



CLEAN PLATE

Impact Summary Report

Delivered by Big Ideas

Co-Produced with HMP Norwich

Introduction

Clean Plate is a groundbreaking initiative addressing the overlooked issue of food waste in prisons with a world-first toolkit, co-produced with staff and prisoners on the ground – because transformative change cannot happen without the inclusion of all.



Taking place during 2025-2026, we worked closely with HMP Norwich to create authentic, sustainable and impactful interventions on food waste with prisoners and prison staff.

The resulting tool kit is available for any prison to use to reduce their food waste and ensure compliance with new legislation on food waste disposal, thereby reducing prison exposure to fines.

Key outcomes:

- New co-produced toolkit with tried-and-tested guidance on how to reduce food waste in any prison
- New tools for reducing food waste at HMP Norwich including induction films, Prisoner Handbook, prison-wide activations and new food waste caddies in each cell.
- Change in culture across HMP Norwich

Before Clean Plate, food waste in prisons was not routinely measured and the scale of the issue was largely unknown.

Through co-production with staff and prisoners, Clean Plate has made food waste visible, measurable and manageable. It has delivered a genuine culture change at HMP Norwich and produced a toolkit that can be adopted by prisons across the estate.

“How much food gets wasted and pollution we’re causing just from food waste... it’s a very big thing isn’t it?!”

Prisoner, C Wing

Food waste is a growing concern within the prison system. We have the largest prison population per head in western Europe, projected to rise to 114,200 by 2027. Being such a large-scale system, the resulting food waste is often huge.

But food waste in prisons is not just an environmental concern. It undermines cleanliness, blocks pipes and sewage systems, encourages rats and bad smells, and impacts the safety and security of the prison environment. Tackling it is therefore fundamental to improving the living and working conditions of prisoners and staff alike.

Clean Plate was piloted with the ambition of achieving real and lasting change, and creating a pathway for systemic reform across the prison network.

Programme Overview

Clean Plate was developed and piloted at HMP Norwich over a 12-month period. The programme centres on co-production with staff and prisoners to design practical, lasting interventions that reduce food waste and shift culture.

The audit

The first critical step was making the problem visible. Through a co-produced food waste audit devised and conducted by staff and prisoners themselves, we discovered that HMP Norwich was disposing of at least 180 tonnes of food waste per year. This provided the evidence needed to advocate for change, and the simple act of measuring and raising awareness has itself been a powerful lever.

“Food waste generally has become a challenging problem which can undermine cleanliness, block pipes and sewage systems, and greatly reduces the prison’s green credentials.”

Governor, HMP Norwich

The toolkit

At the heart of the programme is a digital toolkit co-designed with staff and prisoners. It is built to be adaptable and practical, so that other prisons can apply it to their own context. The toolkit draws directly on the experience of implementing Clean Plate at HMP Norwich.



Interventions at HMP Norwich

Food waste audit process – a repeatable method owned by staff and prisoners for measuring food waste and tracking progress.

Prisoner learning resources – a Handbook and certificate scheme that supports prisoner engagement and has been adopted by Education teams for literacy activities.

Prisoner and Staff induction films – co-created with staff and prisoners in two versions so the every member of staff and every prisoner receives training on food waste on arrival. The films are described as something “never seen before in the prison service.”

Inter-wing competition – approved and supported by the Governor and predicted to deliver a 50% reduction in general waste food contamination.

Food caddies in every cell – a fundamental shift in how food waste is handled day-to-day in the prison.

Relationships & Advocacy



We build interventions with the people inside the system rather than for them. The result is relational, adaptive work that shifts culture from the ground up and creates pathways for lasting, sector-wide change.

A priority at the beginning of the programme was to build relationships across the prison and create a network of internal advocates to support culture change. Our primary relationship

was with Industries Manager James Laurens who was integral to the success of the pilot. We collaborated on every aspect of the pilot, constantly problem-solving and adapting in response to the information and data we were getting.

We engaged with prisoners early on through prisoner-staff forums and prisoner education via the Handbook and Certificate scheme. We visited the prison weekly and built relationships with prisoners, consulting each week and responding to suggestions and ideas. We held a stall at a staff wellbeing day with information about the project, consultation and fun activities, which allowed even more engagement across prison staff network. This was important as change can only come when the prison staff community is engaged and connected.

At the same time we equally engaged with staff through the forums and weekly visits, ensuring we consulted across the departments eg. kitchens, prison officers, waste management and the Senior Leadership Team. We identified staff as a priority as they are the consistent stakeholder in the prison and are influential to changing processes.

This process empowered staff and prisoners to engage with the programme and created supporters across the prison.

Impact

Reducing food waste

Clean Plate was delivered at HMP Norwich, which was disposing of at least 180 tonnes of food waste per year before the project began.

We anticipate a 50% reduction in contamination of general waste with food waste at HMP Norwich by the end of the project, which we estimate as a 30–32.5% reduction in food waste overall. Final data will follow the inter-wing food waste competition taking place at the end of April. Over the next 12 months, we estimate a 54–58.5 tonne reduction in food waste, with potential for this to reach up to 81 tonnes.



Staff response & Advocacy

Staff across HMP Norwich responded with genuine passion and commitment. Tackling food waste as a shared challenge united staff and prisoners around a common goal, with many becoming advocates for the project, from operational and office staff to the Governor himself.



The project has empowered staff to shift from problem-identifying to problem-solving. Kitchen and catering staff and Prison Officers in particular have taken ownership, as we are seeing with the upcoming inter-wing competition.

Change is hard to make in prisons. Seeing it actually happen has been inspiring for staff, and they have been vital stakeholders throughout. With

the extremely high turnover of prisoners at Norwich, staff provide consistency and ensure that initiatives are compliant and operationally sound.

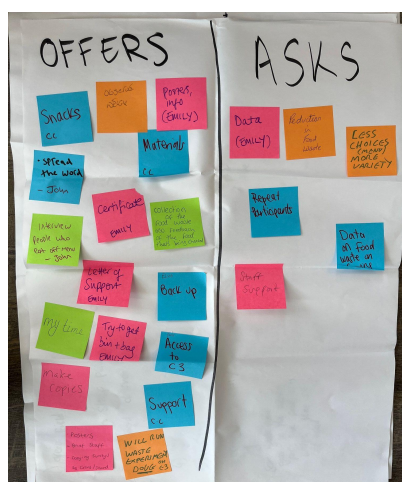
We discovered passionate, dedicated staff who are instrumental in pushing sustainability forward. At HMP Norwich this was Industries Manager James Laurens, without whom this project would not have been possible.

"HMP Norwich has been at the forefront of this pilot, setting a benchmark for innovation and sustainability."

James Laurens, Industries Manager, HMP Norwich

By the end of the pilot we changed the prison priorities and engaged with the Governor as a key milestone in the process.

Participant Experience



Prisoners engaged enthusiastically with Clean Plate, and co-production methods meant that prisoners felt genuinely involved in shaping their environment. This has improved wellbeing for both prisoners and staff.

Food waste has proven to be a fun and neutral topic for engagement, evident in the tone of the induction films and the energy brought to initiatives and activities. The Handbook has been taken up by Education teams.

"Makes me feel important. Makes me feel involved. Having a big ripple effect, positive one."

Prisoner, C Wing

What next?

Clean Plate has attracted significant attention from the prison sector. Big Ideas is seeking funding to support other prisons to use the toolkit and to continue to support HMP Norwich.

"The importance and impact of the Clean Plate project cannot be underestimated, and we need to act now to set new standards. Not only are we striving to understand our food waste problem for the first time, but we are driving a culture change across both staff and prisoner habits of old."

Declan Moore, Governor, HMP Norwich

Legacy

The pilot has enabled genuine culture change at HMP Norwich and created a pathway for systemic change across the prison network. With HMP Norwich Industries Manager, we have put in place a sustainable mechanism with internal support to continue advocating for reduced food waste at the prison, as a legacy of the project.

Alongside a rollout of the toolkit, this presents an opportunity for fundamental, systemic change that will not only reduce food waste significantly but will also improve the living environment of prisoners in their cells and the working environment for staff.

"I'm proud of the way we have worked together within the prison and with the team at Big Ideas to set a new benchmark for innovation and sustainability."

James Laurens, Industries Manager, HMP Norwich

Clean Plate demonstrates that meaningful food waste reduction is achievable even within the most complex institutional settings, when you work with the people within them to lead the change. With an ever-growing prison population, the issue of food waste has never been more relevant.

Clean Plate is funded by Eat It Up from Hubbub with support from the Starbucks 5p cup charge. Hubbub's "Eat It Up Fund" has backed 13 game-changing food waste solutions including Big Ideas.