



## Waste Update

### **Summary and Recommendations**

Councils' waste management functions have continued to work hard to address the ongoing challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and the reinstatement of services. This report provides an up to date picture of what has happened since the last meeting of the Board. Looking forward, we wish to agree future work priorities for waste policy which take account the ongoing impact of the pandemic and our longer term priorities. A verbal update will be provided on the Programme for Government expected to have been published shortly before the Board meeting.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note the ongoing Covid-19 response in waste management
- ii. Agree that COSLA considers future waste policy priorities in more detail and through the lens of their potential contribution to our new strategic goal, i.e. a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy no later than 2045
- iii. Offer initial observations on the planned waste initiatives in the Programme for Government.

### **References**

Previous relevant reports:

- Environment and Economy Board December 2019 – Circular Economy Bill Consultation
- Environment and Economy Board June 2019 – Waste Management
- Environment and Economy Board September 2019 – Waste Management
- Environment and Economy Board June 2020 – Covid-19 - Waste Update

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## Waste Update

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides an opportunity for members to discuss the current challenges facing waste management and the level to which services have been reinstated. This paper also looks ahead to the likely priority areas for the Board on waste in light of the pandemic and the Board's potential strategic goal of a Just Transition.

### **Current Position**

2. The Board received an overview at the last meeting of Councils' management of waste services since the lockdown started in March and the continued challenges facing Councils. At that stage, we were focused upon a significant joint effort, involving Councils, SOLACE, unions and the Scottish Government and a bilateral meeting between the spokesperson and the Cabinet Secretary, for a coordinated reopening of Household Waste Recycling Centres on the 1 June. This was perceived as a successful initiative which allowed centres to reopen effectively.
3. We reported in June that all Councils had prioritised and maintained uplift of landfill, while there were gaps in recycling services and special uplifts. Acknowledging the priority for COSLA to support the restoring of services, the Board also decided that, at the right time, we must return to discuss our longer term goal of building a circular economy, as part of the wider objective of securing the transition to a zero carbon, inclusive economy by no later than 2045.

### **What is Changing?**

4. Since June, Councils have continued to restore services. At this point in time, eleven councils have not been able to fully restore all collections. The requirement for physical distancing is still presenting significant challenges, with most authorities having reduced the amount of waste operators in the cabs of refuse collection vehicles, and many being forced to provide extra vehicles to follow refuse collection vehicles.
5. With schools reopening in early August, the return of such vehicles, especially school busses, to education functions, produced significant problems for nine councils and there were concerns as to significant service reduction and union relations.
6. Following a positive meeting between the spokesperson and the Cabinet Secretary Ms Cunningham, COSLA officers met with Professor Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director of Healthcare Quality and Strategy, to establish what safety precautions and mitigations would be reasonable in Phase 3 of the pandemic and where physical distance produces significant problems for the delivery of essential services. At the time of writing of this report COSLA is now producing additional information to help with local risk assessments, following a second meeting with Prof. Leitch and union representatives.
7. Parallel to the Covid-19 response, the Scottish Government has been looking at their planned waste policy initiatives pre-Covid-19 and a "green recovery". Waste is seen as a significant contributor to carbon emissions.

8. The Scottish Government has put forward the following priorities for post-Covid waste policy.
- The Deposit Return Scheme regulations have been passed by Parliament and are proceeding with an implementation date of 1 July 2022.
  - The Circular Economy Bill will not be introduced in this parliamentary session (before 2021).
  - The intention is for the programme board for the Landfill Ban to be set up and gauging local authorities' capacity to re-engage on the collaborative procurement process as part of that work.
  - Further work is underway on Extended Producer Responsibility on packaging and there will be increased engagement between Scottish and local government to develop this moving forward.
  - On recycling, the intention will be to support further improvements in high quality recycling, including agreeing an approach to evaluating the Scottish Household Recycling Charter and addressing other key priorities identified at Scotland's Recycling Summit.
  - The implications of EU Exit and a "green recovery" will sit alongside the above themes.
9. In addition, the Scottish Government has recently established a group to identify circular economy opportunities across the economy that a 'new normal' may provide in the medium to long term. The group consists of members from Scottish Government, Zero Waste Scotland and SEPA and there is a standing invitation to COSLA. The group is considering the following aims:
- Make strategic links with green recovery work across Scottish Government.
  - Identify sectors with greatest opportunities to embed circular economy/waste to resources as part of Scotland's green recovery.
  - Develop plans for engaging with those sectors as part of the transition from waste contingencies to 'business as usual'.
10. We have little information on planned priorities for the Programme of Government, and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

### **COSLA Position**

11. COSLA is continuing to support the reinstatement of waste services, especially where there are concerns at the national level. It is likely that there will be ongoing discussions with trade unions around relevant safety measures, as well as work with Scottish Government and Health Protection Scotland. COSLA officers will also continue to work closely with waste managers and SOLACE.
12. With regard to future waste policy issues pursued by this Board, we are proposing that all Scottish Government proposals are assessed for their importance, potential impact and cost effectiveness in the context of the main priorities of this Board, in particular the proposed goals as outlined in agenda item 3. As such, waste policy initiatives would be assessed for their potential contribution to our new strategic goal of a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy no later than 2045.
13. There is no straightforward formula to make such an assessment, and it is unlikely that all waste policy initiatives can be covered in full. We anticipate that completing the landfill

ban, circular economy and extended producer responsibility will be key themes, but we will report back to this Board with a suggested prioritisation.

### **Next Steps**

14. COSLA will continue to keep an open channel of communication between the Board's spokesperson and the Cabinet Secretary, so that emerging issues can be dealt with quickly and effectively.
15. COSLA officers will scope out and make a proposal as to which future waste policy initiatives should be pursued in line with the principles above, and report back to this Board. The Joint COSLA/Scottish Government Strategic Steering Group will then offer an excellent mechanism for taking this dialogue with Scottish Government forward.