

## **Public Accounts Committee**

**PAC(5)-27-19 PTN1**

**4 November 2019**

**Inquiry into Waste Management: Additional information from the Welsh Local Government Association following their evidence session held on 14 October 2019**

**What do you see as the key areas where progress on waste prevention is needed and likely to have the biggest impact?**

Whilst engagement and behaviour change amongst the public remains a key area of activity especially around preventing food waste (and associated poverty/health implications), the WLGA feel that ensuring that retailers and manufacturers meet the cost of dealing with the waste they bring onto the market (polluter pays principle) is paramount. That is why we believe that the Extended Producer Responsibility should be a UK government priority and that they should seek to bring this in sooner than currently envisaged.

This would provide a financial mechanism to drive better design using less packaging and more reusable and recyclable materials that would incentivise waste prevention and allow for the sustainable funding of recycling services across Wales.

**What role would you expect local government to play in any emerging plans around deposit return schemes and how is local government supporting efforts under the 'Refill Wales' initiative?**

Having invested in kerb side collections it would arguably be wasteful to introduce a parallel infrastructure and collection system via DRS that could also generate additional journeys. There are concerns that the introduction of a DRS system could undermine the comprehensive provision of kerb side recycling services by removing certain materials. There are also concerns that rural or poorly served communities could be excluded depending on how the DRS actually works in practice (e.g. reverse vending machines at supermarkets).

However, there are some emerging technological solutions that may enable individuals to reclaim their deposit and still use the kerb side service. These need to be explored regarding their practicality and cost but would suggest a continued role for local government.

WLGA does not hold comprehensive information as to the participation of local authorities in the 'Refill Wales' initiative, although anecdotally we are aware that authorities are supportive of it.

**What could be done to encourage different decision-making about spending priorities for local government to place greater emphasis on waste prevention and what are the barriers to that?**

In terms of spending priorities for local government, the current waste budgets barely meet the need to provide a core front line service and in some cases there are concerns that it fails that in places. The development of EPR will allow the provision of funding for local and national communications that address all waste issues. Until that is in place it is difficult to see how significant change can be delivered. In any case, waste prevention is best achieved 'upstream' by those who put products on the market in the first place. Statutory Recycling Targets have inevitably focused local authorities' attention on recycling, leaving limited resource to direct at waste prevention.

When Waste Awareness Wales was part of WLGA it commissioned a waste prevention toolkit. This was felt necessary as there was little evidence on the cost benefit effects of a range of waste prevention activity and what the effect on the local waste stream was likely to be. This work gathered all the available evidence on ten or so interventions (including reduced residual capacity) so that LA's could quantify the value of investing in waste prevention activity. WAW also included food waste prevention messages in all campaigns promoting food waste recycling schemes. This work was transferred to WRAP over four years ago. Continued emphasis on food waste prevention is critical from poverty and health perspectives, as well as the climate change implications. LA's continue to support this activity whilst the WRAP led Courtauld 2025 initiative is trying to focus on waste along the

entire food chain from 'farm to fork'. That work requires greater prescription as the financial signals from the market are not adequately incentivising the right behaviour.

**What are you looking for from the Welsh Government's new waste strategy and how realistic is the Welsh Government's current aspiration of zero residual waste by 2050?**

The strategy must set out how the whole life of materials can be dealt with by society, supporting the development of circular economy principles across the economy. LA's can continue to collect more and more material but if there are not viable markets for this then there are significant risks. These risks are not only financial but relate also to public perception if recycling ends up going to Energy from Waste (e.g. if a particular market collapses or a dominant reprocessor goes out of business). Therefore, the fragility of the recycling process must be addressed through wider Welsh Government economic strategy policy. EPR needs to feature as a core part of the next phase of work.

To facilitate this there remains a need to support investment in infrastructure and to generate end uses for the materials.

In terms of future targets there has to be a robust cost benefit analysis to determine that the marginal costs associated with raising the recycling rates and the opportunity costs are sensible and proportionate. This must be addressed in the wider context of decarbonisation policy and the need to get the biggest impact out of finite budgets.

Waste strategy must better inform how the wellbeing goals and ways of working are to be integrated into the sector. The example given at the committee of LA's having to decide how to use their 'feed stock' to lever the best outcome is a real issue. The income foregone to allow the material to go to a local company is money that can't be used to free up resources for other vital local services such as education.

**Has the apparent delay in production of the strategy created any difficulties for councils' own strategic planning?**

The trajectory towards zero waste by 2050 is well understood within LA's but the need to meet 70% recycling by 24/25 is the overriding current driver for service development/planning. The danger is that current short term decisions to meet immediate targets constrain the options in the future and lead to perverse outcomes. It is expected that the new strategy will lead to a greater emphasis on actions higher up the waste hierarchy and decarbonisation. These actions need to be implemented if the momentum towards zero waste and a more circular economy is to be sustained and cost effective. Therefore, the delay may mean that action is not as fast moving as required. It should be noted that a number of LA's have declared a climate emergency and it is envisaged that this should impact on services across the board.

**24 October 2019**