

WELSH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE: INQUIRY INTO RECYCLING IN WALES

JANUARY 2015

The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the Committee's inquiry. It is very pleasing that the Committee received an overwhelmingly positive message in respect of recycling in Wales; the Welsh Government agrees with the Committee's view that the response of the people of Wales to recycling their wastes has been outstanding. It is down to their efforts and their local authorities that Wales now leads the UK in recycling by a significant margin, and would be ranked fourth in the European Union if it were a separate member state.

The Welsh Government accepts that there are challenges ahead; however, it is optimistic of achieving future targets in large part due to the interventions made by the Welsh Government under the Collaborative Change Programme and waste infrastructure programme, continued levels of funding and the beneficial effects of future legislation, including the proposed waste provisions in the Environment Bill.

The Welsh Government acknowledges the Committee's finding that there are some local authorities that do not share the Welsh Government's belief that the universal adoption of the Collection Blueprint service configuration would provide the most sustainable option, providing the best overall economic, financial, social and environmental solution for Wales. In developing the Blueprint, the Welsh Government accepted the need for flexibility in approaches to collections according to housing type and geography. This is evident already as different authorities employing the Blueprint approach have shown. From Anglesey and Conwy, through Powys, into valley authorities such as Bridgend and Torfaen, and through to the city of Newport – those taking the Blueprint approach are being flexible and taking account of community preferences.

The Welsh Government is of the opinion that there is no detrimental constraint on local authorities if the Blueprint approach is adopted. It is the Welsh Government's view that widespread adoption of the Blueprint will result in the efficiencies associated with it, but that it will also lead to efficiency savings through procurements (economies of scale), to shared depot facilities and a consistent way of presenting materials to market. Whilst the Welsh Government agrees with the Committee's views on a more standardised approach to colours of receptacles we believe that efficiencies and savings will be significantly enhanced where the type of receptacles, the type of collection vehicles and the methods of marketing materials are more standard across Wales. There should be opportunities for a more regularised approach across Wales as local government reorganisation and contract renewals create new opportunities.

The Welsh Government accepts that weight based recycling targets should not be pursued to the detriment of a reduced ecological footprint. The recycling targets in Wales are based on proportions (as percentages of total waste collected) and are wholly complementary with waste reduction. Indeed municipal waste quantities have been on a steady downward trend for the past ten years during which recycling rates have soared. It is better to recycle 70 tonnes from 100 tonnes of waste produced

than 100 tonnes from 200 tonnes of waste produced. The targets are based on proportions of weights and not on absolute weights, and are therefore aligned with the strategic objectives of reducing quantities of waste and reducing ecological footprint impacts.

In addition, in terms of future trends in waste composition and quantities, reductions in the weights of products and packaging will mean that there are lower quantities of recyclable materials and of waste per person overall. It remains to be seen whether the proportion of these recyclable materials is reducing. The Welsh Government highlights the fact that large increases in recycling have occurred at the same time as overall quantities of household waste have reduced. There need be no conflict between recycling and waste prevention; the two are complementary in the Welsh Government's approach.

The Welsh Government is already planning to review its policy and targets on waste as part of the normal cycle of producing and revising its waste strategy and waste prevention programme, a statutory requirement under Articles 28 - 30 of the EU Waste Framework Directive. Therefore the Welsh Government is content to agree with the various investigations and reviews that the Committee recommends.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Welsh Government commissions an independent review of the "Collections Blueprint" and the evidence it is based upon. In commissioning this review, the Government should:

- ensure that the Welsh Local Government Association is involved in establishing the terms of reference and selecting the reviewer;**
- include an analysis of the latest data on reject rates and destination of recyclates from all collection methods;**
- complete the review by the end of March 2016 so that it can inform the approach taken by local authorities to achieving the 2019/20 target of 64%.**

Response: Accept

A key part of the evidence that informed the Collections Blueprint, the study that resulted in the publication by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) in January 2011 of the report 'Kerbside Collections Options: Wales', was overseen by a steering group that included representatives from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and 9 Welsh local authorities; this group provided a high degree of scrutiny throughout the project.

The Blueprint approach has already been tested recently as part of the Collaborative Change Programme (CCP) service reviews and in each case it has been found to be the most cost effective option. The Welsh Government has not seen any evidence that calls into doubt the premise that the Blueprint delivers the most cost effective and best sustainable benefits. Furthermore, not following the Blueprint approach provides a greater degree of risk for local authorities in respect of compliance with the new legal requirements on separate collection that came into being on 1 January 2015.

It is timely to refresh the Blueprint that was first published in 2010 and the Welsh Government already plans to update the Blueprint in 2015, taking into account a review of new developments in equipment, the results of pilots, and the need for new additional materials to be collected to meet the higher recycling targets. The Welsh Government will also carry out an independent review of the evidence. In gathering and reviewing the evidence and updating the Blueprint, the Welsh Government will seek the advice of key stakeholders, including the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).

Whilst the review is underway it is imperative that local authorities do not delay their efforts to review services and make any necessary changes to achieve significant cost savings. The Welsh Government continues to recommend that local authorities adopt the Blueprint where a service review identifies that it is the best option – leading to a more consistent universal service across Wales.

The financial implications of accepting this recommendation need to be assessed and will have to be absorbed into the current MEG provision.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Welsh Government encourages collaboration between local authorities when renewing contracts for providing householder receptacles for recyclable waste.

Response: Accept:

Collaboration between local authorities in service delivery is a valuable potential tool to improve services and deliver savings. For example, the utilisation and procurement of a more standard range of receptacles, the collection of the same range of recyclable materials and the use of the same range of collection vehicles will, almost certainly lead to savings through economies of scale.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) which is helping to deliver the Collaborative Change Programme (CCP) is in the process of creating a framework contract that will enable local authorities to procure receptacles. WRAP is well placed to assist procurements and help local authorities to work together collaboratively.

The Welsh Government will go further and will seek to ensure that a common service configuration is provided across Wales, with consistent local variants for particular housing types. The Welsh Government is already supporting joint procurement contracts for food and residual waste bags and for vehicles.

The financial implications of accepting this recommendation need to be assessed and will have to be absorbed into the current MEG provision.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Welsh Government works with local authorities to make information on the destination of waste collected from householders publicly available.

Response: Accept:

This information has been publicly available each year since 2012 (covering data from October 2010). Three annual datasets have been released by the Welsh Government identifying the end destinations of materials collected by local authorities that are recycled. The latest information on end destinations (covering 2012/13) is available at <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Environment-and-Countryside/Waste-Management/Recycling-Destinations>

These datasets produced for the Welsh Government will help local authorities to obtain the information that the Committee would like to see disseminated by local authorities.

In accepting the Committee's recommendation the Welsh Government will consider whether there should be future legislation requiring local authorities to inform their residents of the destinations of waste materials.

There are no financial implications for the Welsh Government in accepting this recommendation.

Recommendation 4.

We recommend that the Welsh Government investigates weight-based targets and whether they are having any unintended impact on reducing the ecological footprint of waste. This should be completed by the end of 2015.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will investigate weight-based targets and whether they are having any unintended impact on reducing the ecological footprint of waste.

It should be noted, however, that EU waste Directive targets are all weight based – including in respect of the recycling and recovery of packaging, end of life vehicles, waste electrical and electronic equipment, batteries, household waste and construction waste, and the reduction in the landfilling of biodegradable municipal waste.

Other ways of measuring the impacts of waste and recycling at a local level have been considered but have been discounted previously because of their practical difficulties or disadvantages. For example it is not feasible to set local authorities individual ecological footprint reduction targets because of the difficulties in measurement, and setting carbon based targets can mitigate against waste prevention.

The financial implications of accepting this recommendation need to be assessed and will have to be absorbed into the current MEG provision.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Welsh Government commissions research into the relationship between projections for waste reduction; local authority income from waste; and the ability of local authorities to meet their recycling targets in

the period to 2019/20 and then to 2024/25. This should be completed by the end of March 2016.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will investigate the relationship between projections for waste prevention, the changing composition of household waste, local authority income from waste, and the ability of local authorities to meet future targets. The Welsh Government will do this as part of the work to revise Towards Zero Waste, the Wales waste strategy, and will take into account any revised proposals for new EU waste targets that are due to be developed in 2015.

The financial implications of accepting this recommendation need to be assessed and will have to be absorbed into the current MEG provision.

Recommendation 6.

We recommend that the Welsh Government investigates the case for resourcing a national “broker” for the sale of recyclates from local authorities across Wales. The Government should publish its findings by the end of December 2015.

WG response: Accept

The Welsh Government has already tasked the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) with improving the marketing of materials for recycling, including assessing the potential for, and benefits of, a brokerage system for local authority recycle.

The financial implications of accepting this recommendation need to be assessed and will have to be absorbed into the current MEG provision.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Welsh Government considers the merits of investing in a national campaign to help drive higher rates of recycling including to promote understanding of the need to reduce the ecological footprint of waste and the importance of other measures, particularly waste reduction.

WG response: Accept in principle

A national campaign to promote awareness of the need for reduction, reuse and recycling and to achieve behaviour change has been running since 2004, led by Waste Awareness Wales with funding support from the Welsh Government.

Financial resources permitting, the Welsh Government will consider the merits of extending existing campaigns to help drive higher rates of recycling and to promote better understanding of the need to reduce the ecological footprint of waste, including the importance of reduction and reuse, building on previously successful national and local campaigns. However, a higher priority may be communicating with householders more at the local level, to drive higher and more effective participation, particularly for separate food waste collection.

The Welsh Government already supports the National Love Food, Hate Waste campaign developed by WRAP and delivered in Wales through Waste Awareness Wales and WRAP Cymru. This is aimed at helping householders reduce food waste and save money. It also helps reduce Wales' ecological footprint.

The Welsh Government's funding of Waste Awareness Wales also includes an element of national campaigning.

The Welsh Government also provides waste prevention and recycling messages and stories in national Welsh media.

The financial implications of accepting this recommendation need to be assessed and will have to be absorbed into the current MEG provision.