

Written evidence submitted by the Local Government Association

The Government's resources and waste reforms

The LGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry on the Government's waste reforms. Local government fully supports the Government's ambition to reduce waste volumes and increase rates of recycling, which will be vital in the transition to a more sustainable economy and to protect the natural environment.

Waste is one of the most visible and important doorstep council services, reaching every household. Public satisfaction with waste services remains consistently high, which is a source of pride for local government. Almost 80 percent of residents were very or fairly satisfied with waste collection in the [LGA's latest poll of residents satisfaction with their local council](#).

The LGA have been engaging with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to help them to implement the reforms effectively and in a way that works for all areas. To achieve this, we have consistently raised that there will need to be an element of local flexibility in the reforms to allow service provision to take into account local geography, infrastructure and specific local waste collection and recycling needs. We have also raised the need for all the separate elements of Defra's reforms to be implemented in a way that works coherently on the ground.

This letter outlines the current key issues for local government, and how we can work with Defra to implement the reforms effectively and efficiently.

Extended Producer Responsibility

In addition to increasing rates of recycling, it is vital that Government takes action to reduce the amount of unnecessary packaging and waste that is produced in the first place. That is why Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is such an important pillar of the reforms, as it is focused on incentivising industry to reduce the quantity of packaging they produce and move to using materials that are recyclable.

We were therefore disappointed by Defra's decision to delay the introduction of EPR, and postpone [the requirement for packaging producers and retailers to pay councils for the cost of dealing with packaging in household waste and recycling](#). Councils are now expected to receive payments in October 2025 instead of October 2024.

The delay means that there will be another year of excessive packaging unnecessarily impacting our environment. The LGA have also consistently engaged with Defra to warn that the uncertainties and delays around the reforms are causing councils real difficulties in managing their long-term waste contracts and preventing them from planning investments in infrastructure, such as expanding depots to handle more types of material for recycling.

Defra has suggested the delay in implementation is, in part, to allow councils more time to prepare and adjust services. However, councils cannot use the additional time to prepare until they receive a timeline for implementation and confirmation of funding. We previously recommended to Defra that if they could not fully implement EPR by October 2024, the department must put in place transitional arrangements to allow councils to prepare. For example, by setting up the scheme administrator and providing clarity on the timetable for implementation and funding.

The LGA has also repeatedly called for producer responsibility to be extended to other waste streams, for example through takeback schemes for bulky items such as furniture. This could help to reduce the amount of furniture which is fly tipped, saving communities and the taxpayer money for collecting this waste.

The EPR Scheme Administrator

The scheme administrator's role is critical to the success of EPR in future years, as it will be responsible for setting the level of fees required from producers, collecting payments and distributing them to local authorities.

We welcome the Government's commitment to make the Scheme Administrator a public body. Given local government's central role in delivering the reforms, councils input and expertise will be vital to delivering on EPR's ambitions. It is therefore important that councils are well-represented in the administration of the scheme alongside other partners, and the LGA is well-placed to provide this representation on behalf of the sector.

Resources

EPR payments must be fully costed, so that the funding provided to councils to deliver waste services reflects the real cost of processing waste. Some costs are fixed – like trucks and staff – so councils will not be able to translate changes in packaging type or volumes into savings. Councils must provide a service to every household and EPR payments need to factor in increased demand and servicing the type of new homes that are being developed, for example more flats and high-rise properties.

Local government budgets have been subject to significant funding reductions in recent years, which has driven efficiencies in service delivery. Rising costs due to inflation, particularly wages and energy costs, have further exacerbated these pressures.

If EPR payments fall short of covering the costs of developing and sustaining the infrastructure and services to deliver the Government's ambitions, there is therefore no flex within current local government budgets for councils to pick up the shortfall.

Consistency reforms

We are also concerned that Defra has decided to delay the 'consistent collections' reforms until after the implementation of EPR. Like with the delay to EPR, the lack of certainty over the timetable for implementation is impacting councils' ability to plan and is stifling innovation and investment in recycling infrastructure.

The LGA supports the principle of a core set of mandatory materials for household recycling collections. However, it is important that councils retain flexibility over how collections are arranged. The ability to tailor local services and decide how materials are collected, while ensuring that the core set of mandatory materials are recycled in every area, is essential to meet the needs of different communities in different geographies and types of housing.

New burdens funding must be sufficient in covering all costs, including the set-up costs and ongoing revenue costs, and Defra must work with councils to understand the practical challenges of delivering consistent collections everywhere. Councils who are considering implementing food waste collections earlier than Defra's mandatory start date will also need assurance that they will not be financially worse off by acting before the implementation date.

DIY waste and garden waste

The LGA has opposed the Government's plan to remove councils' ability to charge fees for disposing of "DIY" type waste at household waste and recycling centres (HWRCs) and providing garden waste collections. In the case of DIY waste charges, Defra has waived the requirement for government to provide councils with new burdens funding when changes are made to the regulatory framework. Around half of waste disposal authorities use the power to charge a reasonable cost for disposal of DIY type waste, and the ban will remove over £1 million a year from many local waste services. And the costs will grow beyond that; 3 in 4 councils expect the volume of DIY type waste to increase because of the policy. There is also a risk of abuse from non-domestic operators.

A survey from the National Association for Waste Disposal Organisations (NAWDO) found the loss of income from DIY waste will leave a third of councils considering closing some waste recycling sites, a quarter considering reducing opening hours, and a quarter considering reducing the types of material that they accept for recycling.

At a time when government is looking to implement ambitious waste and recycling reforms, we have called on DEFRA to reconsider and ensure that charging for garden waste collections and DIY waste remains a local decision. However, if these changes do go ahead, it is vital that the cost of new burdens funding is met in full to ensure that funding shortfalls do not undermine the deliverability of the reforms.

Next steps

Local government can offer a wealth of experience in working with residents and delivering waste and recycling services in all parts of the country and in all weather conditions.

While the delay to the implementation of waste and recycling reforms is disappointing, we are keen to work with Defra and industry to make sure that the extra time is used to make a proper assessment of the financial impact on local authorities and set out a clear timetable of actions. Clarity over the timetable and funding will be vital to ensure that councils can use the delay to prepare for complex system changes.

The LGA is experienced at supporting council-led improvement across a wide-range of services, from our planning advisory service to our care and health improvement programme. We would be pleased to work with Defra to develop a similar offer to support the implementation of the waste reforms.

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