

NORTH LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY

REPORT TITLE: CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND RECYCLING INITIATIVES

REPORT OF: HEAD OF STRATEGY AND SERVICES AND HEAD OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

FOR SUBMISSION TO: AUTHORITY MEETING

DATE: 4 DECEMBER 2025


SUMMARY OF REPORT:


This report updates Members about proposed new Circular Economy and Recycling Initiatives that are being introduced across north London to support the Authority and constituent boroughs in delivering the priority outcomes agreed in the North London Joint Waste Strategy 2025 to 2040. The proposals have been drawn up in consultation with the Member Recycling Working Group and constituent borough officers

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Authority is recommended to:

- A. Agree that initiatives should be taken forward as set out in sections 2-11 of the paper to take forward goals of the Joint Waste Strategy, Towards a Low Waste north London. Progress will be reported to enable the impact of initiatives to be reviewed;
- B. Approve a four-year commitment, totalling, £1m to continue to evolve and take forward the North London Community Fund. Details are provided in section 6 of the paper.

SIGNED:  Head of Strategy and Services

SIGNED:  Head of Strategic Communications

DATE: 24 November 2025

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1. The Authority's aim is to preserve resources and the environment today and for future generations. The current take-make-dispose model for production in the economy means that far too many items and materials which could have been reused, repaired or recycled end up as waste. For more than ten years, NLWA has been developing and delivering a sector-leading programme of waste prevention activity. Working closely with boroughs, NLWA officers and Members campaign for change, provide innovative recycling services, deliver behaviour change interventions and educate our communities.
- 1.2. The Joint Waste Strategy, "Towards a Low Waste north London", has now been adopted by NLWA and all seven constituent boroughs. The agreed vision states *"Our vision is to move towards a low waste north London and meet the challenges of the climate emergency. We will manage north Londoners' waste according to the waste hierarchy, prioritising waste reduction. We will maximise reuse, repair, recycling and use the most climate-friendly means of disposal possible for unavoidable waste. We will provide environmentally friendly, value-for-money services for our council tax payers."* The Strategy includes a range of aims, objectives and agreed approaches to work which will all contribute to meeting ambitious targets.
- 1.3. The Joint Waste Strategy acknowledges that a vision of a low waste north London cannot be achieved by NLWA and the boroughs alone. Success depends on action across the chain of influence through consistent government support and meaningful action from businesses to reduce waste at source and support circular practices. However, the Strategy also recognises that NLWA and the constituent boroughs must play a leading role in delivering this vision by driving innovation, enabling behaviour change, and investing in infrastructure and services that support waste prevention and circular practices.
- 1.4. In 2025/26, NLWA will receive £14.48m in funding from the Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR) scheme. In 2026/27 the figure has been confirmed to be £13.51m.
- 1.5. NLWA has taken a prudent approach to the use of pEPR funding. In the 2025/26 Budget and Levy Paper to the Authority, it was agreed that £6.27m of the 2025/26 payment would be used to reduce this year's levy. It was further agreed that the remaining £8.23m would be transferred to the maintenance reserve, which is used to extend the life of the existing energy from waste facility, alleviate capital pressures, smooth the multi-year NLWA budget and fund circular economy activities.
- 1.6. This paper proposes a range of activities to support the objectives of the Joint Waste Strategy 2025-2040. These are a combination of new projects and initiatives to extend the reach and impact of existing work programmes, which can be commenced at pace and rolled out into 2026/27. The proposals were presented to the Members Recycling Working Group and Directors of Environment in October

and have been refined, reflecting their views. The projects will be delivered in close cooperation with, and continued input from, borough officers.

- 1.7. These initiatives represent a total investment of approximately £1.3m in the next year, with the costs taken from EPR funding put aside as described in para 1.5 above, meaning that there is zero impact in the current year on the borough levy or balances.
- 1.8. The following sections set out proposals for:
 - 1.8.1. Action to boost recycling participation and tackle contamination of recycling
 - 1.8.2. Increasing the reuse offer at reuse and recycling centres
 - 1.8.3. Improving waste electrical and electronic equipment collections
 - 1.8.4. New initiatives on absorbent hygiene products
 - 1.8.5. The North London Community Fund
 - 1.8.6. Education and outreach plans
 - 1.8.7. Public affairs initiatives
 - 1.8.8. Communications, behaviour change, research and campaigns, including with partner organisations

2. BOOSTING RECYCLING PARTICIPATION AND TACKLING CONTAMINATION

- 2.1. The Joint Waste Strategy says that NLWA and the boroughs will *“Work with residents to ensure there is clear information on what can and cannot be recycled and use our outreach with community groups to help raise awareness.”* Working with borough officers, NLWA has started a trial involving a team of recycling advisers targeting properties that make up the poorest performing collection rounds.
- 2.2. Contamination occurs when residents place unrecyclable material in their dry mixed recycling bins or communal collections. If there are high volumes of contamination it can affect the viability of recycling whole lorry loads of material. In recent years the levels of contamination have increased from 16% in 2020/21 to 23% last year. This increase is not unique to north London and is thought to be a result of less frequent communications, coupled with the introduction by manufacturers of more complex composite packaging, the reduction of some materials, particularly glass bottles, and the lightweighting of other easier to recycle packaging.
- 2.3. To address this growing problem, the team of recycling advisers will undertake visits to residents to amplify borough communications about local services and advise residents on the main contaminants in recycling bins (textiles, nappies, batteries, food, black bagged waste and wood).

- 2.4. The team will also encourage residents that do not regularly put out recycling separately to recycle five easy-to-recycle commodities: paper, card, plastic bottles, metals and glass bottles. There will also be information available for regular and committed recyclers on how to present composite and more complex recyclable materials.
- 2.5. The team will target particular areas within a borough for two weeks before moving to different boroughs in turn and will work closely with borough officers to ensure messaging is consistent with the borough communications and areas identified for visits are on rounds where there is the best opportunity to improve recycling performance.
- 2.6. A baseline for each round has been created using collection round information supplied by the respective borough and regular contamination monitoring conducted by Biffa who process the Authority's recycling. For Islington and Barnet, where recycling is bulked prior to being delivered to Biffa, an additional baselining exercise will be conducted.
- 2.7. The success of the adviser team will be judged on the number of positive resident encounters, reduced contamination and increased yields compared to the baseline. Good recycling behaviours rely on consistent, sustained, communications and engagement. If the trends are positive, the trial will be expanded and rolled out on a longer-term basis.

3. INCREASING REUSE OFFER AT REUSE AND RECYCLING CENTRES (RRCS)

- 3.1. The first priority of the Joint Waste Strategy is to *"support a reduction in waste by promoting prevention, repair and reuse."* To complement the existing reuse shop at the Kings Road RRC and increase the accessibility of reuse services, it is proposed that some items collected across the RRC network will be stored, repaired and tested before being made available through existing digital marketplaces like Vinted and Ebay.
- 3.2. Thanks to a recent communications campaign and growing awareness among residents, the new EcoPark RRC has seen an increase in visitor numbers to 6,000 in September 2025. To capitalise on its increasing popularity, it is proposed that a new retail unit is introduced, dedicated to the sale of reused electrical items. The existing reuse shop at Kings Road will be extended from a five-day to a seven-day operation.
- 3.3. At present the reuse shop at Kings Road, generates a revenue that exceeds its operating cost. The cost associated with improving the network for reuse sales are expected to be offset by increased revenues, with operational expenditure being required. In 2025/26 capital cost for the new outlet at the EcoPark RRC will be incurred, capital and operating costs are set out at the table at 12.1 of this report.
- 3.4. Officers are exploring with LondonEnergy Ltd the potential to introduce work placements to help residents not in work to gain experience and a reference to

help them back into work. It is hoped that short term placements to support residents back into work will be available from April 2026.

4. IMPROVE WASTE ELECTRICAL ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT (WEEE) COLLECTIONS

- 4.1. An important objective in the Joint Waste Strategy is to *“Maintain clear, effective and efficient recycling collections and ensure that as many recyclables as possible are collected from residents.”* Since 2013 WEEE is disposed of at producers’ cost. NLWA also arranges a doorstep WEEE collection service. This is currently offered in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Islington and Waltham Forest currently, who each contribute around £20k per annum to meet the cost of the service.
- 4.2. It is proposed that, due to the large amount of WEEE, including batteries, contaminating dry mixed recycling, the current service will be expanded to all seven boroughs from mid-January. The entire cost of £150k per annum will be met from EPR funding, and will represent a £20k saving to the boroughs currently opting in. The service will continue to offer a minimum of one day of collections per week (20 slots) in each borough which will be flexed to meet demand when required.
- 4.3. It is also proposed that the Authority fund a WEEE bin refurbishment and replacement programme to ensure the large on street bins are well maintained, are safe to use and continue to provide local recycling options to residents. The rolling five-year programme will cost £8k per annum.

5. ABSORBENT HYGIENE PRODUCTS

- 5.1. Absorbent Hygiene Products (AHPs)—including disposable nappies, adult continence products, and period products—are a significant challenge for NLWA. These products are difficult to manage. They make up a material proportion of fossil-based plastic in the residual waste, and contribute heavily to both carbon emissions and disposal costs. They also appear frequently as contaminants in dry mixed recycling.
- 5.2. NLWA already promotes AHP waste prevention through initiatives like the nappy voucher scheme and the Reduce, Reuse Recycle campaigns. However, AHPs still make up 9% of household residual waste collected from homes, with annual disposal costs of £3.2m. The annual cost associated with disposal of AHPs could increase in the future, when energy-from-waste is included in the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) – depending on how Government supports local authorities in meeting ETS costs.
- 5.3. Beyond cost, the environmental impact of AHPs is significant. Reducing their carbon footprint would be a valuable contribution to achieving goals in the Joint Waste Strategy and supporting broader net zero targets.
- 5.4. To drive meaningful change, NLWA is taking a cross-authority approach, looking at activities across waste prevention, service delivery and public affairs to reduce AHP waste and the environmental impact of its disposal.

Recycling

- 5.5. Officers are exploring opportunities to deliver an AHP recycling service, using space available in the Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) at the EcoPark.
- 5.6. Officers have engaged with recycling companies in Wales and Canada who operate or manufacture AHP recycling plants to develop a business case for AHP recycling, including understanding the avoided residual disposal cost benefit. It is anticipated that NLWA will need to commission further work to understand the viability of end markets for the recyclates produced from recycling AHPs as there are few examples of these materials being sold on a commercial scale. Officers have also approached Government to be involved in supporting what would be an innovative development tackling a key waste stream.

Public affairs

- 5.7. The Joint Waste Strategy sets out a hierarchy of influence, with central government at the top. NLWA will galvanise the support of residents, the waste and environment sectors, and parliamentarians, seeking to secure policy change which reduces AHP waste and its environmental impact.
- 5.8. Key deliverables are likely to involve a policy report with recommendations (supported by a survey of north London residents); a mobilisation action, which will allow residents to highlight the issue to their elected representative; assets for further sharing (by other disposal authorities, council, waste and third sector organisations); and engagement with parliamentarians including at least one parliamentary event.

Behaviour change / nurseries

- 5.9. University College London (UCL) are developing a systems approach to reduce nappy waste. As one in four children are not toilet trained by the time they start school, the team are prioritising interventions that support earlier toilet training. This includes calling for changes in policies and guidelines around toilet training and toilet training education.
- 5.10. Supporting childcare settings with toilet training education and the switch from disposable to reusable nappies could deliver impact at scale. NLWA officers have commissioned researchers from UCL to deliver a research project to understand what could support north London nurseries to make the switch to reusable nappies. The results from the research combined with findings from a sector review will inform the development of interventions that will support nurseries to reduce their nappy waste. Making reusable nappies the norm within childcare settings may generate a ripple effect, increasing the use of reusable nappies at home. Interventions will also support parents and carers within target communities to switch to reusable nappies.

6. NORTH LONDON COMMUNITY FUND

- 6.1. One of the agreed aims in the Joint Waste Strategy is to *“Strengthen partnerships with public sector authorities, environmental groups, campaigners, and grassroots organisations to help us design, develop and deliver waste prevention initiatives in our communities.”* Since the launch of the Community Fund, NLWA has awarded funding to 81 organisations dedicated to waste prevention and reuse, awareness and education, circular economy initiatives, and skill building and training. The prioritises projects that reach local residents, including those in social housing and high-density estates, ethnically diverse and multilingual communities, families and older adults. As the fund has developed, Authority officers, borough officers and community groups have developed a greater understanding and this has strengthened achievement on the ground.
- 6.2. Building on positive results achieved to date, guided by the Members Recycling Working Group, and taking account of the Joint Waste Strategy aims, NLWA officers have undertaken a co-design review of the fund with stakeholders. The outcomes provide readily actionable insights on how to improve advertising, awarding and administration of the fund to ensure that the offer is accessible and equitable.
- 6.3. Also identified were opportunities for NLWA officers to deliver more face-to-face engagement on waste prevention topics with funded groups. Flexibility on delivery timescales is also of key interest amongst stakeholders. To take forward this revised strategy, a four-year commitment to the fund with an overall investment by the Authority of £1m is proposed. This is consistent with current levels of funding but provides a continued pipeline to support community action.
- 6.4. This will enable funding of at least 100 projects during this time. A new tiering approach comprising micro, small and medium grants will be implemented. A new co-design approach will also be introduced between the awarded organisations and the Authority for large awards. This significant commitment will enable officers to adapt the approach to best meet local needs year on year. It will also enable NLWA to develop new connections in all boroughs including participation in more grant giving related networks.
- 6.5. It is further proposed that the existing Charity Credit scheme be reshaped to provide greater support to local charities that manage reuse and circular economy activities that do not attract high resale prices. This will be achieved through the introduction of a simple grant process to those organisations that manage furniture or electricals, with a move away from the current and highly complex tonnage-based awards for organisations that require no incentive to continue to manage highly profitable commodities such as textiles and books. It is proposed this change will take effect from 2026/27 allowing time for officers to promote the reshaped scheme with existing participants.

7. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

- 7.1. Since bringing education delivery in-house in 2023, the Authority has transformed its approach to engaging schools and communities on sustainability. With a

dedicated team and a new education and outreach centre at EcoPark House, NLWA officers deliver measurable outcomes in waste reduction and environmental literacy across north London.

- 7.2. The in-schools programme, In the Know, has already helped seven schools reduce waste by 124 tonnes in total, and inspired thousands of students, teachers, and parents to adopt circular economy principles. At EcoPark House, the curriculum-linked programme has welcomed over 500 students since launching in January 2025, with demand now exceeding capacity and bookings extending well into 2026. These achievements demonstrate the appetite for high-quality environmental education and the tangible impact it can deliver.
- 7.3. To support the Joint Waste Strategy aims to *“Expand our work with schools to promote waste prevention to the next generation”* and *“Provide apprenticeship, training and, educational activities”*, the proposal is to:
 - 7.3.1. Double the number of sessions at EcoPark House, reducing waiting times, increasing access to schools across north London, and enable the effective launch of a secondary schools' programme.
 - 7.3.2. Scale up the reach of In the Know, engaging more schools annually across north London and supporting them to achieve and maintain accreditation through waste audits and engaging lessons and assemblies
 - 7.3.3. Enhance the Education Hub, the online resource platform, by introducing gamified and interactive content to support blended learning and extend NLWA's reach to schools otherwise unable to participate in physical programmes.

8. PUBLIC AFFAIRS

- 8.1. The Joint Waste Strategy has clear asks of government, including *“adequate funding for waste services and policy that recognises the local requirements of north London”, “legislate to reduce plastic in the waste stream and ensure product designers and manufacturers are responsible for the emissions of their products”* and *“ensure manufacturers and retailers are responsible for the costs of the waste they produce, while supporting the repair and reuse sector.”*
- 8.2. The Authority’s public affairs function continues to develop. This is leading to increased requests for participation by Members and officers in public panel discussions and events. This illustrates a growing awareness of NLWA, and its position as a reputable source of information, both which are vital to ensure the local authority voice is heard by policy makers.
- 8.3. To further strengthen this activity, funding will support the delivery of at least four parliamentary or other policy focused events per year. These provide opportunities to engage, and develop relationships with, decision makers and works to establish the Authority as an expert on matters relating to the circular economy. Funding

will also support supplementary research to enhance policy position statements and provide evidence for recommendations to government.

9. COMMUNICATIONS

9.1. Research shows that groups that recycle the least could be motivated by a financial incentive. NLWA officers carried out a review of recycling reward schemes to identify characteristics of successful schemes and learnings from unsuccessful ones. Findings have been used to inform the design of a new scheme that will be trialled in one area to test its effectiveness, targeting residents who live in areas where recycling rates are below average. Reducing waste and ensuring recyclable material is put in the relevant bin can save NLWA and constituent boroughs tens of pounds per tonne. Key features of the scheme:

9.1.1. Sufficiently appealing reward which directly, personally, benefits the recipient. This will be the opportunity to win a £250 supermarket voucher each month.

9.1.2. Uncomplicated – participants log into a website, complete a short task, and are entered into a prize draw.

9.1.3. Objective of long-term attitudinal change: in order to enter the prize draw, participants must watch an engaging, educational video, before answering a few questions (answers do not all have to be correct). Officers believe that this method could build trust and knowledge, creating a stronger motivation for recycling in the long-term.

9.2. The scheme would be promoted through playful, localised communications, including leaflets, door-knocking and a local event (stunt) to create intrigue. Evaluation measures include surveying, [reward participation data](#) and recycling tonnage and contamination data.

9.3. This reward scheme aligns with plans in the North London Joint Waste Strategy to maximise recycling, working with residents to ensure there is clear information on what can and cannot be recycled and use our outreach and community groups to help raise awareness.

10. BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

10.1. While there is a renewed focus on influencing policy, the Joint Waste Strategy also includes a number of objectives which can be supported with targeted projects to support the adoption of waste prevention behaviours. The Authority's approach now focuses on in-house delivery and strong partnerships to ensure the best value for boroughs. These projects are steered by the Members Recycling Working Group and include:

10.1.1. Establishing initiatives for renting of household items to reduce unnecessary consumption and keep useful items in circulation.

- 10.1.2. Using nature as a hook to inspire people to take up planet friendly behaviours such as reducing waste, recycling more and disposing of waste responsibly.
- 10.1.3. Incentivising residents to choose repair of small electrical items rather than buying new or throwing away through the North London Repair Voucher scheme.
- 10.1.4. Supporting community-based (non-profit-making) organisations to deliver NLWA developed 'Bin Less Save More' food waste prevention workshops with their community members.

11. COLLABORATING ON RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND CAMPAIGNS

- 11.1. The Authority's vision of a low waste north London cannot be achieved alone. This is reflected in the Joint Waste Strategy, which says that the Authority and boroughs will *"work collaboratively alongside partners to deliver the best possible services and influence government policy"* and *"strengthen partnerships with public sector authorities, environmental groups, campaigners, and grassroots organisations to help us design, develop and deliver waste prevention initiatives"*. Working collaboratively with partners towards a common goal can achieve better value for money and amplify the voices of both partners.
- 11.2. Officers have identified a number of collaborative projects which can be initiated and delivered over the coming months:
 - 11.2.1. Contributing to an urban waste innovation fund with other London waste authorities and local authorities to support collaborative research, pilot projects and knowledge sharing to improve urban recycling. The fund would be coordinated with ReLondon, and NLWA would work with them to make decisions and shape pilot projects in north London.
 - 11.2.2. NLWA officers have been discussing a collaborative project with East London Waste Authority to carry out an initial research phase for an intervention to tackle the growing issue of fast fashion and textiles, which is a significant proportion of residual waste and a contaminant in dry mixed recycling.
 - 11.2.3. A number of London boroughs are supporting a London-wide food recycling campaign, which would direct residents to their local services. NLWA could contribute and ensure an active role in developing the campaign to ensure it meets the boroughs' needs.

12. FINANCE

- 12.1. As explained in para 1.4 to 1.6, these initiatives will have no impact on the levy in 2025/26 or balances for 2026/27. The table below sets out indicative costs for each initiative, with further detail to be provided for the February 2026 Authority meeting when the 2026/27 budget will be proposed.

Initiative	2025/26 cost	2026/27 cost
Community Fund	Already being delivered	£250k
Recycling Adviser task force	£100k	£450K
Reuse sales activity	£50K capital (Sales Unit) Up to £15K offset by income	Up to £40k, offset by income
WEEE Service	£37K	£160k
AHP (Recycling in North London)	£40k technical support	£80k technical support
Communications, public affairs, and behaviour change		Public Affairs £80K Behaviour change, partnerships, incentives and communications £300K

13. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. These initiatives are being delivered in line with NLWA's relevant equalities objectives, which are:
- 13.1.1. We will aim to ensure that we provide a waste disposal and waste prevention service that is fair, accessible to all and promotes equality of opportunity.
- 13.1.2. We will aim to ensure that we communicate the activities of the North London Waste Authority in a way that is fair, accessible to all, and promotes equality of opportunity.

14. COMMENTS OF THE LEGAL ADVISER

- 14.1. The Legal Adviser has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and comments have been incorporated.

15. COMMENTS OF THE FINANCIAL ADVISER

- 15.1. The financial adviser has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and comments have been incorporated.

List of documents used:

Contact officer:

Michael Clarke and Joe Sheeran
Unit 1b Berol House
25 Ashley Road
London N17 9LJ