

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services
Scrutiny Committee

Food Waste Spotlight Review

November 2019

1. Recommendations

The Task Group ask the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to support these recommendations; with a report on progress against the recommendations in six months' time.

	Ambition	Specific recommendations	Agency
1	Increase clarity and consistency on household food waste recycling across Devon	Work with District Councils to give a consistent message to the public that 'any bag' can be used for separately collected food waste.	Devon County Council (DCC) Waste, district councils
		Encourage consistent communication with the public on food waste recycling and collection across the districts informing citizens what can be placed in the food waste bin.	DCC Waste, district councils
2	Encourage greater collaboration with food waste charities to improve food waste education	Encourage food waste charities with links to schools to link up with the Devon Waste Education Programme to improve shared information to schools on the issues of food waste.	DCC Waste, food waste Charities
3	Support Parish and Town Councils to combat food waste	Circulate Community Fridge information, including the Hubbub Community Fridge Tool Kit to Town and Parish Councils through partnership with the Devon Association of Local Councils and DCC Councillors.	DCC Communities, DCC Waste
4	Encourage businesses to combat food waste	Provide online information and signpost to businesses regarding the advantages and potential savings of following the food waste hierarchy and recycling.	DCC Waste, DCC Communications

2. Introduction

- 2.1 This Spotlight Review was established following concerns from Councillors on food waste. The establishment of the Food Waste Spotlight Review was decided upon at the Corporate, Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny meeting on 29th January 2019. The minutes of which can be found here, <https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=427&MId=2830&Ver=4>.
- 2.2 Food waste is an issue that more policy makers are attending to. Recently, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published an inquiry report titled Food Waste in England on 25th April 2017. This can be found here, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf>.
- 2.3 The Government Resource and Waste Strategy published in December 2018 had a large focus on food waste. Its aims included more effective food redistribution before it can go to waste and the appointment of a National Food Waste champion, who is now in post.¹
- 2.4 The Government stated in their 2018 Environment Plan, their aim to “cut by one fifth the greenhouse gas intensity of food and drink consumed in the UK, and also per capita UK food waste by 2025.”² This is in line with the EU Circular Economy package goals to be “recycling 65% of municipal waste by 2035”³ and the UN sustainable development goal 12.3, which sets countries the goal to, “by 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses”.⁴
- 2.5 Devon County Council (DCC) is responsible for the safe disposal of all municipal household waste generated in the eight districts of Devon, although its collection is the responsibility of the district councils.
- 2.6 Trade and commercial waste is not accepted at any DCC recycling centres and DCC does not provide a trade waste service. The only exception to this is for small businesses who have applied to join DCC’s trade recycling scheme for garden and cardboard waste.
- 2.7 A number of Devon district councils do offer charged-for commercial waste collection and recycling services, however there is little consistency on this across districts. Not all the district councils offer a commercial food waste recycling collection service, for example, North Devon.⁵

¹ HM Government, *Our Waste, Our Resources: A Strategy For England*, (2018), p11

² HM Government, *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*, (2018), p89

³ EU, Final Circular Economy Package, (07/08/2019), https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/index_en.htm (accessed 21/10/19)

⁴ United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*, (2015), <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/> (accessed 21/10/2019)

⁵ North Devon Council, Frequently Asked Questions, <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/business/commercial-waste-and-recycling/frequently-asked-questions/> (accessed 21/10/2019)

2.8 Recognising the role that scrutiny can have in bringing different agencies together to collectively problem solve, the scope of this Spotlight Review was:

- a. To understand the underlying causes of food waste and the challenges associated.
- b. To explore the ways in which DCC, district councils and other partners can work together to reduce unnecessary food waste.
- c. To identify the ways in which DCC, district councils and other partners can work together to improve the collection and processing of necessary food waste including increasing householder participation.

2.9 The spotlight review meeting took place on the 6th August and was held in the form of a round table discussion with structured questions clustered around the themes identified above.

2.10 To give this Spotlight Review an effective scrutiny role it was felt necessary to limit the scope in some way. To cover the full extent of food wastage in its entire sense would result in looking at a vast number of topics from farming techniques to restaurants portions to food waste bin sizes. Therefore, Members of the Spotlight Review chose to predominantly focus on household food waste, since this comprises the vast majority of food waste in the UK (see paragraph 3.3 below).

3. Background

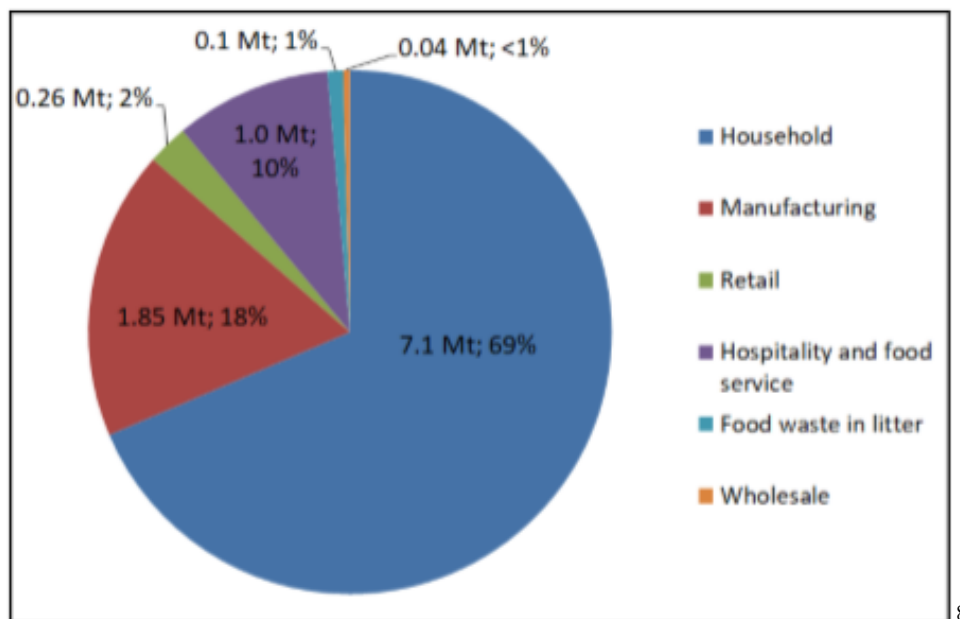
3.1 There is a legal definition of ‘waste’ as “material which the producer or holder discards, intends to discard, or is required to discard of.”⁶ However, there is no such legal definition of food waste. The EU FUSIONS (Food Use for Social Innovation by Optimising Waste Prevention Strategies) defines food waste as “any food, and inedible parts of food, removed from the food supply chain to be recovered or disposed (including composted, crops ploughed in/not harvested, anaerobic digestion, bioenergy production, co-generation, incineration, disposal to sewer, landfill or discarded to sea)”.⁷

3.2 In 2015 the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimated, annual food waste arisings within UK households, hospitality & food service (HaFS), food manufacture, retail and wholesale sectors totalled around 10 million tonnes, 70% of which was intended to be consumed by people (30% being the ‘inedible parts’). This had a value of over £20 billion a year and would be associated with more than 25 million tonnes of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Around 85% (by weight) of this wasted food arises in households and food manufacture, although waste arising in one part of the supply chain is certainly influenced by other parts of the chain.

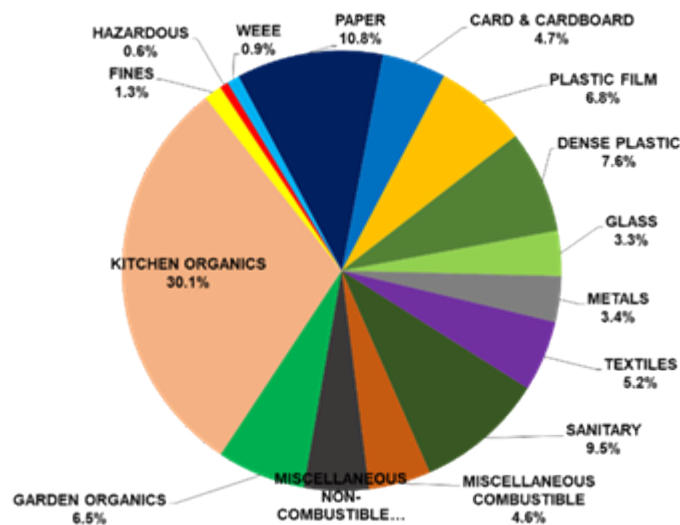
⁶ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Decide if a material is waste or not: general guide (updated version of part 2 of original full document)*, (05/05/2016) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-definition-of-waste-guidance/decide-if-a-material-is-waste-or-not#decide-if-your-material-is-waste> (accessed 21/10/2019)

⁷ EU FUSIONS, *Food Waste Definition*, (no date) <https://www.eu-fusions.org/index.php/about-food-waste/280-food-waste-definition> (accessed 12/10/2019)

3.3 By weight, household food waste makes up around 69% of the UK post-farm-gate (post agricultural sector) total, manufacturing 18%, hospitality and food service 10% and retail 2%. As shown here:



7.1 DCC studies of the contents of residual bins across the County show that kitchen organics is the largest contributor to the content of the average residual bin.



3.4 The Food Waste in England Select Committee Report states that, “economically, food waste has a cost to households and causes increased disposal costs to local authorities. The environmental impact is significant, both in terms of the impact of producing food, which is then wasted, and in terms of the additional emissions of food disposed of via landfill.”⁹ Globally, the World Resources Institute has

⁸ WRAP, *Food surplus and waste in the UK – key facts*, (July 2019) http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Food%20Surplus%20and%20Waste%20in%20the%20UK%20Key%20Facts%20%2822%207%2019%29_0.pdf (accessed 17/10/2019)

⁹ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Food waste in England*, (April 2017), p5 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 17/10/2019)

stated that food loss and waste, were it a country, would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions after the USA and China.¹⁰ Furthermore, the wastage of food raises social questions when others are struggling with food shortages in the UK and abroad.

3.5 Food wastage has been decreasing over the past 10 years. Post-farm-gate total food waste between 2007 and 2015 decreased by around 9%. Excluding ‘inedible parts’ the reduction was 15%, and on a per capita basis the reduction for post-farm-gate total food waste was 14%, and 19% excluding the ‘inedible parts’.¹¹

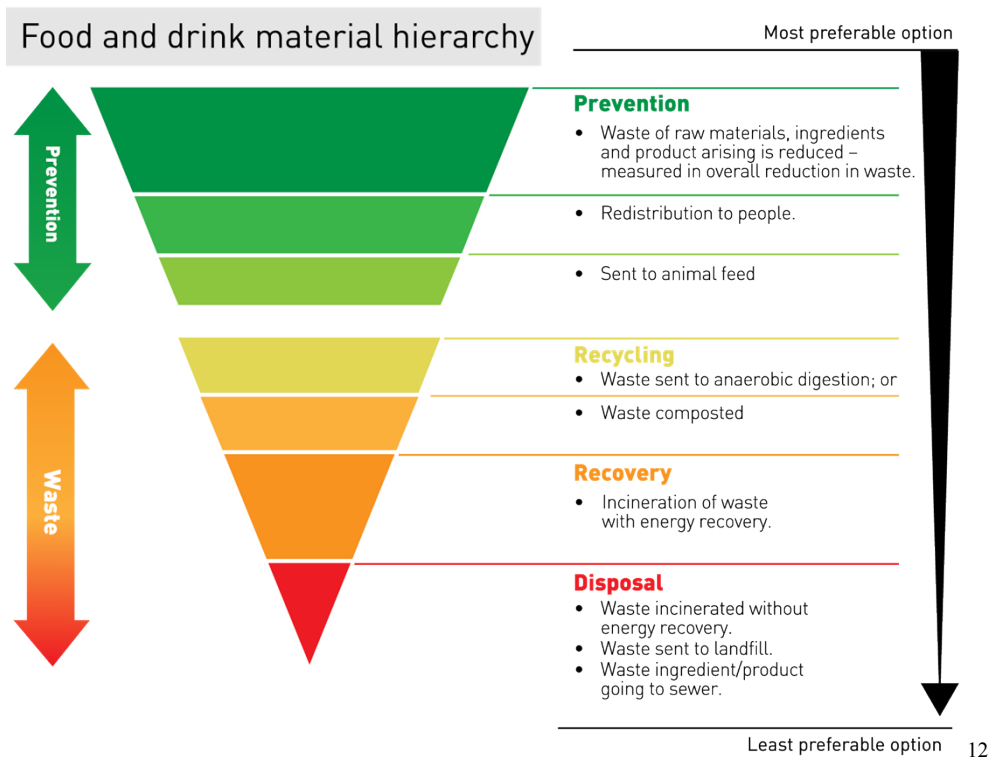
4. The Food Waste Hierarchy

4.1 The Food Waste Hierarchy is a model and guide for food waste reduction and management created by WRAP. The principle is to prioritise the reduction of food waste, then its recycling, then energy recovery and finally its disposal.

4.2 A more detailed vision of the Food Waste Hierarchy can be seen here:

¹⁰ World Resources Institute, *What’s Food Loss and Waste Got to Do with Climate Change? A Lot, Actually*, World Resources Institute, (December 2015), <https://www.wri.org/blog/2015/12/whats-food-loss-and-waste-got-to-do-climate-change-lot-actually> (accessed 17/10/2019)

¹¹ WRAP, *Food surplus and waste in the UK – key facts*, (July 2019) http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Food%20Surplus%20and%20Waste%20in%20the%20UK%20Key%20Facts%20%2822%207%2019%29_0.pdf (accessed 17/10/2019)



5. Household Prevention

5.1 The first level of the food waste hierarchy is prevention. As has been previously mentioned, most food waste in the UK comes from households. The DCC Waste Team currently uses education and engagement campaigns to attempt to reduce people's food waste. This includes one-to-one engagement events as well as countywide media campaigns achieving over 5,000 positive commitments for behavioural change on food waste during the last 4 years. Such campaigns are aimed at changing the behaviour of people so as to decrease the amount of household food wasted, for example, by keeping a household fridge at the correct temperature.

5.2 One of the key schemes undertaken by the DCC Waste Team with its contractor Resource Futures is the Devon Waste Education Programme, a comprehensive programme of visits and workshops about all aspects of waste in the school environment. The programme is delivered by experts to schools across Devon both in primaries and at secondaries. Where possible a whole school approach is taken and one element includes encouraging schools to tackle their lunch waste.

5.3 Regarding redistribution of household food waste to people, which is a part of the larger picture of prevention, DCC does encourage this through Community

¹² Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Food waste in England*, (April 2017) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 17/10/2019)

Action Groups (CAG) Devon and sharing communications via Recycle Devon social media sites (over 15,000 followers).

- 5.4 One of the successful schemes being encouraged in DCC is Community Fridges. Community Fridges are food storage areas - located in a public space. It enables food to be shared within a community, anyone can put food in and anyone can take food out. The main aim of Community Fridges is to reduce food waste. Community Fridges are a method by which household food waste can be avoided, but also commercial food waste if businesses work with Community Fridges. They can enable people facing hardship to have access to fresh, nutritious food, but are open to all. That having been said, the Spotlight Review did highlight that Community Fridges should not be seen as a replacement to Food Banks, for example, which specifically aim to help those facing hardship, rather than being aimed at tackling food waste.
- 5.5 Community Fridges are normally social spaces that enable people to connect to their communities. Some Community Fridges also have an associated area for non-perishable food. In July 2017, a national network of Community Fridges was set up in July 2017 by the environmental charity Hubbub UK, which offers a free support service to new projects. Hubbub particularly offers guidance on how to set up a Community Fridge.

1. Non-Household Prevention

- 6.1 Of course, households are not the only producers of food waste. Other areas, such as commercial food waste should not be forgotten. The largest scheme aimed at reducing commercial food waste is the Courtauld 2025 Commitment which was launched in March 2016. This is a voluntary agreement that brings together organisations across the food system—from producer to consumer—to make food production and consumption more sustainable. This agreement includes a target to reduce food and drink waste in the UK by 20% by 2025, compared to a 2015 baseline. Signatories to the 10-year Commitment include some global food manufacturers as well as major UK retailers, who represent more than 93% of the grocery market. 24 bodies from the local authority sector are also signatories, including the Devon Authorities Strategic Waste Committee, with the aim of improving communications. However, many companies, particularly on the manufacturing side, are not signatories to Courtauld.
- 6.2 There is certainly a public perception of supermarkets “doing too little to assist consumers in reducing waste”¹³, which was reflected in the Spotlight Review meeting. There are schemes in Devon which are supported by DCC which do seek to address food waste from supermarkets through redistribution such as Devon and Cornwall Food Action and Exeter Food Action whose websites can be found here, <https://devonandcornwallfoodaction.org/> and here,

¹³ WRAP, *Household Waste Prevention Evidence Review: L3 m3-4 (T) – Attitudes and Behaviours Food Waste, A report for Defra’s Waste and Resources Evidence Programme*, Brook Lyndhurst, (October 2009), p6

<http://exeterfoodaction.org.uk/>. Indeed, there are arguments that more should be done in supermarkets to avoid the wasting of food due to aesthetic standards.¹⁴

- 6.3 The Food Waste in England Select Committee Report highlighted that food waste from the retail sector is “small in comparison to other parts of the supply chain”¹⁵ Furthermore, “it was relatively easy to encourage retailers to sign up [to the Courtauld Agreement], because they have a public-facing brand and there is a lot at stake.”¹⁶
- 6.4 Nevertheless, it particularly highlighted the need for supermarkets to publish their food waste statistics so as to increase transparency.¹⁷

2. Food Waste Recycling

- 7.2 Anaerobic Digestion (AD) is the process by which organic matter such as food waste is broken down to produce biogas and biofertiliser. This process happens in the absence of oxygen in a sealed, tank called an anaerobic digester.
- 7.3 AD is recognised by the Government, Defra, the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, Friends of the Earth and the National Farmers Union as one of the best methods for food waste recycling and dealing with farm waste and sewage sludge. The biogas naturally created in the sealed tanks is used as a fuel in a CHP (combined heat and power) unit to generate renewable energy i.e. electricity and heat. What is left from the process is a nutrient rich biofertiliser which is pasteurised to kill any pathogens and then stored in large covered tanks ready to be applied twice a year on farmland in place of fossil fuel derived fertilisers. Every tonne of food waste recycled by anaerobic digestion as an alternative to landfill prevents between 0.5 and 1.0 tonne of CO₂ entering the atmosphere, one of the many benefits of anaerobic digestion.
- 7.4 The majority of Devon’s district councils collect food waste to be sent to AD, with the exception of Exeter City Council and South Hams district council. However, Exeter City Council are planning to introduce food waste collection in 2021¹⁸ and will use AD. Furthermore, South Hams does not currently send its food waste to AD, instead its food waste is sent with garden waste and

¹⁴ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Food waste in England*, (April 2017), p18-19 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 17/10/2019)

¹⁵ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Food waste in England*, (April 2017), p14 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 17/10/2019)

¹⁶ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Food waste in England*, (April 2017), p10 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 17/10/2019)

¹⁷ Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, *Food waste in England*, (April 2017), p14-15 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvfru/429/429.pdf> (accessed 17/10/2019)

¹⁸ Devon Live, *Exeter's massive rubbish collection change won't happen until summer 2021*, (9 Oct 2019), <https://www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/exeters-massive-rubbish-collection-change-3410211>, (accessed 10/10/2019)

composted. However, this is planned to change to an AD system by the end of 2020.¹⁹

- 7.5 In Devon 21,522 tonnes of food waste were recycled by AD in 2018/19. As of October 2017 37,797t of food waste were placed in the residual bins. There is a potential of 5,280t of food waste from Exeter. Therefore leaving 32,517t, of which 70% is avoidable i.e. 22,762t.
- 7.6 From the Spotlight Review, the issue of liners was picked up. Liners are useful for keeping the food waste contained, and bins relatively clean, which helps some householders to use the collection service. There is a lot of conflicting advice on the best liner to use. The Devon authorities are working closely together to agree the best advice, which currently is that any bag can be used, and that no bag or newspaper are also acceptable. Work is continuing on this. It should be noted though that commonly used “biodegradable”, starch type bags are in fact unhelpful to the anaerobic digestion process. In fact, any bags used in the food waste bins are removed before the anaerobic digestion process. These are then sent to an energy from waste plant.²⁰ South Hams is an exception to this at the current time, as mentioned since AD is not currently used for its food waste.
- 7.7 Despite the fact that compostable bags are not needed, many people use these bags in the assumption that they are necessary. Different advice regarding liners can be found online, for example compostable liners are advised for East Devon and plastic advised for Mid Devon.²¹ Meanwhile, the DCC website gives a paragraph of advice on why compostable packaging should not be used.²² Yet another set of advice is given by the district council web pages, such as North Devon stating that residents should “line your caddies with special compostable caddy liners”.²³
- 7.8 This is important as both information and consistency are key to fully engaging with residents. Indeed, WRAP has noted that many say that compostable bin liners are one of the top four barriers to using a food waste recycling service. In 2015, 12% stated that “The council doesn’t provide liners for free/I need to pay for them” and 7% stated that “Don’t have any caddy liners/ don’t know how to get hold of them” were one of the top four reasons stopping them from recycling their food waste.²⁴

¹⁹ South Hams District Council, South Hams Looking to Improve Recycling Services, 9 Oct 2019, <https://www.southhams.gov.uk/article/4764/South-Hams-Looking-to-Improve-Recycling-Services>, (accessed 10/10/2019)

²⁰ Devon County Council, Food Waste Recycling and Collections, <https://www.devon.gov.uk/wasteandrecycling/household-collections/food-waste-recycling-and-collections/> (accessed 15/10/2019)

²¹ Recycle Devon, *Recycling and Food Waste Collections*, <https://www.recycledevon.org/recycling-collections> (accessed 15/10/2019)

²² Devon County Council, Food Waste Recycling and Collections, <https://www.devon.gov.uk/wasteandrecycling/household-collections/food-waste-recycling-and-collections/> (accessed 15/10/2019)

²³ North Devon Council, *How to recycle your food waste*, <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/bins-and-recycling/weekly-food-waste-collections/how-to-recycle-your-food-waste/>, (accessed 16/10/2019)

²⁴ WRAP, *3Rs recycling knowledge, attitudes and reported behaviour survey 2015*, Spring 2015, p12, <http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/3Rs%20Recycling%20Highlights%202015%20FINAL%20FOR%20PUBLICATION.pdf> (10/10/2019)

- 7.9 Furthermore, slightly different advice is given online, for example, as to what should be put in the food waste bin. Although, this information is not contradictory, it should be noted.
- 7.10 Of the most misunderstood foodstuffs, such as bones, eggs and teabags around 12/13% of people who use food waste bins do not put these in the correct bin. Furthermore, “when presented with food types that were considered by WRAP to be potentially more challenging to dispose of, only about half of users report using the food waste service effectively, with between 35% and 41% either failing to take food out of the wrapping before placing in the food waste collection or saying they would use the general rubbish bin”²⁵. The fact that there is, across the country, “often inconsistent provision of the infrastructure needed to participate in a food waste recycling collection (e.g. caddy liners and communications)”²⁶ can certainly be seen as a contributing factor to misunderstanding regarding food waste. This can be seen here in Devon also. For example on the Recycle Devon website, East Devon food waste advice is given as “cooked and uncooked food, meat and fish, bones, fruit and vegetables, cat and dog food, plate scrapings and tea and coffee grounds” while Torridge’s is “vegetable peelings, tea bags, coffee grounds, egg shells, stale bread, meat, fish, plate scrapings (raw and cooked)”²⁷.
- 7.11 Regarding commercial waste, WRAP has pointed out that by engaging with the food waste hierarchy, businesses can save money and improve their public perception if well planned and handled. Monetarily, this is mainly due to the costs of waste collections and relative lower price of recycling collections. Perception improvement would be due to the current appetite to improve the environmental credentials of a business.
- 7.12 In the 2013 DCC Waste and Resource Management Strategy for Devon Review, it states that central Government is keen to see local authorities playing a greater role encouraging commercial recycling, but with no statutory duty to perform this function imaginative use of limited resources is required. It suggests that the extent of local authorities’ participation could range from signposting on websites, to providing generic leaflets, to trial initiatives in Business Improvement Districts such as Plymouth where services are paid for by groups of businesses.²⁸
- 7.13 It should be noted that in Devon, the majority of waste, including food waste, that is not reduced, reused, recycled or composted is sent to one of two energy from waste facilities either in Exeter or Plymouth. Therefore the bottom level of the food waste hierarchy, sending food waste to landfill, is avoided for domestic waste.

²⁵ WRAP, *3Rs recycling knowledge, attitudes and reported behaviour survey 2015*, Spring 2015, p13 <http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/3Rs%20Recycling%20Highlights%202015%20FINAL%20OR%20PUBLICATION.pdf> (10/10/2019)

²⁶ WRAP, *A Food Waste Recycling Action Plan for England*, no date, p9 http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/A_Food_Waste_Recycling_Action_Plan_For_England_0.pdf (10/10/2019)

²⁷ Recycle Devon, *Recycling and Food Waste Collections*, <https://www.recycledevon.org/recycling-collections> (accessed 15/10/2019)

²⁸ Devon County Council, *Waste and Resource Management Strategy for Devon Review*, (March 2019), p32

8. Conclusion

This Spotlight Review brought together partners from district councils, the AD operators, food waste charities and DCC officers. The work offers a snapshot view into concerns around food waste.

While it is evident that much is being done to improve the issue of food waste in Devon, it is also clear that there are areas for improvement. Firstly, clarity and consistency on household food waste recycling must be improved to ensure residents have a clear message as to how and what to put in the food waste bin. Secondly, greater collaboration with food waste charities should be encouraged to improve food waste education. As key centres of communities in Devon, Parish and Town Councils should be further supported to combat food waste through methods such as Community Fridges. Finally, although households are the largest contributor of food waste, businesses should also be encouraged further to combat food waste.

Whilst this was a review conducted in a single day the evidence that the recommendations rest upon is based on significant research from several organisations. Food waste is becoming recognised as a more serious avenue of environmental and societal importance. Not only are there climate change implications to food waste, but also issues surrounding food poverty. It is intended that the recommendations in this report will support increased recognition of the importance of food waste prevention and disposal, as well as supporting a multi-agency approach to encourage further community schemes to bring people together over this issue.

9. Sources of evidence

Witnesses

The Task Group heard testimony from a number of sources and would like to express sincere thanks to the following for their involvement and the information that they have shared as well as to express a desire of continuation of joint work towards the fulfilment of the recommendations in this document.

Name	Organisation
Annette Dentith	DCC Waste Management team
Liz Jarvis	DCC Waste Management team
Emma Croft	DCC Waste Management team
Simon Hill	Exeter City Council
Jon Curtis	Exeter Food Action
Gareth Bourton	East Devon District Council
Luke Crisford	Andigestion
David Beasley	DCC Comms Team
Claire Dexter	reROOTed Tiverton
Steven Edwards	DCC Communities Team
Jenny Rayner	DCC Communities Team
Nicky Scott	Devon Community Composting
Aynsley Jones	Axminster Food Bank
Amanda Cole	Chudleigh Community Fridge

Andrea Davis	DCC Cabinet Member
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Thanks also to Philip Bridge for some of his early research and advocacy on food waste.

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10. Spotlight Review Membership

The Group was chaired by Councillor Ian Hall and membership of the Spotlight Review was as follows:

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services	
Councillor Ian Hall (Chair)	Councillor Yvonne Atkinson
Councillor Polly Colthorpe	Councillor Carol Whitton
Councillor Alistair Dewhirst	Councillor Colin Slade

11. Contact

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