

Covid-19 - Waste Update

Summary and Recommendations

This paper provides an overview of how waste management has been delivered during Covid-19 crisis and invites members to start considering which priorities and principles a recovery phase should be underpinned by. This will inform COSLA's work going forward.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note that all 32 councils have maintained essential waste services throughout Covid-19, in the face of significant challenges that this presents;
- ii. Note that Leaders committed to a coordinated reopening of Household Waste Recycling Centres from the 1 June 2020, and
- iii. Comment from a local perspective on challenges facing waste services as we begin the process of easing lockdown restrictions.

References

Previous relevant reports:

- Environment and Economy Board October 2017 - Circular Economy
- Environment and Economy Board September 2019 – Waste Management
- Environment and Economy Board June 2019 – Waste Management
- Environment and Economy Board December 2019 – Circular Economy Bill Consultation

Silke Isbrand
Policy Manager - Environment and Economy
0131 474 9266
silke@cosla.gov.uk

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Purpose

1. To understand how councils' waste services have responded to the challenges of Covid-19 and to provide an opportunity for the Board to consider how waste services are delivered post the Covid-19 crisis. This is a rapidly developing and changing area of work, and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

Current Position

1. All 32 Local Authorities have been working hard and have been successful in maintaining essential waste services during the crisis, and in the face of the very particular challenges that this presents (physical distancing etc). While some recycling collections and special uplifts were disrupted, many have already come back on stream.
2. There is close collaboration between COSLA, SOLACE and the Waste Managers Network, with close monitoring of the level of service provision, staff absentee rates, fly-tipping, and Covid-19 derived challenges in all 32 Authorities.
3. Waste management is one of Local Government services that is significantly affected by specific challenges that Covid-19 presents. The majority of waste uplift requires hands-on work and specialised tasks. Physical distancing in Refuse Collection Vehicles could only be achieved by running additional vehicles behind these and absentee rates in waste management departments were particularly high, with a large number of manual staff self-isolating and shielding.
4. Substantial work was undertaken with Scottish Government to arrive at relevant Health and Safety Guidance and negotiations required with trade unions at national and local level. A strong communication campaign at national level was developed in collaboration with Scottish Government, SEPA and Zero Waste Scotland and professional bodies to underpin the communications by individual Councils and enlist understanding and support from the public. There was a particular focus on combatting fly-tipping and later on the reopening of recycling centres.
5. At the beginning of lock-down, all 32 Local Authorities closed their Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), to protect the health and safety of the public and their staff, and to discourage non-essential journeys.

What is Changing?

6. On 15 May, Leaders agreed to a coordinated reopening of Household Waste Recycling centres, from 1 June 2020, at a pace and in phases that is practicable at the local level, that allows coordination across local authorities and that is in line with current medical advice with regard to essential travel and implications on infection rates. This report was circulated to the Board on 13 May for information.
7. For this purpose, COSLA is developing joint guidance with the Scottish Government, with input from Local Authorities, including waste managers and SOLACE, as well as the waste industry, Zero Waste Scotland, SEPA and trade unions.

8. COSLA Environment and Economy Spokesperson, Cllr Heddle, also met with the Environment Cabinet Secretary, Ms Cunningham, to discuss the challenges around waste services, the reopening of recycling centres, and fly-tipping, particularly given pressure in the Parliament and press, and from the public to do so.

COSLA Position

9. The focus of COSLA immediate work is the reopening of Household Waste Recycling Centres and other waste services which have been suspended. However, we acknowledge that at the right time we must return to discuss our longer term goal of building a circular economy. This goal is part of the wider objective of securing the transition to a zero carbon, inclusive economy by no later than 2045. We intend to make sure that we do not lose sight of this objective as we start to build the recovery from the current crisis.

Next Steps

10. We will continue to work closely with all 32 Councils on full service recovery, and commence discussions with Scottish Government and other relevant stakeholders on developing a vision for waste policy in a post Covid-19 world.