



Reducing single-use plastic packaging in public procurement

The examples of catering services for the Lyon Metropolitan Area

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In a nutshell

The Métropole de Lyon, a French authority covering 58 municipalities and 1.4 million inhabitants, embedded single-use plastic elimination directly into its catering framework contract (2023–2026), covering everything from protocol receptions to packed lunches.

The approach is straightforward: **all disposable plastic tableware, containers, and decorative items are forbidden, hard reusable tableware is mandatory, and individual packaging must be avoided.** The only exception is packed/picnic meals, where recyclable or biodegradable cardboard is permitted.

Rather than writing abstract commitments, the Métropole built the requirement into binding technical specifications and weighted environmental performance at 10% of the award criteria, making zero single-use plastic a condition of winning the contract, not a nice-to-have.

Four years in, the results speak for themselves: zero waste practices are now embedded in supplier operations, the contract has helped consolidate local eco-responsible catering businesses, and the model is being extended across the authority's entire procurement framework. A new, more demanding contract is already planned for 2026.

The core lesson? Start with catering. Solutions already exist, the impact is real, and the visibility of events makes it one of the most powerful places to show, not just say, that zero single-use plastic is becoming the norm.

Authority	Métropole de Lyon
Type	Metropolis - unique French authority combining department and urban community competences
Area	58 municipalities, 1.4 million inhabitants
Contract type	Framework agreement with purchase orders
Duration	2 years, renewable once for 2 additional years (2023–2026)
Maturity level	Generalisation
Scope	Multi-service contract serving all authority departments

Four lots:

- **Lot 1:** Protocol catering services- e.g official receptions & ceremonies, inauguration or signing events, formal dinners hosted by elected officials or the executive, award ceremonies or public commemorations;
- **Lot 2:** Light refreshments (reserved contract - open only to social economy enterprises);
- **Lot 3:** Cocktails, buffets, lunches and dinners;
- **Lot 4:** Breakfasts, snacks, packed meals and meal trays.

Content and rationale

Why focusing on catering services?

Catering and event management are high-visibility sectors for local authorities, making them powerful channels for demonstrating zero waste commitments and raising awareness among a wide range of stakeholders: staff, elected officials, partners, and citizens alike.

Beyond visibility, four practical factors made catering a priority contract:

- **High volumes:** recurring spend across all authority departments;
- **Recurring contract:** regular renewal provides leverage and the ability to raise the bar over time;
- **Existing supplier offer:** upstream market research in 2022 confirmed that local eco-responsible caterers already existed and were largely ready;
- **Ease of action:** solutions were available; the main task was writing the right requirements.

The contract also sits within a broader policy context. Compliance with France's EGALIM law (promoting quality food in public catering) and AGEC law (circular economy and waste reduction) is explicitly required. The contract was drafted ahead of France's national Zero Plastics Plan (2024) and Micropollutants Plan (2025) positioning the Métropole as a pioneer, not a follower.

The local market: ready but fragile

The 2022 market research found a growing number of committed eco-responsible caterers, several grouped within the TRESS cooperative, a local social economy network of zero waste catering businesses. However, some providers were still fragile following the Covid crisis, and one had not yet implemented reusable containers for meal tray deliveries. Flexibility was built into the contract to accommodate this, with full compliance achieved within the first year.

The Métropole de Lyon activated three complementary levers to embed zero single-use plastic into the contract:

- Technical specifications (CCTP¹): binding performance requirements on packaging;
- Environmental criteria - weighted at 10% of the scoring;
- Upstream supplier dialogue: market research conducted in 2022 to assess whether zero plastic catering offer actually existed locally before writing the requirements;

¹ CCTP – “Cahier des Clauses Techniques Particulières” – is the part of a French public procurement contract that sets out the specific technical requirements and performance obligations the contractor must meet.

What does the clause contain exactly?

Outright prohibitions:

- Any disposable plastic tableware (plates, cups, cutlery, etc.);
- Any product containing disposable plastic material, regardless of use;
- Any single-use disposable item used for decoration.

Positive obligations:

- Use hard, reusable tableware for all serviced events;
- Avoid individual packaging wherever possible;
- The service provider undertakes to collect and take back all containers, packaging (and waste, in the case of catered events with service staff) at the end of the service;
- For services provided without on-site staff, the provider will return to collect the reusable tableware and durable containers (a fixed fee may apply for equipment retrieval).

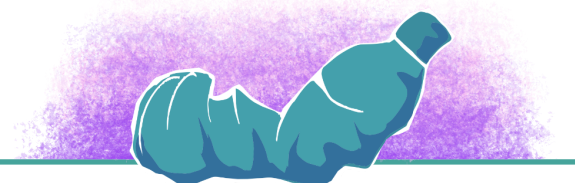
The one exception – packed/picnic meals:

- Recyclable or biodegradable cardboard packaging is permitted, to ensure safe storage and delivery in varying conditions (e.g. heat);
- All packaging inside the bag must be fully recyclable or biodegradable;
- Rationale: practical necessity acknowledged, but the bar is still set high – no plastic, no non-recyclable materials.

Why "limit" rather than "ban"?

The specifications call for avoidance and limitation of disposable packaging rather than an outright ban in every situation, for example, "avoid individual packaging" rather than "individual packaging is forbidden." This was a deliberate choice, made in 2022 before national zero plastic legislation existed, balancing ambition with operational and economic feasibility.

No progress plan was set for the packaging element, this was deemed too burdensome to implement. The only progress plan in the contract covers the share of organic products, which must rise from 35% to 95% over the contract period.



How is environmental performance scored (award criteria - 10%)?

Bidders are evaluated on four dimensions:

- Their delivery methods and logistics (carbon footprint, trip pooling);
- Specific measures to eliminate packaging and disposable products;
- How they manage food surpluses and food waste;
- Their system for collecting reusable containers after unserved deliveries.

The lotting strategy as an enabler

The four-lot structure was deliberately designed to facilitate zero waste logistics. Different service types - protocol events, light refreshments, full meals, packed lunches - carry different packaging challenges. Structuring lots accordingly allows requirements and collection logistics to be tailored to each type, making compliance more manageable for both providers and the authority.



Implementation of the clause – from contract to practice

Implementing zero single-use plastic clauses across a multi-service catering contract serving an entire metropolitan authority required genuine cross-departmental coordination. A dedicated project team was set up as early as 2022 to draft the new procurement framework, bringing together:

- **The resources department:** overall contract management and coordination of public buyers;
- **The communications department:** visibility, messaging, and internal communications;
- **The environment department (agricultural services):** organic food and local sourcing requirements;
- **The waste management department:** waste reduction and circular economy expertise.

Once the contract was live, orders were placed autonomously by each department according to their own needs – which created limited central oversight, and is now recognised as a gap to address.

Supporting staff who use the contract is key. A best practice guide was therefore produced for operational staff placing catering orders, covering:

- What to check before placing an order (compliance with zero plastic requirements);
- How to monitor service delivery on the day;
- Practical arrangements such as ensuring carafes and water points are available (to replace bottled water, which was removed from the price schedule).

This was the primary tool used to cascade the requirements to the many departments relying on the contract – as no formal training programme was put in place.

How does it work in practice?

For serviced events (cocktails, buffets, lunches, dinners):

- Providers delivered hard reusable tableware and collected everything – containers, packaging, and waste – at the end of the service.

For unserviced deliveries (breakfast trays, meal trays):

- Providers returned after the event to collect hard tableware and containers;
- A flat-rate collection fee was included in the price schedule to cover this;
- Providers were encouraged to pool collection trips to limit transport impact.

Replacing plastic thermos flasks:

- Plastic thermos flasks were substituted with stainless steel ones, supplied and collected by the provider, a minor but concrete operational adjustment.

Removing bottled water:

- Water bottles were removed from the price schedule entirely;
- This required the authority to ensure carafes and water points were made available at event venues, an organisational detail that needs to be anticipated and written into either internal procedures or contract conditions.

Where flexibility was applied

One provider did not yet have a reusable container solution for meal tray deliveries at contract start. Rather than disqualifying the bid, the authority:

- Accepted the provider with a clear expectation of transition;
- The move to reusable containers was initiated immediately upon contract award;
- Full compliance was achieved rapidly during the first year of the contract.

This pragmatic approach reflects the "operational feasibility" rationale behind the clause design, requirements were ambitious but grounded in what the local market could realistically deliver.

What was missing, and what the next contract will fix?

The 2023-2026 contract had one significant gap: no mandatory reporting or monitoring mechanism. Without it, the authority has no consolidated data on packaging volumes eliminated, substitution materials used, or reuse rates. The lessons learned are clear:

- Future contracts must include quantitative reporting obligations (waste avoided, packaging composition, % reuse, logistics of collection and washing);
- Penalties for non-compliance with single-use plastic clauses must be explicitly included;
- Clearer definitions of prohibited vs. permitted containers will reduce ambiguity;

The 2026 contract relaunch will address all of these points, with more stringent clauses and a monitoring framework built in from the start.

How have practices evolved so far?

The most significant outcome is not just compliance, it is **lasting behavioural change** among service providers: zero waste practices have become **permanently embedded** in supplier operations, extending well beyond contractual obligations. Providers selected through this contract have internalised zero single-use plastic as a standard way of working, not a one-off requirement.

Testing and iterating on the hardest case: packed picnic meals:

Packed meals represented the most operationally complex category, the one area where some disposable packaging remained permitted. Rather than accepting the status quo, the Métropole used its own internal events as a **live testing ground**:

- At an internal staff picnic bringing together **1,000 authority employees**, progressive packaging reduction trials were carried out:
 - Water bottles eliminated entirely;
 - Individually packaged salads removed;
 - Gradual shift towards finger food formats, which require little to no individual packaging.

This iterative approach demonstrates how authorities can use their own events to **push the boundaries of what the contract requires**, turning each event into a step towards deeper waste reduction.



A ripple effect beyond the contract

Perhaps the most telling sign of success is what happened **outside the contract itself**:

- The elimination of disposable packaging for takeaway food and the rollout of reuse solutions are **growing across the Lyon metropolitan area**, a likely induced effect of the contract demonstrating that zero single-use packaging is achievable and becoming the norm;
- One provider received direct **support from the Métropole** to extend reusable container use to meal deliveries in businesses – showing how procurement can open doors to broader innovation support;
- The **metropolitan canteen** – which serves authority staff daily – has taken the contract as a model and gone further:
 - Disposable cups eliminated for all in-house services;
 - Disposable packaging removed from meal trays;
 - A **consigned reusable container system for staff takeaway purchases** is set to launch in 2026.

Effects on the authority's wider procurement practices

The catering contract has become a catalyst for broader change across the Métropole's procurement framework:

- A **best practice guide on single-use plastic reduction** was drafted in September 2025 and shared with other public buyers via a webinar;
- The Métropole is pursuing **ISO 20121 certification** (responsible event management standard), planned for 2026, which will bring further requirements: consigned glass bottles, reusable delivery packaging, reusable tableware in inert materials (stainless steel, glass, ceramic), reusable textile tablecloths and napkins;
- The catering contract will be **relaunched in 2026 with more stringent clauses**, building on all lessons learned;
- Four **zero single-use plastic solutions for takeaway food** are being rolled out in 2025, with CITEO funding under the national *AMI Réemploi* call for projects, covering events, retailers, home meal delivery in partnership with municipalities, and the metropolitan canteen.

Lessons-learned for other local authorities

Is this replicable? Yes, and easily. The Métropole de Lyon rates this approach as straightforward to replicate, for three reasons:

- Solutions already exist in the market – this is not a pioneering ask with no supply response;
- Catering applies to **all types of authorities**, regardless of size or competence;
- The contract structure, clauses, and best practice guide can serve as a **ready-to-use template**.

Key conditions for success:

1. Conduct upstream market research to adapt requirements to locally available solutions;
2. Build **mandatory reporting** into the contract from day one;
3. Include **penalties for non-compliance**;
4. Anticipate the organisational details (water points, collection logistics) before the contract goes live;
5. Consider using your own events as a testing and improvement ground.

Key message for other authorities



"To reduce single-use plastic packaging in your contracts, start with catering services – solutions already exist, the impact on waste and plastic reduction is significant and visible. Think about waste reduction upstream of the event and throughout service delivery."

Cécile Bernard, Waste Department of the metropolis of Lyon

Contact



[Zero Waste Europe \(ZWE\)](#) is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards a better use of resources and the elimination of waste in our society. We advocate for sustainable systems; for the redesign of our relationship with resources; and for a global shift towards environmental justice, accelerating a just transition towards zero waste for the benefit of people and the planet.



[Zero Waste France](#) is an environmental association that advocates for an ambitious zero waste initiative that prioritises reduction at the source. Its vision is rooted in a comprehensive ecological transition, respect for human rights, and a greater focus on the most disadvantaged populations and future generations.



[The Elevating Reuse in Cities \(ERIC\) project](#) aims to support 18 to 30 EU municipalities in embedding waste prevention at the local level through the creation of Plastic Prevention Plans (PPPs). These plans focus on implementing reuse actions within the municipalities' direct sphere of public control, including public events, buildings, and procurement tenders.



[Lyon Métropole](#) is a major urban area in east-central France, centred around Lyon. Home to around 1.4 million people across 59 municipalities, it has embedded single-use plastic elimination directly into its catering framework contract (2023–2026), covering everything from formal receptions to packed lunches.



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