



HOUSE OF LORDS

Environment and Climate Change Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Waste crime

Wednesday 18 March 2026

10 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Sheehan (The Chair); Lord Ashcombe; Lord Jay of Ewelme; Lord Krebs; The Earl of Leicester; Lord Lennie; Lord Mancroft; Baroness McIntosh of Pickering; Lord Rooker; Earl Russell; Lord Trees; Baroness Whitaker.

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 71 - 89

Witnesses

[I](#): Emma Reynolds MP, Secretary of State, Defra; Sally Randall, Director-General for Environment, Defra; James Cruddas, Deputy Director for Waste and Recycling, Defra.

Examination of witnesses

Emma Reynolds, Sally Randall and James Cruddas.

Q71 The Chair: Good morning, and welcome to the Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee. Today's meeting is the first of two follow-up sessions to the committee's waste inquiry, which reported in October last year. We will be hearing from the Defra Secretary of State, the right honourable Emma Reynolds MP, accompanied by two officials from Defra.

Before we start, I remind everyone that the session will be webcast live and a transcript will be taken and made public. Witnesses will have an opportunity to review the transcript and, if necessary, make minor amendments. Members are reminded that they should declare any relevant interests the first time they speak. I take this opportunity to say that I am a director of Peers for the Planet.

I make an appeal at the outset, as we have much ground to cover, that questions are kept short, and answers are kept to the point and elaborated on only when necessary.

I start by thanking the Secretary of State and her colleagues for taking the time to be with us today. It is much appreciated. Before we start, I ask our panel today to briefly introduce themselves.

Emma Reynolds: Good morning, chair and the committee. I am the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Sally Randall: I am director-general for the environment at Defra.

James Cruddas: Good morning. I am deputy director for waste and recycling at Defra.

Q72 The Chair: The first question is: what assessment has been made of the impact on environmental and human health from mixed waste sites, such as Hoads Wood, Kidlington and Bickershaw in Wigan? I am trying to understand what impact these sites have on ecosystems and on human health, and why they differ from inert sites.

Emma Reynolds: I will kick off then hand over to colleagues. The first thing to say is that, as you know, there are a number of these sites and they are all quite different in location and nature, in terms of their impact on the environment. The Environment Agency is part of the Defra group and we work extremely closely with it in assessing the environmental impact, the impact on human health and other implications for every site that is high risk.

Can I take the opportunity to thank the committee for your work on this issue? Your analysis and recommendations have been extremely helpful to me, as Secretary of State, and to my team in our policy-making and decision-making around this. We really have stepped up our work on this. I am sure we will get into this in more detail, but I want to put on record my thanks to the committee for your work on this issue.

The Chair: Thank you. Can you tell us a little about what mixed waste is and why it is so damaging to ecosystems and human health? What risks do we face from these mixed waste sites?

Sally Randall: I will say a little about that. In this context, as the chair said, mixed waste is anything that is not inert waste. It can be a huge range of materials. We are sometimes seeing waste going to these illegal sites that is diverted from legal streams. It can be a mix of quite ordinary household waste and it can contain things like tyres. In some cases, it contains hazardous waste. It very much depends on the type of site.

We rely on the Environment Agency, in its expert capacity, to look at individual sites and understand what the particular risks are. They vary hugely from site to site, depending both on the nature of materials that might be deposited, and the ground conditions and whether any pollution can escape from those sites. This is why at the most acute sites—the most serious sites where there is the most significant dumping—we rely on the Environment Agency to be doing up-to-date assessments of what is happening and what the potential risk is to the environment. Sometimes, at a site like Hoads Wood, which is a particularly fragile environment, it works closely in conjunction with Natural England in its role to assess the condition of the SSSI.

The Chair: So it can include things like asbestos, heavy metals and organic matter, which can decompose, generating bacteria and viruses, and fire risks.

Sally Randall: The fact that it is illegally dumped means that, at the outset, we do not always know what is there.

The Chair: It can be quite dangerous.

Sally Randall: It can, in some cases.

The Chair: I am very interested in the Bickershaw site in Wigan, Kidlington and Hoads Wood. I have visited all three. Kidlington has been treated very differently to the Bickershaw site, and the go-ahead has been given for clearance of that site. Hoads Wood is being cleared as we speak. Why are the Kidlington and Wigan sites being treated differently?

Emma Reynolds: First, they are three very different sites, as you know very well given your interest and visits. There was a ministerial direction from one of my predecessors in the previous Government to clear Hoads Wood. I am not party to the original advice, but I understand the rationale, because it is a SSSI with different landowners, and ancient woodland. The risk to the environment was judged to be very high indeed.

Kidlington was a decision by the Environment Agency, due to there being an immediate fire risk. The consequences of that fire would be very severe with the A34 close by, because of access to the emergency services that would be needed to get to the nearby hospital, John

Radcliffe, and the potential damage to the River Cherwell. That was a decision that the Environment Agency took in December.

Bickershaw is a site that we discuss with the Environment Agency on a frequent basis. The Environment Agency has declared it a critical incident and a criminal investigation is ongoing. I have spoken to the local MP about the site. I know it is extremely distressing to nearby residents and, as you know, it is very near a residential area and a school that has been temporarily closed in the summer. So we are keeping it under review but, as I say, there are differences between the sites.

The Environment Agency has a very high bar with regard to whether it clears sites. It is not its primary responsibility to clear sites and it is not funded to.

The Chair: We come to why not, because whose responsibility is it to clear that site in Wigan? Before we do that, actually, can we just look at the risks? As you say, there was a fire at the Bickershaw site. There were two fires there last year. One burned for 10 days and the local primary school had to be closed. It is very close to residents' housing. When the fire was not burning, the rats and flies were running amok, and they are vectors that carry disease. There is obvious organic rotting matter in there. It really is a health hazard. More than one resident was hospitalised because of the fumes when the dump was on fire. You and I would not want to live next to that. I do not understand why it cannot be cleared and why the residents in Bickershaw have to suffer this.

Emma Reynolds: Maybe I will turn to a colleague in a minute, but the Environment Agency has a very high bar for clearance of sites. Without getting into the specifics of Bickershaw, let us just zoom out for a minute. We do not want to be in a position where the Environment Agency or the Government are clearing every illegal waste site, because it could produce unintended consequences and perverse incentives.

The Chair: We will come on to the Environment Agency's responsibilities later. May I ask Lord Ashcombe to ask his question before I turn to Earl Russell?

Lord Ashcombe: Can I just ask what a high bar means? I have a follow-up question, which I am sure we will come to.

Emma Reynolds: A high bar is an immediate risk to the environment and human health.

James Cruddas: Shall I say a bit about the site at Bickershaw and how the Environment Agency is operating it? Given the risks that you have outlined, it is working with the local authority and other partners locally to monitor the conditions at the site. Inevitably, a judgment call has to be made about the level of risk that subsists on the site. You have drawn attention to the human health concerns from last year but, at the moment, there are no data in the monitoring that suggest that there is

an immediate risk to human health from the environmental conditions on the site—for example, the monitoring of the water in the local area.

The Chair: The environmental conditions on the site and the monitoring may be one thing but, honestly, common sense ought to prevail at times. It is patently obvious that that site must be cleared before more fires take place this summer. That, I think, is an inevitability, and it really should be clear. There is a risk of fire at Kidlington and there have been two fires already at the Bickershaw site.

James Cruddas: As the Secretary of State said, we receive regular monitoring and are keeping the conditions at the Bickershaw site under regular review. We are in very regular dialogue with the Environment Agency about its risk assessments.

The Chair: Can it please apply some common sense to this situation?

Q73 **Earl Russell:** Good morning, Secretary of State. The reality is that, since our report in October, a handful of independent journalists have found more large-scale waste sites than were known in their entirety to the Environment Agency beforehand. The first question is: does that bother the agency? Secondly, pretty much all our recommendations were fundamentally rejected out of hand, other than the ones that were already in train. We on the committee want to ask you, as you are back here: now that that period of time has passed since we published our report, has your and the agency's attitude to our recommendations moved on? Has it changed? What can you say to us now, today, in light of all the sites that have come to light since we published our report? Do we have grounds for optimism or is it still the same position?

Emma Reynolds: Let me answer both those questions. The Environment Agency has a list of a number of high-risk sites that my team and I discuss with it frequently. I am treating this now as an emergency situation. This is something that has been developing over time but, as you say, has become significant; the committee has shone a light on that, and I am grateful to you for that.

You ask if it bothers the agency. Of course it does. I know you will have Phil Duffy here next week, so you can ask him that same question. It bothers us too; we do not want this kind of illegal waste activity. As well as talking this morning about the sites that are already in existence, we as a Government are putting in place new measures—and we can get into this—and new powers for the Environment Agency that allow us to focus on prevention and on speeding up enforcement. So there are three different issues here: prevention, enforcement and the existing sites.

With regard to the recommendations, I feel that your recommendations were very helpful. Certainly, the recommendations around metrics, where you said that the metrics were too narrow, are something that we have absolutely taken on board. There are other recommendations that we have taken seriously as well.

On the issue of whether we should do another review or get on and take forward the recommendations from the 2018 review, I think the answer is that we have a good analysis of the problems and how they have developed, so I want to spend time and resource on bolstering the powers of the Environment Agency in ensuring that the Joint Unit for Waste Crime is taking the joined-up approach that it needs to and getting on and taking forward the recommendations from the 2018 report. There are three specific measures that it recommended: the carriers, brokers and dealers; the digital waste tracking; and the issue around exemptions that were granted in good faith at the time but have been used as loopholes by criminals.

So there are reasons to be optimistic that we are getting a grip on the situation, but I cannot claim that it is an easy one; it is complex. We know that criminals are using all the different avenues that they can, and it is about us trying to get ahead, closing down the loopholes and ensuring that we have the regulations and powers for the Environment Agency and other partners to crack down on this and prevent it in the first place.

Earl Russell: The 2018 report is now quite dated. A lot of those recommendations have been implemented or are in train—we welcome brokers, dealers and carriers regulation—but last year the number of new sites was 749: it had doubled on the year before. The average size of large sites has doubled as well. Fundamentally, we asked for a root and branch review. Is that something that your department is still open to?

Emma Reynolds: I do not think we want to spend time doing a comprehensive review, given that, in my analysis, we have a very good understanding of the problem. I take your point about the 2018 review being quite some time ago, but the drivers and the issues that are at stake are the same ones. You are right that the situation has got much worse, but that is why I want to double down on taking action rather than doing a big analysis of where we are.

Earl Russell: Are the large-scale waste sites all being visited? Have they been visited recently? What types of officers are visiting them? What reassurance can you give us that you have a handle on those sites?

Emma Reynolds: My team has weekly meetings with the Environment Agency, which is keeping a close eye on the high-risk sites. It is at the front line of this. James, maybe you want to say something more about this.

James Cruddas: I meet with the Environmental Agency every week, as the Secretary of State has said, to review the list of high-risk sites. It is a dynamic situation. The agency has officers on the ground looking at sites that are reported to it and making assessments all the time of how risky those sites are and what interventions are necessary. It does that for all the high-risk sites. On the point about growth in the numbers, in addition to the numbers that you cited of sites being discovered, the Environment

Agency would point out that it has closed significantly more than that over the period from the summer of 2024 until December last year.

Earl Russell: I recognise the work that is being done. It would be appreciated if you could write to us and let us know which large-scale sites have been visited, when the visits were conducted and what kind of officers actually managed to do that.

James Cruddas: We will be happy to do that. I will be happy to set that out for the committee.

Emma Reynolds: And I am sure that Philip Duffy will have something to say about that.

Q74 **Lord Trees:** Thank you for coming, Secretary of State. These large-scale issues do not happen overnight; they develop and accumulate over days, weeks and even months. What is delaying intervention? Early intervention is critical to reduce the environmental damage, the public health risk and the cost of the clear-up. What is causing the delays in action?

Emma Reynolds: I completely agree that we need to make sure that there are interventions earlier. Hopefully, we will get to a point where we can prevent these sites happening. Certainly if there is already one illegal dumping, we know that the criminals, if they think they are undetected, will go back and dump another load of illegal waste. So we are working with the Environment Agency to make sure that it is speeding up its processes. It has lots of calls about these sorts of sites and we want to make sure that it is prioritising the highest-risk sites. I am sure you will hear more from the chief executive of the Environment Agency next week. We are making some progress in that regard, but we absolutely take your view that we have to be as quick as possible and quick off the mark on this, so that these sites do not develop into something bigger and that therefore the environmental risk and the risk to human health do not get worse. Sally, do you want to say anything?

Sally Randall: You have made the main points. The only other point I will add is that we are working with the Environment Agency as well, which it can say a bit more about next week, to make sure that it has the latest technology available to do that. Many of these sites, as some of you will know, are quite remote, and the use of drones and imaging technology to try to identify the sites really early is proving really promising in helping the agency get ahead of the sites before they become as problematic as some of the very large sites that we are talking about now.

Lord Trees: But it is not clear where the delay is happening, is it? Is it the original intelligence, or is it the direction by the appropriate authorities to do something about it rapidly?

Emma Reynolds: It will depend very much on the site. We appreciate what you are saying; there have been some delays in the past. We need

to make sure that it has the technology it needs but also that the processes are in place to escalate when there is a high-risk site.

The Chair: Those processes are not working.

Q75 **The Earl of Leicester:** Thank you for coming. I welcome the fact that you are giving the Environment Agency more resources, money and technology such as drones, but is not the reality that these resources are being misdirected? It seems clear to me, following on from Lord Trees's observation of no interventions coming for weeks and months, that the Environment Agency needs more boots on the ground and fewer people flying a desk.

Emma Reynolds: We are working with the Environment Agency to strengthen its investigatory powers. Some of that is about using the technology we already have more intensively. As you have said, we have increased the agency's enforcement budget by 50%, and we are looking at what more might need to be done in that regard. It has to do a mixture of different things. It has to make best use of the technology available, and it is making some progress on that. Obviously, there must be people sitting at desks doing some of this work as well, because it is about how the processes are taken forward. Sally, I do not know whether you want to say something more about the balance there.

Sally Randall: You have already mentioned that we have given the Environment Agency's enforcement budget a 50% increase, bringing it up to over £15 million; that includes nearly doubling the size of the Joint Unit for Waste Crime. This means that there is additional investment in front-line activity, intelligence and operational capacity. Some of that will happen at desks and some of it will happen on the ground. Some of that work will include, for example, intelligence—looking at what is permitted and what is not. Philip can say a bit more about how it divides these resources, but we have certainly tried to make sure that the agency has increased resources to deal with this problem.

Emma Reynolds: It is about the powers as well. We have found that, in some cases, the agency is pursuing an investigation but does not have the necessary powers. As we said earlier this week, we are looking at what we can do to give it police-style powers—that is, rights of entry, search powers and the right to request the production of documents—to ensure that it has the tools it needs to disrupt this criminal activity. This is a moving picture. We know we must do more, and we will give the agency additional powers so that it can take forward these investigations in the most effective way.

The Earl of Leicester: I maintain my contention that it is about boots on the ground—using those powers physically, with people out in the countryside doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Emma Reynolds: I am sure that you will put the same question to Philip Duffy next week, but it is also about using technology because they cannot be everywhere.

The Chair: Following on from the Earl of Leicester's question, it would be useful for us to understand what proportion of the resources is allocated to people in offices gathering data, information and so on; and what proportion is allocated to the environmental crime teams or environmental officers on the ground. That would be good. Can I have an undertaking that we will receive the organisational structure, if you like?

Emma Reynolds: May I suggest that you raise that next week with the Environment Agency and then, if you have any remaining questions, that you come back to us?

The Chair: Secretary of State, with all due respect, you are in charge of the Environment Agency and it reports to you. Yes, the committee will make that request, but I certainly think that a request from the Secretary of State who heads the department under which the Environment Agency sits will have a great deal of force.

Emma Reynolds: Okay.

Q76 **The Chair:** Before we leave this question, I want to follow on from what Lord Trees was saying. Activity restarts at these sites—even at the Bickershaw site, which is close to housing. Activity restarted there in February, and there is drone evidence of diggers moving waste around again. There has also been activity at the Raspberry Hill Park Farm site. In spite of the Environment Agency giving us written evidence saying that activity dropped in 2021, we know from the BBC South East reporter Yvette Austin's coverage that activity was continuing in 2024, and, just this January, activity was occurring.

We recommended a dedicated hotline and a portal so that residents could ring up and report activity when they saw it happening, so that it could be triaged quickly; one would hope that there would be an immediate response from the local teams on the ground that are already active and know who the criminals are. If we could mobilise them quickly and get them on the ground, that would be preferable, would it not? We are told that the time lapse between recordings being made by drones and CCTV and people being able to act to apprehend the people dumping waste is too long. Why has that recommendation been rejected? I am afraid that Crimestoppers will not cut it because the same thing happens: it goes into the system and disappears. We do not get the action we need immediately.

Sally Randall: We recognise the need to make sure that, when information is provided, whether to Crimestoppers, the local authority or the Environment Agency, it is followed up on quickly. In most cases—

The Chair: It is not. We know that. We know that residents repeatedly report these incidents and nothing happens.

Sally Randall: In most cases, it is right that those queries and reports are directed to the local authority. If you enter "report fly-tipping" into Google, it will send you to GOV.UK, which will direct you to your local authority and the correct place to report that in a local area. The

Environment Agency will also take direct reports of more serious incidents and either refer those back to the local authority, if that is relevant, or follow up on it itself.

The Chair: On that point about local authorities, I just point out—this is just one of the many loopholes and complexities in the system; it is why we think that a systemic review of the whole waste management system is sensible at this stage—that all local authorities have to do when this is reported to them is wait until the load is over 20 tonnes, then it is not their responsibility any more. The responsibility passes to the Environment Agency. Where is the incentive for the local authority to do anything?

Sally Randall: We hope that local authorities will act before that and not allow a problem to escalate before notifying the Environment Agency.

The Chair: They do not.

Sally Randall: We recognise that there is more work to do to join up the intelligence. That is partly what the Joint Unit for Waste Crime is trying to do, but we recognise that that is a complex job and there is still more to do.

The Chair: I am not sure that that is satisfactory, but we will move on.

Q77 **Baroness McIntosh of Pickering:** Welcome to you, Secretary of State and the team. I am delighted that you are seeking to close the loophole. I have a general question. The cost of a licence to collect and dispose of waste is quite low, yet the cost of disposing of waste is quite high. Is this a gap and a loophole that you are seeking to address?

James Cruddas: Where we got to last year was that we consulted on options in relation to landfill tax. The outworking of that consultation was announced at the Budget, where we announced that we would not proceed with the equalisation of the rates, which had originally been proposed, but would instead keep the lower rate of landfill tax; the gap between that and the higher rate would get no wider. That is where we got to in the Budget.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering: It was just a general question.

Emma Reynolds: Can I come in? This might be helpful. It is nice to see you. The other thing we are doing is increasing the barriers to entry for waste operators—carriers, brokers and dealers—which was recommended some time ago. We will bring forward secondary legislation as soon as we can. I am keen to get this going, given how long we have been waiting for it; I am sure that the committee is, too. It will mean that all operators will have to have a permit, and it will make sure that it is a lot tougher to get that permit as well. Then, as we have said, certain exemptions for permitting have been granted in the past, but we want to close those down. So we will have a much tighter grip on who is operating in the system and how they are able to do that.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering: Excellent; it is good to see you too. The Environmental Services Association told us that the probable total cost of this waste crime is £1 billion to £2 billion a year, yet we understand that your resources for enforcement are only £15 million a year. We invited you to look at leveraging more money into enforcement—for example, on the use of permit fees to cover enforcement.

At the moment, Secretary of State, you are still resisting that. But if we compare the situation with that of the Home Office, which can redirect income from immigration and nationality application fees to run the migration and border system, would it not be feasible to have a similar arrangement available to the Environment Agency in relation to waste permit fees and enforcement action against illegal waste activity?

Emma Reynolds: We did get that question from the committee in writing as well. Thank you for that. Unfortunately, different rules apply here from the other situation you mentioned, but we are looking at what more we can do to bolster enforcement funding and capability.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering: The Environmental Services Association set out specific asks, two of which are to stop criminals entering the system and accessing material. Are the Government and the Environment Agency doing enough to achieve that? Where are we with the waste crime levy?

Sally Randall: In terms of preventing criminals entering the system, a really important step, as the Secretary State said, is getting the carriers, brokers and dealers system in place. As you mentioned, it is a simple registration system at the moment. Under the carriers, brokers and dealers system, we will be able to refuse permits to those who have breached previous permit conditions or have certain criminal convictions. Obviously, we know that criminals will try to get around that, but at the moment there is almost no bar to entry. So, that is an important first step: to keep criminals out of the system, because we know that they are engaging and moving between the legal and illegal waste sectors. We absolutely recognise the concerns raised by the ESA there.

James Cruddas: I shall add a bit on the levy. The Environment Agency consulted on that last year. Ministers are considering the next steps on that. But it is worth flagging that managing public money, a set of rules we have to abide by, means that we are in a position whereby money raised from the regulated industry, those that pay for their permits, cannot be deployed to enforcement activity.

The Chair: Who sets the rules of the system?

James Cruddas: That enshrines case law. It is a well-trodden principle across a whole range of licensing and enforcement regimes. It is not specific to waste. It is a legal position that has been well established in a range of sectors. I come back to Baroness McIntosh's question in relation to overall resources. It is worth drawing out that the Environment Agency

also receives a proportion of the money it raises from Proceeds of Crime Act orders. It receives 37.5% of the amount raised through those, and it has received over £1.5 million through that route since 2024. It is an additional bit of resource that is relevant to your point.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering: Perhaps I may ask one last question. How can you impress on us that there is a sense of urgency in what you are doing, including seeking parliamentary time to introduce the measures that you have promised?

Emma Reynolds: Let me reassure the committee that there is a sense of urgency. I have discussed this issue with the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister and I am determined to push forward with the reforms that have been in play, because the three measures we talked about earlier have been recommended for quite some time. We need to get on with them now, because they will put up barriers to entry and make it harder for these criminals to circulate in the system and, as Sally was just saying, move between the legal system and the and the illegal area. Digital waste tracking is also a good tool. I am keen that we introduce these things as quickly as possible.

Earl Russell: Certainly, we welcome that new legislation and it will make a difference. I come back to the permitting fees issue. It appears that too much of the agency's time is overregulating permitted sites, and those fees cannot cross over to fighting the illegal sites. Is that simply a question of new legislation? If it is, can you look at bringing an amendment to whatever the nearest piece of legislation is to allow that crossover to happen, because it is not an efficient system. It cannot be beyond the wit of government to make those legislative changes.

The Chair: It is an artificial barrier.

Emma Reynolds: I will take that back, but I should reassure you, Earl Russell, that we are looking at different ways in which we could bolster the enforcement capability of the Environment Agency as well.

Q78 **Lord Ashcombe:** My question follows on from Lord Leicester's earlier question, in that technology is not everything and boots on the ground are important. We can issue all the permits we like in the world, but who is going to check them? These guys are doing illegal things and are going to find ways around it unless you have boots on the ground checking them. Where are the people to check the permits, because they are presumably issued annually or something like that?

James Cruddas: We and the Environment Agency have been discussing with the industry how it can change the way in which it operates its permit-checking regime precisely to address the concern that you outlined: to step up checks where they have a higher risk profile in relation to permitted sites.

Lord Ashcombe: I am not interested in high risk. Everybody, if they have a permit, needs to be checked. If they do not have a permit, they need to be dealt with. Somebody has to check that. Technology will not

do it. It is people.

James Cruddas: There are two points there. The first is that, under the existing regime, what the Environment Agency is looking at—I am sure that Philip Duffy, the chief executive, will talk to you a bit more about this next week—is looking at how it can strengthen its enforcement of the permitting regime, because we know that some permits are exploited in parts of the industry.

The Earl of Leicester: To reinforce Earl Russell's point, the Environment Agency and the Government have to show leadership on this. It is no good hiding behind, "It is all enshrined in law". The legal waste operators would love some of the income that is spent overchecking them to be redirected at dealing with illegal operators. Also, people in this country are getting bored of it. There has to be leadership, and there is clearly a will from the majority of people who want the Government and the Environment Agency to do something about it.

The Chair: Indeed, it will make you very popular.

Emma Reynolds: As I said, we are leaning into this and there will be more to come on this agenda.

Q79 **Lord Krebs:** Thank you, Secretary of State, for coming to talk to us this morning. I want to take the conversation on to measures that will prevent waste crime and, in particular, ask you whether the deterrents such as fines and custodial sentences are fit for purpose, and whether the punishment fits the crime. To give you a couple of anecdotal examples, we were told about two criminals in Northern Ireland who made £42 million out of illegal waste dumping, who were given a one-year jail sentence and a 21-month sentence. They still have their £42 million sitting in the bank to spend when they get out to buy their fancy villa in the Mediterranean. Also, in our letter to you, we wrote about the three years to March 2025 in which the Environment Agency received over 24,000 reports of waste crime, of which 0.65%, just over half of 1%, led to a prosecution. To us, it looked as though waste crime is a high-reward, low-risk enterprise. As I said in a debate recently, if I were a careers adviser for a criminal, I would say "Go into waste crime, young woman. It is a high-profit, low-risk enterprise". What is your response to that?

Emma Reynolds: There is a lot in there. Let me try to deal with some of it and then hand over to colleagues. The first thing to say is that, since the general election in July 2024, there have been 10 custodial sentences. I absolutely take the point that you are making that the penalties should fit the scale of the crime. We are taking more action with regard to money laundering and the proceeds of crime. We know that organised criminal groups are involved in these activities, as you have implied in your question. I do not think we can look just at the number of calls and the percentage of prosecutions. I am not sure that gives the full picture of a complex range of different calls they would have received. That is not to say that these are not disturbing. Some will be at the

bigger end that we have been talking about, the bigger illegal waste dumps.

Others will be smaller. I do not mean to underestimate the impact of some of the smaller fly tipping as well. As you will have seen recently, we have said that we want to look at what we can do to increase the penalties, such as putting points on driving licences, to try to increase the deterrent here to deter people in the first place from going into this sort of criminality. Sally, did you want to add anything?

Sally Randall: I will make a couple of expansions on what the Secretary of State said. We recognise that sometimes the very limited number of successful prosecutions that come through the system is frustrating. The Environment Agency and its partners are working to try to disrupt the system from end to end. That does not always result in prosecutions but can result in stopping the activity, so the activity is stopped at a far larger number of sites.

As the Secretary of State said, we want to make sure that prosecutions can happen. That might not end up being for an environmental crime. It might end up being where these are organised criminals engaged in a number of activities so the prosecution might be taken against one of their other activities, but we want to see those prosecutions being a significant economic deterrent, end to end. We think there is more to do there, and we continue to work across law enforcement agencies to try to make that happen.

Lord Krebs: To follow up on the numbers, because numbers can be misleading, when you say there have been 10 custodial sentences since the last general election, we cannot tell whether that is a big or a small number. I notice that, first, the true scale of waste crime is not known because a lot of it goes unreported, but, even if you look at what was discovered by the Environment Agency last year, in 2025, 749 new illegal sites were discovered. So in order to put 10 custodial sentences in context, we have to know what the scale of activity is.

I have a supplementary question for you. We were told in some of our evidence that the judiciary could benefit from training to support stronger prosecution of waste criminals—that they do not necessarily appreciate the severity, importance and impact of the crime so they treat it as something relatively trivial. What do you think about that?

Emma Reynolds: I am happy to take that up with colleagues in the MoJ.

Q80 **Lord Jay of Ewelme:** We have talked a lot about the Environment Agency already, and of course we will have a chance to talk to the agency next week. Can you say how you, as Secretary of State, hold the Environment Agency to account and challenge its performance on waste crime? What kind of relationship is there between the Government and the Environment Agency? That is what I am trying to get at. The agency is responsible but you are responsible for the agency. How does that work?

Emma Reynolds: Thank you for the question. As you will be aware, Defra is quite unique in having the arm's-length bodies within the Defra group, so we have a very close relationship. That is not to say we do not hold them to account, by the way, but they are within our group.

Phil Duffy and I meet frequently. We do performance reviews with the leadership of the Environment Agency and indeed the other arm's-length bodies. We recently published our strategic policy statement, where we outline that we want to see more progress on tackling waste crime. So the relationship is one of constructive challenge. I meet the team frequently, on a weekly basis, for updates on what is happening, and I meet Philip Duffy frequently as well, while James frequently meets the EA team to keep a close eye on what is happening.

As I have said, we want to ensure that the Environment Agency has more powers and indeed more resources. We will be saying more, perhaps later this week, about a new waste crime action plan, which will empower the agency and make sure that we are doing all that we can to disrupt this criminal activity.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: Since you have not yet announced the waste crime action plan, I know you are not going to tell us about it, but can you give us a little idea of what it is likely to involve? Is it going to take all this a lot further? Are we going to say, "Thank goodness for that" or "Not enough"?

Emma Reynolds: I am happy to write to the committee as soon as I can with the waste crime action plan. There will be some measures in there that we have already talked about today, along with additional measures. Earl Russell and other Members have raised the funding and its sustainability, and we will be looking at that because we recognise that the scale of this issue has got much bigger than it was a few years ago.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: As you will have discovered, there is a certain—perhaps "scepticism" is too strong a word—about what the Environment Agency is doing. The question that I think a number of us have is: you are giving it more powers, but how confident can we be that it is going to implement those powers effectively? Is that the sort of thing you are looking at?

Emma Reynolds: Yes. We want to give it new powers. We want it to use them effectively, so we will be holding it to account in order that that happens.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: I want to come back to something that was said earlier about drones and technology. The agency said to us recently that 749 new illegal waste sites were found last year. That is a huge number. Is it a common-sense thought that effective drones feeding back to someone effective in the Environment Agency can identify these things early so that action can be taken early? I know we have partly covered that, but why does that not happen?

Emma Reynolds: That is something we are making progress on. We have 33 pilots of this drone technology, which is more advanced than it has been so it enables you to see the situation on the ground in 3D. However, obviously the agency has to prioritise that resource. You have talked about the number of sites overall, but there is huge variation in terms of whether that is a small site or a big site and what the risks are to the environment and to human health. That covers a big spectrum of different sites.

Q81 **Lord Rooker:** Good morning and thanks for coming. I want to follow up what Lord Jay was asking about. I want to know how curious you are about the Environment Agency, because I get the sense that you are not very curious about it. I have a specific question, which will probably answer that. You talk about more resources for the Environment Agency, but do you check how those resources are held at national level or devolved to area level? For example—this is my question—have you seen the organisation chart at the national level of the crime unit and the distribution of crime officers across the local areas? Even if you have not, we would like to see that because it would explain to us what is held at the national level and what is devoted to what we call the local level—I understand that they are areas. That is my question. Have you seen the national organisation chart and the distribution of crime officers at area levels? If you have, can you share it with us, and if you have not, can you obtain it and then share it with us?

Emma Reynolds: I will take that back as to whether we can share it with you but, in answer to your first question, of course I am very curious.

Lord Rooker: Sorry; why could you not share an organisation chart showing the national level and the area officers with us? What is the hesitation about that?

James Cruddas: Let us take that away and come back to the committee with the information that we can provide. It is the Environment Agency's information; I think that is the point. If it helps, Lord Rooker, I can elaborate. There are two different institutions that you are discussing here. The Joint Unit for Waste Crime, which I think you are referring to, is held at the national level. It is a joint unit of a number of partners, hosted by the Environment Agency, and its specific role is in relation to serious and organised crime at the national scale. There are then enforcement officers and waste crime officers that the area teams have in the Environment Agency who work on crimes that are similar but not national in nature. Hopefully that helps to distinguish how the resources are split, but we are happy to take away the question and to come back with an answer.

Sally Randall: Can I add a little on that? We discuss with the Environment Agency the best way for it to structure its resource. I know that one of the things that Philip Duffy, the chief executive of the agency, often thinks about is the right balance between local officers who can be out on the ground and specialist resource in the HQ of the Environment

Agency that can do very specialist work, and I know that he has made judgments that have shifted in both directions, depending on the exact nature of the work. I am sure that he will be able to expand on that, but that is a live conversation that we have with the agency and I know it is something that happens within the Environment Agency's senior team, because, depending on the exact activity, the answers can be different.

Baroness Whitaker: I have two rather ignorant questions. Does the chief executive of the Environment Agency have direct access to you, Secretary of State, or is it always through the senior official who is the sort of minder? Do the environmental health officers of the local authorities have any kind of a role in the EA's operations?

Emma Reynolds: I meet Philip Duffy frequently. He leads a big organisation that is responsible for this area as well as flooding. We are talking to him about water reform. I see him very frequently indeed. He is one of my most important arm's-length bodies. So, the answer is yes.

James Cruddas: On environmental health officers, it is local authorities in general that have a relationship with the Environment Agency, depending on the nature of the incident that we are discussing. They have an important role to play.

Baroness Whitaker: If you want to let us know in writing what exactly they do in this area of waste crime, I will be very interested to see it.

James Cruddas: I am very happy to take that away.

Lord Krebs: I have a quick follow up to Lord Rooker's question about areas and regional breakdown. I noticed that waste crime is not uniformly distributed across the country and that Cumbria and Lancashire are the hotspots. I wondered why that is and what you as Secretary of State are doing to encourage the Environment Agency to respond to the fact that Lancashire and Cumbria are particularly affected by waste crime.

Emma Reynolds: Thank you for the question. We look at the high-risk cases with the Environment Agency frequently. There are problems in the areas that you mentioned but there are sites in other parts of the country as well. When I meet the Environment Agency, what I want to be reassured about is that there is consistent performance in different parts of the country—that we are not seeing good performance in one part of the country and not so good in another. We want a consistent operational performance from the Environment Agency across the country. Unfortunately, this type of crime blights communities in all different parts of the country.

Q82 **The Chair:** Before we move on to Lord Lenny's question, perhaps I may I ask you a question about the Environment Agency's role in preventing the build-up of these large illegal waste sites. We received some supplementary evidence from the ESA—the Environmental Services Association—just last week; I think it is on the website now. In it we heard that the illegal waste sites are supplied by a network of permitted

facilities all over the country that process commercial waste. These are permitted facilities that the Environment Agency is supposed to regulate. They shred the waste so that it becomes far more difficult to identify its source. Those landfill sites, we understand, are supplied en masse by lorries from all over the country queuing day and night to get into them. Yet, as far as we know, they are allowed to continue. These are surely known to the Environment Agency. We understand that there are 10 to 15 of them across the country.

The Environmental Services Association says that it has seen estimates suggesting that the number of vehicles involved means that the scale of landfill tax fraud taking place could be up to £100 million at a single site. There are about 10 to 15 of these sites so the figure is about £1 billion that has not been accounted for, as far as we can see. Extrapolating this, the true scale of landfill tax fraud across the country could be around £1 billion, far in excess of HMRC's estimate of the landfill tax gap, which is about 22% or £150 million. Given that the Environment Agency's own analysis showed that for every £1 spent on tackling waste crime, you see a return of £5 in revenue in benefits to the economy through various means, why is this allowed to happen?

James Cruddas: What you are describing is an exploitation of the current system, known as misdescription. We are grateful to the Environmental Services Association for bringing that intelligence to us. We are aware of the situation. I cannot say too much more about the investigation that is ensuing. The Environment Agency obviously has been made aware of the concerns that the ESA has and live investigations are under way. I can say that much of what the Secretary of State has already said this morning is designed to prevent that happening in the future. You framed the question as one about prevention. All the reforms that we have talked about—carriers, brokers, dealers, digital waste tracking and exemption reform—are designed to prevent that kind of exploitation continuing in the future.

The Chair: The Environment Agency regulates permitted sites. These are permitted sites. They provide, or supply, the rubbish that is being dumped at Hoad's Wood, Kidlington, et cetera. Why can we not prioritise turning the tap off?

James Cruddas: I think that in response to an earlier question—I cannot remember who asked it—I mentioned that the Environment Agency is looking at how it can change the way in which it regulates permitted sites to essentially look at those that are higher risk. That would include the sites that you are talking about that are supplying landfill sites in the way you describe.

The Chair: These are serious organised waste-crime sites.

James Cruddas: Absolutely.

The Chair: The police should be looking into them also. But I am getting distracted.

Q83 **Lord Ashcombe:** We heard from the police and crime commissioner for Kent that he believed there were only five and a half investigators between Dorset and Dover. Is that enough? It is a hell of a big area.

James Cruddas: I do not have the detail at my fingertips in terms of how many investigators the Environment Agency has in Kent. But I would say that the—

Lord Ashcombe: It is not just Kent; it is Kent to Dorset.

James Cruddas: Sorry—Kent to Dorset. What I can say is that the Environment Agency works closely with all law-enforcement partners across all parts of the country to pursue investigations that it needs to carry out.

Lord Ashcombe: My point is that there are five-and-a-half investigators in that area—I dread to think who the half is. That does not make many people across the whole country. The areas are vast and there are only so many hours in the day for each individual.

The Chair: We look forward to receiving that organisational chart, which has been asked for now a number of times. It is important that we receive that.

Emma Reynolds: I make the point that the Environment Agency works very closely with the police.

The Chair: That is news to us.

Emma Reynolds: Someone asked earlier about the percentage of prosecutions. There have been some arrests, as you know, with regard to the Kidlington site. That was the Joint Unit for Waste Crime in support of the police. So it was not the people that you were talking about, my Lord, but the police plus the Environment Agency. We have to work in partnership across the different enforcement agencies in order to have an effective situation.

Lord Ashcombe: Secretary of State, no one is denying that. But we are still getting huge problems, and small tips become big tips if nothing happens. That is what we are seeing, and we are not seeing whoever it is getting in the way to stop it.

Emma Reynolds: I agree with you. We want to do exactly what you have just said and prevent the smaller tips becoming bigger tips. We have seen that happen previously. We are aware of that problem and looking at what more can be done to make sure that these sites are not getting worse.

Lord Mancroft: From previous evidence we received from several different sources, the Environment Agency and the local police are not working well together and things are falling down the cracks. That is part of the problem. As to the idea that there is a seamless or effective relationship between those two bodies, all the evidence that we have

received is that it is not seamless and it does not work very well together.

Emma Reynolds: All I can say is that there have been a number of successes with regard to Kidlington, where we have had four arrests. I cannot comment in any more detail but I take the point that this needs to be consistent across the country.

Q84 **Lord Lennie:** Who is responsible for cleaning up illegal waste sites and what steps are you taking to protect and support landowners when waste is dumped on their land?

Sally Randall: I am happy to say a little about that. This varies from site to site, and we recognise that in many cases landowners are victims of what is taking place here. In some cases, landowners may have a role, so there is not a simple distinction to draw. We try, through the Environment Agency, to pursue an enforcement approach where the polluter pays, so that the person who has dumped takes responsibility; we recognise that that is difficult and time-consuming, and often leaves victims of crime in a difficult position. It is not a simple answer, and there is no easy solution for a person who is left in that position.

Emma Reynolds: We are talking to the insurance industry about whether there are any barriers to having a more effective insurance scheme that could help landowners in this regard. That is something that we are exploring.

Lord Lennie: I am trying to understand how the law originally—it was not your responsibility in your jobs—came to suggest that the landowner should be responsible for clearing dumped waste on their site. It seems to me a peculiar responsibility for them to have.

Emma Reynolds: If the taxpayer had to pick up the tab, that could run into a substantial bill for the taxpayer and, as I said earlier, could create perverse incentives because these waste criminals would know that, at the end of the day, the Government—i.e. the taxpayer—would pick up the tab. As Sally said, in many cases the landowner is a victim but there have been cases where the landowner is part of the criminal activity.

Lord Lennie: I suspect that that is the case in a small number of cases, but the majority of them—

Emma Reynolds: As I said, there are many where that is not the case, but there are some cases where the landowner has been an integral part of the criminal activity. If the Government were to say that they will clean up every site, that could make it more widespread. You have to look at the incentives here and also the bill for the taxpayer if we were to clear every single site. I know it is very difficult for the landowners, and farmers have raised these issues with me as well. In my own constituency there have been problems. It is very difficult for the people involved when they have fly-tipping on their land.

Q85 **Lord Mancroft:** Secretary of State, I am sure you are aware that on the 25 February, the House of Lords passed an amendment to the Crime and

Policing Bill which transfers the responsibility, as Lord Lennie was saying, for dealing with fly-tipping from the landowner to the local authority—this is slightly contrary to what you say. It is true that some landowners and farmers are involved in it, but the vast majority are victims of this crime. It seems rather extraordinary that, being the victim of the crime, they are then asked to pay for the crime of which they are victims. We passed an amendment in the Lords as we believe it is more equitable. Why should the injured party doubly be punished? Also, local authorities are obviously far better positioned to work with the police and the Environment Agency than a farmer or landowner is. It brings together all the public sector stakeholders. I hope that you will not be attempting to reverse that when it comes back to your House, because this House overwhelmingly felt that that was the best way forward. What is your attitude to that?

Emma Reynolds: I cannot pre-empt what will be done when it comes back to us. Local authorities obviously do have a role.

Sally Randall: We want local authorities to take a leading role, whether or not that means taking on ultimate legal and financial responsibility for all sites, which would be a much more significant step. Ministers will consider it and respond when that comes back to the Commons.

The Chair: You mentioned that it is not fair that the taxpayer should have to pick up the bill; it certainly is not. The person who should have to pick up the bill is the criminal who put the waste there. It is the job of the Environment Agency, together with the police, to identify those criminals or to prevent that activity taking place in the first place. The “polluter pays” principle must be made to work here. It is the only way, otherwise it is a ludicrous situation that innocent people who are the victims have to pay for the criminal activity or that the taxpayer pays. This is yet another instance why we thought that the current system of waste management is not working and needs a root and branch review. There are many instances of this. Will you take that away? First, I will turn to the Earl of Leicester, and then Baroness Whitaker.

The Earl of Leicester: I add that the taxpayer is already paying through the nose for the lack of waste clearance, because the Environment Agency is misdirecting its resources into extra managers. Technology can help. But, as I have said before, you need boots on the ground and leadership from the top people in the Environment Agency and from Government.

Emma Reynolds: I agree with your analysis, Chair, that the polluter must be made to pay and we are reforming the system to try to make sure that we are focusing on prevention and enforcement and the polluter paying. As has been pointed out, it is extremely difficult to recover the entire amount, unfortunately, to cover the clear-up. That is obviously where we want to be and where we are driving to. I cannot sit here and say that that happens now because it does not.

James Cruddas: I add that one of the things the Secretary of State mentioned earlier was the policing powers that we are going to give to the Environment Agency. These will allow us to get more documents and so forth, which will allow us, in turn, to be able to pursue more confiscation orders to get at the assets of these criminals exactly as you describe, Chair.

Q86 **Baroness Whitaker:** Can you speed through at the end of our session to your views on how the National Police Service might help you in your work?

James Cruddas: The National Police Service is in its infancy in terms of a concept. We are working very closely with the National Police Chiefs' Council and the National Crime Agency, and the Joint Unit for Waste Crime, which are partners in that. We are working closely—in the period between now and the advent of the National Police Service—to look at how best law enforcement can collectively pursue waste crime.

Baroness Whitaker: It may be that you will be able to let us know a bit more as this develops. The College of Policing, the National Crime Agency and the National Police Chiefs' Council said that they could not send us anybody with sufficient understanding of the issues under consideration. Will one of your efforts be on the education and training of any National Police Service, for instance, to give greater prominence to waste crime among their priorities?

James Cruddas: The Joint Unit for Waste Crime already conducts training for police officers. It has trained about 3,000 officers over a substantial period. It does precisely that; it gives people a greater understanding of waste crime and how they might best pursue that—we touched on this earlier. We are talking to the National Police Chiefs' Council on a regular basis. I have had that dialogue precisely because of the issues you raise about where this sits best within the law enforcement system.

Q87 **Earl Russell:** Thank you for all your evidence, Secretary of State. To my mind, serious organised waste crime should be dealt with as serious organised crime. These people are doing people trafficking, drugs and firearms. They do not separate their activity—"Today, we are doing waste crime and these people over here are doing this". It is all part of their joint enterprise. It strikes me that the National Police Service could be the ideal place to put the Joint Unit for Waste Crime. By having that organised waste crime approach, we can join up all the criminal networks; we can make sure that when serious organised criminals are prosecuted for firearms or people trafficking, we are following through on waste crime. We can follow the money, track the phones and follow the networks. Can I please ask that this is given further consideration? I put an amendment to the Police and Crime Bill; it was rejected out of hand. I recognise that this is an active area of consideration, but I put in a plea to have an open mind to considering it.

Emma Reynolds: Thank you for the way in which you have presented that. I completely understand your point of view. To reassure you, I would say that there are organised criminal gangs that have this as part of a different strand of their criminality. Then there are other gangs more focused on this in their entirety. The whole point of the Joint Unit for Waste Crime is to make sure that we are dealing with those two different scenarios. Regarding the involvement of the police and the different enforcement agencies, we have recently made some progress in the way in which we are working with them, and in the way in which the Environment Agency, HMRC, the other regulators and policing are working together. We have made some progress on how close that integration is. To reassure you, that might not be exactly where you want it to be but there is much closer working than there was perhaps a couple of years ago.

James Cruddas: The only thing I should add is that the intelligence sharing between the various parts of law enforcement is strong. It might help the committee if I reiterated something I said earlier. The Joint Unit for Waste Crime is hosted by the Environment Agency. The unit is well respected in law enforcement and has access to intelligence sharing, tools and techniques at its disposal that reflect that respect within the law enforcement community.

Q88 **Lord Krebs:** My question follows directly from that of Earl Russell. We are told in your written response to a question that we received a couple of days ago that waste crime is not currently designated as a strategic priority by the National Crime Agency. I wondered whether that decision takes account of the fact—as Earl Russell just said and, Secretary of State, you agreed—that waste crime is often part of a wider criminal activity involving people smuggling, drugs and money laundering. I should have thought that combination would mean that it ought to be a strategic priority. I wondered whether it was satisfactory as an answer to say, “No, it is not a strategic priority”.

Emma Reynolds: Obviously, this is something that the Home Secretary keeps under review, and I am happy to take that back.

Lord Krebs: Would you do that, please? Thank you.

Lord Mancroft: In the run-up to the general election, the Labour Party published its rural crime strategy and had a list of priorities. The top priority was waste crime. I have to say that it does not feel like that. Can you assure us today that your number one priority in rural crime, Secretary of State, is waste crime?

Emma Reynolds: Overall, in the whole department, waste crime is a big priority for me. If I think about how I spend my weeks, and I have different things going on, I sit down with the team every week and we have put this on an emergency footing. There are obviously different types of rural crime as well. However, I am spending more time and effort discussing this with the team, making sure that we hold the Environment Agency to account, are making progress and looking at what

additional powers and additional resource can be given over to this issue. We know it is such a big issue. I again thank the committee. You are absolutely right that this issue has got much worse in recent times and that is why we are stepping up. I will have more to say on this in the coming days.

Q89 The Earl of Leicester: Secretary of State, in the businesses that I run, we have five key behaviours and one of them is “go and see”. I appreciate that as Secretary of State you are insanely busy but I suggest that instead of having weekly meetings with your top civil servants, you actually ask and say, “I want to go and see the people on the ground and hear it from them”. That would be far more revealing than listening to the platitudes of your senior civil servants.

Emma Reynolds: Perhaps I may reassure you that my Minister Mary Creagh, who gave evidence to your committee earlier in your inquiry, has been to see the Joint Unit for Waste Crime and I have discussed that with her. I am not just relying on written or verbal updates from officials but, as you said, my time is spread very thinly indeed. I will try to take the time to do that but that is not to say that because I have not done it yet I do not take it seriously. One of my junior Ministers has been out to do that.

The Chair: Secretary of State, thank you very much. On the Earl of Leicester’s point just made—“Go and see”—it would be helpful if you were to go and speak with the people who are responsible for taking action on the ground. We are extremely grateful to you for taking the time to come and see us. You mentioned Mary Creagh. She mentioned to us that we would be seeing the much-awaited CBD—carriers, brokers and dealers—reform in April 2026. It was a long-standing date. We understand that has now been pushed back and we cannot be sure of when we will see those reforms or the legislation for them. Can you update us on that?

Emma Reynolds: All I can say is that I am straining every sinew to have it as soon as possible, because I want to get this thing in place so that we can start to make progress.

The Chair: So, just to wrap up, we have heard that the Environment Agency cannot act when ownership of land is disputed; that it cannot act when it is on private land; that the agency cannot act if waste crime is happening on a non-permitted site; that the Environment Agency cannot issue a restrictions order if there is currently no activity ongoing on a site; and that the EA cannot move money into fighting waste crime although it is collected from the regulated waste sector, and even though the ESA and its members have repeatedly asked the agency to do so. The Environment Agency itself tells us that it is not funded to clear illegal waste sites. This is a whole catalogue of barriers to stopping action on something that is causing huge environmental, human health and economic damage. We really must see a better response. This is why we asked for a root and branch review. These are not isolated things that can be fixed one by one. There is something fundamentally askew with the way in which this issue is being handled. I hope that you will take

that away. We really want to work with you to try and get a resolution to this.

One final appeal is on behalf of the residents of Bickershaw. If we pay our taxes for anything, it is to make sure our streets are clean and we do not have to live with toxic rubbish on our doorstep. To add insult to injury, residents are now living with rubbish from other people on their doorstep, which is toxic and extremely dangerous to health, not least to the primary school within the vicinity. Please can I urge you to take that away and see if we can get some action on this? It is one of the most important sites that need clearing. With that, I say a sincere thank you to all of you for coming before us today.