December 2025 PRN Market Update

A Delicate Finish to the Compliance Year

Market Overview

As we approach the close of the 2025 compliance year, the latest EA data shows the PRN market remains finely poised. Overall recycling supply sits around 4% below 2024 levels, with most materials tracking slightly behind or only marginally ahead of last year's pace.

The UK's total recycling obligation for 2025 stands at 7.53 million tonnes, while year-to-date supply has reached 6.91 million tonnes, leaving a shortfall of roughly 623,000 tonnes still to be met before year-end. While several materials are close to meeting their annual targets, others, most notably Glass (Aggregate), Wood, and Plastic continue to trail obligation levels. These categories will shape the final phase of compliance activity, and in turn, set the tone for PRN pricing as we move into 2026. The market therefore remains delicately balanced, with price volatility likely to persist through December as buyers finalise positions and recyclers assess remaining evidence availability, Adding to this uncertainty are late producer registrations and December transition tonnages, both of which could still push obligations higher. Even a modest uplift in demand could tighten conditions further across already stretched materials. For procurement teams, this means maintaining flexibility and visibility will be key the final month's trading could bring both opportunity and risk, depending on how recycling performance closes out the year.

Material-Level Highlights

PAPER

Supply to Date: 3,432,958 tonnes

2025 Obligation: 3,636,440 tonnes

Deficit: –203,482 tonnes (–6%)

Details: Paper is under the obligation threshold by ~6%, but this is a historically well-supplied market. Supply has remained consistent, and paper often benefits from higher carry-in tonnage. While short on paper, there's no real panic yet, and unless late demand ramps up significantly, prices are likely to remain soft to neutral, with only marginal upward pressure.

GLASS

Supply to Date: 1,453,676 tonnes

2025 Obligation: 1,646,614 tonnes

Deficit: –192,938 tonnes (–12%)

Details: Combined, the glass market is significantly under-supplied. Demand is consistent and may still rise with late registrations. With aggregate contributing less and remelt only just holding ground, the glass PRN market will remain volatile in December.

ALUMINIUM

Supply to Date: 137,293 tonnes

2025 Obligation: 143,542 tonnes

Deficit: –6,249 tonnes (–4%)

Details: Supply is marginally under obligation, but monthly volumes have been strong recently. Aluminium has shown resilience throughout the year, and any moderate December performance should bring this into balance. Market participants are not concerned.

STEEL

Supply to Date: 337,950 tonnes

2025 Obligation: 355,416 tonnes

Deficit: –17,466 tonnes (–5%)

Details: Steel is tracking just below compliance levels but with an upward trend in recent months. There's still a chance to close the gap with December tonnage. Recyclers have been consistent in delivery, so unless there's a drop-off, the risk is minimal. Some firmness in price is possible, but major swings are unlikely.

PLASTIC

Supply to Date: 1,086,706 tonnes

2025 Obligation: 1,203,322 tonnes

Deficit: –116,616 tonnes (–10%)

Details: Plastic is consistently short, and even though supply is 3% up YoY, demand has grown faster. With just one month left, plastic still needs over 116k tonnes to close the gap. That means ~4,000 tonnes per day must hit the system in December — a tall order. Export challenges and recycler capacity limits remain key concerns.

WOOD

Supply to Date: 463,428 tonnes

2025 Obligation: 549,546 tonnes

Deficit: –86,118 tonnes (–16%)

Details: Wood was previously oversupplied but has lost momentum. It now faces a substantial shortfall of ~16%, with only weeks left. Compliance here could depend on strong end-of-year transition tonnage, and buyers may return late to fill their obligations. Price pressure is already creeping in.

Key Risks and Opportunities

Non-Compliance Risk: Plastic, Glass (especially Aggregate), and Wood remain notably short of their 2025 obligations. Without strong December figures, non-compliance becomes a real risk.

Volatility in Transition Period: December trading is likely to see sharp price movements as transition tonnage for 2026 starts to overlap with 2025 compliance needs.

Late Registrants: As producers register late, obligations can rise unexpectedly, tightening already stretched markets and putting further upward pressure on prices.

Outlook and Strategy

As the 2025 compliance year draws to a close, market dynamics remain finely balanced. Supply is broadly stable across core materials, yet gaps persist in Plastic, Wood, and Glass Aggregate, where shortfalls could still drive late-year volatility. For both buyers and recyclers, strategic timing will be key through December and early 2026.

For procurement teams, the closing weeks of 2025 offer a final window to secure compliance at relatively stable prices before any late tightening occurs. While the broader market remains steady, persistent shortfalls in Plastic, Wood, and Glass Aggregate mean buyers should act early to manage exposure and avoid potential year-end volatility. Those materials are likely to drive any last-minute price movement as the market adjusts to final December data and late-registered obligations.

For recyclers and sellers, the outlook points to selective upside opportunities in tighter markets. If December volumes remain modest, plastic and glass evidence could see renewed buyer interest and firming prices into the final compliance phase. Meanwhile, sellers in more balanced materials such as Paper, Aluminium, and Steel should expect pricing stability, with limited movement unless broader market sentiment shifts.

Closing Thought

The PRN market has entered its classic December rhythm, a fine balance of short supply, price sensitivity, and strategic positioning on both sides.

Plastic and Glass continue to carry the most risk and volatility, while Paper, Aluminium, and Steel anchor the market with relative calm.

Whether you're managing a compliance budget or maximising evidence value, success now comes down to timing, insight, and agility. The final few weeks of 2025 will shape not only this year's close but also how smoothly we transition into 2026.