

Written evidence from the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM) (MET0028)

CIWM is the leading professional body for the resource and waste management sector with a purpose to move the world beyond waste. Representing over 6,500 individuals in the UK, Ireland and overseas, CIWM has a mission to unite, equip and mobilise its professional community to lead, influence and deliver the science, strategies, businesses, and policies for the sustainable management of resources and waste.

CIWM is recognised as the foremost professional body representing the complete spectrum of the waste and resources sector. This gives the Institution the widest possible view and, perhaps more pertinently, an objective rather than partial view, given that our goal is for improvement in the management of all wastes and resources.

CIWM welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence and has concentrated on specific questions, as outlined below.

21) What further progress could be made in the waste and waste management sector on reducing methane emissions? Are there interventions and/or technologies that could bring emissions down?

The waste sector has already made a lot of progress in reducing emission associated with it. GHG emissions have decreased by 46% since 1990 and methane emissions from landfills by around 75%. This has been a combination of reducing the organic waste that goes to landfills in the first place and then implementing gas capturing technologies at existing landfill sites.

Defra issued a call for evidence in 2023 on the potential banning of biodegradable waste going to landfill. Whilst CIWM holds no evidence, it is our understanding that most biodegradable waste can be treated by either, composting (open windrow and in-vessel), AD, incineration or MBT and should not therefore end up in landfill.

The government are attempting to implement one of the biggest shake-ups to the waste regulatory landscape since the 1990 Environmental Protection Act. There are so many 'moving' parts at play that it is extremely difficult to predict all the outcomes and unintended consequences, this is especially true because of the lack of hard data on which to base any policies/ proposals on, and one of the policy proposals CIWM would urge to government to implement as soon as possible is digital waste tracking; even though this will not enhance our current understanding of the flows of waste, it will in the fullness of time help the government to measure the success or failure of the current suite of policies.

CIWM are optimistic that a near elimination of biodegradable waste to landfill will ensure that a majority of it will be diverted to treatments further up the waste hierarchy and in some small way contribute to a reduction in methane associated with the resources and waste sector.

In order for a landfill ban to be viable other policies would need to be enacted. One of these is the introduction of weekly food waste collections to businesses and households in England, a policy that was proposed in the 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy. The deadline for implementing this has been set as March 2025 for businesses and March 2026 for households. These are ambitious dates for implementation.

CIWM believes that the initial focus should be on those wastes that readily biodegrade, such as food and garden waste. Other biodegradable wastes such as paper and card, textiles (that cannot be recycled) etc, should be phased in according to their biodegradability potential. This approach will not only make the biggest difference to future landfill emissions more immediately, but it may also go some way to alleviating potential infrastructure issues by diverting those wastes to already established/ planned facilities.

The mandatory collection of food waste should then facilitate a growth in organics treatment infrastructure, notable Anaerobic Digestion (AD) but also In Vessel Composting (IVC). This infrastructure will be key to reducing methane emissions further from landfills and continuing the evolution of the sector and the build on the reductions that have already happened in the past three decades.

22) Given the regulations already in place for methane reduction in the waste sector, why are emissions from the waste sector static over recent years? Are existing regulations monitored and enforced?

CIWM would suggest that the main reason emissions have remained static is the lack of policy implementation on organic waste, in particular mandatory collection of food waste from households and businesses in England. Currently only about half English local authorities collect food waste separately. If the policy were in place, food waste would then go for suitable organic treatment and so significantly reduce methane emissions associated with the sector. The collections across all local authorities would facilitate a growth on the number of AD plants in operation and a reduction in organic waste going to landfill or EfW.

CIWM believe that on a general level existing regulations are being monitored and enforced. The resources and waste sector is subject to a strong regulatory system and frameworks that help to promote high standards across the sector. The caveat to this is the resources that regulators have available to them

following years of public sector funding cuts. Large numbers of Environment Agency staff are CIWM members and given then nature of their roles, are committed to upholding environmental standards helping to combat climate change and GHG emissions. However, their work is hampered by the lack of resources they have to fully undertake the levels of monitoring and enforcement that would help to reduce criminal elements operating within the resources and waste sector. It is these sites, operated for criminal gain, not meaningful environmental business reasons, that are most likely to emit methane and other substances as they are intended to be low cost, employing minimal technology and not meeting acceptable standards.

23) Is the UK on track to meet the Government's deadline of all local authorities collecting food waste separately from landfill by March 2026?

CIWM believes it is unlikely that all local authorities will meet the deadline of separate food waste collections by 2026 given how relatively short the implementation period now is.

When Defra last consulted on food waste collections in 2021, as part of the consultation on "consistent collections" (now dubbed Simpler Recycling) they outlined a 4-year implementation date, with collections due to be in place by March 2025. When the Simpler Recycling reforms were announced in October 2023 the implementation date (for households) was now March 2026, giving only a 2.5-year implementation period. With approximately 200 local authorities having to procure collection vehicles, containers, treatment infrastructure in this period there is a concern that the capacity is not available in the market and from a manufacturing viewpoint to develop and deliver all the relevant infrastructure and equipment to enable all services to have started by March 2026. The final statutory guidance and necessary statutory instrument have yet to be published, meaning local authorities still do not have all the details they need to confidently plan their new services.

24) To what extent will improved methane captured at landfill sites, remain necessary to reduce methane emissions after this date?

As the amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill reduces then so should the associated methane production. That said there will still be a need to methane capture at landfill sites as they can take a long time to stop producing methane. As technology is constantly evolving it is likely that the sites will still produce methane at levels that make energy generation economically viable. It is also likely that as older landfill sites come to the end of their working life and are fully sealed and the land restored emission levels could drop.