

# Newcastle Waste Commission: further thoughts from Newcastle Green Party, November 2017

We would like to first thank City Council staff (Philip Hunter, Gail Forbes and Catherine Lyons) for facilitating our presentation to the Newcastle Waste Commission members on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2017, and Commission members for sharing your emerging thinking with us and engaging in some detailed discussion after the presentation.

We would like to feed back on possible targets or key performance indicators (KPIs) to include within the Commission's final report, as Commission members indicated that they were keen to include specific targets. We wholeheartedly support this approach. We think it will help with debate and engagement moving forwards, as the Council considers and (we hope) adopts an ambitious waste strategy for the city.

We were rightly quizzed on what kind of targets might be most appropriate, given our suggestion that we need to move focus away from quality and onto quality of recycling. To expand on our responses to members' questions given on the day, we hope that the following reflections and ideas may prove useful in formulating targets and KPIs.

1. **National targets** will continue to be based on widely accepted definitions as used for WasteDataFlow. Although there are differences between England, Wales and Scotland on these definitions, using and publicising locally the headline figures for recycling, composting, residual waste etc from WasteDataFlow will best enable comparison with other local authorities, and will match data available from (for instance) <http://laportal.wrap.org.uk>.
2. **Re-use and refurbishment.** Small financial incentives for re-use schemes could be linked to amounts of material diverted from the waste stream. This will encourage such schemes to collect and report in their own data (probably weight-based). When we asked the Council whether it was able to estimate the amount of waste diverted into re-use schemes, we were told that it could not do so ("information not known"). Encouraging schemes to self-collect and report this data will help with both publicity and engagement for re-use. This approach could also re-start projects for the refurbishment and re-sale of unwanted electrical (WEEE) goods, given that they are often heavy and easily weighed. Currently, a very high percentage of our electrical and electronic cast-offs are shipped to 'emerging economies' for their disposal. This is not ethically nor environmentally acceptable, and in future will become less available to the UK in any case. The region used to have some good examples of schemes for white goods and computers, and incentives or partnership working with the Council, Universities/Colleges and others might encourage good practice in this area.
3. **Food waste and packaging.** An environmental assessment (audit) for businesses operating within the city, perhaps starting with recycling/waste information for food retail and takeaways/restaurants (akin to "scores on the doors" for food hygiene ratings). This would also help with public and business engagement, as well as support good practice and enable the Council to have influence beyond legislative or regulatory requirements.

4. **Reduction.** We support the use of “residual kg of waste per head” as a way of highlighting the need for waste reduction, and to encourage the maximum diversion of re-usable, compostable or recyclable materials. Perhaps this could be calculated at ward level, with the budgets for the best (lowest-waste) wards topped up to recognise their lower financial impact on the council’s waste disposal costs. As well as rewarding good practice and encouraging some healthy local competition, this would reward the lowest-consumption (probably more deprived) wards, and counter the false narrative that only the middle classes care about waste and recycling.
5. **Engagement.** An assessment of the impacts of excess rubbish (or clean streets and lanes) on neighbourhoods, should be built into the waste strategy. As well as the direct correlation between excess rubbish and a failing waste strategy (almost all litter is sent to the general waste stream, not recycled or reused), this would ensure that the Council places continuing resident engagement at the heart of its waste strategy. The target would be based on residents’ surveys, with questions specifically about bin collections and the management of waste and recycling.
6. **Recycling.** The Council is not of course in full control of residents’ buying practices, supermarket packaging or the wider economy. So a headline recycling target based on what is achievable given the current waste stream makes most sense. As the Commission’s *Summary of Evidence* indicates (based probably on evidence from Gearoid Henry), metals can be used as proxy indicators for total recyclables within the waste stream, because they are quite easily extracted from both the recycling and general waste streams (blue and green bins, at Wallsend and Byker facilities respectively). So “proportion of recyclables being recycled” would be a good KPI, aiming for say 90%.  
This would probably be a weight-based figure. Weight is not ideal as an overall recycling performance indicator for the reasons indicated by Commission members (e.g. lightweight plastics replacing heavier cardboard packaging). But it is a good basis for a “proportion of recyclables being recycled” KPI, as it incentivises recycling of the heaviest and most important items for extraction (food waste, glass, paper and cardboard). To maintain a ‘quality’ focus, recycling should only be counted if of sufficient quality to be marketable for creation of new product (i.e. new glass, paper, card/board, plastic containers etc).

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