

Supplementary evidence from William Maxwell (MET0044)

Additional information from **William Maxwell** (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse) regarding the collection perspective for further food waste capture, that should result in reductions in harmful emissions of methane.

The Question for additional information was:

What are the barriers some councils are facing in implementing separate food waste collection, particularly by the 2026 target date?

Introduction/Background

- As a result of the Environment Act 2021, the government sought to introduce consistent waste collections and/or a higher degree of harmonisation for collections, covering both local authorities and businesses.
- After extensive consultation, 'Simpler Recycling' was announced in October 2023. As a part of this, the government confirmed the requirement for weekly food waste collection from 31 March 2026 for all local authorities.
- With around half of local authorities in England not currently collecting food waste, this gave approximately one hundred and fifty local authorities a mere twenty-nine months to set up food waste collection services. This was a tough ask.
- Central government has offered £295 million pounds to local authorities that are not currently collecting food waste to establish a food waste collection service. Whilst this is welcome, it is narrowly targeted and based on outdated cost calculations. There are also several key hurdles, other than financial ones, to overcome:

Challenges

Procurement and delivery times: Statutory public sector procurement requires 12 months from launch to completion. The vehicles used to collect food waste are highly specialised and need at least a year's 'lead-in' time from order to delivery. Taken together, procuring, then having vehicles delivered, will take from now up until 2026. This gives very little time for error.

Electrification: Food waste trucks are usually between ten and fifteen tonnes, making them lighter than the standard twenty-six to thirty-two tonne waste trucks. Being lighter, they can do greater round distances and so lend themselves well to be electrically powered. Electrifying food waste trucks offers additional carbon savings, particularly for rural collection authorities where distance is a key factor in vehicle choice. However, this was not incentivised by government in the capital offer made to local authorities. The result will likely be diesel vehicles purchased in 2026 and running, for their roughly seven-year lifespan, until 2033, increasing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Caddies: As a broad estimate, (160 local authorities averaging 50,000 households each) then circa 8 million small plastic food waste caddies will be required. This will put pressure on the market, likely result in shortages and a spike in caddy prices. This will impact those local authorities starting a new service as well as authorities seeking replacement caddies for their existing service (something not covered by central government funding).

Processing: There is currently capacity within some existing Anaerobic Digestion (AD) plants. There is not, however, sufficient capacity for all the additional food waste to be collected from all local authorities and businesses post March 2026. More AD plants need to be planned and built which is not something easily deliverable in less than thirty months.

Collection/disposal authority partnerships: Whilst there is capital money for caddies and vehicles, removing food waste from the non-recycling stream should provide savings for the Disposal Authority (gate fees for AD plants are up to a hundred pounds a tonne lower than incinerator gate fees). Savings could have been used to incentivise local authorities into maximising the effectiveness of food capture, by passing them back some of the savings being made by disposal authorities.

Dense urban areas: It is always a significant additional challenge to establish food waste collection in areas of high urban density, multi-occupation housing, and areas of high transience and deprivation. The need for more complex arrangements to ensure take-up, particularly the time-consuming work engaging the agents responsible for communal bin-store management, seem absent from government thinking.

Service set-up: The logistics involved in setting up a food waste collection service are far greater than just the vehicles, caddies, processing destinations etc. There are also project management issues eg:

- Alterations to collection rounds, involving re-routing and management/staffing changes.
- A communication campaign to ensure the public understand why it is being introduced, what it involves and how to correctly utilise it.
- Changes to bin policies, waste budget profiles and various other internal requirements.

Mixed messaging: It has been particularly odd that some leading government figures have chosen to demonise councils that offer a range of collection bins for recycling, whilst at the same time requiring half of local councils in England to introduce new bins/caddies for food waste.

Summary

Most local authorities welcome the introduction of universal weekly food waste collections.

Concerns are largely disappointment-based. The government announced its intention to overhaul collection services in 2018. Six years on and little has been done to understand the logistical challenges involved, or to facilitate the move towards more comprehensive food waste capture other than a (limited) contribution towards the capital costs involved.

This has been a missed opportunity that will result in needless additional pressure on already stretched local public services.

The public may end up not receiving the comprehensive recycling services they should expect, risking a loss of confidence in what will be essential to further drive down harmful emissions.