

Government Review of Waste Policy in England 2011



defra

Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

Executive Summary

Ambition and Case for Action

- 1 This Government is committed to being the greenest ever. How we deal with our waste is important for a range of broader concerns such as material security, energy, climate change and environmental protection. While good progress has been made over the last decade to reduce the volume of waste sent to landfill and increase recycling, we can and must go further and faster. If we do, we will see the benefits not only in a healthier natural environment and reduced impacts on climate change, but also in the competitiveness of our businesses through better resource efficiency and innovation, helping to create a new, green economy.
- 2 In conducting this Review we have been guided by the “waste hierarchy”, which is both a guide to sustainable waste management and a legal requirement. The hierarchy gives top priority to waste prevention, followed by preparing for re-use, recycling, other types of recovery (including energy recovery), and last of all disposal (e.g. landfill). In many cases, carbon acts as a good proxy for the overall environmental impacts of waste: generally speaking, the higher up the waste hierarchy waste is treated, the smaller the greenhouse gas impacts. **As part of this, we will promote resource efficient product**

design and manufacture and target those waste streams with high carbon impacts, both in terms of embedded carbon (food, metals, plastics, textiles¹) and direct emissions from landfill (food, paper and card, textiles, wood). We will promote the use of life cycle thinking in all waste policy and waste management decisions and the reporting of waste management in carbon terms, as an alternative to weight-based measures.

- 3 In driving waste up the hierarchy, we must ensure that the UK meets its EU obligations and targets on waste management. At the same time, we need to make it easy for people to do the right thing and get the balance right between the service householders and business receive, our environmental objectives and the costs and benefits of different policy options. **We will continue to help local communities develop fit for purpose local solutions for collecting and dealing with household waste and work with councils to meet households’ reasonable expectations for weekly collections, particularly of smelly waste.**

¹ In terms of the total of emissions from those waste streams rather than per unit of waste.

Sustainable Use of Materials

- 4 Waste is a resource. It is clear that for too long we have worried about how to dispose of waste, but not enough about how to minimise it, or the use we can make of it. At a time of material resource pressure – even scarcity in some areas – we need to consider waste more fully within broader material flows and sustainable material use.
- 5 Preventing waste wherever it occurs should be the shared priority of Government, business and civil society – it delivers the greatest economic and environmental benefits. We heard this repeatedly from those who responded to our Call for Evidence and with whom we discussed these issues.
- 6 **The Government will develop a comprehensive Waste Prevention Programme and in the meantime will work with businesses and other organisations across supply chains on a range of measures designed to drive waste reduction and re-use as part of a broader resource efficiency programme.**

Waste Prevention, Re-use and Recycling

- 7 We need to take an integrated approach to waste prevention, re-use and recycling – absolute prevention of waste is in many areas unrealistic, but we can prioritise prevention while seeking to re-use and recycle as much as possible of the waste which does arise. **On recycling, we must continue to increase the percentage of waste collected from both households and businesses which is recycled, at the very least meeting the revised waste framework directive target to recycle 50% of waste from households by 2020.** This will include overcoming some challenges ahead, particularly in urban areas and within a tight funding settlement for local authorities, and to ensure that smaller businesses have access to cost effective recycling services.

Responsibility Deals

- 8 One way of driving waste reduction and greater recycling will be through voluntary responsibility deals with business. Better environmental outcomes can, in many circumstances, be delivered in the least burdensome way through a voluntary approach, rather than legislation. **Building on the experience of existing successful agreements, we are now working closely with businesses to develop new voluntary responsibility deals in a range of sectors – including hospitality, retail, direct mail, waste industry – focussed on reducing and recycling waste.**

Food Waste

- 9 Tackling food waste is an example of where prevention and recycling/recovery go hand in hand. We need to cut down the estimated 16 million tonnes a year produced every year in Britain, while ensuring that much more of the food waste which is produced is not simply disposed of in landfill. **The Government will work with and support businesses, local authorities and third sector organisations to help reduce avoidable food waste – in the home, in supply chains, across the public sector and within businesses themselves.**

Packaging

- 10 Voluntary action is also an important driver of behaviour change on packaging. Survey after survey shows that consumers believe packaging is a big environmental problem. **The Government will work with business to encourage – where appropriate – greater use of recycled content in packaging, as well as to make packaging more recyclable.** Regulation on packaging has also played a valuable role in creating markets and driving behaviour change. **We intend to consult on increased recycling targets on packaging producers from 2013 to 2017. The scale of the increases we consult on will depend on our Impact Assessment, which will consider issues**

such as affordability for businesses and Government. We will also consult on establishing a sub-target for recycling of glass into re-melt applications. Government will make a final decision in the 2012 Budget.

Recycling on the Go

- 11** Recycling at home has increasingly become the norm, but recycling *'on the go'* – in the street and in public places such as stations, shopping malls, conference centres and sporting arenas – is nowhere near as easy. **WRAP will support councils who want to work with local businesses to explore how the necessary street infrastructure can be funded to allow recycling on the go to grow. WRAP will collate and disseminate information and good practice on recycling on the go and identify models for delivering improved facilities both on the street and in public places.**

Regulation and Enforcement

- 12** Waste legislation exists for a reason. It protects the environment and human health and can help to create markets, providing a level playing field in which legitimate businesses can operate. However, businesses also made clear that, at times, legislation and its enforcement can impose significant burdens on them.
- 13** We have listened carefully to these views. **Defra, BIS and the Environment Agency have set in train a programme of work – in partnership with industry – to identify how the burden of compliance on legitimate business can be reduced, with enforcement targeted even more clearly against those who consistently operate outside the law.** This work will look at measures aimed at allowing businesses to fulfil their obligations more easily and effectively, reducing unnecessary burdens and better integrating regulatory controls in the best interests of business and the environment.

- 14** At the same time, **we will ensure that enforcement bodies have sufficient powers to tackle illegal waste sites and flytipping. As part of this, we will introduce stronger powers to seize vehicles suspected of involvement in waste crime.** In addition, we will further examine a range of issues around prevention, detection and enforcement including sentencing guidelines, collaborative working and guidance to business.

Householders and Local Authorities Working Together

- 15** **The Government will be working with local councils to increase the frequency and quality of rubbish collections and make it easier to recycle,** and to tackle measures which encourage councils specifically to cut the scope of collections. Waste services are a matter for local authorities to develop fit for purpose local solutions. However the Government believes that better procurement and joint working can improve the efficiency of collections while improving the frontline service for the public in an affordable and practical manner. The Government understands that the public have a reasonable expectation that household waste collections services should be weekly, particularly for smelly waste.
- 16** The Government has already moved to remove Audit Commission guidance and inspections which marked down councils who do not adopt fortnightly rubbish collections; and to abolish Local Area Agreements imposed by Whitehall which created perverse incentives to downgrade waste collection services. The Government will also work with WRAP to monitor service levels to understand whether and how they are changing, keeping the quality, affordability and frequency of household waste collections under review.

- 17** We will encourage councils to sign up to the new Recycling and Waste Services Commitment, drawn up by the Local Government Association and representatives of local councils, working with Defra and WRAP.
- 18** Local authorities need to work with their householders, not against them. Enforcement powers and penalties available to local authorities should balance the need to respect individuals' civil liberties with the need to deal effectively with behaviours which have a negative impact on residents' local neighbourhoods. Enforcement must be targeted at those who deliberately and persistently break the law. Therefore we will introduce a 'harm to local amenity' test to tackle 'neighbours from hell', ensuring that enforcement is targeted at those who deliberately and persistently break the law. **We will remove criminal sanctions applying to householders and ensure that the level of fines local authorities can impose are appropriate. In addition, we are repealing certain powers of entry in England that currently enable local authorities to inspect household waste.**
- 19** We will also remove some of the burden and barriers which prevent local authorities from focussing on local priorities, including abolition of some data requirements, targets and legislation burdens, principally the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme from 2013.

Litter

- 20** Litter remains at persistently high levels, despite increasing funding spent on street cleaning over the last decade. With this in mind, **Keep Britain Tidy will develop the Love Where You Live litter campaign; WRAP will work in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy to enable groups participating in Big Tidy-Up activities (many of which are school groups or charities) to recycle the materials they**

collect. WRAP and Keep Britain Tidy will pool their knowledge, and bring anti-littering and tidy-up messages and recycling on the go messages together under the same banner. We will also work with business and others to develop ways of tackling the problem of littering from vehicles, through encouraging changed behaviour and practical disposal solutions.

Business Waste Collection

- 21** In partnership with local authorities and private sector waste management providers we want to make it easier and more cost effective for SMEs to recycle. Households and businesses often produce similar types of waste and, where it makes sense to do so, materials should be collected and treated together. We will end the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme to remove an important perceived barrier to local authority service provision in this area. We have found that SMEs are not always aware of their legal responsibilities; of available recycling services and indeed in some areas there is a lack of such services. **We are working with representatives of the waste management industry to develop a voluntary Responsibility Deal under which they will work to improve the experience and access of SMEs to cost-effective recycling services. We are also working with local authorities on a Business Waste Commitment to develop the recycling services offered to SMEs.**

Energy Recovery

- 22** Government supports efficient energy recovery from residual waste which can deliver environmental benefits, reduce carbon impacts and provide economic opportunities. Our aim is to get the most energy out of genuinely residual waste, not to get the most waste into energy

recovery. Anaerobic digestion offers a positive solution to food waste, and the Government is publishing separately a anaerobic digestion strategy. **We will work to remove barriers to other energy from waste technologies by ensuring information is available and readily understood. We will publish a guide to energy from waste to help all involved make decisions best suited to their specific requirements. While remaining technology neutral, we will look to identify and communicate the full range of recovery technologies available and their relative merits – right fuel, right place and right time. The Government will also provide the necessary framework to address market failures and ensure the correct blend of incentives are in place to support the development of recovery infrastructure as a renewable energy source.**

Landfill

- 23** Landfill should be the last resort for most waste, and particularly for biodegradable waste. The landfill tax – with increases maintained towards a floor of £80 per tonne in 2014/15 – will remain the key driver to divert waste from landfill and remains necessary to ensure we meet key EU targets in 2013 and 2020. As noted, we are removing the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme as we no longer consider this an effective tool to ensure delivery of the EU landfill targets.
- 24** However, even with existing measures in place and new actions which will drive waste up the hierarchy, it is likely that some waste will end up in landfill that could be put to better use and which may warrant the introduction of additional, legislative tools, such as landfill bans or restrictions, to ultimately achieve our aim. **In 2012 we will consult on introducing a restriction on the landfilling of wood waste, with**

the aim of diverting the still substantial tonnages that end up in landfill to better uses up the waste hierarchy and delivering clear environmental benefits.

- 25** Building on this, **we will review the case for restrictions on sending other materials to landfill over the course of the Parliament, including looking specifically at textiles and biodegradable waste.**

Infrastructure and Planning

- 26** The Government continues to support local authorities in the provision of necessary waste infrastructure. We believe local communities should benefit from hosting waste infrastructure and be involved from an early stage in planning for infrastructure. **We will support this by providing advice and support for local authorities on science and technology, drawing together and publishing data on likely waste arisings and treatment capacity in future years, and supporting efforts by local authorities through effective contract management to generate further efficiencies in waste collection, reprocessing and treatment.** We will also seek to reduce commercial barriers to the effective financing of infrastructure.