

Delay to Simpler Recycling requirement to collect plastic film for recycling

To: All English authorities, for information in Scotland/Wales/NI

Introduction

In the original Simpler Recycling requirements, Defra required the kerbside collection of plastic film (also known as flexible plastics or soft plastics) to be in place by **31 March 2027** for households and businesses, exactly a year after the initial Simpler Recycling requirements (food waste and other dry mixed recycling) which came into force on 31 March 2026 for households (and 2025 for businesses of over 10 people).

However, through our engagement with our local authority members, our State of the Market Survey, and other events such as the Defra Change Network and discussions with other local authority networks, it was clear that there were concerns around the collection and particularly the availability of end-markets for the recycling of the flexible plastic material, and whether a sufficient market and infrastructure would be in place by the deadline.

Proposed changes

Following these concerns raised by the local authority sector, in recognising the collection, sorting and reprocessing system is not yet ready to deliver plastic film recycling collections effectively at scale, Defra has responded to these concerns by announcing a delay to the mandatory implementation of the collection of flexible plastics, to **1 April 2030**.

This means that local authorities are no longer obliged to collect flexible plastics by the 31 March 2027 deadline. This does not preclude authorities from bringing in collections earlier, nor does it mean they should end a service if it is already in place.

Defra have informed us that they will work with industry to explore the changes needed, convening stakeholders in Autumn 2026 to kick-start this work. Defra also stated if authorities have already started or will be collecting this material in 2027/2028, this will be considered in the calculation of payments to local authorities under the pEPR scheme for 2027/2028, and are keen to ensure that early movers are not penalised.

In justifying the delay, Defra mentioned they are “*keen to avoid additional burden on local authorities, businesses and the wider sector during a period of significant transition*”

What about the devolved nations?

At the time of writing, the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own policies in place to mandate the collection of flexible plastics by 2027. Currently there have been no indications of a delay from those governments but we will inform members as soon as possible if this is announced.

What can local authorities do in the meantime?

Around 45 local authorities already collect flexible plastic from the kerbside, some through the FlexCollect scheme, others themselves. They operate a mixture of collection methods: separate bags collected as part of kerbside sort, survival bags sorted at the MRF, residents reusing their own bags, and collected loose fully commingled. Authorities should look at the lessons learned from these councils and begin to prepare for their own collections well ahead of the new 2030 deadline, seeking collection, infrastructure, MRF modifications and disposal outlets over the coming years.

Gareth Morton, Discovery Manager, Ecosurety, who led on the FlexCollect research, shared the FlexCollect trial findings at **APSE’s Waste and Recycling Seminar in October 2025**. You can view his slides [here](#).

Example of a kerbside collection in North Somerset where residents are encouraged to contain soft plastics their own tied bag



- glass bottles and jars. No broken glass, drinking glasses or sheet glass please. Remove the lids (place these in red bag for recycling)
- plastic bags and soft plastic wrapping, in a bag (or multiple bags if needed) no bigger than a carrier bag with the top tied

Source: North Somerset Council

Many supermarket chains collect flexible plastics for recycling at the front of their stores, and APSE is aware of some authorities encouraging residents to use these outlets, which in turn discourages residents from adding them to their mixed recycling bins. Local authorities may wish to incorporate this into their communications campaigns to reduce contamination if this is an issue in their area, or if it is a frequent request from residents.

Examples of council communications to encourage residents to recycle soft plastics at supermarkets



Source: Highland Council, Herefordshire Council

APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the delay to the mandatory collection of flexible plastics for recycling. Whilst the requirement was clearly put in place with good intentions, to increase the amount of materials collected and recycled, which is positive, it became obvious that the UK reprocessing capacity is currently unable to cope with the amount of material likely to be collected for recycling.

Whilst 63% of authorities who responded to our 2025 survey said that they would plan to collect the material if required, there were concerns around seeking sorting and disposal outlets. Many felt the collections themselves could be relatively straightforward, be it through separate bags as demonstrated in the FlexCollect trials, or collected loose, but this would require more advanced sorting technology at the MRF to remove the material which would be challenging. Furthermore, many authorities are under long-term contracts and may be unable to vary these or implement any MRF upgrades that may be required in the short timescale.

The lack of infrastructure and end markets is a further concern since this could result in stockpiles or exporting. Whilst the exporting of material for recycling is permissible, a possibility of negative press coverage of this could undermine the recycling system and damage confidence in local authorities if material were to end up in the wrong hands, low quality sites abroad, or simply end up in incineration at home or abroad.

The delay is therefore welcome to give the industry and flexible plastics reprocessing market time to mature, for new sites to be built and for government investment. In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that the UK market has been weak with several plastics recycling facilities becoming unviable and closing down, so significant infrastructure investment is required to create a domestic market for this material. There has been some good news though with a number of new plants being announced, but these would not be ready by March 2027.

Equally there is an imperative that local authorities consider future implementation of collections over the next 3.5 years, where possible, and if viable recycling outlets exist rather than waiting until the 2030 implementation date. Extending collection systems now can be a positive story for recycling, residents and elected members if they are able to recycle more plastics at the kerbside, as there is

currently a lot of confusion. Starting the dialogue now would be key to avoiding a bottleneck come this time in 2029 and being in the same position again if nothing has been done in the interim.

With mandatory food waste collections, there was a significant rush and bottleneck around the procurement of containers, vehicles and disposal outlets in the run-up to March 2026, so hopefully lessons can be learned and authorities that are able to seek the appropriate outlets can begin to phase in flexible plastic collections earlier than 2030. A number of authorities have successfully use facilities to bring in flexible plastic recycling fully commingled, making it easier for residents. The FlexCollect trials are helpful in demonstrating what works and what doesn't in terms of capturing the material and help to evidence effective collections. APSE would encourage authorities to look at best practice through the APSE Waste and Recycling network.

Bonni Jee
Principal Advisor
Waste and Recycling
APSE

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Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
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