

# Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

## Oral evidence: Food waste, HC 429

Wednesday 1 February 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 February 2017.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Chris Davies; Jim Fitzpatrick; Simon Hart; Kerry McCarthy; Dr Paul Monaghan; Rebecca Pow; Ms Margaret Ritchie; David Simpson; Rishi Sunak.

Questions 298-383

### Witnesses

I. Andrew Bird, Chair, Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee; James Potter, Assistant Director for Waste, Hampshire County Council; Stuart Donaldson, Waste Strategy Manager, Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority.

II. Charlotte Morton, Chief Executive, Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association; Paul Killoughery, Managing Director, Bio Collectors; Jacob Hayler, Executive Director, Environmental Services Association.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Andrew Bird, James Potter and Stuart Donaldson.

Q298 **Chair:** Thank you very much for attending this inquiry on food waste. It is a pleasure to see you. Starting with Stuart, could you introduce yourselves across the panel and then we will fire away with the questions? You are very much welcome this afternoon.

**Stuart Donaldson:** Thank you, Chair. My name is Stuart Donaldson and I am the Waste Strategy Manager for Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority.

**Andrew Bird:** Good afternoon. I am Andrew Bird, Chair of LARAC, which is the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee, but I also have a day job managing environmental services for Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**James Potter:** Good afternoon. My name is James Potter. I am the Assistant Director for Waste at Hampshire County Council.

Q299 **Chair:** Thank you very much, gentlemen. I am going to start off with the first question. The findings from the Courtauld Phase 3 were disappointing for household food waste. Quite a broad question: what is the role of local authorities in reducing this amount of food waste?

**Andrew Bird:** Essentially, local authorities provide a key element of the supply chain. If we look at any products that go from manufacture through to disposal, we are a key point in terms of defining what happens to those materials, and it is an increasing cost to us, so it is in our interests to try to reduce waste as much as we are able to. The problem is nobody has found the magic solution to make that happen, and it is really unfortunate to see the figures that have come out of the work of Courtauld. There has been an awful lot of publicity about food waste. Certainly, over the last few years, we have had a lot of money spent on Love Food Hate Waste and yet, for some reason, it would appear that the public just do not get it or do not understand it. That is something that we, collectively as an industry—

Q300 **Chair:** Is it the public that do not get it or is it the fact that you, as local authorities, are not presenting the message in the right way?

**Andrew Bird:** It is not that we are not presenting the message, but there is something in it in terms of there needs to be a rethink about how those messages are presented. Local authorities have been very heavily involved in Love Food Hate Waste with WRAP and that has gone on for years. There is a lot of good work in there, but clearly with those messages we are missing something, so yes, I would agree that there is a need to really look at how we communicate.

Q301 **Chair:** The trouble is, in a way, there is a lot of pressure on local authorities at the moment probably to collect less frequently. One of the problems, in a way, if we are not careful, with food waste, is it probably is of very little use, other than anaerobic digestion, if it is left to ferment for too long. I do not know what you feel the solution there is.

**Andrew Bird:** Certainly, I would advocate that length and frequencies in collection of residual waste need to have a separate food waste service as part of that change, really. It is completely unfair to go for a three or four-weekly residual collection without something in place that is adequate for food. In my authority, we have run a separate food waste service for the last seven years; what we have seen is that while participation rates have gone up, the tonnage that we collect has stayed relatively static. What that indicates to me is that once people are using that service, they see how much they are wasting rather than what they think they may be wasting.

**Chair:** Yes, because they are not mixing it with the rest of their rubbish; they are identifying it as an amount.



**Andrew Bird:** Correct, they are identifying it very clearly and that is a key element in moving forward.

Q302 **Chair:** Does James want to add anything?

**James Potter:** Bluntly, from a waste disposal point of view, if we do not see it coming through our gates we do not have to pay for it, so our focus at the moment is very much on prevention and trying to get messages out to the public as to how they can reuse leftovers, and trying to remove some of the confusion around use-by and sell-by dates. It is very difficult.

We are now in the process of reinvesting in what we call prevention campaigns. We went through a period where it became very difficult to justify the cost, because to be specific about the cause and effect, and to say, "Right, that is my bang for buck; therefore I can justify that expenditure," is very difficult when we are under increasing pressure. However, we are recognising that the tonnage per household we are seeing at the moment is unsustainable, so we are investing to try to drive that down with some education.

It would be useful if that was done on a national basis or there was at least a national campaign. While there is Love Food Hate Waste, it seems to be a little less frequent and the support for that is less than it was. I was thinking about this the other day and you almost want to go back to infomercials. Maybe at primetime, just before *Strictly* on a Saturday night, have something there that gives people some information about wasting food and what they can do, how they can save themselves £60 a month or something like that if they do so. It is getting that, then the local authorities can pick up on that sort of branding and do their own local messaging, but if it is just left to local authorities to do their own messaging, you are going to end up with a plethora of different messages that, to a degree, will only add to the confusion.

Q303 **Chair:** Also, naturally, partly due to local circumstances, different authorities will have very different policies quite often, and methods of collection and times of collection, and people who move around find this quite difficult. I suppose it is difficult to know whether we should have one policy across the country, because it is a case of the old adage that one size will not fit all, will it? It is whether we have too much difference at the moment; I do not know. Do local authorities learn enough from each other, do you think?

**Andrew Bird:** To be fair, it is changing. Yes, if you go back 10 years, when we were developing recycling services, we all tended to do it our own way. What you are finding now is there is a lot more collaboration. There are some really good partnerships out there that are working together. The WRAP work on consistency has been really positive over the last 12 months and there is going to be another 20-odd pilots that start work this year. It is improving and, given time, it will make a difference.



**Stuart Donaldson:** We have been actively involved in a major waste prevention programme for the last nine years across Merseyside. We are dealing with 1.5 million residents and that adage of "one size fits all" does not work. One of the things we are looking at now is how we target different communities and different people in different social demographics. We have certainly learned from that, from our waste composition analysis and being able to work with the public at events and in communities. Part of it is moving into teaching them skills of cooking. As waste managers, we are teaching people, which maybe they should have learned at school but that is another argument altogether.

We can actively see engagement working with partners when they recognise that we understand where they are coming from and the difficulties and pressure of the lives that they are living. It is not just about what you throw away; it is how you are living, your lifestyle. That is a key lesson that we have learned as a local authority.

**Chair:** And the space to store waste and all sorts of things come in.

**Stuart Donaldson:** There is space, there is families, individual householders. There are a lot of issues to consider.

Q304 **David Simpson:** You are very welcome, gentlemen. I think you have already touched on my question. James, I think you touched on it. What should the Government be doing more to promote prevention? You have mentioned a number of things: advertising, whatever. What relationship do the councils or your organisations have with schools, for example primary schools, educating young people, at that age, on how waste should be handled?

**Stuart Donaldson:** I certainly think more could be done in supporting local authorities and other partners to promote waste prevention. It is top of the waste hierarchy and you are saving resources by doing that, by not creating the waste in the first place. You also have added environmental and financial benefits from doing so. In the work that we have done on Merseyside, we have been able to calculate that for every £1 we have invested we have at least saved £3, but it is not coming into the council, it is coming into the community, so there is a definite social value there that can be captured.

With schools, Merseyside Recycling Authority has taken the lead on engagement with our partner authorities, mainly because they do not have the resources to go into the schools as much as they used to be able to do. While we have not gone into schools to do assemblies or anything like that, we have worked with partners to deliver programmes such as the work we have done with the Children's Food Trust. We have created 65 Mersey Waste Muncher clubs, most of which are based in primary schools; they are after-school clubs. We have children as young as reception age learning how to cook, learning the value of food and learning to enjoy it, and that keeps them in good stead as they go



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

through. There seems to be a gap then at secondary school level, where other things start happening and there is the importance of examinations.

**Q305 David Simpson:** When you were talking about initiatives, I think you mentioned there is £3 going back into the community. In my own area and constituency in Northern Ireland, primary schools have had one or two initiatives to help food waste. They have a programme and any revenue coming from that, which was not a large amount of money, the primary school gets to keep as a bonus and an incentive for them, to go towards kids' clubs or whatever the case may be. Is that an option here, do you think, or is it being done here?

**Stuart Donaldson:** We definitely have examples where we have school cookery clubs, but they have also linked it to growing food on the ground and then using that for school meals and things like that. There is definitely a synergy.

**Andrew Bird:** Very much the same. We have seen resources reduced, in that we have lost recycling officers and the like, so we have had to do much the same as Stuart. We have had to use other agencies, but there are certainly plenty of examples going on. The biggest problem is the hole that is around the senior school area. There are obviously valid reasons for that, but that is something that nationally we do need to look at seriously.

**James Potter:** One of the difficulties we have found is the hook into the national curriculum, so how do you justify taking that bit of time within a busy school curriculum to be able to get those messages across.

**Q306 Rishi Sunak:** Good afternoon, gentlemen. Our investigation has uncovered that about only half of local authorities in England currently separate out food waste collection or provide that service. We would be interested to hear from each of you why you think that number is so low and how are local authorities working with WRAP to increase the number.

**James Potter:** Only one collection authority in Hampshire collects food waste at the moment. We are the beneficiary or the victim of having developed an integrated waste management system from the mid-1990s. Therefore, we are still paying off the mortgage of what we currently have, which gives us limited flexibility and cash to manoeuvre. However, one authority has come forward and asked specifically if they can do that and we have made arrangements for them to be able to place that material to anaerobic digestion. With the other collection authorities, where they have investigated it we have had a conversation with them, but currently none of them have come forward on an economic basis; and to a large degree, at the moment, most things are driven by economics. We also have the difficulty where seven of the 13 collection authorities are already doing AWC, so, in effect, the opportunity to move to alternate weekly and introduce food waste at the same time has disappeared. The others are moving slowly and if they choose to look at food waste as part



of that move to AWC, then we would have those conversations with them.

**Andrew Bird:** Similarly, in Staffordshire, with the waste partnership that we have, my authority is the only one currently that separately collects food waste. Another couple co-mingle it with garden waste, which is very costly for what they get out of it. As part of the WRAP consistency work over the last six months, we have looked at how we could bring in separate food waste collections for the other eight collection authorities. Effectively, because we are all on alternate weekly in terms of residual, the way forward was to look at pushing that out to three or four-weekly. We have a very similar energy-from-waste, long-term disposal, integrated strategy that has been in place since 2000. As far as our taxpayers are concerned in Staffordshire, we have a very cheap and reasonable rate for disposing and collecting waste. We probably have the cheapest disposal costs in the country and the collection costs are good as well, and we have, overall, 50% recycling even without the separate food waste. From a performance and cost point of view, currently, we are performing quite well.

We very much looked at it in terms of how much further we can go if we reduce the frequency of residual waste even further, and even bringing it to four-weekly does not quite add up in the short term, because of getting that investment in. The only way that we can do it, and the way we are looking at it at the moment, which will not be particularly popular, is to start to look at charging for garden waste and using the income from that to invest in the separate food waste side. What James has just outlined is probably the key to why only 50% of authorities are engaged at the moment, and it is to do with existing contracts and, basically, finances.

**Stuart Donaldson:** We are very similar. We are in the commissioning phase for an energy-from-waste plant. We have two districts that are doing it. Liverpool is currently having discussions with WRAP on the expression of interest through the consistency programme, but we need to see how it all stacks up.

Q307 **Chair:** With the energy-from-waste plant, you would put virtually everything into that, would you, and burn it?

**Stuart Donaldson:** Everything that is going into the residual bin will go through there and, ultimately, only a small amount—less than 5%—will end up in landfill. It is going for the opportunity to gain income from the energy produced, which will allow us to do other things. We also have to look and see how the mix of everything allows us to invest in waste prevention and re-use again. We are at 42% recycling, so we still have a little bit to do, but we think there is more robust work to be done—

Q308 **Chair:** Do not feel happy when you reach 50%. We would like you to get to 100%, so do not feel you are too close to the target.



**Stuart Donaldson:** Yes, but from our point of view it is about what more we can do on re-use and waste prevention more so than recycling.

Q309 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Gentlemen, good afternoon. Following on from what Rishi asked and recognising that only 50% of local authorities are in the area that we are talking about, can I ask you about the different challenges for different communities? Mr Donaldson, perhaps if there is anything you can tell us about collecting from flats as opposed to terraced houses; Mr Potter, collecting from urban communities versus rural communities; and Mr Bird, if there is any generic information nationally that you are sharing as best practice, that would be really helpful.

**Stuart Donaldson:** In Merseyside, we have over 660,000 households and a population of 1.5 million. The majority of them live in the city of Liverpool and, in that area, 64% of the population live in either terraced properties or multiple occupancy. We also have 55,000 students attending three universities, so there is a transient population who often live in accommodation provided by the university or run by private landlords. Sometimes it is very difficult to get in and provide infrastructure to those areas. We have masses of terraced properties. Liverpool has more Georgian terraced properties than Bath, so we have a difficulty of getting into those. There are four-foot alleyways that the vehicles cannot go down and there are gated alleyways, so there are a lot of difficulties of getting in there. Equally, we have some of the most deprived wards in the country under the index of multiple deprivation. We have issues of communication. On the ability of those individuals or families to undertake recycling, it is not at the top of their agenda and they are probably pressured in their lives to be able to think about how to separate out the food waste or, equally, they are eating meals for one and throwing everything in with the plastic tray into the bin. There is a lot of work that we need to address and a lot of it is inbuilt into the community, so it is really hard to pick it out and see where we can support that community and move them forward.

Q310 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Recognising that, is there a different challenge between the terraced housing and you must have some high-rise flats in Merseyside? Is that a different proposition altogether?

**Stuart Donaldson:** Part of that will be the space with flats, and probably they are more likely to be private landlords, who have provided a waste service but do not necessarily provide the infrastructure to enable the residents to do recycling. Since it is a multiple occupancy building, you only need a few people in that block to contaminate all the good work that has been done by other residents, so maybe they will then go, "Well, why should I do it, because it is not worth my while?" There needs to be some support and intervention, where we can, to enable them to do it.

**James Potter:** It is an interesting question, because it touches on what we are doing this for. Are we advocating separate food collection and recycling of it in order to achieve targets, or are we trying to do the most



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

sustainable thing? If you look at, say, a rural situation, I happen to live in a rural area and I have private drainage. I know you have had a previous manufacturer of a waste disposal in here in a previous session. I use that, so it goes into my septic tank and gets taken away once a year. It is never going to get caught as a percentage of the recycling and if you said to me, "Here is a caddy; now go and put all your waste in there," I am probably not going to do it, because it is a lot easier just to put the peelings down the sink.

We have already touched on how, in certain areas, one size does not fit all. You need to look at it and ask whether the recycling target is the important thing. However we measure it and whatever metric we want to use, a carbon one or an environmental against an economic one, what are we trying to achieve? If you ask me, a rural collection of 10, 20 or 30 kilograms, going a mile down a rutted track to get to it is not viable. However, if you can find a way of collecting it in an urban area where, yes, there is a high density of people and they are collecting it and if you want to use the economies and move to three or four-weekly collections, then it is a viable proposition. We just have to look at it and say that different demographics and different settings require different solutions, and, rather than say, "This is mandatory; everyone shall collect food waste," we need to be a little more sensible and scientific about it.

**Andrew Bird:** I do not have a lot to add to that. That makes absolute sense. Certainly, flats and apartments are the biggest challenge; that is what we have found in our authority. We have some really good examples of one or two that do it very well, but again, as Stuart mentioned, it is dependent upon the local community buying into it and owning it, essentially. Again, it does only take one or two to spoil it, unfortunately. Dense urban areas and flats, we are seeing more and more of those being developed as land is tight, so it is an area we have to crack really.

Q311 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Forgive me; I did not quite pick up on your last set of answers. If you are going to have, as many authorities have, alternative waste collections—two-weekly, three-weekly or even four-weekly—food waste is going to be even more difficult to collect under those circumstances.

**Andrew Bird:** Absolutely, yes.

Q312 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Therefore, it goes backwards rather than becoming more efficient.

**Andrew Bird:** Yes.

**Stuart Donaldson:** Liverpool has moved to alternate weekly collections, but in certain parts of the city, particularly in terraced properties, they have kept it at weekly, so it is addressing some of the issues where we cannot move over at this time, but we will look at what ways we can take it forward.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q313 **Chair:** Where you have lack of space for people to be able to store, you are still collecting weekly.

**Stuart Donaldson:** Yes, and we are aware with some of those properties that recycling rates are inherently lower than a lot of other areas, so it is about how much you put into those areas to get what you need out of it.

**Chair:** Yes. Good point.

Q314 **Dr Monaghan:** Good afternoon, gentlemen. The Welsh and Scottish Governments have given grants to local authorities to help meet the cost of delivering food waste services. Have you had any, or do you plan to have any, discussions with the UK Government on this issue?

**James Potter:** We would like to have conversations with the UK Government. I have come from a meeting this morning of the national waste disposal officers and we had a representative of Defra there. There was, for the first time, an indication that there might be some form of funding, possibly, for performance enhancement processes. That is probably the first time that that has been suggested for at least the last five years, if not longer, other than the stay on your weekly collection funding and so on.

If there is that opportunity, we would be delighted to have that conversation. However, it needs to be realised that when you enter into a collection contract you tend to buy your vehicles at the front end of the contract, depreciate them over life and get a new set at the end of it, so your opportunities for change tend to come around infrequently. If you are a direct service organisation, you tend to have a rolling programme of renewal, so you might be replacing one or two vehicles a year. All of this tends to mean that it is difficult to find the right point of intervention to say, "Right, we are going to change to something different". Yes, the funding would be fantastic; whether or not it would grease the wheels for change we will have to wait and see.

Q315 **Dr Monaghan:** That is an interesting point; thank you for that. How would you describe your relationship with the UK Government?

**James Potter:** Through some of the things we have done recently, I hope that I am getting closer to the two key ministries that we intercede with. Defra came and did a visit in December, and I have DCLG coming down next week. We are trying to build those relationships so that there is an understanding of the issues on both sides. It sometimes feels very much like you get told certain things and when you start to scratch at it, the operational practicalities are not necessarily fully understood. We are trying to engage as much as we can to build those relationships and open a dialogue.

**Stuart Donaldson:** I will declare the fact that I was a Defra, or DoE, official for 23 years—

**Chair:** That is very brave of you.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Stuart Donaldson:** —focusing on waste and sustainability, so I always think it is good to have conversations with the Government and officials to discuss what opportunities and what ways we can move things forward and, if there is funding available for it, then make it available; it would be really difficult for local authorities to do it on their own. What we should also do is address what other ways of funding we can obtain: is there something through producer responsibility in the food and market sector, who are helping create this waste? Can they help invest?

Q316 **Dr Monaghan:** Some of my colleagues might come to that. I am focused really on your relationship with the Government in relation to the idea of financial support for local authorities, and the follow-up question is: what is your relationship with the UK Government now?

**Stuart Donaldson:** I would say our personal relationship with the UK Government has reduced in the last few years. At the time when we were set up, there was a very active dialogue and, to be honest, the Government Office Network in the regions did a lot of work to facilitate that. Since then and since the loss of staff in Government Departments, you have had the difficulty of engaging, other than through national bodies like LARAC, to have that discussion. If we can get back to a better dialogue, it would be really useful.

**Andrew Bird:** The message really is that it is improving. Over the last 12 months, I have seen a vast improvement in engagement, very positive engagement. I think all three of us would agree that we do not want to be seen as stumbling blocks. We want to engage; we want to do the best for our residents and the best for the country, and certainly it is getting better. It is not all about funding and what would help is, again, some clear policy direction as well, and I dearly hope that when you publish the 25-year environment plan we start to see some positive policy moves in that document that we can all buy into and support.

**Dr Monaghan:** Maybe, Andrew, you could provide us with some written evidence in relation to the key areas that you would like to see that dialogue take place around. Stuart, you wanted to come back.

**Stuart Donaldson:** Yes. I just wanted to add that obviously the conversations that we want are not just with Defra. You did say the UK Government, and we are really keen on how we can take forward the resource efficiency, say, for economy. We are very strongly in favour of the messages that have been coming out of the Business Department regarding the industrial strategy and how we can link to that and make improvements there at the local level. There are a lot of other areas as well as food and Defra work going on that we could actively contribute to.

**Dr Monaghan:** Indeed. Thank you very much.

Q317 **Kerry McCarthy:** Can I go back to the economics of it and the business case for doing this? I know that local authorities are incredibly stretched in terms of finances at the moment, so it is quite difficult to take an



innovative approach; it is like treading water. If you were able to have separate food waste collections, do you have figures for how much it would cost and how much money you would save in not sending to landfill and so on? Are you able to put figures on it?

**Andrew Bird:** It is quite difficult, in a sense, to give a consistent figure, because it does vary so much depending on local circumstances. To give you an example, when my authority took the decision to introduce it, we had a very powerful portfolio holder at the time. We wanted to go to alternate weekly on residual and, basically, he would not let that happen unless we had a separate food waste service, so we did invest in that. Fortunately, we had the money at the time to do it. Effectively, that was costing us an additional £1 million a year to run in those first six years. Since then, in July, we brought a new service in where now the food waste is collected on a single pass vehicle, it is deposited at the same site, which we own, where the dry recycling is deposited, and it has built up from there.

We then got a brilliant deal on AD, so the gate fees have come down drastically. Now we are in a position where our food waste service is one that is very cost-effective for us. That is why I say we were looking in Staffordshire to see whether we could get the other eight authorities into the same situation and we cannot at the moment, because you need that initial input of funding. As Stuart said, it is around changing vehicles. It is really dependent on being able to deposit the food waste strategically at the same place as you are depositing something else, so you are not adding journeys in. It is all around transport and logistics. In terms of the treatment side, again we have seen gate fees drop dramatically, certainly in the Midlands, over the last couple of years, which is good for us as long as that is sustainable.

However, in other areas, of course, we are lacking infrastructure, so you are into a chicken-and-egg situation, in that you need a contract before there is a plant built and you cannot have a contract unless you have a plant there. It is a really complex issue, so I am sorry I cannot give you a definitive price, but for us it was around about £1 million a year for the first five years.

Q318 **Kerry McCarthy:** When you now describe it as cost-effective, do you mean as in not costing you money?

**Andrew Bird:** It is not costing us now. It is saving us money now and if you take a longer-term vision on it, it can do that, but you have to invest up front and it has to be at the right time in terms of when you are changing your vehicles, when you are looking at the other services that you are integrating it into.

Q319 **Kerry McCarthy:** What tends to be the average length of a waste contract or, again, does that vary? Is there an issue of people not being able to do it now because you are tied into a contract for the next 10 years?



**Andrew Bird:** Yes, there are certainly issues around that and there was a move to longer-term contracts. That is probably changing a little bit. There seems to be some pulling back on that now to more shorter-term arrangements, because of the volatility that we have seen in dry recycling markets and the like over the last few years. Length of contracts is an issue, but typically they would be around about five to seven years for a collection contract, some possibly up to 10.

**Stuart Donaldson:** It depends which side of the house you are on. When you are dealing with treatment and disposal, contracts can run to 20, 25 years. Part of the discussion that we have with the collections authorities is they may be finding some marginal savings in the collection round, but ultimately, if you take the whole package with the treatment involved as well, then it could become more expensive. Certainly for authorities like Merseyside, Greater Manchester and the four authorities in London that are joint waste disposal authorities, they are financed in a different mechanism from two-tier authorities. We do not have tax-raising powers, so we have a levy paid for through our districts and what that means is that there is difficulty forecasting what that cost would be going into the future, which sometimes makes it difficult to secure a proper business case at the time.

**James Potter:** As a waste disposal authority, I probably would not comment on collection costs, because they are not something I am too well-versed with.

Q320 **Chair:** What potential knock-on effect would separate food waste collection have on the residual waste collection? It could have some benefit by taking out food waste. Is there a big financial cost?

**Andrew Bird:** It depends again. Certainly, if you were looking at traditional landfill compared with gate fees for anaerobic digestion, then yes, there are significant savings there. There are savings in terms of energy from waste as well, so if you purely look at it from that point of view, yes, there are savings there. It is the collection costs and the additional side there—the bulking and transfer costs—that basically reduce that saving dramatically.

Q321 **Chair:** There must be an issue when you are trying to recycle other waste if you have a lot of food waste with it. I suppose it depends on whether you are going to the waste to power route, where you probably do not worry too much about what is in there because you can burn it, but then I suppose that would depend on each local authority. Have you any idea of the number of local authorities that would have food waste to power plants in the country? Is it half or much less than that?

**James Potter:** I would say it was fewer than half, but it is a growing number and those that do not have access to a UK-based energy recovery facility are increasingly shipping it across to the continent as refuse-derived fuel. At the moment, about 3 million tonnes of residual waste is being exported.



From Hampshire's point of view, the cost benefits to the disposal authority for energy recovery or anaerobic digestion are negligible. That is because, effectively, the way our contract is constructed is we are paying a mortgage off, so whether we use it or not we are paying for the privilege of having it. Therefore, you end up with a different gate fee than you might otherwise see in the WRAP gate fee publication. Ultimately, they end up being comparable. If we have to pay recycling credits on top, then that tends to put us in a negative position. I know there are conversations going on with regard to incinerator bottom ash and whether or not that might be deemed to be a recycled material, just as the digestate, when it meets certain criteria, is considered to be recycled through AD. If that were to come to pass, you then have to say, "Do I want to put on an additional collection and undertakes those costs, when in fact my recycling performance per se probably will not change very much?"

**Q322 Chair:** Stuart, is there a significant cost benefit in having one collection and putting it into a waste to power plant? How do the figures stack up? I suppose it depends on the local authority, how densely populated and so on.

**Stuart Donaldson:** I do not have the figures available, but, ultimately, the way we operate on Merseyside, in the main, is we have a co-mingled recycling collection and residual bin collection. Ultimately, all food that is not being separated out or being prevented from going in in the first place will go for energy from waste when we are up and running. That probably will carry on with a lot of the unavoidable or inedible food waste and we will make something out of that. There are opportunities for going on with how we collect separately with food waste. One of the things we have been looking at is whether we can also close the loop and create biofuels out of the food waste. We have a reprocessor on Merseyside. We are having discussions with them and other partners to see whether we can do that and then have food vehicles run on biofuels, so we are closing the loop. We are looking at that opportunity. When the public see that, it is something that would resonate with them and it is an example that has been followed in Malmo, in Sweden.

**Q323 Chair:** Are you talking about creating a biogas that you then put back into your vehicles and so on?

**Stuart Donaldson:** Yes.

**Chair:** Interesting, because that is another recycling process, is it not.

**Stuart Donaldson:** Yes, and it could go beyond that to public transport. We are working with our transport exec to have those discussions. There are ways of looking at it differently from just collecting and recycling the food waste.

**Andrew Bird:** Just to give you a bit of a flavour in terms of the cost, typically a collection vehicle with its crew will cost about £150,000 a year to run. A typical refuse collection vehicle, as you say, just picking up



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

streams of waste and going into one facility, effectively ought to be able to collect from about 1,500 properties a day. On the recycling side, we run a separated system with the food waste. Typically, of course, the minute you do that the productivity of that vehicle drastically reduces, because it is slower due to the time it takes to collect. Therefore, effectively, you need two vehicles to do that for every one that does a single multi-stream that goes into one facility.

**Chair:** Yes, so there could be a significantly different cost.

**Andrew Bird:** It is significantly different, yes.

**Chris Davies:** Chair, I am sure I speak on behalf of all of us when I say what a pleasure it is to have you back in the chair.

**Chair:** What do you want? You cannot be too long asking your question.

**Chris Davies:** I would say we did enjoy immensely the time the Chair was off.

**Chair:** I have been away having my hip operation; that is what Chris is referring to. Carry on, please.

**Chris Davies:** That was a great form of recycling.

**Chair:** Not total recycling, thank you.

Q324 **Chris Davies:** My question relates to food waste targets. Looking at the evidence that was submitted, Hampshire County Council says that voluntary initiatives can only achieve so much, although it notes that the effects of legislation and/or mandatory targets could be limited. Mr Donaldson, you have said with Merseyside that legislation does have a role, but must be designed carefully to avoid perverse outcomes—in other words, chasing recycling targets ahead of waste prevention and refuse. How should this be implemented? Where should we go on this?

**Stuart Donaldson:** Part of it is recognising it in its totality. We do not just want to race down the route of, "Let's recycle and nothing else". It is a costly exercise to undertake. Waste management, in total, on Merseyside, probably costs about £100 million a year. That is a hell of a service from collection to disposal and, by having targets, you can measure your performance against it, you have an idea of where you are going with it, but you are also flexible enough to move into those areas where there may be other benefits to be had. We want social and economic benefits as much as environmental benefits, so where it is environmentally and economically prudent to move ahead and take forward initiatives like separate food collections, we have clearly looked at it and are not being pushed down a route that is basically saying, "Just recycle". We need to examine those other measures.

Q325 **Chris Davies:** Do you think those targets should be set by Government? Should there be legislation or should they be set by your authority?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Stuart Donaldson:** At the moment, the only target we have is the 50% target. We used to have individual local authority targets. By having that, and it is a statutory duty, it does make councillors and officers be clear about what they need to do, how they prepare for it and how they budget for it. Where it is a national target and nobody is given responsibility for it, it makes it quite muddy waters that you have to look at and say, "Who is doing it?" and everybody is pointing to everybody else to deliver it. Regulatory routes have their place, but it has to be done in a picture of good will, participation and working together. We have spent a lot of time in the last 20 years building partnerships and relationships. We have just started building relationships with the retailers, through Courtauld and through previous work that WRAP had brokered. That could bring some tremendous benefits to us, but we still have to develop that and work on it.

Q326 **Chair:** That is all about creating less waste in the first place, is it?

**Stuart Donaldson:** Yes, and moving forward with the recycling options and whether other players can take their part in it and support local initiatives, like Marks and Spencer has done.

Q327 **Chris Davies:** Would you agree with that, gentlemen?

**Andrew Bird:** I would. Personally, I do not like weight-based targets. I will use the example of garden waste in particular, which is a material that none of us collected at all 15 years ago; people composted it or whatever in their own gardens. In order to hit our recycling targets, we all introduced garden waste collection schemes, because the material is very heavy and it ticked boxes. Now we are in a situation where finances are tight, we do not have individual targets, as Stuart said, and now garden waste has become a huge burden to us, hence why you see more and more local authorities charging for it. We need to be a lot more scientific and savvy about how we have targets and what targets we have. I suppose if I was to advocate any, it would be around a reduction target on residual waste and not focused on recycling.

Q328 **Chris Davies:** Mr Potter, your evidence states that voluntary initiatives can only achieve so much. Do we have great conflict on the panel?

**James Potter:** No, because I think voluntary initiatives can only achieve so much, but if you are going to use legislation it needs to be very tight. If you put a target on a local authority to provide a service, effectively to say, "You have to have a recycling target of X"—or I think the circular economy package is suggesting they might want two: a bio-waste target and a recycling target—if it is going to be a bio-waste target and you put that on the local authority, the local authority will provide a service, but unless you give enforcement powers against residents, it is very difficult for us to make sure that they recycle appropriately. Unless you are giving them some sort of carrot and stick and suggest maybe even looking at pay-as-you-throw initiatives, so that if you are charged for what you put out but there is a discount for recycling, then there is a



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

benefit to residents for doing that, and they can see a financial driver to help them.

Where there might be some profit or ability to legislate is in the commercial sector. I am always conscious that we focus a lot on household waste, but it is only 20% of everything, and food waste is only 25% or 30% of that 20% of the whole. We are putting a lot of energy into what is a relatively small proportion of all the waste around, and there is a lot of commercial food waste out there. If there was some requirement that, shall we say, all businesses had to have or the waste management industry had to provide pay by weight, then again you can put in some mechanisms by which you can encourage or incentivise businesses to segregate food waste and so on. At the moment, it is pay by lift, and therefore I do not want another lift of food waste because it is an additional cost. In some respects, targeting legislation in that direction might be more effective than looking at local authorities.

**Stuart Donaldson:** I agree, on the whole, with not having a weight-based target, but fitting in with having a waste reduction target based on arriving rather than what is going into the residual waste bin. That is before you have done anything, so you are really addressing growth. We have such a target within our strategy that was adopted by our local authorities in 2012, but it was set over a 20-year timeframe because we are aware of the peaks and troughs of economic activity, and I do not believe we have decoupled waste from economic growth. We have had a period where we have had quite successful waste reductions, but it is beginning to creep up now, so we need to address those things as much as just going for recycling targets per se.

Q329 **Kerry McCarthy:** Rather than statutory targets, how about a statutory requirement that you have to have separate food waste collections? How would you respond to that?

**Andrew Bird:** To be honest, the response would be no, unless it was coupled with significant funding and support in that way. To just put that mandatory target on a local authority, with the pressures that are on us at the moment in terms of trying to keep other services going, to just do that without any support, we would certainly argue very strongly against it.

**James Potter:** I would refer back to the argument I made at the beginning about urban and rural. Putting on mandatory, "Thou shalt provide a service to rural communities", probably is not economically or environmentally sensible to do, so a blanket, "Do it", would not work.

Q330 **Kerry McCarthy:** How would it be enforced if it did come in? Is it enforceable?

**Chair:** They do not want it enforced, from what I understand.

**Kerry McCarthy:** Yes, so the answer would be, "Badly".



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**James Potter:** I guess it would be enforced in the same way that other things are, through the Environment Agency and through the data reporting that we do at the moment through waste data flow. If we were not able to evidence that we were providing a service, we would have to answer that question. However, as I say, I do not think it would be a practical option.

Q331 **Kerry McCarthy:** Presumably, it would also be a resource issue for the Environment Agency if they were to meaningfully monitor it and enforce it.

**Andrew Bird:** Yes, absolutely.

Q332 **Simon Hart:** When we started this inquiry we were quite focused on how to reduce food waste, in particular household waste and retail waste. We seem to have moved on to how to deal with the waste rather than, in some ways, what we were originally attempting to identify and resolve. With that in mind, I am wondering, if you were in our shoes or if you were in the Government's shoes, whether you think enough attention has been given to what I, personally—not the Committee—would argue is one of the principal sources of food waste, which is the manic way in which retailers attempt to flog us ever more, ever cheaper and ever more unnecessary food, which we then have no option but to get rid of. I wonder: are we tilting at the wrong windmill here and should we be addressing that form of waste with more vigour than we are?

**Stuart Donaldson:** I was at a meeting yesterday; it was the first anniversary of Courtauld 2025, so a lot of the retailers who are actively participating in that programme were there. They were saying that we do not get the level of the offers in the supermarkets the way that we used to do. I certainly think it is an area where the public does not see that it is not happening. It is almost like, "I used to get BOGOF offers, but now I do not", but until it is pointed out to them, they have probably not recognised it. They still do not think that the retailers have done enough, even though there is a lot of packaging waste that has been reduced through Courtauld previously. There are a lot of opportunities for the retailers to build that relationship with their customers, to show what they are doing and to help support them in the programme.

I notice just recently there are a lot more advertising campaigns about loving food and valuing food, which saves us having to do it, so it is helpful in that area but they are major players in this and they could do more. However, working with us in partnership and engaging with the public is a key way forward and it is a voluntary way forward and everybody at the Courtauld meeting seemed to be committed to doing that. One of the areas probably left to address in that is the link with the health agenda and addressing obesity and supporting and bringing everybody together in that sort of partnership.

**Andrew Bird:** In my discussions with retailers over the last couple of years, I have seen a big change in their view of this and they are going in



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

the right direction, undoubtedly. They really recognise that they have a key role to play. I suppose one of the issues is that when you look at what they spend on branding and marketing as opposed to sustainability, sustainability is a tiny proportion and that is the bit that needs to change. Whatever encouragement can be given to them to do that more effectively would be welcome.

**James Potter:** I would echo what my colleagues have said, in that the retailers are moving in the right direction. A comment that a colleague who attended the Courtauld meeting yesterday made to me was that there was a disappointing lack of numbers of manufacturers within that grouping. There were about 30 out of about 8,000, so maybe there is an area to look at there.

I also think, ultimately, it is consumer choice. Whether or not the retailer is offering you "buy one, get one free" or sales and so on, you are a consumer and you make that final choice. All the way through the chain in waste, in general, it tends to be that producer responsibility goes up the chain from the local authorities, the local authorities deal with post-consumer waste, but the consumers who are generating it tend to not get the focus, as in: what are they doing, what information do they have, what education are they getting and what incentives do they have to do the right thing? Going back to the very start with the prevention side of things, it is around that. It is consumer education where we need to focus, because then they can make intelligent choices both when buying and when recycling or disposing.

Q333 **Simon Hart:** I am grateful for that. That makes sense. With recycling or composting or whatever it is, if you are doing your job incredibly well and making it very easy for me, as a consumer, to not have to worry too much about the food surplus or food waste, are you contributing to or resolving the problem? I live in a local authority area where it is really easy to do it and, therefore, I do it really easily, but I wonder if it was tougher it would force me to think a bit more about the manner in which I was disposing of my food waste. I wonder if there is a balance and where it lies.

**James Potter:** With food waste in particular, yes, making it too easy almost can, so that you are encouraging people to recycle, which is not the ultimate level of a waste hierarchy that you should be trying to achieve. You need to get them to think about producing it in the first place, prevent it, if you can, or re-use it however and then, yes, recycle what is left. I would agree that you are making it too easy. You are almost subverting the waste hierarchy in some respects. With other materials, making it as easy as possible is probably a good thing, but food waste is possibly different.

Q334 **Simon Hart:** A last point to the panel: from the point of view of investing taxpayers' money in this particular issue, do you share Mr Potter's view that prevention is the area where we should be concentrating efforts, whether that is at household, retailer or producer level?



**Andrew Bird:** Absolutely, it has to be. Unfortunately, there is no magic solution to it; it is hard. However, prevention has to be the focus of what we need to be doing.

**Stuart Donaldson:** When you look at the amount of investment that we put in waste management, the amount into waste prevention is probably less than 1% and that is being generous for a lot of local authorities. When we say we found that we could evidence at least a three-to-one gearing in the investment that was being made, it is not just about spending money and providing a service; it is saving resources and saving money, not necessarily where you expect money to be saved, but it certainly helps individuals and families.

I would also add that working with the retailers through Courtauld and the 10 cities challenge campaign that WRAP ran, we worked very closely with Tesco on that campaign for two years and that was our first real opportunity to work with retailers. At the waste disposal authority level, you do not really have that opportunity and we were talking at top level as well as regional offices. It also enabled us to work with individual stores and capture their resources; they have community champions who are really enthusiastic in what they do and have that link with the community. It enabled other ways of doing things to be brought forward that we would not have been able to have done with our own resources.

Q335 **David Simpson:** What investments, if any, are local authorities making in in-vessel composting?

**Andrew Bird:** I would suspect very few now. Going back 10 years, there was an awful lot of them being built as treatment for both garden and food waste combined. What we have found is that separate food waste tends to yield a better tonnage of food than you get in a co-mingled system, bizarrely. Nobody can quite figure out why, but it is obviously to do with behaviour. You are probably, typically, only getting 1% or 2% food waste mixed in with garden waste. It then becomes an incredibly expensive way of processing garden waste as opposed to just traditional open windrow. For that very reason, in-vessel composting days are over, because it does not produce energy. Okay, it produces a compost, but so does anaerobic digestion.

**Stuart Donaldson:** 10 years ago, our contractor built one. It was at the time after foot-and-mouth, so the new regulations came in, they could not hit the hotspot figures that were needed, so in the end it was dismantled and the equipment sold off.

Q336 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** James, you referred to the percentage or the volumes of commercial waste and, Stuart, you just mentioned about store champions and what is happening in different places. Should there be a requirement for food companies to separate food waste, and can any of you describe any best practice, good practice or what negotiations are taking place at local level between local authorities and food businesses in this regard?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Stuart Donaldson:** We are in discussion with Unilever. They approached us about a scheme that they are looking at, for which they already have some European funding and they are looking at us as the organisation that can get to the local community to work with them on it. One of the issues with food waste when you are doing co-mingled collections is, if either your residual waste bin is too full or people do not care, all that recycling can be contaminated just by somebody putting some food waste into that system, so we lose the lot. We are looking at what we can do, particularly on behavioural change, for our local community with Unilever. It is early days, we are in the discussions, but we hope it is something that could be trialled on Merseyside and then rolled out later.

Q337 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Do you know which European budget the money is coming from?

**Stuart Donaldson:** I am afraid I do not.

**Andrew Bird:** I have nothing really to add. Unilever have been very proactive. There is work going on in Scotland with Zero Waste Scotland and the fact that they have focused on not just household waste but the commercial element as well. There is some really good work going on up there that we, as local authorities and as the wider industry, can learn from.

**James Potter:** Other than our involvement in Courtauld, at the moment we are not having any direct conversations with retailers or manufacturers.

Q338 **Chair:** Do you think Government and Defra should be doing more to promote those companies that are doing a really good job on separating food waste and reducing food waste? Are we doing enough to say "Unilever is doing a good job, step up to the plate"? Do you have any quick ideas on how we would do that?

**Andrew Bird:** I honestly think that would be a really positive move. To hold up some examples of good performance that way could well encourage others and would dispel some of the myths about these large organisations that are not necessarily true.

**Chair:** They could be nice, cuddly people, really.

**Andrew Bird:** Possibly.

**Chair:** Possibly, if we dig down deep enough. Okay. That is an interesting response, thank you.

Q339 **Ms Ritchie:** Moving on to disposal in landfill and landfill tax, is the current landfill tax working?

**James Potter:** It has worked. It has probably stagnated, because you have gone from the £8 escalator into an inflationary one. However, I am



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

not sure it needs to be inflated hugely, because, by and large, it has done its job. Most authorities are diverting away from landfill.

**Ms Ritchie:** To recycling.

**James Potter:** To recycling or to alternative disposal options. For food waste collection, where you do not have alternative options, separate food waste and AD is an option there. As I said earlier, there is quite a lot going through to RDF and being exported, because there is a marginal economic benefit in doing so. If you increase landfill tax now, you have caught most of it so you are only going to get marginal gains from that.

**Andrew Bird:** I would agree with that. It has been a tremendous driver over the last 20 years in terms of where we are now with recycling, not only in household waste but in commercial and industrial waste as well. We have seen a sea-change in the industry because of landfill tax, but I suspect we are now at the peak of its effectiveness.

Q340 **Ms Ritchie:** Stuart, maybe you could elaborate on why Merseyside does not support a food waste landfill ban.

**Stuart Donaldson:** We said we did not support it, but we qualified the statement. Effectively, we would not support a landfill ban that came in immediately, with no long-term plan of what you are doing. Food waste and other materials do not stop being produced by households. We still have to deal with it year in, year out and so, as long as there was a planned step-change over the medium to long term, then that would be supported. However, the more we are doing in terms of getting recycling increasing and getting waste reduction increasing, that will squeeze out the amount going to landfill anyway, without having to introduce a ban and the regulations that you have to put in as well. It was a qualified statement.

Q341 **Rebecca Pow:** Apologies for being late, Chair, and welcome back. Gentlemen, apologies to you for being late. While you are all there with your local authority recycling hats on, I just wondered what your views were about the idea that if local authorities do not collect waste, that means it goes in the bin, which means you are collecting more black bins and that is costly. What are your views about the customer paying for the number of black bins they have collected? That would then be an incentive for us not to want to put our rubbish in the black bin, then we put pressure on the producer to help the whole basically circular system.

**Chair:** I assume you are not standing for the local council.

**Rebecca Pow:** I have discussed this with a number of local waste companies and it is an idea.

**Chair:** It is a good idea.

**Rebecca Pow:** What it also means is those people who are recycling well are carrying the can for the ones who cannot be bothered to separate it



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

out and that affects you, because you are paying for collection. I have been thinking about this a lot.

**Andrew Bird:** I do think there needs to be a fundamental change in the way household waste collection and disposal is funded, and I do think pay-to-throw is worthy of consideration, whether we call it "save to recycle" and dress it up in a different way, maybe. We seriously have to consider it. That is where the extended producer responsibility comes in as well. It is completely unfair that the taxpayer, at the end of the day, is left to pick up the bill for other people's products and the like. While, in all honesty and reality, trying to introduce it would be extremely difficult, we should be open enough to have the debate at least.

Q342 **Rebecca Pow:** It would not be difficult the more pressure you put on to recycle and the more the message was put across that, at the end of the day, this would be economic and lead to efficiencies.

**Andrew Bird:** Yes, it would, and it works in the commercial sector. We run trade waste services; all of that is effectively pay-to-throw. Coming back to the landfill tax question, the reason we have seen a sea-change there is because it was costing people, so yes, it does focus minds.

**Chair:** Thank you, Rebecca. You are going to start a revolution again.

**Rebecca Pow:** I would like to.

**Chair:** Gentlemen, thank you very much for some very interesting evidence. If you would like to retire from your chairs, we will have the second panel. Thank you very much for some very useful evidence and thank you for coming down today to the Select Committee.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Charlotte Morton, Paul Killoughery and Jacob Hayler.

Q343 **Chair:** Thank you very much and welcome. Can I start with Jacob, and can you go through name, rank, serial number and organisation you represent, please?

**Jacob Hayler:** Jacob Hayler, Executive Director at the Environmental Services Association. We are the trade body that represents the waste and recycling industry.

**Charlotte Morton:** Charlotte Morton, the Chief Executive of the Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association and, funnily enough, we represent the anaerobic digestion industry.

**Paul Killoughery:** I am Paul Killoughery, the owner and director of a company collecting and processing food waste in London. We operate an



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

anaerobic digestion plant in south London, in the London Borough of Merton, taking food waste and making fertiliser and energy, both gas and electricity.

Q344 **Chair:** My question to start with is: why is such a low percentage of food waste currently recycled? It is a very straightforward question.

**Jacob Hayler:** There are two dimensions you can think of it along: household and commercial. If you look at the household waste, there are two aspects to it. One is rolling out additional collections; the other part is trying to increase the yield where collections are already offered, and there will be different challenges and barriers around each of those. I am sure the previous panel were keen to highlight the cost of introducing new food waste services and sometimes, in order to offset that, you might need to introduce other service changes, such as reducing the frequency of residual waste. There are challenges and barriers around those, but those are the two overall dimensions that we need to improve.

**Charlotte Morton:** A simple answer would be to say there are no mandatory separate food waste collections; therefore, we are not extracting this resource out of the waste stream and so it is not coming to AD to allow us to recycle it. A more complicated answer would be to say that when we are looking at cost-benefit analyses; we are not looking at it with the full picture in mind, on the one hand. On the other hand, we are failing to take into account that, say, a waste collection authority has the obligation and cost of the collections, but is not able to take into account the benefits that come from the value of recycling. Many of the benefits, for example, in terms of greenhouse gas abatement, benefit the UK and the renewable energy generated benefits all of us in the UK, but the cost falls on the waste management authority.

Q345 **Chair:** Yes. What you are saying quite clearly is that to have a separate food waste collection is going to cost the waste authority more and they have to cost that against the rest of their collection, whereas you are saying the bigger picture should be taken of the benefit of creating a biogas and the improvement to the environment in the recycling of that food waste. Is that what you are saying?

**Charlotte Morton:** Yes. The World Resources Institute last week published a very good chart that demonstrates that food loss and waste, were it a country, would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions after the USA and China. It is mindbogglingly obvious that we should be separating out food waste and recycling it. The No. 1 objective would be to reduce the amount of food waste because, we all agree, everybody knows that the amount of food waste generated is unsustainable and unacceptable.

Q346 **Chair:** Yes. I suppose the only trouble, in a way, is when you all have biodigesters, you almost want the waste food to be able to run those biodigesters. However, you are still saying, naturally, we still need to reduce the amount of food wasted, but then separate what is left.



**Charlotte Morton:** Everybody agrees and is united in the fact that we must reduce food waste. WRAP produced a statistic many years ago that said that reducing food waste was eight times better even than AD, and I am the biggest advocate of AD. We all know that reduction is absolutely what we need to do and anaerobic digesters are not hungry machines looking for food to feed them. We are there to solve a problem, to recycle this waste and to recycle it into valuable products that we, as a country, absolutely need. We need the biogas and we need the biofertiliser; otherwise, that is going to waste in landfill or incinerators.

**Paul Killoughery:** I just wanted to start with what is recycling and what counts as recycling for food waste. There are four things you can do with it: you can landfill it, which does not count as recycling; you can burn it, which does not count as recycling; composting does count as recycling if you get the PAS accreditation; and AD, again, if you get PAS 110 it counts as recycling. However, in order to count as recycling for AD, it has to have PAS 110, and PAS 110 has to have segregated collections. It does not count as recycling, even for AD, unless you have that segregated food waste collection. That is my first point.

My second point is that one of the problems is it is all there in the waste hierarchy and Charlotte has said, and I agree, the first thing we should be doing is re-using this food and then recycling it. However, who is policing the waste hierarchy? There is no enforcement of the waste hierarchy. It is there, it should be used, but it is not being used in that way. That is another barrier to recycling. In addition, the status quo is a huge factor. We have a system that is fairly entrenched in the country and it is very difficult to shift moods. We have talked about local authority contracts; they have timelines and so on. It just makes it more difficult to shift the status quo.

**Jacob Hayler:** Just following up on Charlotte's point, everyone agrees that reducing food waste is the absolute priority. Everyone agrees that redistributing food waste as part of perhaps, a food waste hierarchy would be a beneficial step. Everyone also agrees that getting food waste out of landfill is absolutely the right way to go. Where there is, perhaps, room for debate and where it is a bit more nuanced is the question of where there is energy from waste as a residual waste treatment option. You save about two-thirds of a tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> for every tonne of food waste you get out of landfill and put into AD. The relative marginal benefit is a lot tighter between energy recovery and anaerobic digestion.

**Chair:** From a waste-to-power point of view.

**Charlotte Morton:** We would not agree with that. The benefits of AD are about 60% greater than incineration and we are happy to provide evidence on that.

**Chair:** We have a difference of opinion here; that is fine. We will analyse the evidence and the figures.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q347 **Dr Monaghan:** Charlotte, some witnesses have told this Committee that current incentives for anaerobic digestion mean it is cheaper for companies to throw food away than it is for it to be redistributed as food. How would you respond to that allegation?

**Charlotte Morton:** We as an industry receive incentives to process food waste. It is up to those people who have the food waste to manage it in the best way for them. If something is not working in the financial structures, then that needs to be looked at by Government. It is not something that we can individually address. It is not the AD industry's issue, in a way. We do not want to be receiving food that is edible. That is not something that should be coming to us. If there are issues around edible food coming to us, they should be resolved one way or another, but it is not an issue with the incentives coming to us, in particular. There are lots of issues around why that is happening, but we are not the experts on that. That is where companies like FareShare would understand what the issues are better than we would.

Q348 **Dr Monaghan:** Indeed, so would you advocate the removal of incentives for sending edible food to anaerobic digestion facilities?

**Charlotte Morton:** I would say we are not qualified to comment. We are not the ones who understand how companies that produce food waste make decisions, so I would not know whether that would work.

Q349 **Dr Monaghan:** You must have a view on it though, surely.

**Charlotte Morton:** I do not think we do, no.

Q350 **Chair:** Surely, having an aerobic digester, you could say that you would not accept edible food, but you do at the moment.

**Paul Killoughery:** We operate an anaerobic digestion facility. Let us be clear on this. Supermarkets pay to dispose of the waste to our facility. Effectively they are paying the gate fee and the transport to get it there. There is no reason why they would not accept a collection on a no-cost basis from a food distribution company. I do not see any. Just to put it in perspective, the vast majority of what comes into a facility like ours is not this sort of avoidable waste. The majority is unavoidable waste. It is the prep; it is the peelings; it is the teabags; it is the banana skins. It is all of those waste streams. We have had numbers of film crews coming to our site because we are London-based; it is very convenient for them. They come in looking for a story about supermarkets chucking away food all in-date. They have been disappointed, but they have had the truer picture, which is the vast majority of the waste that comes to a facility like ours—we never see tins of anything, because tins are non-perishable and they do go to FareShare. We do not see the pastas and the non-perishable items. The majority of what comes through our gate is perishable—the unavoidable.

Q351 **Dr Monaghan:** What incentives do exist for companies to send edible food to facilities like yours?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Paul Killoughery:** If the network was there for free disposal to a food-sharing organisation, they would not send it to us. It costs them money to send it to us, so why would they do that?

Q352 **Dr Monaghan:** There are no financial incentives.

**Paul Killoughery:** I do not see any financial incentives, because they pay for us and they do not pay for sending it—

Q353 **Dr Monaghan:** Do you agree with that, Charlotte?

**Charlotte Morton:** Yes.

Q354 **Dr Monaghan:** Jacob, do you have a view?

**Jacob Hayler:** On the one hand, the presence of subsidies will make it cheaper than it otherwise would be to send edible food waste to anaerobic digestion, but I do not think that is addressing the real issue at all. I do not think playing with the subsidies would have much of an impact, because you have the logistics infrastructure there already: the incentives are in place to help anaerobic digestion and its place within the waste hierarchy. Establishing the right relationships between the retailers, redistribution charities and organisations, and establishing the right sort of logistics there and addressing those sorts of practical barriers for introducing redistribution is where the focus should be much more than on anaerobic digestion.

**Charlotte Morton:** Can I just add one point as well? There are enormous amounts of focus on the 270,000 tonnes of edible waste that is not being redistributed. There are 10 million tonnes of food waste that is in the waste stream, of which only 2.4 million tonnes is getting to AD, so we are talking about 7.5 million tonnes of food waste that is being wasted. We do need to be a little bit proportionate in our focus on the 270,000 tonnes of food that, rightly, should be eaten and is not, compared with the 7.5 million tonnes that is lost.

**Dr Monaghan:** Can I suggest, Chair, that we secure some further witnesses who can speak to us about the tax incentives that apply in this particular situation?

**Chair:** Yes, to either have witnesses or written evidence would be useful, okay.

Q355 **Rishi Sunak:** Thank you all for being here. This is a question for Jacob. I think you mentioned in your submission to us that you believe any move to mandatory food waste collection should be accompanied by a TEEP certification or requirement. It would be helpful, for the benefit of the Committee, if you could just elaborate on why you think that is necessary, what exactly it is and why we should not be worried that using this TEEP requirement will give local authorities an excuse to avoid doing it in the first place.



**Jacob Hayler:** As I am sure the Committee are all aware, TEEP stands for “technically, environmentally, economically practicable”, so what we are saying is that if you were to introduce mandatory separate food waste collections—indeed, it is the same with any form of recycling collection—you should only do it where it is practical to do so and where it is not overly costly. That is a reasonable position to take. That is the position that is taken by the European Commission in its discussions in terms of the circular economy package currently being negotiated. Even the European Parliament suggests that, even though they would not go down the route of a TEEP exemption, they suggest that there should not be a mandatory separate requirement in very rural areas, because they think it might be prohibitively costly. That is also the approach that they have adopted in Scotland, where they have introduced mandatory separate food waste collections.

We think it is the reasonable approach. Why would you try to introduce food waste collections where it is impractical to do so? We have heard from local authorities, which we know are under quite tremendous financial pressure. There may be practical difficulties in very urban environments where there is a lot of multi-occupancy housing, for example, trying to introduce separate food waste collections, and in sparsely populated, very rural areas, similarly, it could be quite costly to introduce.

**Charlotte Morton:** I just have a point to add, which refers to my earlier point about the business case. We do need to look at the bigger picture when assessing TEEP, so that we are not losing out on some benefits if we are taking a too narrow approach to assessing TEEP. There are benefits that accrue to, say, the UK that may not accrue to a local authority when taking that decision and the bigger picture does need to be taken into account.

Q356 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Sorry, Jacob, but this is to you as well, following up Rishi’s question and your reference to Scotland. There has been mandatory requirement for businesses since 2014, and for local authorities, for domestic premises collection, since 2016. You wrote in your evidence that there were some initial issues. Can you say a little about that and whether or not there are lessons that can be learned by local authorities in England, and on the role of incentives, whether there were any or whether there should be any?

**Jacob Hayler:** Yes, certainly. I guess we have heard a range of views about the implementation of separate collections in Scotland. I suppose there is the glass-half-empty view, which is that it has led to contamination, where some businesses that perhaps would not have voluntarily participated in separate food waste collections are being forced to do so and are not doing it in the correct manner. Also, a lot of concerns around enforcement and how the separate requirement was being enforced, if at all. We also do get a glass-half-full feeling, which is that certainly some of our members have made investments in new



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

anaerobic digestion facilities on the back of that regulation, because it does, even if imperfect, help to improve the certainty around feedstock. I think Charlotte might agree that one of the biggest barriers to the AD industry is securing that feedstock. We published a report called "Circular Organics", looking at a circular economy for organic material and that recommended that we take the results of what is happening in Scotland and review them to make an assessment of how that might be applied in England, particularly around commercial food waste collections.

Q357 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Where are you with that review?

**Jacob Hayler:** It is open at the moment.

Q358 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** So "half full" and "half empty"—there are no real conclusions to be drawn so far.

**Jacob Hayler:** There are mixed views within our membership, but I would say if it was introduced and enforced properly, certainly there is support within our membership for mandatory separate food waste collections for commercial properties, subject to TEEP and so on.

Q359 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** How long perhaps before your report will be published or conclusions drawn from the evidence you are collating?

**Jacob Hayler:** We can certainly provide supplementary views in the forthcoming weeks and months.

Q360 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Okay. Is there a role in the Scottish experience for incentives or was that not necessary?

**Jacob Hayler:** It was more a regulatory approach.

Q361 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Is there a role for incentives, or is it not necessary if there is a regulatory regime introduced?

**Jacob Hayler:** On the commercial side, for commercial businesses I would have thought the regulation would be one reasonable approach. On the household side, once you start talking about incentives you are talking about pay-as-you-throw type options, or "save as you recycle", however you want to frame it, and that is an interesting political discussion to be had.

Q362 **Chair:** For any of this information that is ready, can you let us have it in writing? It will be really useful.

**Jacob Hayler:** Absolutely.

Q363 **Kerry McCarthy:** Can I ask about the waste hierarchy? Do you feel it is being sufficiently monitored and enforced in efforts to try to move up the waste hierarchy and who should be in charge of doing that?

**Charlotte Morton:** I have certainly been having discussions with the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, because it is their duty to enforce the waste hierarchy and they are not doing it at all. We find it very frustrating that there has been no enforcement.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Q364 Kerry McCarthy:** In response to a written question that I received very recently, and I am seeking to see whether you agree with the Minister's response, it says, "The Environment Agency always promotes observance of the waste hierarchy and takes a risk-based, proportionate approach to enforcement. It rewards good performance and targets regulatory effort at high-risk operators with the worst environmental performance." From what you have said, you do not feel that that is an accurate reflection of the way it is carrying out its role.

**Charlotte Morton:** No. They seem to be moving on to environmental performance and operational issues rather than enforcing the waste hierarchy. I have had endless communication with the Environment Agency and at no stage do they accept that they are enforcing the waste hierarchy.

**Q365 Kerry McCarthy:** Do you think they do not see it as their job or they are not resourced to do it?

**Charlotte Morton:** It is incredibly difficult to get a straight answer. At some point, there was a discussion about whether they had the power to enforce the waste hierarchy or whether it was their duty, and we are still not clear whether they think it is their duty or they have the power to do so. In our view, it is their duty to do so and they are not.

**Q366 Kerry McCarthy:** It seems like the Minister has told me that it is their duty to do so and they say that they do it, but there is clearly a communication issue in terms of responsibilities.

**Charlotte Morton:** Yes.

**Jacob Hayler:** There is a duty on the Environment Agency to enforce the waste hierarchy. Waste producers have to sign declarations that they are adhering to the waste hierarchy or they have given due consideration to the waste hierarchy in the way that their wastes are managed. The question is: how much scrutiny is placed on those waste producers as to when they make those declarations? What resources does the Environment Agency have to follow that up and to enforce that? The other way it works is local authorities, for example, will have to give due consideration to the hierarchy in terms of how they manage all of their wastes, in the round, and that also has to be considered by the waste management industry and how it provides services in the round.

The only other point I would make is that the legal requirement to follow the waste hierarchy does allow some flexibility, so you are allowed to deviate from the hierarchy if you can demonstrate that what you are doing is environmentally more beneficial than if you were to stick to the hierarchy.

**Q367 Kerry McCarthy:** Can you come up with examples of where the Environment Agency has stepped in to try to encourage or force people to go up that?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Jacob Hayler:** I am not aware of any.

Q368 **Kerry McCarthy:** There was a case of a particular council that was sending all its residual waste to a new incinerator without separating food waste, and the Environment Agency just would not make a decision on that. It may have been a Cornwall council.

**Charlotte Morton:** It was a Cornwall council decision and they did not intervene.

Q369 **Kerry McCarthy:** They just would not act, okay. Paul, did you have anything to add?

**Paul Killoughery:** Yes, it is just the same thing, really. If food and the residual waste stream is separated, then the waste hierarchy does kick in and the food waste should go to an AD or composting site. If you mix your food waste and residual, then almost by not doing something it goes down the waste hierarchy and then it is available for incineration and landfill, so it is a disincentive. By not doing the right thing and separating residual from food waste, you have created something that is allowable then to go to incineration and landfill rather than separating and going further up the waste hierarchy.

Q370 **Chair:** We had local authorities here giving us evidence just now, where they said if they have locked into a contract for some time with various vehicles, they need that contract to run its course. I can see some logic in that, but do you find that the waste hierarchy system kicks in then? Does the Environment Agency or does Defra follow that contract when that contract finishes? That is what I am interested to know. I can have some sympathy for where the local authorities are, but when those contracts come to an end, does it automatically kick in that the local authorities then should take notice of the waste hierarchy? Do you know whether they follow it—Defra or Government?

**Jacob Hayler:** Whenever a local authority has to renew or re-tender its contract, it is going to make an assessment of its options, which will include due consideration of the waste hierarchy. However, as I am sure the local authority witnesses will have said, they have to weigh up improving environmental performance, service provision to householders with DCLG, and the cost. It is trying to balance those conflicting objectives that creates the difficulty.

**Charlotte Morton:** Just to answer your point using the Cornwall example, it was at the end of a contract and they were due to re-tender it and there was no assessment done, as far as we could tell. There was a protest group that looked into it quite closely and there was no evidence given of any analysis.

**Chair:** If it was reassessed on the waste hierarchy.

**Charlotte Morton:** Yes, and the Environment Agency did not require that they should make that assessment.



**Chair:** Okay, we will look at that. Thank you very much.

**Kerry McCarthy:** Maybe we could get the Environment Agency in, or certainly seek their thoughts.

**Chair:** We either get them in or we ask them some written questions—one or the other. Yes, we will give that consideration.

Q371 **Ms Ritchie:** This is about the issue of the consistency of recycling and it is to Charlotte. You call for more consistency between household waste and recycling collections. Can you please expand on what you mean and give us a few examples?

**Charlotte Morton:** I am sure the Committee is aware of the work that has been undertaken, which was led by WRAP and instigated by Rory Stewart when he was Minister. That looked at whether we could streamline the 100 or so different types of waste collections across the country in such a way that we could get them down to three or four more consistent options, so that we did not have such confusion amongst householders about which system applied in their county. The conclusion from that work was that it would make sense to reduce the number of types of collection down to three, and that should, in the long term, reduce the overall cost of waste management and lead to an improvement in the reduction in waste—in particular in food waste.

Q372 **Ms Ritchie:** Jacob, what is your opinion, in light of your argument that local authorities are best placed to decide what types of bio-waste collection service is most suitable for them?

**Jacob Hayler:** Do you mean in the context of greater harmonisation and possible tension between the two? We support very much the principles behind greater harmonisation. We think the range of different systems that are approached or that are adopted is crazy. There are different ways you can harmonise things, in terms of types of material you collect, the way in which you collect that material, the types of containers and the colour of the bins that you use.

From our perspective, the real efficiency savings that can be made through harmonisation come through joint working and better joint working between local authorities to achieve economies of scale. Often, district councils are such small units that more joint working between them is where the real savings could be made. From our perspective, that points towards more of a bottom-up approach to harmonisation rather than a top-down diktat from the centre saying, "This is the way it should be done everywhere", which does not necessarily take account of different types of housing stock and local demographics, etc. There is not going to be a single one-size-fits-all, so we believe that local authorities are best placed to make that decision based on their local circumstances.

Q373 **Ms Ritchie:** Do you believe or do you think there is a tension between improving the efficiency of recycling at one end and retaining simplicity and feasibility for households at the other? Would too much change



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

make it harder for households to adequately follow the rules on separation and collection? I know in my own council area it is separation at source.

**Jacob Hayler:** The choice of what sort of system you make should be determined based on the conflicting objectives that local authorities have, as I articulated five minutes ago. Householders are able to cope with different types of recycling systems. With anything, too much change and if you keep changing types of service provision, that might create some confusion, but that would be an inefficient way of doing things anyway. I do not necessarily think that there is a tension between consumer confusion and introducing the right sorts of recycling services for local authorities.

Q374 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** Charlotte, you made a point, and forgive me if it is in your written evidence; I have not looked at it properly and I apologise if that is the case. You said 100 different types of collections and, therefore, more consistency and streamlining would help. I get garden, plastic, food and so on; I get different coloured bags; I get different cycles. How do you get to 100?

**Charlotte Morton:** I am not the best expert on this, but, as I understand it, there are so many different permutations and combinations of different types of systems you can have across the country that it is really quite confusing.

Q375 **Jim Fitzpatrick:** It gets to that number?

**Charlotte Morton:** Apparently it does.

Q376 **Chair:** Interesting point. The next question is about Milan. I do not know how au fait you are with Milan, but they have a very high rate of food waste recycling despite a large number of flats, so what do you believe are the lessons that could be learnt from Milan? I do not know how au fait you are with them.

**Charlotte Morton:** I have been to Milan. I had a fantastic waste tourist visit.

**Chair:** Milan is a lovely place, yes.

**Charlotte Morton:** It is a great place and the system they have in place there is immensely impressive. I do not have the statistics available about the improvement following the introduction of that system, but they do have dedicated vehicles and separate bins. They have very impressive recycling rates, including of food waste, and there is an exceedingly impressive anaerobic digestion plant outside Milan. It is one of the most impressive AD plants I have seen, and they are incredibly proud of it, both in terms of the system itself and the results.

In terms of the flats, in the well of each flat they have separate collections and bins and there is often a caretaker to help manage the system.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q377 **Chair:** Do you think they have concentrated a lot of effort on food waste in particular? Do you think that is what they have done, or is it that they have a different hierarchy of food waste? Have you any idea how they have dealt with it?

**Charlotte Morton:** They do have a separate food waste collection, but they also separately collect glass, paper and others; I cannot quite remember exactly the different streams they collect, but it is a very impressive system and it is not just focused on separately collecting food waste. However, the fact that they do have a separate food waste collection, which is, in some cases, almost daily, means they are able to have very good quality dry recyclables.

Q378 **Chair:** Right. Does anybody else want to add anything?

**Paul Killoughery:** Just to say that they went from a 35% recycling rate to over 50% in four years. If you look at London, which is a similar urban model, we are at about 36%. Where could we be with a separate food waste collection in London? Even of the London boroughs, there are 18 that are not segregating food waste.

**Charlotte Morton:** I understand it was quite cost-effective as well.

Q379 **Rebecca Pow:** I think you touched on this a little earlier. I believe that quite a lot of local authorities are tied into long-term contracts to send their waste to anaerobic digesting systems, and that affects subsequent contracts and how they can be more flexible or change. I just wondered whether you had any comments to make about that or whether you think there is any way of going around them.

**Chair:** Could I just say, Rebecca, what you are saying is that long-term contracts have limited the ability of getting food waste into anaerobic digesters? I think you got it slightly the wrong way around, so I just wanted to clarify that. Otherwise please carry on.

**Paul Killoughery:** My experience is in London, we are a London-based company, and we have come across that as a barrier in some boroughs, but there is usually a clause in there about food waste. It is usually not contracted. If they do not collect food waste separately, it is usually not part of their contract anyway and there is some flexibility. It is usually a cost problem.

Q380 **Rebecca Pow:** These are contracts that mean they are tied into incineration, so they cannot use your AD systems.

**Paul Killoughery:** If it is a contract tied into incineration, it is usually a co-mingled, food and residual waste, so it will only apply if there was a separate food waste collection.

Q381 **Chair:** There has been a difference of opinion on the panel as to the environmental impacts of incineration and waste-to-power. It is an interesting one, because I suspect if those contracts are waste-to-power, they do not include necessarily separating the food waste. Would that be



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

the case?

**Paul Killoughery:** To be clear, if you have a separate food waste collection you would not be allowed to send it to an incinerator, according to the waste hierarchy.

Q382 **Chair:** That is right, but if it exists at the moment, then you would be able to; is that right? If the contract was in place already.

**Paul Killoughery:** If it was a co-mingled, food and residual waste, you could send it to incineration.

**Jacob Hayler:** Just following up on what Paul said there, it is more the cost issue. There is nothing within a collection contract that should stop you introducing separate food waste collections. The reason those contracts are 10 years is that you are amortising the cost of the vehicles and other bits and pieces over that 10-year period. If you try to introduce new types of vehicles, new containers and what-have-you part-way through, it is just an additional burden. If you wait until the end of the contract period, you can wrap it all up, perhaps with other service changes, and spread it over the life of the contract, so it is not as costly to introduce at that point.

With energy-from-waste contracts, they should be sufficiently flexible for the council to be able to make service changes during the life of the contract. Again, it is a cost issue, because if you have an energy-from-waste facility, you do not incur the cost to separate that food waste; you can just send it to the plant and it is burnt as renewable power, as part of the residual waste stream. However, if there is nothing to stop you introducing that separate food waste collection upstream, and those contracts are usually sufficiently flexible that if there is less local authority waste going into that plant, then the contractor is compelled to make up the shortfall from commercial sources and there is usually a lot of commercial waste around that would be able to do that.

Q383 **David Simpson:** Some witnesses have said that the pricing structure of waste collectors, using volume rather than weight, has led to a financial disincentive for businesses to separate food waste. How do you respond to that, Jacob?

**Jacob Hayler:** I can see the argument, and with improving on-cab technology, the barriers are reducing. Historically, there would have been barriers that existed that made pay-by-weight more difficult and more challenging. Those barriers are probably reducing now. The question is, what would one's proposal be to try to initiate that market shift? Would it be a regulation banning paying by volume? That would be a bit of a heavy-handed response, but perhaps there is scope for looking at how these things work going forward, yes.

**Paul Killoughery:** We live in that commercial sector, not the residential sector, and we do find that there is still a surprising number of businesses with large amounts of food waste that co-mingle. They put it



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

in their general waste and it is collected on a per-lift basis, which is very cheap. That is one of the things that discourages them from segregation. That is our experience. There has been some work done by the commercial food waste collectors, the larger companies, and if a business has a restaurant in their name or they are obviously a food-related business, they will ask them to have a separate food waste bin, but that does not always work. You still have this mix of people, and even some very large chains in the UK do not have a separate food waste collection, surprisingly.

**Charlotte Morton:** I do not think I can add anything to what Paul said.

**Jacob Hayler:** You get over that problem by regulating to introduce separate food waste collections.

**Chair:** Thank you very much for some very good evidence this afternoon. There are one or two points that we did ask for some evidence in writing; if you can let us have that fairly quickly, please, it would be really useful. Thank you very much for your valuable evidence this afternoon, which will make part of our report. Thank you very much and thank you very much to our previous witnesses as well.