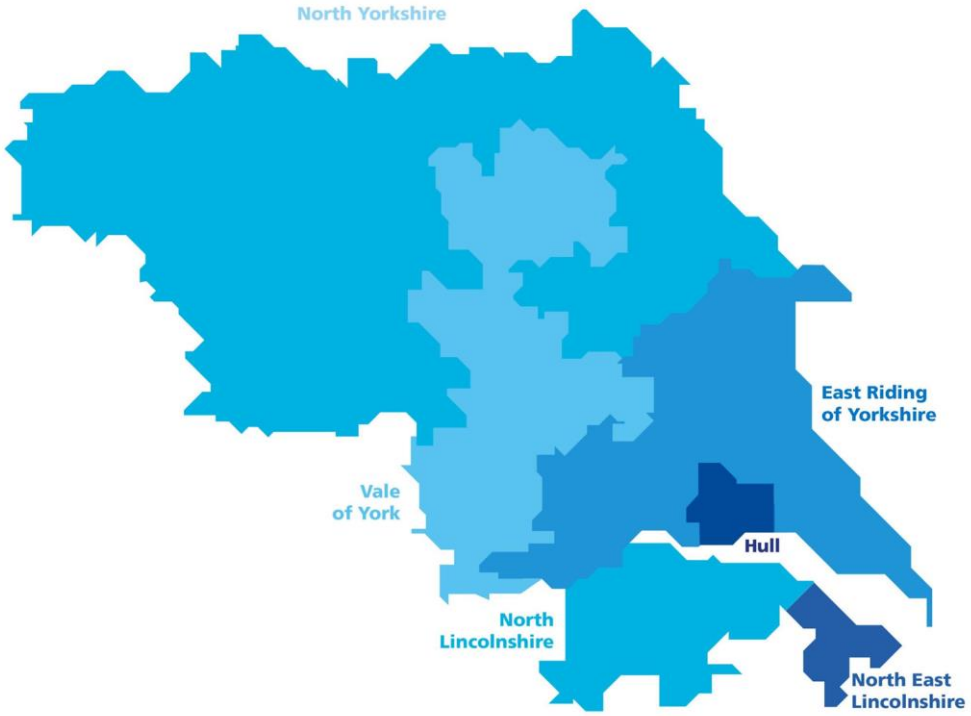


# Decarbonising general practice – Business Services

Your guide to a net-zero action plan for non-clinical emissions

Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership

NHS
Humber and North Yorkshire
Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Dr Matt Sawyer
See Sustainability

Humber and North Yorkshire
Health and Care Partnership

# Business services

# Addressing your business services footprint

Business services cover all the professional services we use such as telephony, computers and IT, accountancy and finance and payroll and insurance and many others.

Each service a practice uses has a carbon footprint from running their business. Part of their footprint forms part of our footprint. We can lower our footprint by influencing those around us and those whose services we use to start their own net-zero or decarbonisation journey.

We have financial influence over our suppliers and can use this to improve their environmental behaviour.

Rather than switching to a new more ‘sustainable’ supplier, giving existing suppliers a chance to improve will improve the supply chain.

You won't be the only one asking them to change, and the more that request, the better.

# Top actions you can take

- Identify your expenditure and hotspots on services.
- Cancel services you no longer need.
- Identify and substitute for low-carbon alternatives and less environmentally harmful services for the services you use.
- Ask your suppliers about their plans to tackle their carbon emissions.
- Set them deadlines to improve by.

# Essential business services

GP practices need to abide by certain minimum legal standards. These include providing services for patients which includes telephone access or well-trained staff with up-to-date mandatory training such as first aid, CPR or safeguarding.

The CQC require a number of policies which may involve additional or external business services e.g., infection control, health and safety, preparing a business continuity plan, equipment calibration and PAT testing, checking staff on the DBS register.

The premises need to be well maintained and hazard free – waste providers and fire safety is paramount.

Other services are highly desirable such as independent accountants analysing the books for tax payments.

These services can continue to be provided but questions asked about the impact they are having wither their own carbon emissions footprint.

"Every time you spend money, you're casting a vote for the kind of world you want,"

Anna Lappe

## Why address your business services footprint?

Every service and purchase has a carbon footprint from travel, production, cleaning and waste impacts.

The message from the Greener NHS report is clear: suppliers must meet or exceed their commitment on net zero emissions.

## Audit of business services

Use your invoice information to calculate the amount of spend in each of categories (see next page).

Having your carbon footprint calculated will help identify which services are the highest contributors to the practice's overall footprint.

See here for more details.

# Calculating your impacts with spend-based data

There are many services used by practices. These tend to fall into one of the following categories.

| Category | Examples | Our practice spend (£) |
|---|---|---|
| Financial | Accountancy, payroll, banking/bank charges | |
| Communication | Telephones, IT, websites, broadband, software licences | |
| Membership services | Defence unions, DBS checks, music performance | |
| Insurance and legal services | Building insurance, liability insurance, ICO (information commissioners office), CQC and medical levies/membership fees | |
| Servicing | Lifts, oxygen, fire alarms, medical equipment, boilers and heating equipment, sterilisation of equipment services | |
| Maintenance | Building fabric, facilities management, building service charges | |
| Waste | Confidential, shredding, recycling, clinical and non-clinical waste | |
| Recruitment costs | Advertising, screening, occupational health assessments | |
| Postage and carriage | Letter, parcels, Docman, scanning | |
| Water and sewerage | | |
| Education and training | | |

## Conduct an audit

Using the IT services approach as a template, the other business services can be audited and examined in a similar manner.

Calculate the total spend by category. This can give a rough carbon footprint although some business types have a higher average carbon footprint per £ spent than others.

You can use spend-based figures against your annual accounts and the categories your services and purchases fall under.

The practice accountant may have all this information already available.

Spend-based figures provide an average for different services. They have limitations – for example if services become cheaper - but are an easy way to monitor, measure and demonstrate progress.

# Setting targets

Setting targets can help you deliver the strategic changes that are needed to reduce carbon emissions from all business services.

Regarding business services, the practice can set their own targets to achieve their goal such as

- Reduced service use by identifying legacy or historic services which are no longer needed,
- Identify less environmentally harmful services for the services contributing most to your footprint,
- Have carbon along side financial cost as metrics when contracting with services,
- Number (%) of services contacted to ask about their emissions footprint.

| **Route to reduce** | | **Aim/target** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Area** | **Current footprint** | **3 years time** | | **6 years time** | | **9 years time** | |
| | | **Total % reduction** | **How** | **Total % reduction** | **How** | **Total % reduction** | **How** |
| **Business services** | E.g. 110,000 kg $CO_2e$ | 20% in service use<br>25% reduction in carbon | Identify services which are no longer needed. Use lower carbon services in the biggest hotspots. | 50% reduction in carbon | Actively identify further low carbon services. Use only services with a decarbonisation plan in place. | At least 75% reduction in carbon | Use only carbon neutral suppliers for all new suppliers. Audit and press current suppliers to achieve carbon neutrality. |

# More actions you can take

For the business services you use, can you

- use resources more efficiently?
- substitute for low-carbon alternatives?
- ensure that suppliers are decarbonising their own processes?
- request services have had their carbon footprint calculated?

Identify low carbon alternatives using the Carbon Trust, green directories and regional low carbon networks (see Resources).

## Influencing change

When engaging new suppliers for tenders and new contracts include questions about their sustainability and carbon reduction commitments. This can also be done with existing suppliers.

Start with your biggest providers first or the ones with the highest figures in your audit.

**A letter can be sent to suppliers asking what they are doing regarding their carbon emissions footprint and the actions they are taking to reduce it.**

# Resources

## Green business directories and suppliers

- Carbon Trust Accredited Suppliers and installers of energy efficiency and renewable energy technology
- UK's most comprehensive Green Business directory
- Directory to find like-minded businesses committed to environmental best practices
- edie's suppliers directory
- For help from construction professionals e.g., for intelligent heating control specialist
- Accredited supplier registry
- Future Fit Business Benchmark provide a comprehensive scheme to assess and address the environmental and social impact of your business, but doesn't currently support benchmarking.
- International Chamber of Commerce has set up a pledge scheme for SME leaders future-proof their business by committing to halve greenhouse gas emissions before 2030 and reach net-zero emissions before 2050.

## Regional low carbon business networks

- Derby / Notts
- Oxfordshire
- Kent

## Accountancy

- How to create a greener accountancy practice
- Kung Fu - Low Carbon Accountant (B-Corp)

# Resources – examples of providers

## Business Services
### Accountants

**Green Accountancy** — National
info@greenaccountancy.com
01865582064
https://www.greenaccountancy.com/

**Green and Moore** — National
info@greenandmoore.co.uk
07422650034
https://greenandmoore.co.uk/

**Kung Fu Accounting** — National
hello@kungfuaccounting.com
https://kungfuaccounting.com/

## Business Services
### Cleaning

**EcoBrite** — Hull/Grimsby
hello@ecobrite.co.uk
01482646770 (Hull)
https://www.ecobrite.co.uk/

## Business Services
### Insurance

**Naturesave Insurance** — National
mail@naturesave.co.uk
01803864390
https://www.naturesave.co.uk/

## Business Services
### Banking

**Triodos** — National
03303550355
https://www.triodos.co.uk/

**Starling Bank** — National
help@starlingbank.com
https://www.starlingbank.com/

**Cooperative Bank** — National
03457 213 213
www.co-operativebank.co.uk/business/online-banking/

**Charity Bank** — National
enquiries@charitybank.org
01732 441900
https://www.charitybank.org/

**Ecology BS** — National
info@ecology.co.uk
tel:01535650770
https://www.ecology.co.uk/

For more information on which banks have investments in fossil fuels:

**Bank Green**
https://bank.green/

## Business Services
### Web Hosting

**Eco Web Hosting** — National
sales@ecowebhosting.co.uk
03300430712
https://www.ecowebhosting.co.uk/

**Eco Hosting** — National
02920003338
https://www.ecohosting.co.uk/

**Green Web Host** — National
service@greenwebhost.net
01422303506
https://www.greenwebhost.net/

**GreenNet** — National
info@gn.apc.org
03303554011
https://www.greennet.org.uk/

**Kualo** — National
sales@kualo.com
0800 138 3235
https://www.kualo.co.uk/webhosting/green-web-hosting

# Resources – examples of providers

## Business Services
### Water Cooler Services

**The Water Delivery Company** — **National**
quotations@thewaterdeliverycompany.com
03301233309
https://www.thewaterdeliverycompany.com/

**MIW Water Cooler Experts** — **National**
sales@miw.co.uk
01207572000
https://www.miw.co.uk/

**Connect Coolers** — **York**
info@connectcoolers.co.uk
08006124931
https://connectcoolers.co.uk/

**AquaPoint Water Coolers** — **Yorkshire**
sales@aquapoint.co.uk
03700555333
http://www.aquapointwatercoolers.co.uk/

**Active Watercoolers** — **Yorkshire**
info@activewatercoolers.co.uk
03334561202
https://www.activewatercoolers.co.uk/

**Water Logic** — **National**
03330600214
https://www.waterlogic.com/en-gb/

## Business Services
### Broadband

**Green ISP** — **National**
service@greenisp.net
01422303506
https://www.greenisp.net/

**GreenNet** — **National**
info@gn.apc.org
03303554011
https://www.greennet.org.uk/

## Business Services
### Mobile Network

**Honest Mobile** — **National**
sales@honestmobile.co.uk
02045255578
https://honestmobile.co.uk/

**Ecotalk** — **National**
home@ecotalk.co.uk
03338005500
https://www.ecotalk.co.uk/

## Business Services
### Gardening Services

**Eco Garden Maintenance** — **York**
stuart@ecogardenmaintenance.co.uk
01937558731
http://www.ecogardenmaintenance.co.uk/

**Andy's Gardening** — **Beverley**
01964598430
https://andysgardening.com/

## Business Services
### Printing Services

**The Green Office** — **National**
info@thegreenoffice.co.uk
0800 038 5744
https://www.thegreenoffice.co.uk/carbon-neutral-printers

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# Example: Net zero IT services

# The impact of IT services

IT can fall into two sections – both business services and procurement of goods. Services include telephone services and broadband suppliers; procurement of goods include new computers and peripherals.

Information technology (IT) is increasingly a place where companies can save money and energy, while reducing their carbon footprint and preserving the environment.

Green IT (green information technology) is the practice of environmentally sustainable computing.

Green IT aims to minimise the negative impact of IT operations on the environment by designing, manufacturing, operating and disposing of computers and computer-related products in an environmentally-friendly manner.

## Action

Audit current expenditure on services including telephone systems, IT, websites, broadband contracts, software licences etc. using the table below.

| Service | Supplier | Cost (£) |
|---|---|---|
| Telephone systems | | |
| IT | | |
| Website hosting | | |
| Broadband contracts | | |
| Software licences | | |
| Data storage | | |
| New computers | | |
| New peripherals (e.g., monitors, printers) | | |
| Other | | |

# Addressing your IT and online carbon footprint

The motives behind green IT practices include reducing the use of hazardous materials, maximizing energy efficiency during the product's lifetime and promoting the biodegradability of unused and outdated products.

Green IT covers the purchase on new equipment through to the disposal at the end of its useful life, alongside the software and energy when in use.

E-waste — the obsolete technology that winds up in landfills and incinerators, often in developing nations — is an increasingly serious global environmental problem, so it is important to maximize the lifespan of IT products.

Whilst storing data in the cloud may seem like it doesn't have an impact, the reality is it is actually stored on the ground in huge data servers that are run on energy and often fall back on diesel generators. Regularly deleting emails, unnecessary files and reducing the need for sending unnecessary data or files is another way to reduce your carbon footprint.

**Life cycle of a computer**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mining | A computer has over 30 different minerals including silica, iron, aluminium, copper, nickel, arsenic and cadmium |
| Manufacturing | Often energy intensive and included processing of minerals and transportation |
| Packaging | Often involving cardboard and plastics for protection and include its disposal |
| Shipping | From factory to store and to homes /businesses |
| Use | Using software and electricity |
| End of life | Including recycling or waste disposal |

**Dell calculated each** desk top computer emitted **720kg** $CO_2e$ over an average lifespan of 4 years.

# Top actions you can take

- Identify your expenditure and hotspots on IT.
- Request services and products which have their carbon footprint calculated.
- Discuss with IT regarding procuring and using low-carbon/low environmental impact equipment and services.

# Carry an IT audit

## Perform an audit of your current IT systems – both equipment and use

Audit what services and tools are being used. This could identify items that do not need to be powered on or refreshed as part of a cycle, leading to a reduction in energy usage and costs.

The audit can examine:

- What is being used and when?
- What is being left on when not used?
- All plugged in IT equipment including hard drives, monitors, printers, fax and franking machines,
- All consumables including toners/print cartridges,
- Reuse and recycling options end of life.

Can the power management of the essential devices be improved?

A study in 2016 showed an office using 50 computers (exclusive of the monitor) used 171 watts of electricity. If permanently left on, this generates about 35,000 kg $CO_2e$ per annum.

To absorb this amount of carbon dioxide – using an average amount of carbon dioxide absorbed per hectare of UK woodland at 5.4 tonnes per year, this equates planting over 6 hectares of woodland *each and every year*.

**The most sustainable solution for a computer is taking care of the one you have.**

# Tips for Greener IT - Equipment

## Lifetime of equipment

It can be tempting to purchase new, more efficient computers every couple of years, but the amount of energy and hazardous materials used to produce new equipment can be far more environmentally damaging than the extra electricity consumed by older systems.

## Circular procurement

PCs can be leased or rented rather than bought. By considering hardware as a 'service', the supplier ensures it is the optimal system and longevity including repairing and maintaining rather than replacing

## How much equipment?

Recording the amount of IT and peripherals can help practices reduce their purchases. Are there extra monitors, headphones or tones in the backs of cupboards that have been forgotten about and could be used rather than buying another one?

## Do I need more?

When you do make new purchases, look for hardware than can easily be upgraded and consider sourcing from suppliers that guarantee they will take back and recycle all equipment at the end of its useful life.

## Reducing the refresh rate of devices

Whilst it may be natural to look for the lowest cost options when purchasing new kit, if the lifespan of a device is considered, a more expensive upfront device may become cheaper over time if it is expected to last longer. This also reduces the amount of equipment that needs to be recycled or disposed of.

## Carbon emissions and IT options

Sending an email

| | |
|---|---|
| 0.3g | Sending a short email from laptop to laptop |
| 17g | Sending a long email (10mins to write, 3mins to read) |
| 280g | Sending same long email as a letter on recycled paper |
| 350g | Sending same long email as a letter on virgin paper |

Video consulting or meetings – per hour

| | |
|---|---|
| 2g | on 13' Mac book |
| 10g | on laptop |
| 50g | on desk top |

Holding an online video conferencing meeting for 10 people on laptops for an hour would generate a total of **100g** $CO_2e$. If the meeting was face to face, average travel was 2 miles and all attendees drove average cars, the footprint would be **5,300g** $CO_2e$.

Data from Mike Berners-Lee in 'How Bad Are Bananas?'

# Tips for Greener IT – Use and end of life

## During use

### Energy consumption

- See Energy section
- Reduce energy use - switch off when not in use; buy products with low energy consumption.
- As part of the energy audit, map energy consumption across the practice for IT/electronic equipment.
- Set energy efficiency settings for all computers, printers and monitors.

### Digital transformation

Practices and patients are far more familiar with digital working including video and phone consultations, e-consults, remote access of information etc. This includes online meetings both internally and externally of the practice

### Software

- Set requirements for sustainable design to be incorporated into software applications – ask the IT department when it comes to installing or upgrading software.
- Switch to Ecosia as web browser – a tree is planted for every 45 searches made.

### Maintain and reuse

Upcycling and repairing  at the right time makes equipment last longer. Local repair shops or the IT department can help. A guide from Norton is here.

## After use

- Take back programs - Dell has emerged as an industry leader with its takeback service.
- Recycle 'Anything with a plug, battery or cable can be recycled' – Recycle Your Electricals.
- Reduce e-Waste with Recycle Now.

recyclenow

recycle your electricals

# Setting targets

Setting targets can help you deliver the strategic changes that are needed to reduce carbon emissions from IT.

Regarding IT, the practice can set their own targets to achieve their goal such as:

- Three yearly audit of equipment and services
- Reduced the number of pieces of equipment or the frequency they are replaced
- Reduce energy consumption while in use
- Look at extending the life of equipment through maintenance.

| **Route to reduce** | | **Aim/target** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Area** | **Current footprint** | **3 years time** | | **6 years time** | | **9 years time** | |
| | | **Total % reduction** | **How** | **Total % reduction** | **How** | **Total % reduction** | **How** |
| **IT equipment and services** | 5,000 kg $CO_2e$ | Reduce by 25% | Repair and maintain all computer equipment rather than replace. Reduce number of printers to a few in a central location. | 50% | Change procurement policy for new equipment to only those with lower impact. | 75% | Have zero emission IT online services for data storage with green supplier. Commit to 100% repairable and upgradable equipment. |

# Resources

### Greener procurement of IT equipment and services

- Ethical Consumer's laptop shopping guide (subscription service)
- How to choose a sustainable and ethical laptop

### Recycling toner and printer cartridges

- What to do with printer cartridges
- The Recycling Factory

### Green webhosting

- Green Geeks

### End of life

- What to do with electrical items
- Recycle Your Electricals

### Useful articles

- 25 vital computer maintenance tips and checklist to protect your device
- Why your internet habits are not as clean as you think

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# Example: Net zero waste

# Addressing your waste footprint

Waste contributes to the overall carbon footprint of a practice.

The management of healthcare waste is an essential part of ensuring that General Practice activities do not pose a risk or potential risk of infection and are appropriately managed. A small minority of waste is potentially hazardous and if not disposed of correctly can result in injury or infection.

**All** staff are responsible for the safe management and disposal of waste and should understand how waste should be segregated and stored prior to collection or disposal.

This is driven by the need to reduce environmental impact, comply with waste regulations and other national guidance such as the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of practice* and guidance on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance, and reduce costs associated with waste management.

While the carbon emissions from our waste are relatively small, **we cannot recycle our way out of the climate crisis, but we can reduce wasted resources.**

## Infectious or offensive waste?

**Infectious** waste contaminated with body fluids from a patient with a known or suspected infection with a proven infection risk and there are also medicines or chemicals present. ->Yellow bag.

Examples – Contaminated PPE • Medicated dressings • Contaminated dressings

Non-contaminated infectious waste -> Orange bag

**Offensive** (non-hazardous) waste from patients with no known or suspected infection which may be contaminated with body fluids. -> Yellow and Black Tiger stripe bag

Examples: Gloves, aprons • Dressings (including blood stained) • Stoma or catheter bags • Cardboard vomit/urine bowls • Incontinence pads • Female hygiene waste, nappies.

## Why address your waste footprint?

Following the Waste Hierarchy is not only law to reduce resource usage and to prevent pollution, but it also reduces the carbon footprint.
It is the legal responsibility of the General Practice, not the waste contractor, to ensure full compliance with environmental waste regulations.
BMA advice is here.

# Top actions you can take

- Don’t use clinical waste bags for non-clinical waste.
- Identify the main items in waste and remove at source.
- Segregate the waste correctly.

# Monitoring and measuring

Carrying out a waste audit (see box)

- Current waste collection systems
- Volume of waste generated
- Composition of waste and detailed analysis of key waste streams e.g., quantity of avoidable waste and causative factors, composition of waste packaging etc.
- Seasonality or demand peaks
- System constraints (e.g., infection control)

## Waste audit

Over a week:

1. Record the number and type of waste bags collected within the practice
2. Examine the contents of each bag by colour e.g., tiger stripe bag/black bag, recycling bag
3. Separate into categories and weigh totals e.g.
    - Plastic
    - Metal (e.g., aluminium)
    - Paper
    - Mixed/contaminated waste
    - Food waste
4. Return waste to (correct) waste stream
5. Repeat for other waste streams
6. Consider if waste has been appropriately disposed of and whether it was avoidable by comparing against the waste hierarchy

**Download a waste audit form here**

# Where do I put healthcare waste?

## General practice waste management categories

It is easy to overlook the duty of care and legal responsibilities placed upon us personally to dispose of healthcare waste appropriately.

Correct segregation of waste ensures compliance with law and means it will be processed in the safest & cost-effective way, minimise any environmental impact; the colour of the container indicates its disposal route.

Improper segregation of waste and mis-use of waste bag types creates a significant challenge for the NHS.

**Offensive waste (tiger-striped bags):**

- All clinical rooms should have this as main waste stream for GP practices.
- Used for non-infectious healthcare waste, e.g., items contaminated with blood or body fluids, PPE, speculums etc.
- All healthcare waste should be considered non-infectious unless proven otherwise?

**Infectious waste (orange bags):**

- Used for infectious waste **only** – typically solely needed in treatment rooms for dressings (e.g., leg ulcers), minor ops products etc.
- Should **not** be used routinely in GP practices as majority of patients and procedures are not infectious.

**Sharps waste (yellow lidded):**

- Used for all needles, syringes and vials contaminated by anything given to the patient, e.g., pharmaceuticals and most vaccines.

**Sharps waste (purple lidded):**

- Used for all needles, syringes and vials contaminated with cytotoxic and/or cytostatic medicinal products and their residues (e.g., BCG, Leuprorelin, Testosterone, Progesterone, Goserelin).

**Sharps waste (orange lidded):**

- Used for needles, vacutainers and waste from phlebotomy/podiatry (contaminated by blood or body fluids taken from the patient) that are **not** contaminated with pharmaceuticals.

**General & recycling waste:**

- General waste includes couch roll and paper towels.
- **Not all** clinical rooms should have a recycling bin – it is better having one in a central location. Recyclable waste may include packaging, papers, plastics etc.

**Confidential waste:**

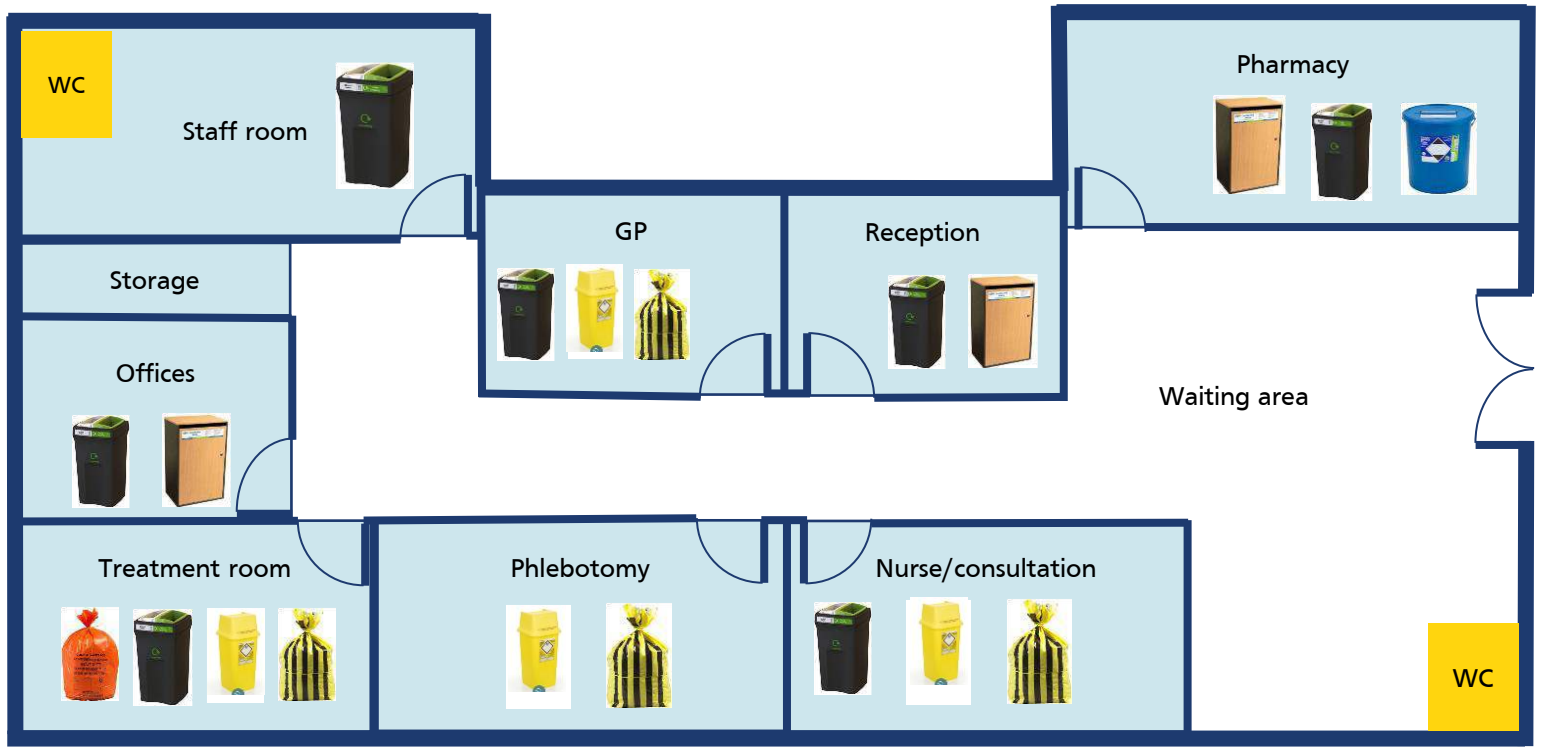
- For all patient identifiable papers and sensitive information.
- This should be shredded and recycled (whether on site or via appointed third party).

**Medicinal waste (blue or purple lidded):**

- All expired or patient returned medicines should be placed in blue-lidded containers, with exception of cytotoxic/cytostatic medicines which is placed in purple lidded containers.

# How to configure waste bins on site?

**General Practice Waste Management Floorplan**
This waste management floorplan should be used as a guide for ensuring that all rooms/areas have the correct waste containers available. Sites should apply this as practically as possible noting different estates types may allow for different configurations.




**GP consultation rooms**
- Tiger waste
- General waste
- Sharps bin

**Offices, reception**
- Paper recycling
- Confidential waste

**Treatment room**
- Tiger waste
- Sharps bin
- Infectious waste
- Recycling

**Phlebotomy**
- Tiger waste
- Sharps bin
- Recycling

**Nurse consultation rooms**
- Tiger waste
- General waste
- Sharps bin

**Pharmacy**
- Medical waste
- Recycling
- Confidential waste

# Sources of waste

Tissues and couch roll, gloves (and other PPE), paper and packaging are the most commonly disposed of item and biggest sources of waste in practices.

The most frequent materials in waste are:

1. Paper (including as tissues).
2. Nitrile, from which the gloves are made.
3. Plastic e.g., sterile wrapping and aprons.
4. Separatable paper and plastic (as packaging).

## What is meant by ‘zero waste’?

The aim is that zero waste produced by the practice is sent to landfill sites or for incineration.

This requires a total re-think of the concept of waste, to be thought of as a ‘potential resource’, which can be returned via recycling firms to become an input in making the next item.

Progress towards this goal requires creative thinking to see how ‘waste’ can be reduced, reused within the practice or recycled.

The carbon footprint of recycling is lower than landfill, but **waste avoidance has no carbon footprint at all**.

Preventing waste through purchasing choices will reduce the carbon associated with the production of new goods and the impacts of waste or recycling.

# The waste hierarchy

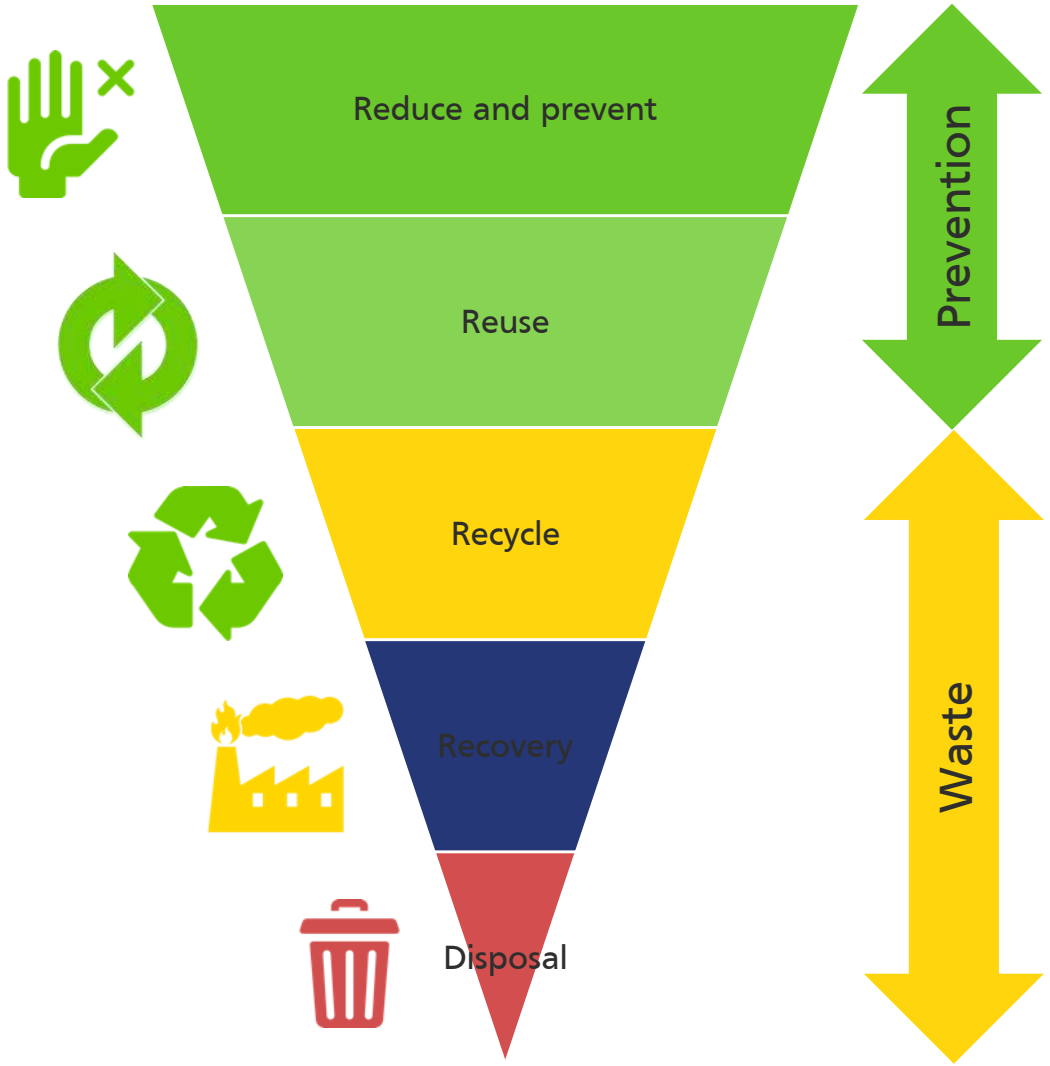
### Reduce and prevent
Biggest reduction in waste is be preventing it from being generated in the first place. For example, less packaging, less new products, repairing, products designed for a longer life.

### Reuse
Products and components that are used for the same purpose again, e.g., reusable PPE masks.

### Recycle
Waste materials that are reprocessed into products and materials that can be used for the same or different purposes.

### Recovery
Energy is recovered but the loss of resources occurs e.g., waste to energy incineration plants.

### Disposal
Last resort. Either sent to incineration without energy recovery or sent to landfill.



# What about plastic?

Plastics are incredibly useful and have changed the way we live our lives. The versatility of the material – to be moulded and shaped makes them suitable for many applications. There is increasing concern about how many are used and how they are disposed. Because they generally don't degrade or corrode, they persist for many hundreds of years.

Plastics are useful for packaging goods.  Plastics is versatile, hygienic, lightweight, flexible and highly durable and accounts for the largest usage of plastics worldwide. It is used in numerous packaging applications including containers, bottles, drums, trays, boxes, cups and protection packaging.

Primary care rely on flexible plastics for packaging. When it comes to plastics, the softer they get the harder they are to recycle.

The UK government has set a target of eliminating avoidable plastic waste by end of 2042.

A useful guide from WRAP is here.

| | Durable, high strength and can be used in low weight applications | Recyclable? |
|---|---|---|
| Non-biodegradable | Lasts for years, can fracture into smaller pieces/ microplastics. | Yes, if collected and sorted into separate material reprocessing streams. |
| Biodegradable | Breaks down in a defined period of time. | Yes, if separated from nonbiodegradable plastic streams and dealt with separately. **Cannot** be recycled in the same way as non-biodegradable plastic. |
| Compostable | Material decomposes/ biodegrades in **industrial** composting conditions. Materials that meet an appropriate home composting standard can be composted in home composting systems. | Separated and sent to industrial composting facilities. **Not** suitable for sending to recycling with other plastics. |

**In the UK, it is estimated we use five million tonnes of plastic every year, nearly half of which is packaging.**

**Any plastic that evades appropriate collection and treatment that escapes into the environment has the potential to have a long-lasting impact on the environment.**

# Types of plastic

Plastic can be made from fossil-based or bio-based materials. The nature of the material used to make a plastic, or the term used to describe it does not necessarily dictate the way it will behave at the end of its life e.g., a bio-based plastic or bioplastic does not automatically mean it will biodegrade.

Important characteristics can include strength, thermo-stability, gas barrier properties, transparency, lightweight, shatter-resistant and recyclability.

| Name | Polymer name | Symbol | Uses | Recyclable |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Yes |
| | | | | Yes |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | Yes |
| | | | | No |
| | | | | Not usually |

Source: wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/understanding-plastic-packaging-and-language-we-use-describe-it

# Monitoring and measuring

## Monitoring and measuring

Understanding a ‘current state map’ at each site includes:

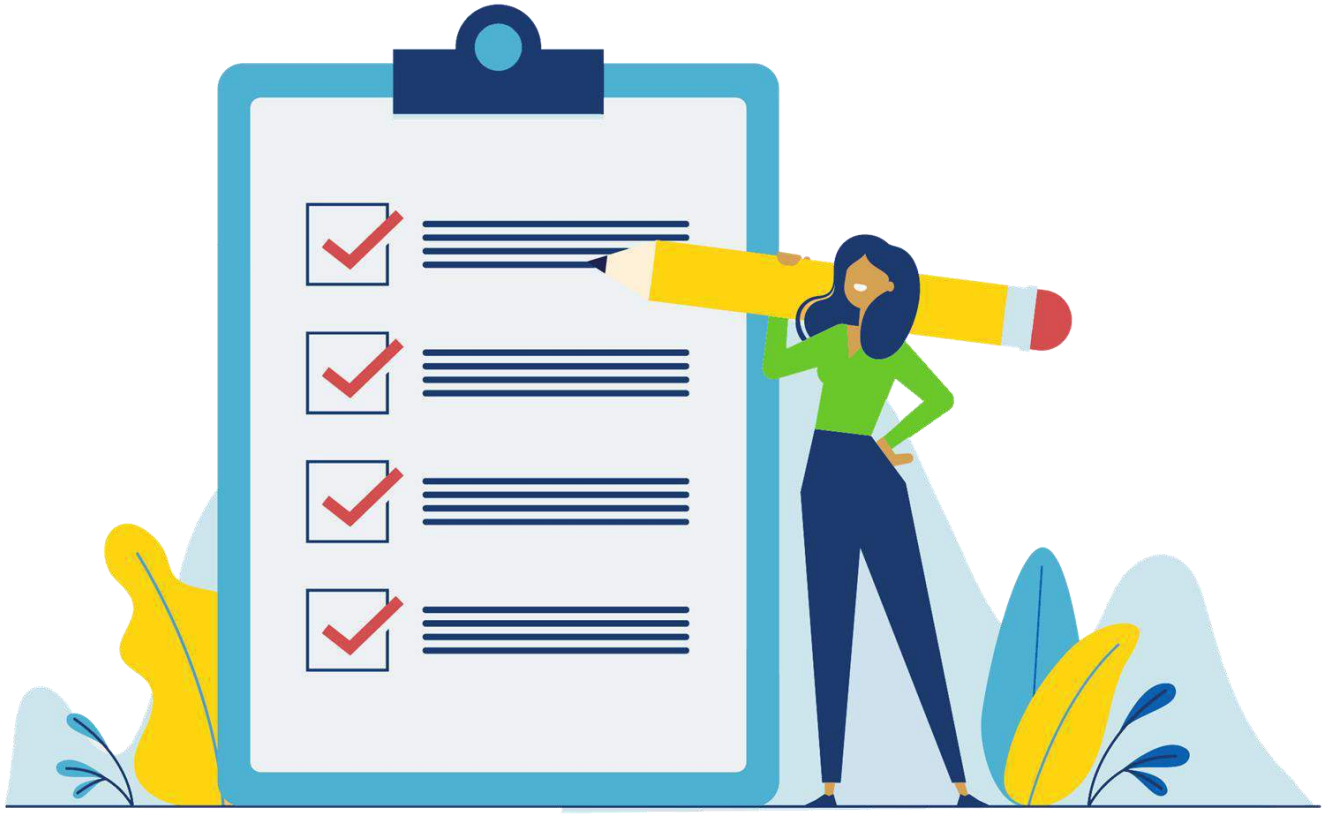
- Carrying out a plastic audit (see box)
- Considering actions to reduce unnecessary use

### Plastic audit

Start from the beginning and make a list of all the single-use plastics that exist in your practice: getting a better understanding on what actually gets thrown away will give a great starting point on what to eliminate altogether.

Identify the different types of plastic (where possible) – see previous page for types.

Identify if reusable or recyclable options are possible e.g. changing from polystyrene cups to reusable (glass, metal, rigid plastic) or recyclable (e.g. Type 5 Polypropylene) ones.



# Tips to reduce plastic

## Think long term

- Getting into good habits with the small steps is not the only thing you can do.
- Thinking longer term to change the culture of using single-use plastics is essential.

## Plastic free office

- Pointless plastic – identify and avoid unnecessary plastic e.g., plastic folders, folder dividers, plastic coated paper clips.
- Paperless office – as offices transition to becoming paperless, start phasing out plastic (biro) pens and use pencils or metal pens instead.
- Laminating – laminating posters will take hundreds of years to biodegrade. Choose alternatives like printing on card.
- Create a central supplies library – for stationery and equipment , and ask staff to check there before purchasing anything new.
- Stationery orders – order eco-friendly stationery and ask the supplier to use paper or cardboard packing materials instead of bubble-wrap, polystyrene or plastic wrapping.

## Food and drink

- Kitchen and staff room – provide reusable crockery and cutlery e.g., glass jugs and glasses for water and metal spoons for stirring drinks. Avoid disposable plastic cutlery.
- Encourage homemade lunches – having good food storage and preparation facilities will encourage and enable staff to bring in homemade lunches which inevitably reduces single-use plastic packaging.
- Office snacks and shop – a great way to influence what snacks are eaten in the office, and what packaging is left behind. For example, replacing bottles for cans, and plastic packaged sweets and crisps with healthy fruit and other alternatives.
- Provide staff with reusable mugs and bottles.
- Plastic-free events – use paper decorations for practice parties and birthdays. Avoid cards and wrapping paper with glitter which is micro-plastic.

**Encourage good recycling or go compostable**
Sometimes using a single-use item is unavoidable. Even with the best effort, there are going to be times when you do have plastic waste in your office, but the key is to make sure staff are encouraged to recycle all appropriate materials, and correct usage of bins.

# Setting targets

Setting targets can help you deliver the strategic changes that are needed to reduce carbon emissions from waste and plastics.

Regarding waste and plastics, the practice can set their own targets to achieve their goal such as:

- % volume reduction.
- % increase in recycling.
- % reduction in financial costs.

| **Route to reduce** | | **Aim/target** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Area | **Current footprint** | **3 years time** | | **6 years time** | | **9 years time** | |
| | | **Total % reduction** | **How** | **Total % reduction** | **How** | **Total % reduction** | **How** |
| **Waste** | 40 bags a week | 25% | Audit current use, aim to increase recycling to **all** recyclable material. | 50% | Identified excess packaging, unused resources, change suppliers. | 75% - 10 bags in total | Aim for fully reusable medical equipment, so eliminating waste at source. |
| **Plastics** | 5 bags a week | 20% | Audit current use. Identify plastic hotspots. Single use plastic free kitchen. | 50% | Identified excess packaging, use circular loops where packaging returns to seller. | 80% | No single use plastics used at all. Only plastic from essential single use medical equipment. |

# Top actions you can take

## Recycle

- Send printer cartridges for recycling.
- Set up a food waste collection for kitchen waste.
- Look for a closed- loop paper recycling supplier e.g. Paper Round collect paper in London and then resell it as office paper.

## Best practice recycling set-up

- No under-desk bins.
- All waste and recycling bins in the same place.
- Clear visual signage with images on them that reflect the waste streams people have in your office. Words like Mixed Recycling or General waste are meaningless as different waste collectors accept different items so include images. WRAP has some good examples of clear signage.
- Ensuring clinical waste bins are not used for ‘general waste’ with clear signage.

# Resources

### UK government guidance

- Guidance on applying the waste hierarchy in England
- Guides to understanding your waste responsibilities
- Environmental guidance for your business in Northern Ireland & Scotland

### Waste and recycling guidance

- WRAP (the Waste & Resources Action Programme)
- Zero Waste Scotland
- Recycle Now

### Useful articles

- BMA 'Disposing of clinical waste'
- CQC 'GP mythbuster': Health care waste
- IPC Waste management Policy for General Practice