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Epsom and Ewell lags Surrey's recycling front-runners, new tracker shows

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Surrey's self-assessment – and what sits behind it

A new "Surrey Waste Tracker" published by the Surrey Environment Partnership (SEP) claims Surrey is one of the best performing areas in England for recycling and low landfill. The tracker uses data for the 2023–24 year and compares Surrey County Council with 28 "similar" waste authorities across England.

SEP reports that 54.5% of Surrey's total household waste is recycled, reused or composted, placing Surrey joint second out of 29 comparable authorities. Surrey households produced around 445kg of rubbish per home, said to be eighth out of 29 and better than an England average of around 511kg. Just 0.2% of Surrey's household waste went to landfill, compared with an England average of 5.5%, and 85% of Surrey's waste is processed in the UK rather than exported.

The tracker does not spell out which 28 other authorities Surrey is being measured against, nor does it cite the exact national datasets used for those comparisons.

How independent national data stacks up

Provisional government waste statistics for 2023–24 show that, across England as a whole, the household recycling rate is around 44%. The same official release reports that 5.5% of local authority-collected waste in England was sent to landfill.

Taken together, these independent figures broadly support SEP's central message: Surrey's recycling rate is around ten percentage points higher than the England average, Surrey sends a much smaller share of its waste to landfill than the country as a whole, and Surrey households appear to be producing less residual rubbish than the average English household.

However, the 42.3% "England average" recycling figure quoted on the Surrey Waste Tracker is slightly lower than the 44% national rate reported by government, suggesting SEP may be using a different measure or earlier cut of the same data.

Where Epsom and Ewell sits in the Surrey league

The tracker also breaks down performance by each of Surrey's 11 district and borough councils, including Epsom and Ewell. For each area it publishes annual rubbish per household (in kg), the proportion of household waste recycled, reused or composted, and the proportion of recycling processed within the UK.

On those measures, **Epsom and Ewell** is a low performer within Surrey, but well behind the best-performing districts.

Recycling rate: Epsom and Ewell recycles, reuses or composts 52.1% of its household waste. This places it ninth out of the 11 Surrey districts and boroughs on the recycling measure, while Surrey Heath leads the county on 58.9%, with Guildford and Tandridge close behind.

Rubbish per household: Epsom and Ewell households produce 402.3kg of rubbish per year. That is better than Elmbridge and Spelthorne, but still ninth out of 11 when ranked from lowest to highest residual waste. Surrey Heath again tops this table with 341.2kg per household.

How much recycling stays in the UK: Only 63.7% of Epsom and Ewell's collected recycling is processed within the UK, the lowest share in Surrey. Several councils send a much higher proportion of recyclables to UK facilities, including Reigate and Banstead, Guildford and Tandridge.

Surrey district and borough waste league table, 2023–24

Based on the Surrey Waste Tracker's published data, the picture across the 11 local areas is as follows, ranked by recycling rate from highest to lowest:

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Rank (recycling)	District / Borough	Rubbish per household (kg)	Proportion recycled / reused / composted (%)	Proportion of recycling processed in UK (%)
1	Surrey Heath	341.2	58.9	76.8
2	Guildford	347.5	57.9	84.6
3	Tandridge	361.5	57.8	84.2
4	Waverley	350.0	57.0	75.3
5	Mole Valley	362.1	56.4	72.2
6	Woking	348.1	56.4	73.1
7	Elmbridge	407.5	54.2	72.6
8	Reigate and Banstead	381.2	54.2	96.2
9	Epsom and Ewell	402.3	52.1	63.7
10	Runnymede	386.4	46.8	71.5
11	Spelthorne	439.3	44.5	70.7

On this reading, Epsom and Ewell recycles a larger share of its waste than the national average, but less than eight of its ten Surrey neighbours, produces more rubbish per household than most Surrey areas, and sends the smallest proportion of its recycling to UK plants.

Who owns the Surrey Environment Partnership?

The Surrey Waste Tracker is published by the Surrey Environment Partnership, which is a partnership between Surrey County Council and the 11 district and borough councils. SEP is therefore not an external watchdog but a joint project of the councils whose performance it reports on.

The tracker draws on data that councils are legally required to report to central government through the WasteDataFlow system, which the government then uses to produce national statistics. However, it does not identify the 28 “similar areas” Surrey is compared with, nor the criteria for including them, and it does not explicitly reference the government publications from which national averages appear to be taken.

For residents in Epsom and Ewell, the Surrey Waste Tracker offers a useful snapshot of local performance within a strong-performing county, while also raising questions of transparency and comparability. The extent to which the borough can close the gap with Surrey’s recycling leaders, and keep more of its recycling treatment within the UK, is likely to remain a live policy issue for years ahead.

Sam Jones – Reporter

Image: Landfill site in UK by M J Richardson CC BY-SA 2.0

Since publication of the above report the Surrey Environmental Partnership has issued the following helpful clarification:

Unfortunately, there was an error in the number of authorities that we compared Surrey with. The report originally listed that there were 29 similar authorities, when in fact it was 27. This has now been amended on our website – Surrey Environment Partnership – Surrey Waste Tracker. The authorities that Surrey compares to are the other waste disposal authorities in England.

The article also mentions a discrepancy between the figure of 42.3% that we used for England’s recycling rate compared to the figure of 44.0%. Just to clarify that 44.0% is England’s recycling rate for the calendar year of 2023 whereas 42.3% is England’s recycling rate for 2023-24, which is the period that our report covers.

Finally, with regard to the source of the data, the source is Defra’s publicly available data, which can be found here – Local authority collected waste management – annual results – GOV.UK.

We have made a note to include the above level of detail in Surrey Waste Tracker reports from hereon.

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