



Commercial food waste recycling services

Tools and tips for local authorities

January 2022

Revised September 2024

Policy updates 2024

The Environment Act 2021 sets out a number of policies to improve waste and resource efficiency across the UK. This includes the requirement for the separation and separate collection of recyclable waste (including food waste) from households and business premises – a policy referred to as ‘Simpler Recycling’¹.

The timeline by which businesses must comply with Simpler Recycling is as follows:

By 31 March 2025	By 31 March 2027
<p>All businesses* must arrange for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separate collection of dry recyclable materials• Separate collection of food waste <p>* Businesses with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees ('micro firms') have an extended deadline of 31 March 2027. ReLondon estimate that this accounts for 99% of London's businesses².</p>	<p>All businesses must arrange for the collection of plastic film for recycling</p>

27 local authorities in London currently provide a commercial recycling service for at least one material stream, with only eleven of these providing a commercial food waste recycling service. These policy changes will see an increased demand for food waste collection, presenting a considerable opportunity for local authorities to grow their market share and income through introducing (or expanding an existing) commercial food waste recycling service.

ReLondon hopes this will be a valuable guide for local authorities in developing successful commercial food waste recycling services. In addition, ReLondon has established a range of free resources for local authorities to support them in developing their commercial recycling and waste services. These include toolkits³ at reondon.gov.uk and dedicated business pages on our London Recycles campaign website⁴. ReLondon can also provide dedicated support to individual local authorities on their commercial recycling and waste services. Please contact hello@reondon.gov.uk for any support requests.

Please note that the policy information and gate fees within this document have been updated, however, the data and service information provided by Local Authorities has not, so these are current as of 2021.

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Executive summary

In summer 2021, ReLondon and the Greater London Authority facilitated a series of workshops on commercial food waste recycling. Commercial waste officers from local authorities in London and beyond shared their experiences in service planning, operations, marketing and business engagement. This document brings together the key learning points to act as a helpful guide for other local authorities looking to establish a new food waste recycling service or expand an existing one.

There are many drivers for including food waste recycling in a commercial waste portfolio: reducing CO2 emissions; complying with national and local policy changes; lowering disposal costs; and generating a competitive advantage.

Ensuring commercial food waste recycling services are financially viable requires local authorities to undertake good service planning and modelling:

- **Completing soft market testing or trialling the service** can help predict likely uptake.
- **Speaking to other local authorities** who provide a similar service and **checking prices against competitors** will help those designing a service to develop their operational planning and set fees and charges.

The local authorities that presented in the workshops had a range of operational models for their services:

- **Co-collecting** commercial food waste recycling along with a household service can improve efficiency by using spare capacity.

- **Dedicated commercial rounds** can be more flexible in terms of collection frequency and disposal options, but may be less cost-effective.
- Local authorities should ensure there is **access to a backup vehicle**, regardless of whether they have dedicated food waste recycling vehicles or use standard collection vehicles.
- Across local authorities, the provision of container size varies. However, all reported that **240 litre containers**, provided as a standard for food waste recycling services, are **too heavy**, causing health and safety issues for crews.
- **Some local authorities provide liners** as part of their service, whilst others require customers to buy their own.

The cost benefit of providing food waste recycling services will come not just from charging businesses for the service but also reduced disposal costs compared to residual waste. **Gate fees are changeable** and market-dependent, so they should be reviewed both when completing service planning and modelling, and on an ongoing basis.



Marketing should be considered an essential part of service planning, with a specific budget allocated. Local authorities starting from scratch with marketing should place immediate focus on their commercial recycling and waste website to attract and inform customers. Marketing content should always be designed with the customer's needs and wants in mind.

Engaging with businesses more widely can help drive increases in market share and enhance the reputation of services, as well as businesses themselves. Identifying other council teams that can spread knowledge about commercial recycling and waste services provides an additional way of engaging local businesses. Local authorities can also run award schemes to motivate and recognise sustainable business practices.

This guide provides a valuable range of learnings and experiences to help local authorities establish a successful commercial food waste recycling service. **ReLondon has additional resources available to local authorities, including toolkits⁵ at reondon.gov.uk and dedicated business pages on our London Recycles campaign website.⁶**

I. Introduction



In summer 2021, ReLondon led a series of workshops to share good practice between local authorities on establishing new, or improving existing, commercial food waste recycling services. The workshops, jointly facilitated by ReLondon and the Greater London Authority, aimed to help London's local authorities deliver their Reduction and Recycling Plan commitments.⁷ The local authorities who contributed to the workshops had varying experiences of running food waste recycling collections. Some were at the planning stage, whilst others had run their service for over ten years. Sharing their own experiences and lessons learned, they covered three key topics: service modelling, operations, and marketing and business engagement. This guide summarises the presentations delivered during the workshops and the outcomes of the discussions that followed. It is aimed at commercial waste managers and officers within local authorities.

The guide is split into the topics covered in the workshops:

1. Service planning and modelling
2. Operations
3. Marketing and business engagement

This guide also makes reference to WRAP's Commercial Recycling Collections Guide⁸ and Commercial Food Waste Collections Guide,⁹ both of which provide guidance to local authorities on introducing commercial recycling and waste services.

ReLondon would like to thank everyone who contributed to the workshops, with a particular thank you to those who presented:

Rebecca Goodwin, Waste Minimisation and Recycling Officer, London Borough of Bexley

Georgio Tafla, Commercial Waste Project Manager, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Steve Baker, Waste Transformation Consultant, London Borough of Haringey

Ashley Buttress, Waste Strategy & Commercial Waste Contract Manager, Oxford City Council (ODS Group)

Jarno Stet, Waste and Recycling Manager, Westminster City Council

Vaughn Armstrong, Director, BabelQuest

Karen Marks, Recycling and Clean City Awards Manager, City of London Corporation

Jessica Hurley, Commercial Sales and Accounts Manager, London Borough of Hackney

2. Service planning and modelling

2.1 What should a commercial food waste recycling service aim to achieve?

Setting principles for a commercial recycling service helps guide the development of an effective service and acts as a reference for creating branding and marketing materials.

Westminster summarise their service aims as:

1. Providing a high-quality service at a competitive rate from a brand businesses can trust
2. Delivering a reduction in waste, and increase in reuse and recycling options
3. Helping to manage street scene and the public realm
4. Assisting with income provision for controlling service costs

Local authority insight

When setting up their initial food waste recycling trial in 2007, Bexley had an existing customer base of 1,500 businesses, 200 of which already used their dry recycling service. They used a three-stage process to recruit existing customers across the seven main retail and hospitality areas of the borough. A direct mailshot yielded a 2.4% sign-up rate, with non-response followed up through a phone call and finally an in-person visit.

Bexley found that visiting businesses was the most successful recruitment method for their trial. Using all three recruitment methods, they signed up 70 of their existing customers to the service for the trial period – exceeding their original target of 35. Customers that were already using the dry recycling service were more likely to take part than those using only the residual waste service.

2.2 Who might the customers be?

If a local authority already provides a commercial residual waste and/or a dry recycling service, their first food waste recycling customers may already be known to them. Understanding how existing customers would want to use the service, as well as any barriers they have for not using it, is a helpful tool for service design.



Case study

Kensington and Chelsea already have a strong customer base for residual and dry recycling services. In 2020 they modelled a food waste recycling service, looking at their existing customer base to establish:

- Which customers were likely to produce food waste based on their business type;
- Which of these customers had sack or bin collections;
- The estimated frequency of food waste recycling collections that customers would require.

A cross-section of their customers (c. 150) were then interviewed for soft-market testing. The purpose of the soft market testing was to understand: customer appetite for the service; their likely requirements in terms of service frequency; and any barriers to them taking it up. They used a standard survey to obtain this information, conducting face-to-face interviews.

The soft market testing found that some customers:

- Were not producing significant amounts of food waste, despite being identified from the local authority's customer database as a food-producing business. This was due to the business either undertaking waste minimisation activities or partnering with charities to donate surplus food.
- Do not see the separation of food waste for recycling as a priority for their business.
- Had concerns over the time and space required for separating and storing food waste for recycling. Officers at Kensington and Chelsea reflected in the workshop that similar concerns were raised when businesses were first asked to separate dry recycling and will likely change over time as food waste recycling becomes the norm.
- Will need frequent collections, including weekends.

From their soft market testing and analysis of their customer database to predict how many of their existing customers were producing food waste, the council were able to estimate the likely demand for a food waste recycling service and plan accordingly. Through this process, they determined that the vast majority (89%) of their potential customers would require at least one weekend collection, and two-thirds wanted collections six days a week. This information was crucial for the authority to model and plan their food waste recycling service.

2.3 Identifying potential new customers

When identifying new customers, local authorities should target a variety of business sizes on a collection round. Using spare capacity in household collection rounds can limit risk

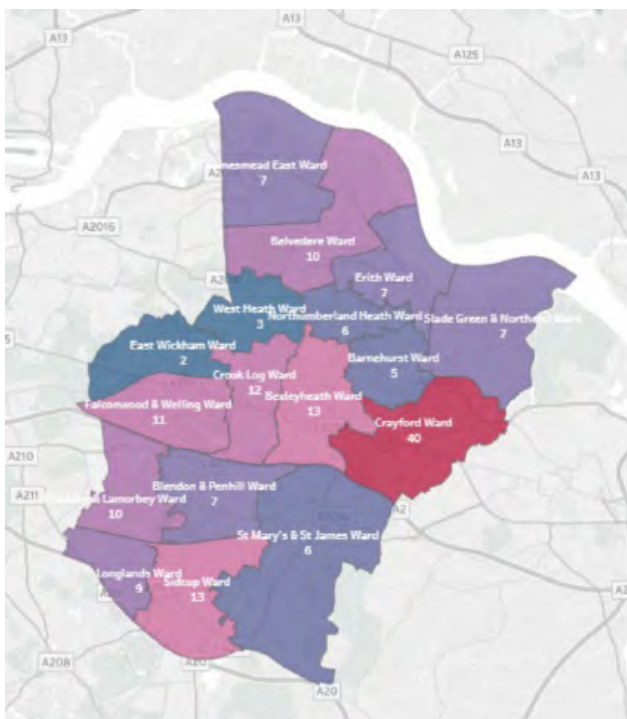
and increase the efficiency of the commercial food waste recycling service if the sign-up rate of businesses is low or customers are spread out.

Local authority insight

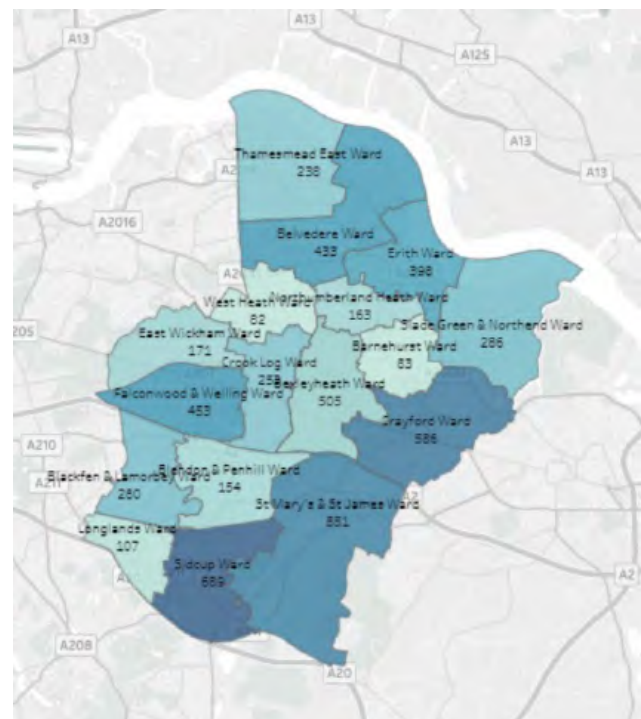
Bexley's customer base is a small proportion of the potential businesses in the borough, so they are planning to expand their collection days and increase their market share. To aid targeting of new sign-ups to their food waste recycling service, Bexley have produced heat maps¹⁰ of where their customers are concentrated and where food waste-producing businesses are located within the borough. Bexley recommend being

creative when speaking to customers about food waste recycling. If customers feel they do not have space for an additional bin for food waste, they should be supported with waste minimisation activities. For example, encourage them to ask their suppliers to take back packaging. Reducing residual waste and dry recycling streams alongside the introduction of food waste recycling will also provide customers with financial savings.

Food waste customers by ward, Bexley



Food waste businesses by ward, Bexley



2.4 Researching the experience of other local authorities

Talking to other local authorities with similar characteristics that are already running a commercial food waste recycling service can be helpful for planning and decision-making. When deciding who to engage with, local authorities should consider how their service is structured (i.e. is it in-house or outsourced),

whether they co-collect with household services, the geographical area (whether an inner or outer London borough) and the business types that will be serviced (for example, hotels or hospitality businesses in tourist areas, large offices, or small independent retail units on local high streets or within residential areas).

Case study

To inform the planning of their new commercial food waste recycling service, Kensington and Chelsea spoke to three other London local authorities with similar characteristics and logistics to understand:

- Operational set-up: the type and number of vehicles used, and the number of personnel on each crew.
- Service offering: how the service was carried out in terms of container types offered, number of collection days, and frequency of collections.
- Sales and marketing approach: the type of marketing that was carried out, how the service was promoted, how fees and charges were set, and the most common obstacles faced when selling the service.
- Disposal routes: where they took food waste recycling, the disposal rate, and the percentage of contamination that was permitted by their disposal site.

There were several key learnings from this exercise that were taken forward into their own service design and modelling, including:

- Choice of containers offered (140 litre bins and caddies).
- Deciding to co-collect with household collections so that there was no immediate pressure on the service to fill a whole round to cover costs.
- Ensuring there would be access to a spare vehicle.
- Incorporation of a weekend collection day within their schedule.



2.5 Creating a business case for a commercial food waste recycling service

Modelling the potential costs of running a commercial food waste recycling service, and the income it could generate, will support decision-making on how the service is designed. The following questions should be considered by local authorities when developing a business case and setting fees and charges:

- ♦ What are the expected savings in disposal costs if food waste is collected as recycling compared to as residual waste?
- ♦ What is the revenue potential of the service?
- ♦ What are the operational costs of running the service?
- ♦ How may operational costs differ if the service is a dedicated commercial service compared to being co-collected with the household service?
- ♦ How may operational costs vary if the frequency of collections is altered?
- ♦ What are competitors charging for their services?
- ♦ Can the service be offered at a competitive price point?
- ♦ How can customers be financially incentivised to recycle their food waste?
- ♦ What resources will be needed to deliver the service? Consider vehicles, crew, initial stocks of sacks and containers, plus additional information management and customer systems, communications, and customer engagement and education.
- ♦ Are existing transfer station or disposal facilities able to accept commercial food waste? If not, where will commercial food waste be taken for transfer and disposal?
- ♦ How long will it take for the service to break even? Will this be determined using a tonnage per shift, or within a particular timescale if customer projections are realistic?
- ♦ Are there any local authorities already providing a commercial food waste recycling service that could review and give feedback on your business case?



Local authority insight

Since introducing their commercial food waste recycling service in 2012, Hackney have offered this to their customers free of charge. When the service was introduced, disposal costs for food were much higher than they are currently and Hackney were keen not to pass these costs on to their customers. Doing so would have resulted in very low take-up of the service and would have financially disadvantaged local businesses.

Hackney made the decision to offer their commercial food waste recycling service free of charge, meaning the service does not cover its costs. As such, it is offered at sales officers' discretion, and only to businesses that also have a residual waste and dry recycling service with the council.

The commercial food waste recycling service does receive some income, as Ridley Road market utilises it and these costs are recharged internally.

The cost of residual and recycling services have not been increased to cover the costs of providing a free food waste recycling service, so although the costs of disposal have come down, the service still runs at a loss. More recently, Hackney have revisited their fees and charges, considering whether charges for the commercial food waste recycling service could be introduced. However, members have not supported this to date due to prioritising sustainability, and not wishing to introduce any measures that might adversely affect recycling rates.

Local authority insight

The income from providing a commercial food waste recycling service is unlikely to fully cover the costs of providing it – it is the corresponding reduction in residual waste disposal charges and associated costs that will provide the additional savings to balance out the overall costs of the service.

Bexley price their commercial food waste recycling service 25% lower than their residual service. This reflects the lower disposal costs from having segregated food collections, and it incentivises customers to separate their food for recycling, lowering Bexley's disposal costs further.

2.6 Staff resources

Local authorities should not underestimate the additional staff resource required to implement a successful commercial food waste recycling service. Considerable handholding may be required to get customers up to speed with the service and, depending on the customer, this could take months. Some customers may need ongoing support, particularly those who sign up but struggle to segregate their food waste for recycling. For example, Hackney signed up 200 businesses to their service initially, but found that only around 50% used the service fully. Monitoring of the service is therefore crucial to ensure that customers are separating out their food waste and using the service correctly.

Local authority insight

Officers from several local authorities advise that having sufficient staff resource to educate and support customers is key to a new service being successful:

- Bexley employed two full-time members of staff to support their initial commercial food waste recycling trial.
- Kensington and Chelsea will be employing one full-time member of staff to support the implementation of their new service in the first year.

Local authority insight

Westminster segment their customers into directly contracted customers, sub-contracted customers, high volume key accounts (that produce one to two tonnes of food waste per day) and other stakeholders such as business improvement districts and service advocates. They have found that with food waste recycling, customers can be very uncertain about the new processes and need significant support to implement the service. Westminster starts by carrying out a waste audit to determine whether it is viable to provide the service. Westminster offer food waste reduction advice, and work with the customer to determine how food waste can be segregated and stored internally. They also offer staff training, either in person or online, to inform businesses about how to implement food waste recycling successfully.

3. Operations

3.1 Containers

Container sizes

The range of container sizes a local authority can offer for food collections is likely to differ from those for residual waste and dry recycling services. Due to the heavy weight of food, particularly when segregated, 240 litre (or bigger) containers risk becoming too heavy, potentially creating health and safety issues for crews and damage to the containers. This has been evidenced by Haringey, who currently use 240 litre containers. The crews find these too heavy, and so Haringey are exploring moving customers to smaller containers (for example, moving from one 240 litre bin to two 140 litre bins) whilst ensuring their pricing structure does not mean businesses will be financially penalised.

140 litre containers are the most common size used by the local authorities who contributed to the workshops and this toolkit.

Variations from this include:

- Oxford City Council, who use 120 litre and 200 litre containers and allow a maximum weight of 60kg per container. They use Henkel bins with rounded bottoms, which are designed to prevent vermin chewing the corners of bins.
- Although Westminster provide 140 litre containers as standard, they also offer 240 litre containers for customers that only produce light food waste (such as bakeries and patisseries). Although this increases the service offering, having different sized containers based on the type of food produced will require more staff resource to validate initial requirements with businesses, as well as to support ongoing monitoring (for example, if crews report that bins are too heavy).

Caddies and sacks

Oxford City Council provide 23 litre caddies and 80 litre sacks that each have a maximum weight of 10kg. This service was introduced as it was developed from the authority's household food waste recycling service. However, they have found that caddies can cause problems with street clutter and the sack service has had low take-up. They are considering moving customers who use the caddy or sack services to container collections in the future.

Some local authorities do not offer caddies or sacks as part of their commercial food waste recycling service due to street scene concerns and their aim of minimising street clutter, for example Haringey have so far not explored the use of such containment, due to these issues.

Westminster offer 23 litre caddies for customers who do not have sufficient storage space for a 140 litre container. However, they do not provide a sack service for their own commercial food waste recycling service. They also do not allow any business to leave segregated food waste in sacks on the public highway, regardless of the waste collector. This minimises street scene issues and addresses concerns surrounding animal by-product regulations.

Internal bins and caddies

Providing caddies, liners and internal bins increases service costs but makes it easier for customers to use a commercial food waste recycling service. Some customers may wish to use their own internal bins, but offering them the choice makes a service more versatile. Internal bins could be provided at a cost, or be hired out to customers, to cover the authority's additional costs.

- Bexley offer internal bins that are taller and thinner than standard caddies, to fit into smaller spaces, or the business can use their own.
- Westminster offer support in sourcing suitable internal bins if a customer does not want to use those provided by the council, including putting them in touch with suppliers.
- Haringey do not currently provide caddies but will assist customers to source suitable internal storage.

Including liners as part of a commercial food waste recycling service will make the service more attractive to customers as bins will be cleaner (a WRAP survey of householders showed

that the perception of food waste as being smelly was a common barrier to participation¹¹). The type of liners a local authority uses (compostable or plastic) may depend on whether commercial food waste is co-collected with household food waste, as there may be a requirement for consistency between the two. Consideration should also be given to difficulties with communicating different messages on liners to businesses and households, as well as the benefit of having shared stock and resources. In addition, local authorities should explore suitable liner types with their disposal authority and/or facility, determining whether there are any restrictions or cost implications of compostable or plastic.

- Bexley provide compostable liners as part of their service. The cost of liners was initially added to the cost of the service but now it has been absorbed by the disposal savings made.
- Haringey and Westminster provide plastic liners.
- Hackney do not provide liners as part of their service; customers are required to buy their own compostable liners.



Container cleaning

Local authorities should consider whether to include container cleaning alongside their commercial food waste recycling collections. This could be offered free of charge, the cost could be incorporated into the collection charge, or the service could be provided at an additional charge. As well as providing customers with liners, Westminster offer a twice-yearly bin swap, included in the price of collection, with additional cleaning as a chargeable service. Oxford City Council have a dedicated vehicle to clean containers, and charge customers for this service.

Bin weighing

The opportunity that bin weighing can offer commercial food waste recycling services should also be considered. In conjunction with weighing residual waste collections, it can: allow price banding for heavier residual bins, provide a financial incentive for customers to take up a food waste recycling service, and increase the local authority's competitiveness.

Local authority insight

Oxford City Council have a 60kg limit on all bins, regardless of size. They have on-board weighing on their collection vehicles which records the weight of all container collections. The back-office team are notified of any overweight bins and follow up with the customer to review their current set up, determining whether any changes to capacity or pricing are required.



3.2 Vehicles

Co-collection with household services

Co-collecting commercial food waste recycling with household collections maximises the existing capacity of both vehicles and crews. This efficiency removes pressure to fill a dedicated commercial round which can be difficult, particularly when starting up a new service. However, co-collection may restrict a commercial service in terms of collection days. Commercial collections would have to be scheduled around existing household rounds and capacity, which may provide less flexibility for businesses. Co-collection may also impact on liner use by commercial customers.

Local authority insight

Haringey Council currently uses dedicated commercial food waste recycling vehicles and their customers can use plastic bags for their food waste recycling. If Haringey moved to a co-collection model, the plastic bags would be classed as contamination, as the household food waste recycling service utilises a different disposal route which only accepts compostable liners.

Vehicle types

The local authorities who took part in the workshops have a range of vehicle types for their commercial food waste recycling services, with some having dedicated food vehicles and others using standard collection vehicles.

The collection vehicles used for Haringey's commercial food waste recycling service are not narrow access, which can be problematic when undertaking collections from certain customers. Oxford City Council have two 12 tonne vehicles for their commercial food waste recycling service – one that provides a dedicated commercial round operating six days a week (Monday to Saturday), and the other a co-collecting vehicle which operates three days per week. The council have recently developed a business case for the addition of extra vehicles and rounds due to increased demand over time.

When looking at vehicle types, local authorities should also ensure they will have access to a backup vehicle. When Westminster first launched their commercial food waste recycling service, they used bespoke vehicles. They found that the vehicle capacity was too limited, and the need for extra bespoke vehicles for back-up added inefficiencies, so they switched to standard 26 tonne collection vehicles, meaning they have access to a wider fleet for contingency purposes.

3.3 Disposal method for commercial food waste recycling

Both the Mayor of London and Defra support anaerobic digestion (AD) as the preferred disposal method for food waste recycling as it offers a greater CO₂ emissions benefit compared to landfill, incineration or in-vessel composting (IVC).¹² AD also allows for higher contamination thresholds, with food de-packaged before processing, so liners are removed. This de-packaging gives the option of using either plastic or compostable liners.

Currently, gate fees for AD and IVC offer a considerable saving compared to incineration or landfill. The letsrecycle.com price index for November 2023¹³ shows the differential in disposal costs:

Disposal route	Price per tonne (£)
Energy from waste (incineration)	£90 to £116
Landfill (including tax)	£122.10 to £133.70
IVC	-£36 to -£65
AD	-£5 to £30

Disposal costs are variable and market-driven. When establishing a service and undertaking modelling, local authorities should review the most recent figures available. Disposal fees should also be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure customer collection costs are appropriate.

Despite disposal costs for AD and IVC being cheaper per tonne than incineration and landfill, commercial waste services are often sold by volume and so there may not be an immediate, direct saving for customers. Local authorities should ensure that they fully re-profile a customer's service when food waste recycling is taken up, reducing their residual waste collections accordingly to ensure they do not bear additional costs.

3.4 Contamination

Although none of the local authorities presenting at the workshops had experienced real problems with contamination within their commercial food waste recycling service compared to dry recycling collections, they do have policies for how to manage contamination if it arises:

- ♦ Oxford City Council record contamination on their in-cab recording system, with crews also taking a photo which is sent to the support team. The support team then follows up with the customer, communicating why their bin has not been collected and how to resolve the contamination issue.
- ♦ Westminster allow three contamination incidents per customer in a rolling 12-month period before charging a penalty. Westminster engage customers on how to resolve contamination issues and encourage them to remove the contamination themselves, allowing the container or caddy to be collected as food waste recycling.

3.5 Collection days, frequencies and timings

Determining the collection days and timings offered will depend on the customer base and local enforcement policies. Some local authorities, such as Oxford City Council, have a clear-streets policy where no recycling or waste can be placed on streets between 10:00 and 18:00. Haringey's commercial food waste recycling collections are performed at night-time and early morning, with main roads collected around 02:00 and other locations around 06:00.

Businesses which produce high volumes of food waste, such as hospitality premises and hotels, are likely to require frequent collections, including weekends. During their soft market testing exercise, Kensington and Chelsea found that a high number of customers would require a weekend collection, and Bexley are looking to introduce a weekend collection due to demand.



Local authority insight

- ♦ Kensington and Chelsea currently have one vehicle and crew for commercial food waste recycling collections but plan to expand to two vehicles (with both co-collecting commercial and household food waste). They are also considering including a weekend collection.
- ♦ Westminster provide a seven day collection service, with individual collection frequencies set by customers.
- ♦ Oxford City Council provide a six day per week service covering Monday to Saturday (which is run as overtime).
- ♦ Bexley currently provide a five day collection, with three days as dedicated commercial collections and two days co-collected with the household service. They are looking into expanding this to include a weekend collection, to increase their commercial offer to customers.
- ♦ Haringey offer flexible collections. Most are weekly, but more or less frequent collections can be accommodated if requested by customers.
- ♦ Hackney offer collections five days per week, Monday to Friday, with collections scheduled in the afternoons between 14:00 and 20:00.

3.6 Timed collections

Commercial food waste recycling collections may be time-banded, as with other collections, depending on local street scene policies. Depending on the type of businesses a local authority collects from, early morning or night-time collections may be preferable (e.g. to avoid restaurants putting waste out at the end of a shift and leaving it on the street for a prolonged period of time). Close working with enforcement teams is important to ensure that time banding is adhered to.

Local authority insight

In Oxford city centre, restrictions mean that no recycling or waste can be placed on the public highway between 10:00 and 18:00. Outside these hours, any recycling or waste presented must be collected within two hours. Oxford City Council run a morning collection round for their commercial food waste recycling service and ask customers to present waste between 05:30 and 06:00 to avoid it sitting out for long periods of time. Despite requesting that their customers comply with these presentation times, some put their recycling and waste out in the early hours of the morning, with a lot being put out at around 02:00. Oxford City Council are exploring the introduction of a second collection at 08:00 to enable these businesses to put their recycling and waste out once they open in the morning.

3.7 Working with waste brokers

Working with waste brokers provides an additional opportunity for local authorities to grow their commercial food waste recycling service. Local authorities offer flexible, low cost and efficient local collections, so will often be a good provider of choice for businesses who procure services through waste brokers. Developing strong relationships with brokers also opens up opportunities for local authorities to take on sub-contracted work from regional or national private waste collectors who may not be able to operate as efficiently on a local level.

Westminster considers waste brokers part of their regular customer portfolio. They proactively maintain relationships with brokers, especially those that have a high number of customers within Westminster. Oxford City Council started off by working with a small selection of waste brokers. When this proved beneficial for their service, they reached out to several others, which has supported the growth of their service into the wider Oxfordshire area. Their experience is that once a proactive dialogue with waste brokers is commenced, this leads to sales enquiries being received from brokers.



4. Marketing and business engagement

Marketing and business engagement is an essential part of a local authority's commercial recycling and waste service. It is crucial that sufficient budget is committed. Without budget, a service will not grow – and has the potential to shrink.

Promotion of services is important not only for attracting new customers, but for retaining existing ones. Successful marketing can create interest in the service, overcome

barriers to uptake and participation, and enable contamination issues to be addressed.

Local authorities should establish an annual budget for marketing and engagement regardless of the size, or ambition, of their commercial food waste recycling service. Spend on marketing should be proportionate to the size of the service, ensuring that spend can be recovered through customer fees and charges.



4.1 Who will market the service?

Commercial waste teams should engage their council communications team to work in partnership to develop, and deliver, a marketing strategy. If there are constraints in working with an internal communications team, for example due to resourcing, local authorities can explore using a specialist marketing agency. Agencies can be brought in to set up an initial marketing strategy or provide support longer term.

Local authority insight

Westminster made the decision to outsource the marketing for their commercial recycling and waste service ten years ago as their own internal communications team did not have the specific skills or resources needed to support the service satisfactorily. The communications team did not have sufficient capacity to provide the level of support required, and they were unable to deviate from standard council language, which was important as the audience were businesses, rather than residents. These issues led the commercial waste and communications teams to agree that the service should look externally for marketing support. Westminster engaged several potential marketing agencies, targeting smaller ones that were more likely to be agile and flexible.

For the past ten years, BabelQuest have handled Westminster's marketing for their commercial recycling and waste service with great success. The main benefits have been the access to creativity, flexibility and expertise, and the effectiveness of partnership working. Having the website managed externally also allows the service to integrate with additional software, supporting business development and sales lead harvesting.



4.2 Profiling customers

Different subsets of customers will require different marketing approaches, so local authorities should profile their customers and tailor content to suit their business. This is more likely to attract them to take up a commercial food waste recycling service. Customers can be segmented by contract size, business type, or a combination of both.

Oxford City Council segment their customer base into colleges/universities, key accounts (contracts worth over £5,000 per year), schools and small businesses. They are currently focusing on marketing their commercial food waste recycling service to their key accounts that do not yet recycle any food.

Case study

Westminster create 'buyer personas' to inform their marketing. Buyer personas are semi-fictional representations of ideal customers based on real data, combined with some educated speculation about customer demographics, behaviour patterns, motivations and goals.

Buyer personas are not just target markets, job titles, or based on specific products. They are based on customer pain points¹⁴ and motivations for using certain products and services. Creating these personas allows Westminster to tailor marketing content, as each persona has different communication needs. An example of a persona's pain point, emotional driver¹⁵ and solution are shown below.

Pain point	Emotional driver	Solution
Service delivery is poor due to slow and/or inefficient systems, causing the business and its revenue to suffer.	Use of multiple systems is a nightmare, causing disruption to the business and frustration across teams.	Needs fast, high-quality solutions with a hands-on provider who can offer 24/7 technical support.

Buyer personas should be created with input from the whole commercial recycling and waste service, including frontline staff (both operational and customer service), as they will spend the most time interacting with customers and will have a good understanding of their requirements.

Westminster has six defined buyer personas. As each persona requires different content, they do not market to all of them at the same time. Campaigns will usually focus on just one or two personas. Three examples of Westminster's defined personas are shown below. Each of these will require different information to align with their different motivations, their interest in the service, and what they need the service to deliver. For example, cost and service driven personas will want information on competitiveness, reliability and ease of use, whereas an ideology driven customer will want information on the sustainability aspects of the service and their participation in it.

Examples of personas using food waste recycling services

Simon Multi-site manager Partnership driven	Dean Professional purchasing Cost and service driven	Suzanne Small office manager Cost and ideology driven
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing down issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contamination/non-compliance of tenants • Any equipment, e.g. compactors not working • Holds up everything • Managing up issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good, accurate reporting • Demonstrating that site has achieved compliance and targets • Range of services • Increased recycling • More reporting on CSR (key to landlord) • Had looked around and went with best overall service offering at right price • See Westminster as a partner, not just a supplier • They "hold your hand" in getting the job done and reporting on achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of other things to sort/procure – could do without worrying about waste management • Missed collections have a very quick knock-on effect on site operations as very little space made available for waste storage ("storage doesn't make money...") • General managers complaining about the performance of a supplier that Dean procured them to use • "Invisible reliability" • Fits in the budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of internet searching for services needed, including social media • Little more time than most to read up and propose a supplier to bosses • Key influencers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client/visitor impact • Level of service provided • Cost • Wants to be as green as possible • "Everything she is told is true to her"

4.3 Communication channels

Online

Online communications can include a commercial waste website, AI solutions (such as chat bots), social media channels (for example Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), email and phone. For local authorities that are launching a commercial food waste recycling service, developing the website is a recommended first step. A service website is the equivalent of a shop window, and it will be a crucial tool

in competing with private waste collectors. The London Recycles website has a business recycling section¹⁶ with information on how to reduce waste and increase recycling, along with toolkits for businesses to download on duty of care responsibilities and communications materials. Authorities can link to all of this information from their own service pages to promote consistent recycling messaging.

Westminster and BabelQuest's 10 tips for web pages

Local authorities should:

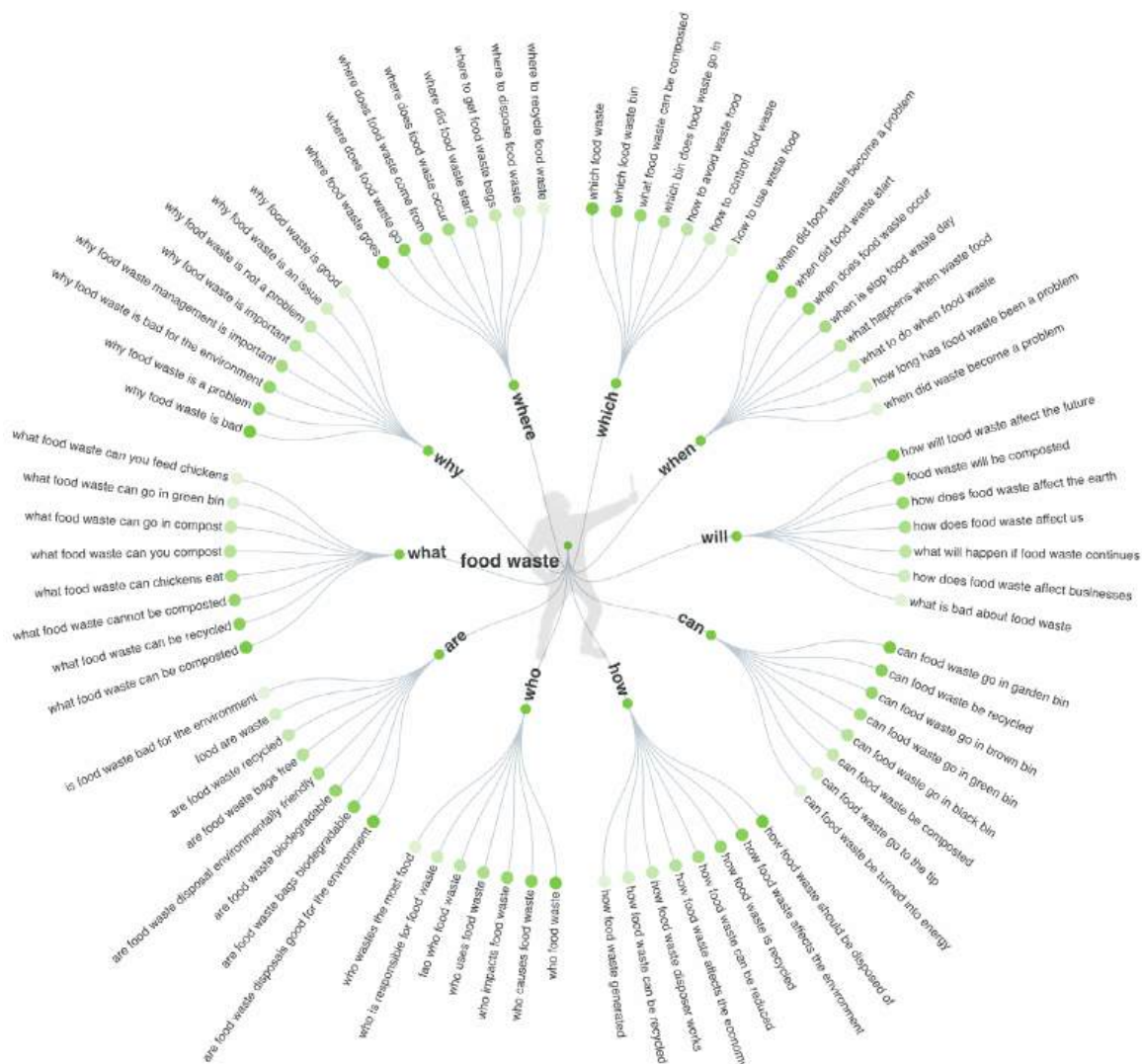
1. Undertake search engine optimisation¹⁷ (SEO) research by:
 - a. Inputting the name of their council and “food waste” into a search engine, reviewing the search results and noting where they, and their competitors, appear in the list.
 - b. Reviewing the autofill prompts on search engines to understand what businesses are searching for.
2. Look at how local competitors market their food waste recycling service when deciding how to market their own.
3. Utilise this SEO research and competitor information to guide content creation, thinking about what sort of customers to attract, and creating buyer personas.
4. Ensure all content is written from the customer's perspective, not the service perspective. For example, lead with key service information rather than legal and enforcement information.
5. Use ‘skyscraping’ and go one better than what their competitors are claiming. For example, if a competitor has ‘five reasons to use our service’, local authorities should come up with six reasons to use theirs.
6. Think about how they are going to answer questions from potential or existing customers. There are good self-service technical solutions for FAQs that can also rate content and record what people are searching for.
7. Consider what nurturing and follow-up they are going to do. If a business downloads a resource, automate a follow-up email with additional information or a call to action.
8. Design their content with a specific aim in mind, as different content types serve different purposes and personas. For example, content on Westminster's website is targeted at either attracting, converting or delighting its customers.
9. Drive their content ideas by using Answer The Public.¹⁸
10. Ensure that all content has a ‘call to action’, for example “book a waste audit”.

Answer The Public

Answer The Public is a keyword research tool, an easy-to-use website that can help generate ideas for marketing content. It uses Google search data to generate questions that people are asking about the topic of your choice. For example, typing 'food waste' into [Answer The Public](#) brings up 78 questions (shown in the diagram below) that people ask about food waste. Many of these can be answered through the marketing content a local authority produces, for example including information on how food waste recycling actually works, or how food waste is linked to climate change.

Local authority insight

Westminster time their marketing emails to customers to align with when they are most likely to re-order a service. This helps with retention at a time when customers are most likely to move to another provider. Using customer data, Westminster have predicted re-order dates for individual customers, and established workflows so that emails are sent out to remind customers to re-order. As well as prompting the customer to re-order with them, it removes any friction that the customer may experience about how to re-order. Predicted re-order dates are also shared with the sales team, so customers are also proactively contacted. This additional contact is particularly useful if customers have had service issues previously.



Results produced when 'food waste' is typed into Answer The Public
Source: [answerthepublic.com](#)

4.4 Offline communications

Local authorities should also consider producing physical communication assets such as leaflets, brochures and guides. Physical assets allow sales officers to hand information to customers face to face when completing sales visits, or mail it to them as part of campaigns or other council communications such as business rates letters.

Providing posters and stickers for containers and internal bins will promote recycling and reduce contamination. Branding of containers and vehicles should also form part of a local authority's promotional activity. Consideration can be given to promotional merchandise to give out at events where there are opportunities to market a service. ReLondon has developed a toolkit of commercial recycling and waste communications assets which are free to use for local authorities. These can be downloaded from the ReLondon website.¹⁹

- Westminster have produced written service guides (which include sector-specific information), case studies, and posters and stickers to communicate with customers. These are available for customers to download from their website as well as being provided to customers as a physical asset.



4.5 Engaging via partners

Local authorities can be creative when it comes to communicating with businesses and keeping them engaged with services. They should reach out to other internal council teams, or external partners, that engage and work with businesses in the borough to explore collaboration opportunities. The household recycling team may also have campaigns that can be expanded to businesses, particularly if it is a co-collected service. Examples of internal and external partners local authorities could collaborate with include:

- Other council teams, such as business rates, trading standards and environmental health
- Business improvement districts
- Trade associations
- Local business papers
- Service advocates, for example councillors, residents and business champions

Local authority insight

City of London use a range of methods to engage businesses as part of their Clean City Awards Scheme (CCAS).²⁰ They hold regular environment best practice meetings, at which a range of organisations, such as local businesses and charities, are invited to present to businesses within the Square Mile on topics such as food waste reduction, food sharing, cup recycling and refill schemes.

- **Promoting good practice:** City of London provide a dedicated member area on the CCAS website, with case studies showcasing local businesses' successes and resource packs on topics such as communication and climate action.
- **Working with other teams:** City of London work closely with their environmental health teams to promote good food management practices, helping businesses reduce their food waste.



4.6 Engaging with and rewarding existing customers

Finding ways to continually engage and reward customers, and celebrate successes, is an important part of a local authority's engagement with businesses and promotion of their service. Determining customer perception of the service and understanding how (and if) it meets their needs, as well as how it could be improved further, should be part of a local authority's promotional activity.

Support can be provided to customers through communications materials as well as, or instead of, frontline staff such as sales officers, customer service staff and crews. Local authorities should consider how they can reward customers for good practice, which will in turn enhance their own reputation and provide a financial benefit. Rewarding customers for their good practice is also a way of motivating them to improve further.

Local authority insight

- ♦ Westminster send a quarterly survey to all customers asking them to rate the service on a scale of one to three. A response is quick and simple to provide as the question uses a smiling, neutral and sad face. Any neutral or negative responses are followed up with supplementary questions, and customers who give a poor rating are contacted to enable their issues and concerns to be addressed.
- ♦ Bexley carried out a survey of customers in their food waste recycling trial to check how they had found the service and provide insights for service improvements. They also gave customers certificates to recognise their participation.
- ♦ The City of London CCAS recognises and awards exceptional effort in sustainable business practice. Receiving recognition is valuable to businesses and encourages healthy competition between them to become the most sustainable within the Square Mile.
- ♦ Westminster report back to customers on how much waste has been collected from them and what their recycling rate is. This is important in supporting customers and building relationships and trust.

Appendix: Drivers for commercial recycling and waste services

From a survey of businesses²¹ WRAP have identified several key drivers for local authorities in providing commercial recycling services – both food waste recycling and dry recycling. Recent policy developments, including the Mayor's London Environment Strategy²² and Defra's Resources and Waste Strategy,²³ along with London's green recovery from COVID-19, present further incentives for London's local authorities to deliver food waste recycling as part of their service package. These drivers are summarised below:

- ♦ **London Environment Strategy:** The Mayor of London published his London Environment Strategy in May 2018, setting targets for municipal waste and expanding responsibility to residents, employees, businesses, local authorities and private waste collectors. The Mayor expects London to achieve an overall municipal recycling rate (by weight) of 65% by 2030. To help achieve this, a 50% recycling target for local authority collected waste has been set for 2025, alongside a 75% business waste recycling target for 2030. Significant improvements in commercial recycling services will be required to achieve these targets. The Mayor has identified several interventions that are needed within the commercial waste industry, including the provision of separate food waste recycling collections for businesses. WRAP research²⁴ shows that local authorities are likely to achieve higher recycling rates if they offer a larger number of materials for collection.
- ♦ **Simpler Recycling:** The Environment Act 2021 sets out a number of policies to improve waste and resource efficiency across the UK. This includes the requirement for the separation and separate collection of recyclable waste (including food waste) from households and business premises – a policy referred to as 'Simpler Recycling'²⁵. Under Simpler Recycling, all businesses must separate and arrange for the separate collection of dry recyclable materials and food waste by 31 March 2025. Businesses with fewer than 10 full-time equivalent employees ('micro firms') have an extended deadline of 31 March 2027. ReLondon estimate that this accounts for 99% of London's businesses²⁶. Businesses must also arrange for the collection of plastic film for recycling by 31 March 2027.
- ♦ **Income:**²⁷ Local authorities can recover all costs associated with providing a commercial recycling and waste service, including investment costs that are required to improve or expand existing services. In addition, under section 95 of the Local Government Act 2003, an authority may set up a wholly council-owned trading company to deliver recycling and/or waste services on a commercial basis. Establishment of a trading company allows authorities to generate income rather than just cover costs.
- ♦ **Protecting the local economy:** Local businesses are supported through the provision of cost-effective, local and efficient services, protection of green jobs, and maintenance of a healthy environment for businesses.
- ♦ **Reinforcing household recycling:** By providing services for businesses that are consistent with local residents' services, local authorities can reinforce messages on recycling and encourage better use of both services.
- ♦ **Reducing the misuse of household waste services:** 41% of micro businesses dispose of their commercial recycling and waste in household services,²⁸ resulting in increased household service costs, as well as missed opportunities for income generation as part of the commercial recycling and waste service.
- ♦ **Optimising resources:** Co-collecting household and commercial recycling and waste maximises existing vehicle capacity and resources, enabling services to be delivered more cost-efficiently.

- ♦ **Commercial competition:** A significant proportion of private waste collectors across London offer commercial food waste recycling services and so have a competitive advantage over local authorities who do not. This may become even more relevant with the implementation of Simpler Recycling, where commercial food waste operators may be in the position to offer these services to Local Authority customers. One local authority reported that private waste collectors were targeting their customers on the basis that they offered food waste recycling and the local authority did not. By offering food waste recycling services, local authorities are not only protecting their existing customer base but are increasing opportunities to grow their market share. Providing commercial food waste recycling collections, and other segregated material collections such as paper/card or glass, is a key factor in enabling a local authority to service a bigger customer base and to win contracts with larger companies, who often prefer a total waste management provider. These customers often have a requirement to demonstrate their own, strong, environmental credentials.
- ♦ **Environmental benefit:** Offering a commercial food waste recycling service allows food to be diverted from incineration or landfill to composting via either IVC or AD. This diversion will reduce the CO2 emissions associated with disposal and supports the UK government's waste hierarchy. On average, WRAP estimates that for every tonne of food waste recycled via AD, 705kg of CO2e is saved when compared to landfill, and 41kg of CO2e is saved when compared to incineration with energy recovery.²⁹ As the Mayor of London and 28 of London's local authorities have declared climate emergencies, the diversion of food waste to more sustainable disposal methods should form a key part of plans to move to net zero CO2 emissions. IVC and AD also both allow for the recovery of nutrients from food waste, by producing compost or digestate which can be used to improve soils.
- ♦ **Cost benefit:** Diverting food waste away from incineration or landfill provides a cost benefit to local authorities, as disposal costs for AD and IVC are currently lower than for residual waste.³⁰ In November 2023, the average disposal cost per tonne of food ranged from -£5 to £30 for AD, compared with £90 to £116 per tonne for incineration.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consistency-in-household-and-business-recycling-in-england/outcome/government-response>
- 2 Number of businesses (enterprises) by employment size band', Office for National Statistics via the London Datastore - 2023 data for London: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/local-units-employment-size-borough>
- 3 https://relondon.gov.uk/resource_topic/commercial-waste-services
- 4 <https://londonrecycles.co.uk/business/>
- 5 https://relondon.gov.uk/resource_topic/commercial-waste-services
- 6 <https://londonrecycles.co.uk/business/>
- 7 Reduction and Recycling Plans are a requirement of the Mayor of London. All London waste authorities must produce four year plans setting out how they are working to deliver the Mayor's waste reduction and recycling targets
- 8 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/commercial-recycling-collections-guide>
- 9 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/commercial-food-waste-collection>
- 10 Bexley Council produced these maps using their customer database and business rates information.
- 11 <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/HH%20food%20waste%20guide%20section%202%202021%20final.pdf>
- 12 <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Carbon%20WARM%20Report.pdf>
- 13 <https://www.letsrecycle.com/prices/>
- 14 Customer pain points are persistent problems with a product or service that can inconvenience customers and their businesses (<https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/uncover-business-pain>)
- 15 Positive emotions toward a brand have a far greater influence on consumer loyalty than trust and other judgements, which are based on a brand's attributes (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/inside-the-consumer-mind/201302/how-emotions-influence-what-we-buy>)
- 16 <https://londonrecycles.co.uk/business/>
- 17 Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of making your site better for search engines.
- 18 <https://answerthepublic.com/>
- 19 <https://relondon.gov.uk/resources/toolkit-commercial-waste-services-communication-assets>
- 20 The CCAS is run by the City of London Corporation to help drive sustainable business. The scheme helps City of London businesses improve in the areas of air quality and climate action, communication and engagement around sustainability, resource efficiency and moving towards circular economy practices, and transitioning towards a Plastic Free City.
- 21 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/commercial-recycling-collections-guide>
- 22 <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/environment/london-environment-strategy>
- 23 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765914/resources-waste-strategy-dec-2018.pdf
- 24 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/commercial-recycling-collections-guide>
- 25 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consistency-in-household-and-business-recycling-in-england/outcome/government-response>
- 26 Number of businesses (enterprises) by employment size band', Office for National Statistics via the London Datastore - 2023 data for London: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/local-units-employment-size-borough>
- 27 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/commercial-recycling-collections-guide>
- 28 <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/guide/commercial-recycling-collections-guide>
- 29 <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Carbon%20WARM%20Report.pdf>
- 30 <https://www.letsrecycle.com/prices/>



The White Collar Factory
1 Old Street Yard,
London EC1Y 8AF

 @ReLondon_uk

 /company/reondonuk/

reondon.gov.uk