



## EFRA SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON FOOD WASTE IN ENGLAND

### Written Submission by the Merseyside and Halton Waste Partnership (MHWP)

#### 1.0 Executive Summary

##### 1.1 Our key points are:

- 39.1% of the kerbside residual household waste stream in Merseyside and Halton is food waste of which 63.9% is avoidable (edible before disposal)<sup>1</sup>
- MHWP food waste sent to landfill in 2015/16 generated carbon emissions of 63,749 tonnes
- MHWP food waste management costs are estimated to be in the order of £20 million p.a. Local Authorities (LAs) are faced with significant costs in managing food waste which can stretch the resources available for other services
- WRAP estimate that £700 per family per year can be saved through households following basic food waste prevention techniques. In Merseyside and Halton these savings could amount to £430 million p.a.
- Merseyside and Halton data indicates a £3 gearing of savings for every pound invested in promoting food waste prevention and behavioural change.  
**Government should increase its support for food waste behavioural change initiatives to reduce the impacts of food waste**
- The Courtauld Commitment 2025 provides opportunities for collaborative action across the food sector, including LAs, to reduce food waste by 20% by 2025. The hospitality sector could address portion size and the quantity of left-over food from meals. Retailers could review store displays and influence supply chains to improve food packaging design and labelling
- Statutory and voluntary initiatives can both tackle food waste reduction, but new requirements on LAs must be accompanied by additional Government support.  
**Government funding would be required to support collection and treatment infrastructure if a statutory requirement was placed on LAs to collect household food waste separately**
- England lacks policy leadership in reducing food waste compared with the approach in Scotland and Wales. **Government should develop an English**

<sup>1</sup> Merseyside and Halton Waste Composition Study 2016

## **Resource Strategy covering food waste and other material resources to promote the circular economy.**

### **2.0 Introduction**

**2.1** This submission is from the Merseyside and Halton Waste Partnership (MHWP). The partners include the waste collection and disposal authorities of Knowsley MBC, Liverpool CC, Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority (MRWA), Sefton MBC, St Helens MBC, Wirral MBC and the neighbouring unitary authority Halton BC. This MHWP response was collated by MRWA from views expressed by the partners.

**2.2** The MHWP area (the Liverpool City Region) has a population of over 1.5 million people, generated 756,634 tonnes of Local Authority Collected Waste (LACW) in 2015/16 and has a Joint Recycling and Waste Management Strategy (JRWMS): <http://www.merseysidewda.gov.uk/waste-strategy/resources-merseyside-2011-2041/>. We have made a submission because of the significant cost and impact of food waste on MHWP.

### **3.0 Main Submission**

#### **3.1 What is the economic, environmental and social impact of food waste in England?**

##### **Economic Impact**

**3.1.1** There is a significant financial cost for LAs in managing food waste. Assuming a total MHWP waste service cost in the order of £100 million p.a. and that food waste represents 20% of the total MHWP wastestream (see 3.1.2) then a working estimate of ~£20 million p.a. could be reached. This broad figure excludes commercial and industrial sources of food waste, but provides a scale for the financial impact of food waste on LAs.

##### **Environmental Impact**

**3.1.2** During 2015/16, MRWA completed a study <http://www.merseysidewda.gov.uk/waste-strategy/waste-analysis/> to establish the composition of the 756,634 tonnes of LACW generated by MHWP. The research found that 39.1% (~148,000 tonnes) of the kerbside residual wastestream (residual bin currently going to landfill) is food waste of which 63.9% (~93,000 tonnes) is avoidable, i.e. edible at some point before disposal. This high proportion of food waste represents the largest fraction of potentially recyclable material in the residual stream. Food waste emerges as the largest fraction of the overall wastestream at 20.1% (~152,000 tonnes) when all elements of MHWP LACW are combined together. This includes food waste as a non-target material representing 2.1% of dry recycling and 0.8% of garden waste collections. Food waste in these streams can lead to the loss of recyclables due to the contamination of target materials. Food waste also comprises 8.5% (3,985 tonnes) of the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) residual waste stream as bagged waste. The proportion of food waste in the kerbside residual stream has increased by around 10% since a similar study in 2010. This could be due to increased diversion of dry

recyclables from residual to recycling collections and potentially some increase in food waste generation.

**3.1.3** Carbon reduction is a priority for the City Region and contributes to the UK carbon target to reduce emissions by 57% by 2030 on 1990 levels. MHWP food waste sent to landfill in 2015/16 was estimated to generate 63,749 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e). This should reduce from late 2016 as waste is diverted from landfill to incineration with energy recovery. The overall carbon emissions of MHWP's waste management service have reduced from 87,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e emitted in 2009 to a net saving of 7,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e in 2015, primarily through reduced landfilling and increased recycling which offsets carbon emissions from landfill. A greater focus on promoting behavioural change, especially waste prevention, re-use and developing skills, has contributed to the lower impact. Significant reductions in emissions can be achieved by reducing food waste arisings further, recycling and by recovering more energy from the unavoidable food waste generated.

### **Social Impact**

**3.1.4** WRAP estimate that £700 per family per year can be saved through following basic food waste prevention techniques from smart shopping to using up leftovers in making fresh meals. With over 620,000 households in the city region, savings up to £430 million per year could be available to Merseyside and Halton households through behavioural change. The waste composition study (3.1.2) used a sampling methodology reflecting the distribution of neighbourhood types across Merseyside and Halton. ACORN (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods) identifies 5 main categories from Category 1 (Affluent Achievers) to 5 (Struggling with Urban Adversity). Findings show that residents in categories 4 and 5, the poorest neighbourhoods, generate the highest proportion of food waste. As reliance on food banks increases nationally, with over 160,000 emergency food packs provided in the North West during 2015-16 alone <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/>, there is an opportunity to reduce the social impact of food waste through promoting behavioural change and improving the population's food skills. Austerity measures have reduced the opportunity for LAs to educate and raise awareness directly, but organisations such as The Children's Food Trust (CFT) are actively working with schools and families to develop cookery skills and reduce food waste. Their work in Merseyside and Halton is discussed in 3.2 below.

### **3.2 What measures could be most effective in reducing food waste by retailers, the hospitality sector, local government, and consumers? These can include redistribution, recycling and recovery, and improved packaging and labelling?**

**3.2.1** The UK Courtauld Commitment 2025 <http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/courtauld-commitment-2025> signatories, including major supermarkets and food businesses, will participate in a ten year programme aiming to reduce food waste and carbon emissions by 20%. MRWA signed up in 2015 as an LA engagement partner. The Commitment provides an opportunity to tackle the complex issues behind food waste generation.

Retailers could reduce food waste further by reviewing store layout and shelving, e.g. the quantity of bread discarded from over-stocked daily displays, and promoting Love Food Hate Waste (LFHW) to customers. Retailers can influence their supply chain e.g. to use re-sealable containers for perishable foods and to include recipes showing how the food can be used up towards its end date. Dates could be printed in traffic light colours explaining simply the product's life expectancy with red indicating that it needs consuming quickly. Hospitality sector initiatives could tackle portion size and the quantity of left-over food at the end of meals. WRAP have identified that the equivalent of 1 in 6 of meals served in the UK are wasted<sup>2</sup>. In Scotland the 'Good to Go' initiative encourages restaurants to provide a take-home box service for leftovers to be enjoyed later <http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/GoodToGo>.

**3.2.2** LAs have a duty to promote waste prevention and local delivery of the national LFHW campaign exemplifies the role they can play if suitably resourced. Techniques from smart shopping, storage and using leftovers, through to developing cookery skills and the use of fresh ingredients enable residents to grow their skills and confidence and prevent food from becoming waste. Home composting for unavoidable vegetable food waste provides a final option for residents to recover value from any food waste produced. LA resources for new initiatives are limited, but more Government investment in waste prevention can help reduce the quantity of food waste requiring collection and treatment. Prevention offers the greater rewards of keeping resources in circulation, reducing food miles and pressure on natural resources, whilst delivering financial savings for people. Using the Waste Prevention Benefits Calculator, Merseyside and Halton data indicates a £3 gearing of savings for every pound spent on promoting food waste prevention and behavioural change. Further development of the Calculator is needed to support more investment in waste prevention and to reduce food waste costs.

**3.2.3** There are varying levels of commitment and investment across England in addressing waste prevention and the circular economy. MHWP have been at the forefront of this drive and won the LARAC 'Best Waste Minimisation or Prevention Project' Award in 2013 for its work on preventing food waste and junk mail and was a finalist again in 2015 for its Community Fund projects. MHWP is seeking to develop a circular economy approach to recovering energy from food waste and is working with local partners to establish a cycle of food waste collection and digestion to create a biogas fuel for use in local bus and food waste collection vehicle fleets with associated air quality and health benefits. MRWA engaged with a similar system implemented in Malmo, Sweden through involvement in the EU Horizon 2020 funded Wastecosmart project <http://www.wastecosmart.eu/>.

**3.2.4** The MRWA and Veolia Community Fund supports community groups to promote behavioural change and reduce waste. Since 2013/14, the fund has invested over £113,000 in community food waste projects alone with an estimated food waste diversion from landfill of over 1,100 tonnes. In 2013/14, Can Cook delivered a cookery skills project in Liverpool and engaged with over 60 schools, business and community organisations, training 1,800 individuals to cook and diverting an estimated 260 tonnes of food waste from landfill. CFT established 45 'Mersey Waste Muncher' cookery skills clubs during

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<sup>2</sup> WRAP. Overview of Waste in the UK Hospitality and Food Service Sector. 2013

2013-15. Evaluation indicates that over 87% of participating families felt they had reduced their food waste since involvement in the clubs. CFT will be establishing 20 more clubs in 2016/17 focussing on young adults to develop their cookery skills, reduce food waste, create healthy appetising meals and save money. Other local initiatives include a 'Make 28 Taste Great' competition, which created new recipes using leftover ingredients following the 2010 Merseyside and Halton Waste Composition Study finding that 28% of kerbside residual waste was food waste. Partners have engaged in the 10 Cities Challenge and the Sustainable Food Cities campaign <http://sustainablefoodcities.org/>, including sponsoring its annual conference held in Liverpool in March 2016, and work closely with the Liverpool Food People - a Third Sector led network working towards a healthy and sustainable food system for the city region.

**3.2.5** LAs have an important role in reducing the impact of food waste through collection and treatment. Decisions on the food waste management approach should be taken locally based on cost, social and environmental impact considerations. Food waste landfill bans are not supported, but rather a managed withdrawal from landfill encouraged by incentives for more sustainable treatments. The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 make Government responsible for ensuring that 50% of waste from households is prepared for reuse or recycled by 2020. It may be necessary to roll out further food waste separate collection schemes around the country to achieve this. Analysis from our study (3.1.2) suggests that diverting 50% of the total household food waste in Merseyside and Halton into recycling could improve our recycling performance by up to 10%. A requirement on LAs to separate food waste for recycling can only be accepted if Government provides the funding necessary to deliver the infrastructure required for this material which is expensive to collect and treat. Assistance to bridge the funding gap would be welcomed and it is noted that the Scottish and Welsh administrations have provided support in their areas. Government might consider establishing food waste performance indicators as part of any enhanced support for LAs in tackling food waste.

### **3.3 What proposals are necessary to further reduce food waste?**

**3.3.1** The waste hierarchy introduced by the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011 identifies waste prevention as the priority. A food recovery hierarchy also exists which prioritises prevention, followed by food re-distribution to people then animals. If food cannot be consumed safely then it should be treated by anaerobic digestion (AD) or composting, leaving a final option of energy recovery. Government could consider national Guidance on food waste recovery and LAs could take this into account in local waste management decisions. There is opportunity for Government to support LAs in developing a more strategic role over commercial and industrial waste management in their areas. This, and the Courtauld Commitment, can encourage LAs to engage with the hospitality sector and support improvements in local business resource efficiency.

**3.3.2** More Government support should be given to new communications and technology initiatives. Examples include WRAP's Food Waste Assistant and free apps such as 'Olio'

to encourage sharing of unwanted local food by householders and businesses. MRWA has developed recipe cards to encourage use of leftovers and MHWP promotes food waste prevention through its website <http://recycleformerseyside.com/>. New initiatives for learning and skills development around food are required, e.g. growing fruit and vegetables in school grounds. The national curriculum has neglected this for many years, leading to a large proportion of young adults unable to cook, prone to wasting food and eating a diet high in convenience and take-away foods contributing to poor public health and impacts on NHS resources. The CFT 'Mersey Waste Munchers' project referenced in 3.2.4 is tackling this issue, but more could be done in partnership across the public sector.

**3.3.3** There is a potential role for small-scale AD or in-vessel composting treatment options co-located with centres such as hospitals and universities in local food waste management approaches. Other food initiatives such as Farm Urban <http://www.farmurban.co.uk/projects/> are developing novel food growing projects, e.g. aquaponics in Liverpool's Alder Hey Children's Hospital, so making the circular economy connection between local food and health. Local and regional approaches should be complementary to ensure an integrated and inclusive approach delivering the best overall benefit in tackling food waste.

**3.3.4** Support for partnership activity is key, e.g. Liverpool Food People coordinate and promote sustainable food systems and actions using public, private and third sector cross-partnerships and advocate food being embedded into strategic plans for the city region. Food waste must be taken more seriously as an economic and social issue as much as an environmental one.

### **3.4 How effective are existing voluntary initiatives in England and is there a need for legislation?**

**3.4.1** The key issue for both voluntary and statutory initiatives is the effective delivery of achievable outputs and outcomes. The Courtauld Commitment 2025, referenced in 3.2.1, is the first voluntary agreement to include LAs as a key engagement partner so exploiting their link to householders as a channel for behavioural change. Previous rounds of the Commitment have delivered progress in tackling food waste and effective partnerships have developed giving the current initiative a sound foundation for achieving its objectives. The 2025 initiative now needs a period of time to demonstrate its delivery and Government should demonstrate clear support for it.

**3.4.2** Legislation has a role, but must be designed carefully to avoid perverse outcomes, e.g. chasing recycling targets ahead of waste prevention and reuse. As discussed in 3.2.5, further statutory burdens on LAs would be difficult to sustain without potential consequences on other services. Reducing non-recyclable single use food packaging, e.g. take away coffee cups, polystyrene trays, remains a challenge. Disposable packaging can only encourage consumers to dispose of uncompleted meals similarly. Initiatives such as the 5p plastic bag charge show the impact of targeted legislation on behaviour, although more of these funds could be directed into food waste prevention. Such legislation can also provide a level playing field for businesses and promotes innovation in waste prevention and reuse. Improved recyclability of plastic food

packaging could also provide a nudge for consumers to value the food contents more highly, as opposed to the easier option of throwing the unused food and packaging away together in the residual waste bin.

### **3.5 What are the comparative approaches to reducing and managing food waste in the devolved nations, and across Europe?**

**3.5.1** The devolved nations have led the way in developing policies to reduce food waste. The Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012 introduced a requirement for food businesses to separately collect food waste as did the Food Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. The Scottish regulation requires that food businesses generating over 5kg of food waste are required to present it for separate collection for composting or AD. The overall waste strategy for Wales, 'Towards Zero Waste', includes 'The Food Manufacture, Service and Retail Sector Plan' which sets out a coordinated approach to improve the resource management of both food waste and food packaging.

**3.5.2** In contrast, there is a relative lack of policy leadership from Government in England. WRAP's 'A Food Waste Recycling Action Plan for England 2016' focuses on increasing food waste collections in recognition that the devolved administrations have wider coverage of food waste schemes. The Plan is voluntary and failed to clearly set itself within the wider context of the Courtauld Commitment 2025 which aims to improve the overall sustainability of the food system.

**3.5.3** Brexit has generated uncertainty about future English waste and resources policy. It is possible that a vacuum will develop through lack of policy direction in England, whilst EU Member States and the UK devolved nations move forward with circular economy initiatives backed up with legislation. Government should now develop an English Resource Strategy, pulling food waste and other material resource issues together under the circular economy. The Strategy should outline a joint and shared vision across all stakeholders to provide a long term framework informing future investment infrastructure, whilst taking the best from the EU Circular Economy package and customising it to England's needs. Regardless of the Brexit outcome, a Strategy is needed as other international obligations will remain in place, including delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goal of halving food waste by 2050.

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