

Waste

Summary

At the Board meeting members will hear from Paul Levett, Veolia and Ian Jopling, Head of Environmental Management, Horsham District Council. They will provide an industry perspective and local authority view respectively on the waste landscape, challenges and risks facing the sector. This note provides background information and current government activities to provide context to the debate.

Recommendations

- For information, members to note report and use its contents to inform discussion at the meeting

Action

- Officers to shape post-election policy position in light of members' views.

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Waste

Background

1. Waste services cost local authorities over £3.1bn in 2008-9 and are expected to increase to £4.2bn by 2013. Apart from education and social care, waste collection and disposal is the biggest area of council spending. Yet, unlike social care or even health services, everybody uses local authority waste services; waste management is a truly universal service.
2. In recent years growing awareness of environmental issues has forced a re-think about the level of waste we generate and how we manage it. The EU has set targets for member states to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, Government has reinforced these with national targets to increase the recycling and composting of household waste. In addition to these targets, the main policy instruments are the landfill tax and the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS), both of which are progressively increasing the cost of sending waste to landfill.
3. Local government has responded with a strong track record of delivery. Recycling rates are increasing and people in England now recycle around a third of their waste, up from less than 15% of households six years ago. Over the same period the annual amount of land-filled biodegradable municipal waste has been reduced by nearly 7 million tonnes, from 22.4 million tonnes to 15.5 million tonnes. As a result, local government has achieved the 2010 landfill diversion target two years early.
4. Looking forward, the 2013 targets are rapidly approaching and beyond that, by 2020 the UK will have to divert more than half of that remaining waste away from landfill and the new EU Waste Framework Directive will require the UK to recycle 50% of our municipal waste.

Forthcoming Defra consultations

5. Defra are expected to publish two consultations in March 2010 that will have a significant impact on waste services undertaken by local authorities:
7. The consultation **on the definition of municipal waste** will outline the revised approach the UK is taking to the EU Landfill Directive targets to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill. It will address the potential implications of the revised approach and is intended to be the first of two consultations, with specific proposals being presented in the second consultation.
8. The revised approach will include much more commercial waste than currently and mean approximately doubling the volume of waste classified as municipal

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waste – extending the definition to commercial waste which is similar in type to household waste, i.e. a lot of SME trade waste. As a result Defra have agreed revisions to the UK's baseline and landfill targets with the European Commission. Defra's provisional analysis is that the UK's position relative to meeting the landfill targets will be similar to the previous approach, and civil servants are confident of meeting the first target year in 2010.

9. Defra say they are keen to ensure that local authorities are not disadvantaged and are not proposing to change the coverage of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme or to change their existing allowances. However, the consultation provides an opportunity to review the suite of existing and potential policies in place, including the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme, to ensure that England meets the targets set, and where the burden for meeting those targets falls. The consultation will therefore ask for views and evidence on the relative effectiveness of these policies. The evidence from this consultation and further work by Defra will inform a second consultation due later in the year. Clearly LGA will need to ensure its consultation response reflects clearly the extent to which the sector shares Defra's benign interpretation of the likely impact of this change on costs and the achievability of targets.
7. Defra also intend to consult on whether the introduction of further restrictions on the **landfilling of biodegradable wastes and recyclable materials** would make an effective contribution to meeting the objectives set out in the current waste strategy, of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resource efficiency. This consultation will be linked to the further work on priority waste materials set out in this strategy, which aims to maximise waste prevention, recycling and recovery of those materials.
8. Two pieces of research into landfill bans or restrictions have since been commissioned. The first, commissioned by Defra and published in September 2009, was carried out by Green Alliance and looked at experience with landfill bans in other countries. The second piece of research was commissioned jointly by Defra and the three Devolved Administrations and is being carried out by WRAP and sub-contractors Eunomia. This research looks at the potential benefits of landfill bans or restrictions in a UK context, and also examines some of the practical implications and associated costs, to assess whether bans or restrictions of certain materials would be beneficial overall.
9. The materials being looked at in the WRAP/Eunomia research include the seven priority waste materials from the England Waste Strategy – food & garden waste, wood, paper & card, textiles, aluminium (but the research looks at all metals), plastics and glass. The research also looks at some other waste streams. It will model the potential impacts of a ban or restriction alone, and one accompanied by a mandatory requirement to sort waste.
10. The consultation document next month is likely to seek views from interested parties on whether they think there is case for a landfill ban or restriction on a

particular material, bearing in mind the evidence from the research and the accompanying Impact Assessment. The consultation is also likely to seek views on what the practical implications of any ban or restriction might be, and on what the appropriate lead in time for a ban might be, and on possible alternatives to a ban.

11. Officers are continuing to discuss these consultations with Defra officials to try and answer the following questions:

Definition of municipal waste

- What are the practical implications of the proposed change in definition?
- What will be the effect on the relevant National Indicators and LATS?

Landfill bans

- how would such a ban be enforced?
- who would be treated as the guilty party if a banned substance ended up in landfill - the person who threw it away, the council or trade waste firm, or the landfill operator?
- have we facilities to dispose of materials in a different way, e.g. are there enough Anaerobic Digestion etc plants to process all the food currently thrown away?
- how much would such a ban cost and who would pay?

Current media and political context

12. The Conservatives continue to campaign against fortnightly bin collections, recently accusing the Audit Commission of "forcing and cajoling" councils to drop weekly collections. The Party has committed to introducing a "Responsibility Deal on waste" - a voluntary arrangement among producers to cut back on the production of waste and improve its disposal. They have also confirmed they will encourage councils to adopt the "RecycleBank" scheme, piloted by Windsor and Maidenhead Council, which gives financial incentives to households that recycle funded through savings made from landfill tax. George Osborne confirmed in November 2009 that in his first budget he will put a floor under the 2013 level of landfill tax until 2020, thereby making it clear to councils that encouraging people to recycle is the way forward. This fits in with an overarching policy to harness the potential of waste rather than send it to landfill.
13. The Liberal Democrats have stated that their final objective in terms of waste and bins is zero waste going to landfill. They have proposed setting up an independent Resource Efficiency Committee (REC) responsible for advising government on the costs and benefits of recycling and resource use in the same way that NICE does for health matters. They will strengthen the duty on councils to develop waste plans to ensure the maximum recovery of useful resources and the provision of the necessary resource recovery

infrastructure. They want to encourage neighbouring authorities to co-operate together, preferably through the formation of Joint Waste Authorities. On littering they suggest releasing all fines for littering to be used by councils to help their local environment. They have also committed to providing local authorities with the power to introduce variable charging for household waste collection, rewarding those who recycle more, and punishing those who refuse to play their part. The Party has also committed to standardising recycling practices by, for example, having the same colour bins and items collected. The Lib Dems are also in favour of binding packaging reduction targets.

14. Although the issue of waste has been relatively low key in the media over recent months, a recent report from the Big Brother Watch / Taxpayers' Alliance stated that many councils across the UK are now putting microchips in their bins. The LGA response said that the purpose of using microchips was simply to identify the house to which a bin belongs in order to provide people with a better service that costs less. Before this report, in the run up to Christmas, stories appeared in one or two national newspapers about bin collections not being made for a number of weeks due to alternate weekly collections and the holiday period. During the prolonged freezing weather, a number of stories appeared about bin collections not being made because roads were not gritted. The LGA issued a robust response explaining that councils were doing all they could to pick up bins but public safety was paramount. The issue of bin collections and waste will continue to draw interest from parts of the national media, no doubt during a general election campaign and as attention begins to focus on council budgets and potential spending cuts.

Financial Implications

15. Whilst there are no financial implications for the LGA Group there are of course significant budgetary pressures for member authorities

Implications for Wales

16. Defra's consultation on landfill bans applies to England and Wales, whilst the definition of municipal waste consultation applies to England only.

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