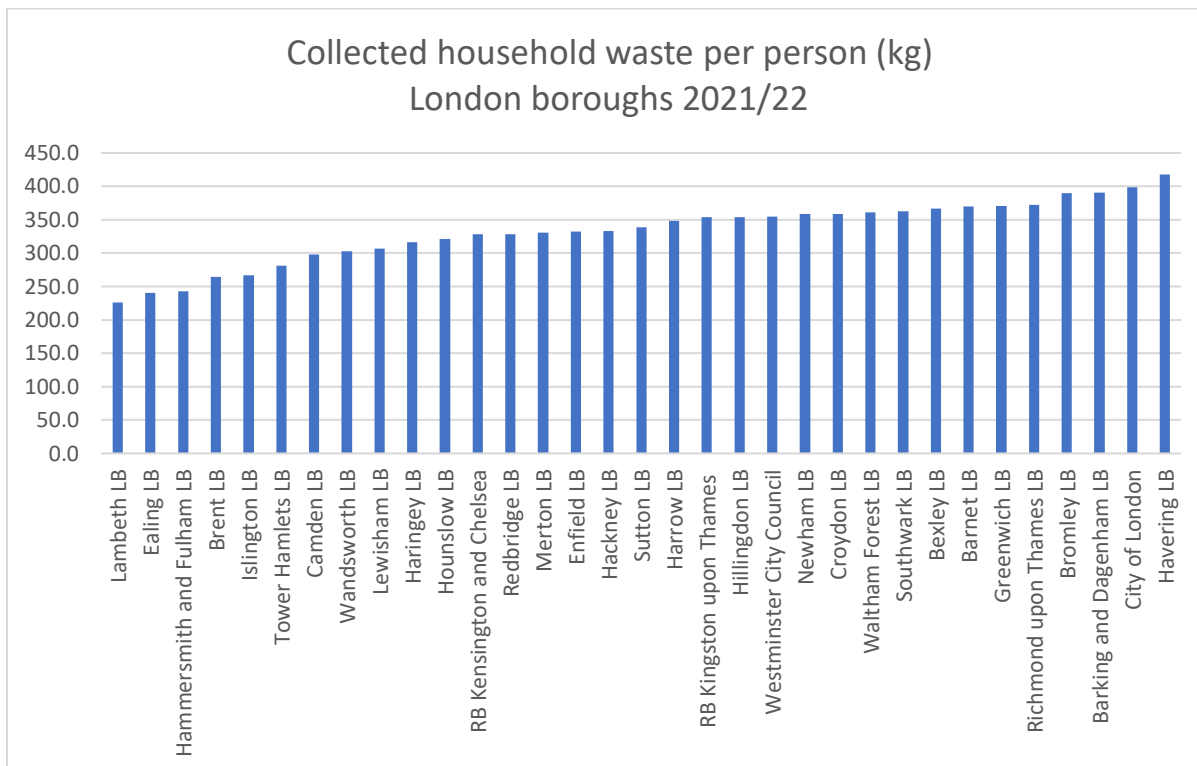
**London's recycling rate is now worse than it was ten years ago and showing no signs of improving.**

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%.



## 2c. There are also very large differences in the overall kg of waste collected per person

The chart below shows the amount of waste collected *per person*. This is the total amount of waste collected per person immaterial of whether it was sent for recycling, composting or disposal. The lowest rate was 226kg per person in Lambeth and the highest 418kg in Havering. This chart demonstrates an important point, namely that sustainable waste management is not solely about recycling and composting: it is also about promoting re-use and waste reduction.



- The boroughs with the highest amount of waste collected per person in 2021-22 were Havering, City of London, Barking & Dagenham and Bromley at close to 400kg compared to the boroughs with the lowest rates Lambeth, Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham at 200-250kg per person.
- In good news, of the 20 English local authorities with the lowest kg of household waste collected per person, half are London boroughs, see Annex Table 3 p8. These included Brent and Ealing, which were also among the 20 English local authorities with the largest *decrease* in waste collected per person over the previous year, see Table 4 p8.

### 3. Delivering change

#### Communications are key: invest to save

Boroughs are, on the whole, already providing the collection services to deliver high recycling rates. The problem is they 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

**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](#)

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.
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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On behalf of the *A More Natural Capital* coalition  
March 2023

### References

[Communications Guidance | WRAP](#)  
[Recycling - Who Really Leads the World? \(Issue 2\) - Eunomia](#)  
[Guide to Improving Waste Management in the Domestic Rented Sector - Eunomia](#)

**ANNEX TABLE 1 – Largest increases in Household Waste Recycling (2021-22)**

Authority	Region	Authority Type	% HH waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2020-21	% HH waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2021-22	Improvement (% points)
Reading Borough Council	South East	Unitary	36.1%	51.5%	15.4
Blackpool Borough Council	North West	Unitary	27.5%	41.7%	14.2
Bracknell Forest BC	South East	Unitary	43.4%	56.2%	12.8
Oldham MBC	North West	Collection	36.7%	46.5%	9.8
Eastbourne Borough Council	South East	Collection	32.8%	38.9%	6.1
Trafford MBC	North West	Collection	53.3%	58.8%	5.5
North East Derbyshire DC	East Mids	Collection	39.8%	45.3%	5.5
Tewkesbury Borough Council	South West	Collection	48.6%	54.1%	5.5
Tameside MBC	North West	Collection	47.2%	52.6%	5.4
St Helens MBC	North West	Collection	31.4%	36.8%	5.4
Newcastle-under-Lyme BC	West Mids	Collection	42.2%	47.5%	5.3
Stockport MBC	North West	Collection	55.0%	60.3%	5.3
<b>Redbridge LB</b>	<b>London</b>	Collection	<b>25.4%</b>	<b>30.5%</b>	<b>5.1</b>
Rushmoor Borough Council	South East	Collection	31.9%	36.8%	4.9
Wokingham Council	South East	Unitary	49.5%	54.2%	4.7
<b>Brent LB</b>	<b>London</b>	Collection	<b>33.4%</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>4.4</b>
Council of the Isles of Scilly	South West	Unitary	35.9%	40.2%	4.3
North West Leicestershire DC	East Mids	Collection	42.5%	46.6%	4.1
Canterbury City Council	South East	Collection	40.9%	44.9%	4.0
Plymouth City Council	South West	Unitary	30.6%	34.5%	3.9

**ANNEX TABLE 2 – Highest Household Recycling and Composting Rates (2021-22)**

Authority	Region	Authority Type	% Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse or Composting
Three Rivers District Council	Eastern	Collection	63.5%
South Oxfordshire DC	South East	Collection	62.7%
St Albans City and DC	Eastern	Collection	62.4%
Vale of White Horse DC	South East	Collection	61.9%
East Devon District Council	South West	Collection	61.0%
Stockport MBC	North West	Collection	60.3%
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	Yorkshire and Humber	Unitary	60.1%
Tandridge District Council	South East	Collection	59.9%
Rochford District Council	Eastern	Collection	59.9%
South Gloucestershire Council	South West	Unitary	59.9%
Dorset Council	South West	Unitary	59.8%
North Somerset Council	South West	Unitary	59.5%
Guildford Borough Council	South East	Collection	59.3%
Surrey Heath Borough Council	South East	Collection	59.2%
Cotswold District Council	South West	Collection	59.2%
Bath and North East Somerset	South West	Unitary	59.2%
Waverley Borough Council	South East	Collection	58.9%
Trafford MBC	North West	Collection	58.8%
Maldon District Council	Eastern	Collection	58.3%
Stroud District Council	South West	Collection	58.2%

**ANNEX TABLE 3 – Lowest Household Waste Generation per Head (2021-22)**

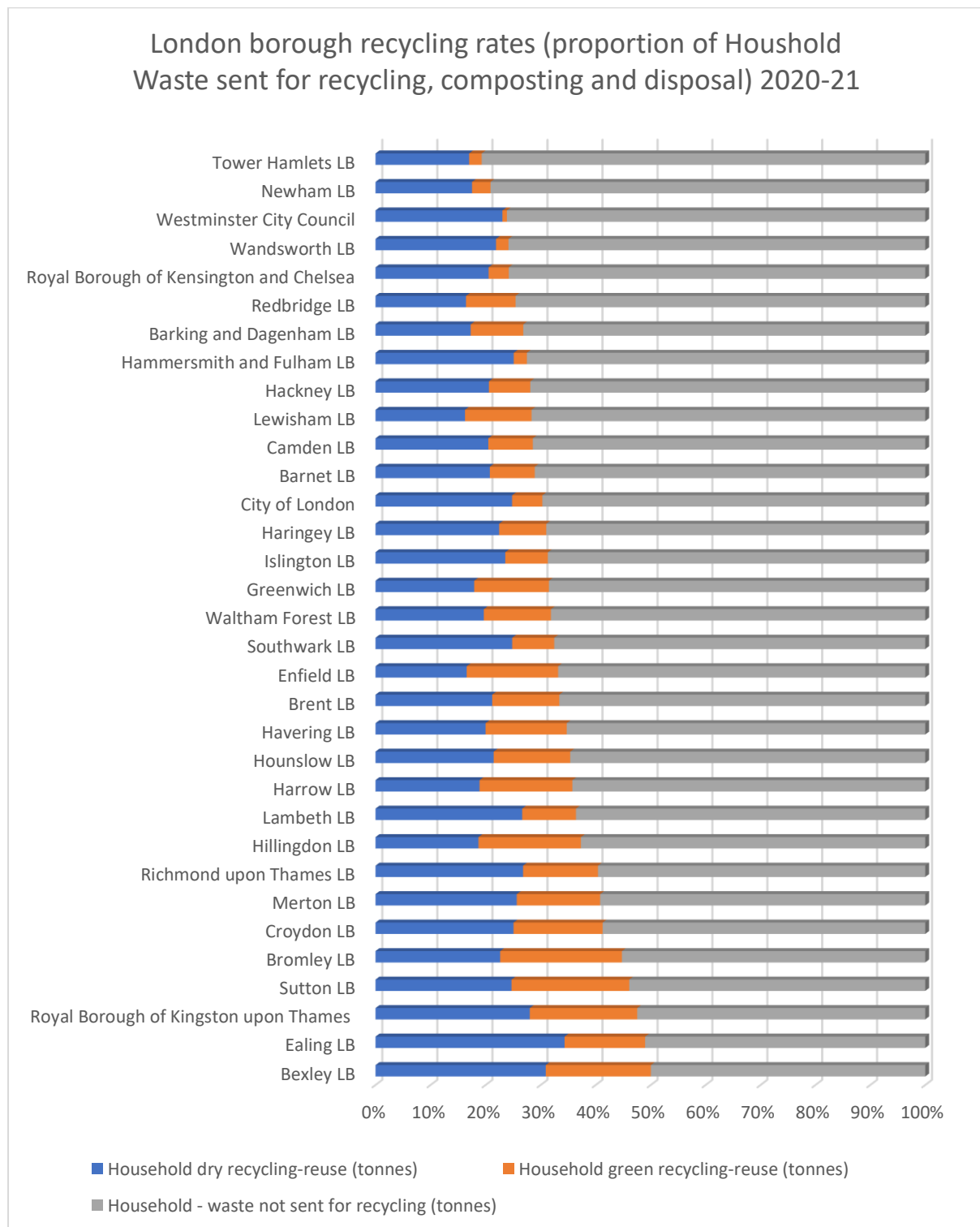
Authority	Region	Authority Type	Collected household waste per person (kg)
Lambeth LB	London	Collection	225.9
Ealing LB	London	Collection	240.2
Hammersmith and Fulham LB	London	Collection	243.0
Brent LB	London	Collection	264.7
Islington LB	London	Collection	266.9
Oxford City Council	South East	Collection	276.3
Tower Hamlets LB	London	Unitary	281.1
Western Riverside Waste Authority	London	Disposal	281.9
Hyndburn Borough Council	North West	Collection	289.5
Crawley Borough Council	South East	Collection	296.5
Camden LB	London	Collection	297.8
Exeter City Council	South West	Collection	301.9
Wandsworth LB	London	Collection	302.5
Adur District Council	South East	Collection	303.4
Manchester City Council MBC	North West	Collection	305.7
Lewisham LB	London	Unitary	307.1
Oldham MBC	North West	Collection	313.0
Salford City Council MBC	North West	Collection	314.5
Bolton MBC	North West	Collection	315.3
West Devon Borough Council	South West	Collection	315.6

**ANNEX TABLE 4 – Largest % Decrease in Household Waste per Head (2021-22)**

Authority	Region	Authority Type	Collected household waste per person (kg) 2020-21	Collected household waste per person (kg) 2021-22	% change between 2020-21 and 2021-22 (kg per head)
Woking Borough Council	South East	Collection	408.2	341.3	-16.4%
Brent LB	London	Collection	315.0	264.7	-16.0%
Elmbridge Borough Council	South East	Collection	440.5	377.0	-14.4%
Tonbridge and Malling BC	South East	Collection	415.2	358.8	-13.6%
Mole Valley District Council	South East	Collection	437.0	378.3	-13.4%
South Hams District Council	South West	Collection	404.2	355.0	-12.2%
Watford Borough Council	Eastern	Collection	357.6	315.9	-11.7%
Surrey Heath BC	South East	Collection	397.1	352.0	-11.4%
South Oxfordshire DC	South East	Collection	405.6	360.0	-11.3%
Reading Borough Council	South East	Unitary	363.7	323.7	-11.0%
Worcester City Council	West Mids	Collection	358.0	320.0	-10.6%
Cherwell District Council	South East	Collection	452.0	404.5	-10.5%
Ealing LB	London	Collection	267.0	240.2	-10.0%
Burnley Borough Council	North West	Collection	370.3	333.4	-10.0%
Cheltenham BC	South West	Collection	453.6	408.4	-10.0%
Stratford-on-Avon DC	West Mids	Collection	470.6	426.9	-9.3%
Bolton MBC	North West	Collection	344.9	315.3	-8.6%
Slough Borough Council	South East	Unitary	364.2	333.0	-8.6%
Harlow District Council	Eastern	Collection	348.0	318.7	-8.4%
St Albans City and DC	Eastern	Collection	389.2	356.8	-8.3%



## ANNEX GRAPH: PREVIOUS YEAR DATA – London Boroughs Household Recycling and Composting Rates for previous year 2020-21 for comparison



**ANNEX TABLE 5 – London Boroughs Household Recycling and Composting Rates, highest to lowest, 2021/22**

	<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Household - % waste sent for recycling- composting- reuse 2021/22</b>
1	Bromley LB	49%
2	Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames	48%
3	Ealing LB	48%
4	Sutton LB	44%
5	Bexley LB	43%
6	Merton LB	42%
7	Richmond upon Thames LB	41%
8	Croydon LB	39%
9	Hillingdon LB	38%
10	Brent LB	38%
11	Havering LB	37%
12	Hounslow LB	36%
13	Southwark LB	36%
14	Harrow LB	36%
15	Lambeth LB	35%
16	Waltham Forest LB	32%
17	City of London	32%
18	Greenwich LB	31%
19	Enfield LB	31%
20	Barking and Dagenham LB	31%
21	Redbridge LB	30%
22	Haringey LB	30%
23	Islington LB	30%
24	Barnet LB	30%
25	Hackney LB	29%
26	Camden LB	28%
27	Lewisham LB	27%
28	Hammersmith and Fulham LB	26%
29	Newham LB	25%
30	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	23%
31	Wandsworth LB	23%
32	Westminster City Council	21%
33	Tower Hamlets LB	20%