

# Consistency in Household & Business Recycling in England – consultation outcome

## Briefing for Leaders & Chief Executives

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The DCN broadly welcomes the government's announcement that councils will retain the freedom to decide how to collect recycling and to set local garden waste fees. This is a victory for the DCN and sector partners who have campaigned against a one-size-fits all waste footprint being imposed.

Retaining proposals to let residents recycle more at home – whilst allowing councils to decide how to collect recycling – should ultimately result in higher levels of recycling. The requirement for all services to be provided to all properties by **31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**– including high-density flats and remote properties – will present challenges for many councils.

The DCN will proactively engage officials and ministers to highlight any concerns and work to find solutions in order to support our members councils.

However, we remain concerned that capital new burdens funding for new food waste collections will not be sufficient for all councils and disadvantage those who have recently introduced the service in advance of this announcement. Many districts are likely to struggle to meet any additional costs alongside growing demand for our other services.

## Consistency in recycling – key points

The key points of interest for waste collection authorities are as follow:

- Councils will retain local discretion to choose how to collect the 'core' recyclables how they see best, including where councils operate kerbside-sort systems.
- All local councils will be required to provide a weekly food waste collection to all property types by **31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**. We expect councils to receive a s.31 notice of capital funding by the end of **2023**.
- Proposals for free garden waste collections have been scrapped – as have plans to cap councils' charges. However, all properties including flats will be able to request this service.
- The government will also consult on a statutory requirement for councils to collect residual waste every fortnight. This document rules out compensating councils for costs incurred moving from three-weekly collections back to fortnightly.
  - The document indicates that fortnightly collections should not be treated as a minimum - though introducing weekly residual collections alongside food waste collections would be counterintuitive and incur unnecessary expense.
- Kerbside collections of soft plastics and microfilms will be required to start by **31<sup>st</sup> March 2027**.
- Recyclables and food waste must be presented separately by non-domestic properties by **31<sup>st</sup> March 2025** – with proposals to widen this to include charity shops, places of worship and hostels.
- New burdens funding will only be provided for weekly food waste collections, based on modelled costs. This will cover capital expenditure (vehicles and containers), initial transitional costs, resource costs (for vehicle re-routing and communications) and ongoing service costs.

## Consistent kerbside collections

- A core set of recyclables will be required to be collected at kerbside by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026: glass bottles and jars, plastic pots, tub and trays, plastic tubes and TetraPak cartons.

- Plastic film packaging and plastic bags will be required to be collected by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2027.
- A statutory exemption will be proposed to allow councils to commingle all dry recyclable materials as they decide – allowing them to retain existing arrangements.
- The government stated its ambition for all food waste to be processed by Anaerobic Digestion plants. Regulations will set out any materials that councils would not be expected to collect in food and garden waste bins.
  - The response indicates no decision has been made on requiring councils to provide caddy liners – it will collect further evidence to decide on a policy which promotes ‘the best environmental outcomes.’
- Weekly food waste collections must be in place by 31 March 2026 – except where transitional arrangements are required due to long-term waste disposal contracts.
  - Transitional arrangements will only be available to disposal authorities where DEFRA is made aware of the need for these arrangements in order to avoid contract breaking.
  - The government indicates it would not provide value for money to compensate disposal authorities to vary or break their contracts.
  - It will also not compensate disposal authorities for financial penalties from the reduction of residual waste once food waste collections come into force.
  - Any collection authorities eligible for transitional arrangements will be named in forthcoming regulations – following one-to-one engagement last year – alongside the date they will be required to commence their food waste collections.
- If councils decide to commingle food and garden waste – these collections must be provided freely and weekly by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.
  - There will be no requirement to separately collect compostable or biodegradable plastic packaging due to concerns about its recyclability.

### Consistency – new burdens and ongoing funding

- New burdens funding will only be provided for weekly food waste collections, based on ‘reasonable’ modelled costs. This funding is intended to cover capital expenditure (vehicles and containers), resource costs and ongoing costs (from collection and disposal).
  - For any councils who already provide a food waste service – the consultation rules out compensating any capital incurred before 31 March 2023. These councils are also ineligible for transitional funding.
  - However, **all waste collection authorities** will receive new burdens funding for ongoing service costs. We await further detail on this portion of funding.
  - The consultation response indicates the government will not ‘meet all additional expenditure by local authorities regardless of value for money’, such as where a new depot is required.
- Where new costs are incurred to meet the requirement to collect all dry recyclables at kerbside – the government’s expectation is that this will be covered through EPR funding allocations.
- Ongoing transition funding will be provided to local authorities named in the forthcoming regulations as requiring a transitional arrangement for food waste collections.
- The government does not intend to modify or amend the recycling credits mechanism at this stage – however it indicates it will monitor this source of income as EPR is introduced.

### Changes to business recycling

- All non-households premises firms will be required to present dry recyclables, residual waste and food waste separately by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
  - This will include any businesses with over 10 FTE staff, schools, hospitals – and a further consultation proposes this will be expanded to include: places of worship, charity shops, prisons and residential hostels.
  - All firms, including micro firms, will be required to comply with the above requirements by 31 March 2027.
- This earlier date is intended to reflect flexibility in commercial waste contracts.

- However, this will affect councils who provide business waste collections as a source of vital additional income. This variation in dates could present operational challenges, in particular for the separate collection of food waste.

### Next steps

- The DCN will be promptly engaging officials and ministers with our most pressing concerns, including on the following issues:
  - Inequity of funding for councils who have adopted food waste collections in anticipation of consistency reforms.
  - Push for a national awareness campaign leading up to implementation of reforms.
- The DCN will be submitting a response to the promised statutory guidance consultation when it is released. We will engage with our member councils shortly to capture useful evidence to inform this and future work in this area.