



Briefing 19-12

February 2019

Resources and Waste Strategy Latest consultations.

This briefing is provided to all APSE member authorities but will be of particular interest to those officers responsible for waste collection, waste reduction, re-use and recycling collections.

Key Issues:

True to its promise the Government has launched four major consultations on key aims within its Resources and Waste Strategy (2018).

- Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging waste.
- A consistent set of materials to be collected for recycling by local authorities (England only)
- A deposit return scheme (DRS) for beverage containers.
- A 'plastics tax' on packaging containing less than 30% recycled plastic.

These consultations aim to radically change the way the UK produces and manages materials which can either become waste or re-usable resources.

Local authorities and other interested stakeholders will have until 13 May 2019 to respond to the consultation documents

All of the proposals aim to support each other and deliver a consistent UK wide approach which will result in a collaborative and beneficial approach for manufacturers, retailers, consumers and reprocessors.

It is critical that whatever approaches are finally decided upon, that there is a four-way agreement between the nations within the UK so that the whole supply and user chain work in tandem to deliver the aims of moving away from a throw-away society and drive up domestic recycling.

Background

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as part of its Resources and Waste Strategy (2018), the first government document on waste and recycling since 2012, is consulting on **four key measures** contained within the strategy:

- Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging waste.

- A consistent set of materials to be collected for recycling by local authorities (England only)
- A deposit return scheme (DRS) for beverage containers.
- A 'plastics tax' on packaging containing less than 30% recycled plastic.

The consultations have been launched on 18 February and the first three will run over a twelve week period ending on 13 May 2019. The consultation on a plastics tax being the second consultation on this issue will concentrate on how the tax will work, asking which packaging should be in scope, how to assess recycled content and which businesses will be liable for the tax. The closing date on this consultation is 12 May 2019.

Government are expecting a wide range of views on how these new initiatives should work and will be analysing responses as they come in.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove, has stated that the strategy and responses from the consultations will be critical to *"cementing our place as a world leader in resource efficiency"*

"Through our plans we will introduce a world-leading tax to boost recycled content in plastic packaging, make producers foot the bill for handling their packaging waste and end the confusion over household recycling"

Detail

Consultation on Reforming the UK Packaging Producer Responsibility System

This consultation seeks views on the measures to reduce the amount of unnecessary and difficult to recycle packaging and increase the amount of packaging that can and is recycled. through reforms to the packaging producer responsibility regulations. It also proposes that the full net costs of managing packaging waste are placed on those businesses who use packaging and who are best placed to influence its design. This aims to ensure consistency with the polluter pays principle and the concept of extended producer responsibility.

Producers currently only pay around 10% of this cost, with local authorities being left with the other 90% of costs.

Defra has suggested that these costs could be based on the difficulty of recycling materials, thereby giving producers an incentive to make packaging more easily recyclable. It is also hoped that this will also lead to a harmonisation of packaging materials produced thus reducing the complexity of types consumers have to deal with when recycling.

A link to the consultation document can be found below.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environmental-quality/consultation-on-reforming-the-uk-packaging-produce/consultation/>

Consultation on Consistency in Household and Business Recycling Collections in England.

The Government is looking for views on the use of a consistent set of materials to be collected for recycling by all local authorities in England in order to reduce the confusion for householders and businesses, and by doing so, increase the country's recycling rate which in recent years has begun to slow down and in some areas, stagnate.

Consideration will also be given to frequencies of collections.

As well as slowdowns in recycling rates, changes in the world market, in particular China's refusal to take poor quality recyclable materials means we now need to improve the quality of the materials we collect by reducing the levels of contamination in our recycling bins as well as increasing the amount of materials we collect. This will be helped by producers making packaging waste more easily recyclable and having clearer labelling to avoid confusion as to what can be recycled.

As part of the consultation Defra will be addressing the need to invest in carrying out separate food waste collections.

A link to the consultation can be found below.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environmental-quality/consultation-on-consistency-in-household-and-busin/consultation/>

Consultation on Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The aim of the consultation is that should a DRS be introduced, that it will be easy for consumers to return drinks containers, leading to increased recycling rates and a reduction in littering. Whilst waste policy is a devolved responsibility, Defra hopes that there will be a consistency of approach across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in order to have a UK-wide system.

This consultation is primarily aimed at:

- Businesses that produce, sell or import drinks in single use containers.
- Organisations involved in the management and recycling of packaging waste including local authorities, waste management companies, brokers and exporters and UK reproprocessors.
- Packaging compliance schemes.
- Other organisations such as professional and membership organisations, NGOs, consultants and charitable/voluntary bodies who have an interest in packaging and how packaging waste is managed in the UK.
- The public.

A particular point of the consultation is what a DRS should look like, as currently two models are proposed: The first option, known as the 'all-in' model, would target a large amount of drinks beverages placed on the market, irrespective of size. The second option, known as the 'on-the-go' model, would restrict the drinks containers in-scope to those less than 750ml in size and sold in single format containers. This model would target drinks most often sold for consumption outside of the home (while 'on-the-go') and which often become litter on our streets and in our waterways.

A link to the consultation can be found below.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environment/introducing-a-deposit-return-scheme/consultation/intro/>

Consultation on a Plastics Tax.

A view is sought on placing a tax on plastic packaging which contains less than 30% recycled material.

Over 2 million tonnes of plastic packaging is used in the UK each year. The vast majority of this is made from new, rather than recycled plastic. Using new plastic typically has greater environmental impact: it requires unnecessary resource extraction and processing, with higher energy use and emissions than using recycled material. Using recycled plastic is often more expensive than using new plastic, despite its lower environmental impacts. Significant variations in the price of new plastic over time can also discourage businesses from committing to using recycled plastic instead of new plastic in the long term. This will help to drive the treatment of plastic waste up the waste hierarchy so that more plastic is recycled rather than being sent to landfill or incineration, to improve resource productivity and make more plastic waste a useful and valued resource

The tax will apply to businesses that produce or import plastic packaging which uses insufficient recycled content, taking effect from April 2022. The tax will be set at a rate that provides a clear economic incentive for businesses to use recycled material in the production of plastic packaging, which will create greater demand for recycled plastic, and in turn stimulate increased levels of collection and recycling of plastic waste.

The tax will complement the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and the aim to improve consistency of materials collected, both part of the consultation process highlighted earlier.

A link to the consultation can be found below.

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/environmental-quality/plastic-packaging-tax/consultation/>

APSE Comment

Whilst there is seemingly little doubt that the Government is committed to speed up the reduce, re-use, recycle and cut waste agenda, it is to be hoped that following the consultations in May 2019, that real speed is given to acting on the results of the findings.

If consistency in collecting materials is to be achieved, then there needs to be funding made available to deliver the infrastructure (bins, transport etc.) required to make it happen, as well as a well-thought out national communications campaign to engage effectively with residents and businesses. Certainly if weekly and separate collections of food waste are envisaged then local authorities will need appropriate support to enable this to happen. Perhaps the income from the plastic tax or the Extended Producer Responsibility payments will be re-directed to enable this to happen, although initial reports do not seem to support this approach as the Treasury has refused to say where the money raised by the tax will be spent. One source would only guarantee that "some of it will be put to efforts to reduce plastic waste".

However, a further point which needs to be considered is that industry will take a great deal of the strain in designing new products, which need to be not only more easily recyclable, but also made of a higher recycled content. There needs to be an awareness that in having to do so, they do not increase the cost of their products to the general public as an excuse to meet these requirements.

Equally if we are as a nation tasked to recycle more and achieve better quality materials, we need to ensure we have the infrastructure to utilise these materials rather than exporting them, as in failing to do so, we would be losing an opportunity to strengthen the UK's manufacturing base and increase its economic prosperity.

APSE applauds any attempts to reduce the UK's waste problem and acknowledges the Government has begun to develop a joined up approach to dealing with problems such as plastic waste, however it should not lose sight of the need to retain and even increase waste and recycling targets and a mechanism for ratcheting plastic taxes upwards over time. Certainly leaving the European Union should not be seen as an excuse to dilute environmental targets and legislation.

Therefore the government has begun to set out a clear strategy for long awaited changes to waste legislation in the UK. However, it will need to ensure the support of businesses and the wider population who will face increased costs and revised collection and disposal systems. APSE will therefore support local authorities in any way it can to highlight best practice in both collection systems and communication programmes to make this waste vision become a reality. To further this aim APSE will shortly be issuing a consultation survey to inform a collective response from APSE based on the views of the APSE membership. We will also be inviting Directors of Environments and Senior Environmental Services Managers to roundtable consultation forums to further support APSE's response to the consultation documents.

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