

Local Government/SOLACE/COSLA Waste Think-piece

Context

1. We are responding to the invitation by Mrs Lorna Slater MSP and Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity from November 2021, to identify key issues that would enable Local Authorities to improve waste reduction, increase recycling and meet net zero targets. Local Authority waste managers, COSLA and SOLACE have been working on this 'think-piece'. All 32 Local Authorities have been consulted and their responses have informed this work.

Summary

2. We need a step change in how we deal with our waste in Scotland if we are to meet the national waste, recycling and net zero targets. Against a background of significant pressure on public resources, we have to make sure that we employ the most effective means to drive progress.
3. We believe that there is no one single instrument that will produce such a step change. Instead, we need to:-
 - assess current waste collection and processing systems, especially in view of
 - new technological developments in waste processing post collection;
 - different challenges arising from urban/rural and individual household/tenement/communal bins.
 - build on increased public awareness, facilitate informed consumer choice and drive strong campaigns for behaviour change.
4. Any proposals within the Waste Routemap and a forthcoming Circular Economy Bill must be underpinned by clear evidence, peer reviewed by Local Authority waste professionals and tested, where appropriate, in pilot schemes before national rollout, and avoid undesirable consequences especially where these affect the poorest households. Any new measures put forward by Scottish Government have to be accompanied by adequate finance.
5. The key to meeting the national waste and carbon reduction targets is consistent and focussed improvement, informed by clear evidence from current service delivery and context, co-design of waste policy, access to relevant data and intelligence, and good collaboration between Local and Scottish Government, Zero Waste Scotland and the third sector. Significant service changes must be based on a thorough root-and-branch review of existing services and clear empirical evidence (including impact and investment assessment) and accompanied by strong behaviour change campaigns. Alongside, there is scope for exploring effective and relevant powers for Local Authorities to help meet future targets and improve performance.
6. The aim is to have in place a range of highly effective kerbside collection systems with common elements that are simple for householders to comply with. These need to link

effectively with waste processing, waste movement and circular economy opportunities, and maximise outputs from the whole process.

7. Access to sufficient and flexible finance, both revenue and capital, is crucial for progress.
8. Changes in waste collection and processing at the local and national level need to be complemented by a strong lobby for increased producer and polluter responsibilities.

Key issues

9. A significant redesign of Councils' waste collection and processing services should establish whole system approaches, based on whole systems review with robust whole system data. It needs to be accompanied by firm evidence and empirical data where new elements are introduced. We suggest in the first instance
 - a. a review of the 32 Councils' different kerbside collection schemes, understanding their strengths and weaknesses, along with challenges faced (including urban/rural/tenements/social deprivation). At the moment, there are no kerbside specific data;
 - b. building up a much better understanding of citizens' behaviour (what encourages/stops recycling and waste reduction) and removing barriers to, and creating key levers for, behaviour change;
 - c. waste composition analysis across all 32 Councils or relevant groupings;
 - d. evaluation of the Household Recycling Charter and its implementation;
 - e. an not
10. Against this background, we need to
 - test the durability of existing waste collection and processing systems and the strengths and weaknesses of the Household Recycling Charter, to meet new policy drivers including the Deposit Return Scheme and the Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Waste;
 - test the effectiveness and efficiency of material separation by householders against technological improvements in waste processing post collection;
 - consider the significantly different challenges arising from tenement/communal bins;
 - improve the quality of current data collection for more robust metrics on tonnage, volume and carbon impacts, to allow for agile review and ensure that the Waste Routemap is continually informed by the most impactful data (recycling tonnages that include construction waste can for example, in certain circumstances, be misleading and tools for assessing carbon impacts are not readily available);
 - have firm assumptions on the impact of Deposit Return and Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging Waste on household waste;

- identify, develop, implement and share good practice.
10. The desire to pursue 'clean' material streams has to be assessed in the context of achievability and whole system costs for separating out specific material streams.
 11. An ongoing process for service improvement (review-invest-review-adjust) provides best value, informed by a peer reviewed and professional understanding of the local circumstances and technical complexities.
 12. As part of this, a strong focus on behaviour change and communication campaigns (locally led with parallel messaging at the national level, both waste specific and as part of wider net zero campaigns) are key to success.
 13. Given the significant financial investment tied up in physical waste infrastructure and the length of contracts (often 25 years plus), and the time and resources involved in changing the public facing elements of kerbside collections (collection intervals etc), a stable legislative and policy environment is crucial to allow Local Authorities to plan for effective service design. A co-design of national waste policy must be at the heart of this.
 14. Adequate, flexible and long-term capital and revenue finance are essential for strategic investments and changing environments.
 15. The introduction of new measures or instruments proposed in the Waste Routemap and Circular Economy Bill must be considered based on firm empirical evidence, clear data and professional peer review by waste practitioners. If considered for implementation, they must be fully funded, co-designed, tested in pilot schemes before a national rollout, and proofed for undesirable consequences, such as shifts from home composting to recycling. Equally, we must avoid undesirable social and equalities implications, for example where households in poverty or with more complex needs and challenges produce larger waste volumes or are less able to recycle.
 16. Any new approaches and instruments have to take account of forthcoming changes in waste composition arising from Deposit Return and Extended Producer Responsibilities for packaging waste, and provide for sensible phasing in.
 17. There is already a high level of collaboration in the waste sector and between Councils. Gains are evident, such as by pulling local waste tonnages for larger waste disposal contracts and jointly procured Energy from Waste facilities. While there might be scope to extend this good practice further if household waste volumes decrease or waste composition changes as a result of Deposit Return or Extended Producer Responsibility, we are clear that centralising services in itself does not provide for efficiencies or improved outcomes.
 18. Alongside, we need to test and develop initiatives, locally and at the national level, that move us further up the waste hierarchy, and continue to develop innovative approaches locally that facilitate behaviour change.
 19. Over and above an improvement of local waste collection and processing systems, it is vital that levers higher up the waste chain are pursued. We are keen to develop joint lobbying by Local and Scottish Government on key levers at the UK and international level, further extending schemes for producer responsibilities (polluter-pays principle), and especially for

hard-to-treat items, pollutants and longevity labels equivalent to EPCs (Energy Performance Certificates).

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