

APSE Summer Roundtable – Food waste: finding the resources

To: All APSE Contacts in England

For info: For Information to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

1. Context

Following the general election on the 4 July 2024 and the change in government, a roundtable session was convened for APSE Members with responsibility for waste collection, to examine any proposals to come out in the King's Speech and the potential impact on the local authority waste collection and specifically food waste.

This briefing provides a summary of the current position, and overview of the roundtable discussion, and outlines the key asks of the new government.

2. Current position

In October 2023, the government announced its ambitions for simpler recycling collections and tougher regulation to a reformed waste system. Following on from this on the 9th of May 2024, the government further announced its response to the consultation on Simpler Recycling for England. As part of this Councils, in England, will be expected to make weekly food waste collections.

These separate food waste collections are mandated under the Environment Act 2021, which sets out that recyclable household waste must be collected separately from non-recyclable, with each stream collected separately from each other.

The roll-out of mandatory food waste collections starts in 2025. From 31 March 2025, businesses will be required to segregate their food waste and arrange separate collections, while 12 months later, from 31 March 2026, dedicated uniform kerbside collections will be introduced for homeowners.

The last governments consultation on household and business recycling consistency found that if all local authorities provided kerbside food waste collection, the amount of food waste collected would increase by [1.35m tonnes by 2029 - reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 1.25 million tonnes per year](#).

Over ten million tonnes of food is wasted every year in the UK, with much sent to landfill. Separate collections of food waste from every household will prevent contamination of other waste which, it is argued, which could otherwise be usefully recycled, as well as ensuring that food waste can be sent to anaerobic digestion facilities rather than needlessly lost to landfill. The government estimates directing food waste to these plants will generate

more sustainable energy to power homes and businesses, and cut down the more than 18 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions associated with this waste.

Councils in England will be supported with up to £295 million in funding to introduce the weekly food waste collections by 31 March 2026. The new funding will cover new food waste containers for homes and specialist collection vehicles, targeted at local authorities that have yet to fully put food waste service in place.

The funding is part of the government's [Simpler Recycling plans](#) – meaning that people across England will be able to recycle the same materials, and ending the confusing patchwork of rules governing what can and can't be recycled in different parts of the country.

3. Current issues in delivering the service

As part of the Roundtable discussion, there were various points raised through the discussion regarding the current issues being experienced in delivering and preparing to roll out the new food waste service and these can be summarised as follows: -

3.1. Current Collection Issues

Many of the authorities on the call already provide a food waste collection service, they do however encounter many issues in the process of providing this service. These issues can be logistical, financial, or related to public engagement and environmental concerns.

Some of the challenges faced by councils include:

Collection from communal properties and flats:

One issue which was raised by several of the attendees were issues around food waste collection from communal properties, student accommodation and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Many dwellings of this type suffer with issues of transient populations and in some cases language barriers, with campaigns targeted at specific demographics, working with landlords, housing associations and student representatives. This usually leads to several repeat visits to continue to reinforce the food waste collection message which has a knock-on effect to the councils in terms of people and resources, to ensure the message is getting through to residents. Different approaches have been taken with specific projects on a case-by-case basis.

There have been issues where food waste collections have not been offered in certain areas due to ongoing issues and collections only provided on request in other areas.

Food caddy bags supplies

There have been concerns in others areas where, at the roll out of food waste collections,

food caddy bags were initially provided, with some questions as to the impacts on the volume of food waste collections, if the provision of the free food waste bags was discontinued or stopped. This is however seen to be less of an issue in areas where food waste could be collected via plastic bags.

Issues around roll out of new food waste services

The main issue mentioned by members at the round table is around financing the changes, with others concerned more generally with issues of infrastructure that would be needed such as vehicles, containers, route frequencies and other operational practicalities. Concerns were also raised as to supply chain issues, with everyone aiming to procure bins, caddies and trucks at the same time.

A new burdens fund of £295 million of capital funding has been allocated to support the transition to food waste collections and will be allocated to local authorities. Many members have said the allocated new burdens allocation funds are insufficient to meet the costs of having to introduce the new food waste service.

Members have mentioned that with the new burdens allocations to date, it would be welcome capital upfront, but this does not deal with the ongoing additional costs, which is a huge burden within the current budgetary environment, and where such additional funding could subsequently be found.

There are also concerns funding allocated for kitchen and kerbside caddies for food waste, and for the additional vehicles to collect these, is inadequate to cover councils cost with several councils having financial shortfalls; this means councils will need to cover the difference in funding, as well as concerns about increasing costs of capital spending for equipment, bins and trucks due to inflation, supply chain issues and shortages.

In addition to this there is an absence of 'no new burdens funding' allocated for additional treatment infrastructure. One member described that they have some current funding but no revenue projections ahead of the 1st of April, to help inform how the service could be rolled out, meaning in that case that their roll out date will be pushed back closer to the deadline. Members also said that they would like to look at a potential cost savings from selling on the food waste collected.

Many councils are pushing the introduction of food waste further down the line. This has the potential to create problems if too many authorities are leaving purchasing and rollout decisions, this crowding the market for suppliers, which will potentially leave a shortage in necessary supplies to introduce the changes, and risk cost inflation as demand outstrips supplies.

4. The Kings Speech

The Rt Hon Steve Reed, MP is Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and he has notable said that a zero-waste economy is a priority, the King's Speech however did not mention any of the recycling and waste reforms (there was a reference made to increased investment in Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF)). The lack of a detailed mention of waste and resources in the King's

Speech is not however surprising given the more strategic and scene setting nature of the parliamentary occasion.

With regards to the waste legislation and policies (Simpler Recycling, Extended Producer Responsibility and the Deposit Return Scheme) it was hoped there would be more certainty provided to the waste sector. This was a missed opportunity to clarify vital reforms. Hopefully there will be greater clarity and further action from the new government, in the coming months, to set out new proposals for more effective and consistent local collections, giving local authorities greater autonomy to deliver the best local collection methods that works best in local areas.

5. Asks for government

Following the discussion regarding the challenges in the sector, the group outlined their key asks for the new government and the main asks were noted as follows: -

- With a new government now in place will there be any movement on the deadlines? Will further clarification be provided around this? This is especially an issue around business food waste collections which is meant to start on the 31 March 2025. A concern has been raised around if this date could be reviewed/pushed back? Again, due to the cost implications, many councils who would want to offer this service would need to set up from scratch as domestic vehicles cannot be used for trade waste collection as per Defra guidance.
- Clarification is also being sought as to whether Simpler recycling collections will be retained? Are deadlines going to be reviewed? When will the new burden payments be made? Will there be a sufficient time scale to ensure deadlines are met? What will the new funding look like? Councils also need more time to implement service changes.
- Fortnightly food collection and garden waste, is also an area of uncertainty with many wishing to ask the new government 'will these proposals now change?' Further clarification is also being sought by authorities who currently collect food waste with their garden waste collections.
- The guidance says collections will come in by 31 March so many questions were asked around who will be monitoring and verifying to ensure collections are taking place? Is there an assumption councils will just get on, and do it? How will compliance be demonstrated? There are feelings that even with the hard deadline, enforcement will not be possible at that time but with some leeway from regulators (depending on who it ends up being). Clarification is also sought around what would happen if the council provided food waste collection, but have to withdraw the service due to non-compliance? Is it determined that you have technically provided the service and fulfilled your duty?

APSE Comment

While APSE is supportive of the simpler recycling collections and indeed the food waste recycling and other aspects of Defra's waste and resources waste strategy, however APSE has consistently argued that the scheme must be adequately funded to ensure councils have the correct resources to implement and run the new food waste service. We look forward to working with the new government to boost the efficiency of waste collection and recycling arrangements, progress existing waste reforms, including Extended Producer Responsibility and the Deposit Return Scheme and achieve a circular economy.

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