



House of Commons
Communities and Local
Government

**Refuse Collection:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2006–07**

**Second Special Report of Session
2006–07**

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Communities and Local Government Committee

The Communities and Local Government Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Communities and Local Government and associated bodies.

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Jessica Mulley (Clerk of the Committee), David Weir (Second Clerk), James Cutting (Committee Specialist), Sara Turnbull (Committee Specialist), Clare Genis (Committee Assistant), Ian Blair (Chief Office Clerk), Kerrie Hanley (Secretary) and Laura Kibby (Select Committee Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Communities and Local Government Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1353; the Committee's email address is clgcom@parliament.uk

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix: Government response	2

Second Special Report

1. On 16 July 2007, the Committee published its Fifth Report of the Session 2006–07 as HC 536-I, on Refuse Collection. The Government’s response, in the form of a memorandum to the Committee, was received on 12 October 2007.
2. The Government’s response is published as an Appendix to this Report.

Appendix: Government Response

On 10 July 2007 the Communities and Local Government Select Committee (the Committee) published a report on its inquiry into Refuse Collection in England. The inquiry began in March and its primary purpose was to identify how the ways in which local government collects household waste can help reduce the amount of waste we produce and, in particular, the proportion sent to landfill.

The committee received around 60 written submissions and heard evidence from the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management (CIWM), the Local Government Association (LGA), the Greater London Authority, representatives of four individual waste collection authorities, and Ministers from the Departments for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

The Committee recognised the great diversity in waste collection methodologies in use in the country and the need for decisions about the most suitable waste management strategies to be taken locally. The Committee also noted that waste collection generates considerable public reaction and identified public perception of the issues as crucial to the success of both Government and local authority policies.

The Government welcomes the report, particularly the statement that ‘the primary principle underlying future policy must, then, be to prevent waste rather than disposing of it once we’ve made it’. The waste hierarchy, with prevention of waste at its highest level, has been the basis of European and domestic law and Government policy for waste management since the inception of the Waste Framework Directive and the need to minimise waste has been reinforced most recently in the Waste Strategy 2007 published in May.

Response

The inquiry looked at most elements of waste collection including planning, financing, collection methods, joint waste authorities, and financial incentives and charging. The Committee itemised thirty conclusions and recommendations in their report. This is the Government’s response to those conclusions and recommendations.

The Government’s response is set out in the same order as the conclusions and recommendations in the Committee’s report. Wherever the word ‘we’ appears it refers to the Committee and the paragraph numbers at the end of the recommendations refer to paragraphs in the Committee’s report.

1. We endorse the Government's clear indication that it intends to include measures on waste among the 200 indicators being developed for the new local government performance framework. Given refuse collection's significance and high public profile, we recommend that such indicators be priorities for inclusion among the 35 'local improvement targets' identified for each authority. (Paragraph 20)

The Government agrees that waste management is an important responsibility of local government and waste indicators are being included in the new performance framework. Under the new performance framework each area's 35 Local Area Agreement (LAA) improvement targets will be negotiated taking into account local priorities and levels of performance against national priorities. The Government will strongly encourage local authorities to consider waste targets especially where there is a need to improve performance in this area.

More detail on the new national indicator set to underpin the local government performance framework is included in the Comprehensive Spending Review.

2. We endorse the autonomy of local authorities and recognise their expertise in implementing the best solutions for their own areas. The problems posed by waste collection and disposal are not, however, confined within local governmental boundaries, and require a national response driven by a clear vision energetically communicated from central Government. We recommend that the Government commission research to evaluate the best local collection, recycling, re-use and reduction schemes operated by local authorities and to develop a strategy to encourage their widespread adoption. (Paragraph 23)

The Government welcomes the Committee's endorsement of the autonomy of local authorities. Giving local authorities the freedom and flexibility to manage their interests is key to the Government's approach to local issues. Accordingly the Government believes that local authorities and their residents are best placed to decide on the most appropriate waste collection and disposal arrangements for their area, within the context of a strong national waste strategy.

The Government recognises that issues around waste collection and disposal are not always confined to individual local authorities. Common issues may be faced by a number of local authorities and there is therefore a need for expert support and guidance. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) is funded by Government to conduct research into aspects of collection systems and provide local authorities with good practice guidance and a solid evidence base on which they can develop their own local waste strategies.

WRAP is currently undertaking a study to determine cost and performance ranges for different kerbside collection schemes, taking account of different local authority contexts. The report will include associated good practice advice and is due to be completed in March 2008.

In order to further help local authorities reduce the amount of waste they have to deal with and make decisions on the most suitable strategy for their local area, WRAP is undertaking a survey of local authorities to determine their needs for support and advice on waste

prevention/reduction initiatives, and will put proposals to Defra for consideration as part of WRAP's new Business Plan and programme proposals for 2008/11.

Outside the general principle of the waste hierarchy the Government does not recommend or endorse any one waste treatment over another. However, through WRAP and the guidance it produces, the Government endeavours to ensure local decision makers are as well informed as possible. WRAP's guidance draws together the experiences of those authorities that have already introduced new schemes and identifies good practice that authorities considering more sustainable waste management can call upon.

3. Given the sensitivity of local opinion when it comes to changes in the ways refuse is collected, we recommend that the Government develop clear, straightforward best practice guidance on information provision to householders, using examples both of those local authorities that have introduced alternate weekly collection systems without prompting local concern and those who have, in the words of the Minister for Waste, "blundered into introducing alternate weekly collections without proper consultation, without proper planning". (Paragraph 31)

The Government agrees that it is essential for local authorities to engage and consult stakeholders, particularly local residents, in the development of local waste strategies. Defra guidance on the development of municipal waste management strategies stresses the importance of such engagement. This package of guidance includes an information sheet on community and stakeholder engagement and is available from the Defra website at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/localauth/practice-guidance/index.htm>.

The Government funds WRAP to encourage good practice on collection systems and this includes advice on engagement with residents. WRAP's revised guidance on alternate weekly collection published in July 2007 is an example. The decision on whether to use the guidance or take heed of the messages it contains is a matter for local authorities. Defra always recommends local authorities contact WRAP when considering changes to their waste collection arrangements.

In addition through the national Recycle Now campaign and the Behaviour Change Local Fund, WRAP provides advice and resources to local authorities to support good quality communications. There is good practice guidance and case studies on both the WRAP and Recycle Now partners' websites.

4. Up to one third of food purchased is disposed of without being eaten, perhaps the most shocking example of utter waste revealed during our inquiry. Householders are throwing away £400 a year. Councils are forced to waste their time and our money clearing up our leftovers, which are often the most problematic part of domestic waste. We recommend that Government set specific targets for food waste reduction and follow through on the Waste and Resources Action Programme's autumn food waste information campaign by promoting some simple measures households can take such as menu planning and improved storage, and by encouraging supermarkets and other retailers to help customers avoid waste by, for example, packaging perishable goods in sizes suitable for both single and family households. (Paragraph 35)

The Government agrees that reducing food waste should be a priority. The carbon emissions associated with growing, processing, packaging, transporting and storing food

which is ultimately discarded presents a significant opportunity for everyone to act on CO₂. Food waste is a very significant proportion of the biodegradable waste sent to landfill. Capturing that waste for recycling or energy recovery offers further carbon benefits.

Under the new local government performance framework each local area will be able to negotiate its own improvement targets to reflect a balance of local and national priorities and performance. The Government will strongly encourage local authorities to consider waste targets, which could be for specific materials, such as food waste, especially where there is a need to improve performance in this area.

Under the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) local authorities have a strong incentive to reduce biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) arisings, which includes food waste. Waste disposal authorities are legally required to hold sufficient allowances for the amount of BMW sent to landfill. Any authority that exceeds the limit set by the allowances they hold will be penalised £150 for every tonne they are over the limit. The total number of allowances available is limited and the Government believes this driver together with the increasing cost of landfill is sufficient to ensure local authorities adopt sustainable alternatives to landfill for food waste.

Plans are progressing well for the launch of WRAP's Food Waste Reduction Campaign in November 2007. WRAP is working with a range of stakeholders including local authorities, retailers, the Women's Institute and other government agencies to help promote the campaign messages, which will include simple practical steps that individuals can take to reduce waste.

Examples of smart packaging, which allows greater flexibility on portioning, are starting to appear in supermarkets. WRAP is working with retailers to stimulate further innovation in this and in other packaging innovations which may give extended shelf life or allow customers to choose how much of a product they buy to match their family circumstances.

5. We recognise that research conducted to date into the health impacts of alternate weekly collection systems has found no evidence of adverse health impacts. Given the strength of public concern, however, allied with the wealth of anecdotal evidence about increased populations of flies, maggots, rats and other vermin associated with AWC systems, we strongly recommend that the Government commission further and more detailed research if the public is to be persuaded that there is no appreciable risk. (Paragraph 37)

Defra has recently published the Waste and Resources Evidence Strategy 2007-2011 which sets out the broad base of evidence and research needs required to support sustainable waste and resources management policy. In developing the plans for implementing the strategy, Defra will consider the needs for risk/exposure assessment work in this area as well as work surrounding amenity issues where monitoring and quantification of nuisance parameters and loss of amenity are less well developed.

WRAP is supporting the Chartered Institute of Waste Management in work to investigate areas of identified concern.

6. If councils are to collect food and kitchen waste only once every two weeks as part of an AWC system, Government guidance must stress the absolute necessity to provide

householders with sealable containers, such as hard-sided wheeled bins or boxes. (Paragraph 38)

The Government agrees and can confirm that the revised guidance, published by WRAP in July, includes this advice.

7. Food waste represents nearly a fifth of the total household waste stream and is a particularly significant contributor to greenhouse gases when sent to landfill. We recommend that Government encourage more local authorities to adopt both separate food waste collection and at least weekly food waste collection. (Paragraph 39)

The Government strongly supports this view and has said in its Waste Strategy that there are strong arguments for encouraging more separate collection of food waste, especially since it can help achieve environmental gains more cost-effectively. Research does indicate that weekly collections are likely to be most successful in diverting food waste from landfill and offers the best overall environmental outcome. WRAP's latest guidance recommends that local authorities considering moving away from weekly collections of residual waste should consider weekly food waste collections. The Government has asked WRAP to obtain more evidence of the cost to local authorities of such collections.

WRAP (with funding from Defra) is supporting 17 local authorities to undertake food waste collection trials in order to deepen understanding of the most cost effective ways of managing such schemes in different local environments. In all cases the collections are weekly.

Based on the results and learning gained from the trials WRAP will publish further good practice guidance.

WRAP will be discussing with Defra what further support can be provided to local authorities on food waste collections in the light of the trials.

8. We suggest that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in preparing any further legislation, clarify the legal situation on additional charges for rubbish sacks and that the Department learn from the knowledge those authorities have developed of the practicality and efficacy of such systems. (Paragraph 41)

Defra is in the process of writing to all local authorities in England to clarify their responsibilities and powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to waste collection. Authorities should receive this communication during the autumn.

9. We note that the Government has set recycling performance targets for local authorities and that the Local Government Association argues for statutory performance targets. We endorse the Government's devolutionary intent to allow collection authorities as much freedom as possible to implement waste policy, but recommend that Government enter into discussion with local authorities about the creation of statutory targets. (Paragraph 45)

Waste indicators are being included in the new performance framework and development of these indicators included consultation with local authorities. The Government has no plans to create new statutory targets.

Under the new local government performance framework each area's 35 Local Area Agreement (LAA) improvement targets will be negotiated to ensure a balance of local and national priorities and performance. Government will strongly encourage local authorities to consider waste targets where there is a need to improve performance in this area.

10. The number of fully trained and experienced local authority recycling officers remains low, restricting the spread and sophistication of schemes available. The continuation of statutory local authority recycling targets, rather than any shift towards merely residual waste targets, would help drive more officer training and development of greater expertise. (Paragraph 46)

The Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme and the landfill tax escalator, along with the economics of different waste treatment options, will be the primary influences on local authority decisions on waste management strategies for at least the next five years. These ensure local authorities will need to focus attention on all recovery levels of the waste hierarchy, including recycling, for the foreseeable future and there will consequently be a continuing need for training and development of expertise.

The national targets in Waste Strategy 2007 to reduce the amount of household waste not re-used, recycled or composted and on recycling and composting will ensure that recycling remains a high priority for local authorities.

WRAP offers a range of training for local authority officers. The Recycling Managers Training Course is delivered at two levels, and training sessions are also provided on specific issues such as waste prevention, monitoring and evaluating recycling schemes, working with the community and design of communications materials.

11. For a variety of historical, geographical, economic and other reasons, practice on the collection of recyclable materials has grown in a piecemeal, haphazard fashion across England over the past decade and more, resulting in myriad local systems and some public confusion. A national recycling system is clearly not feasible in the short term, and the imposition of such a system from the centre would run counter to the Government's proper desire to let councils implement collection strategies suitable to their own areas and electorates. Nonetheless, we urge the Government to evaluate means of achieving more public understanding and co-operation by reducing random and unnecessary differences in practice across local authority boundaries. In particular, wider application of WRAP's national colour-coded recycling system for paper and card, glass, metals and food waste would give not just clarity and simplicity, but substantial long-term economies of scale. (Paragraph 48)

Increasing amounts of waste, of all the main kinds, need to be separated at the point of collection in order to increase its value. There has already been a considerable expansion of kerbside recycling collection schemes. But for any given locality decisions on the best ways to collect waste are a matter for local authorities, with the Government's role being to set clear outcomes and provide a strong evidence base, and give local authorities as wide a range of tools as practicable to do the job effectively.

WRAP's work with local authorities and retailers and evidence from local authority returns to Waste Data Flow suggest that local authorities are starting to converge on the materials

that are commonly collected for recycling. At this time in the development of the industry in this country this trend needs to be encouraged.

The Government supports the wider adoption of common recycling iconography by local authorities so that the look and feel of recycling activities is more common to householders wherever they live. WRAP's Recycle Now campaign and all its supporting materials have been designed to provide local authorities with a flexible but cost efficient approach to communicating recycling messages and WRAP is working with retailers to reinforce this by encouraging common messaging about recyclability on their packaging and in store. The Government will encourage greater take up of WRAP's standard iconography by authorities.

The Government also believes Waste Partnerships, Joint Waste Authorities and the advantages in two-tier areas of all the waste collection authorities working closely with their waste disposal authority to achieve diversion from landfill will encourage a convergence of all aspects of the recycling services offered, not just the iconography.

12. The adoption of alternate weekly collection systems in around 140 local authority areas has been accompanied in most of them by rapid and substantial increases in local recycling. Whether there is a direct causal link between those two facts is, however, unproven: AWC, where it has been introduced, is always part of a package of measures aimed at encouraging householders to sort more of their waste for recycling. AWC is clearly not appropriate to all areas, particularly highly urban areas characterised by much shared accommodation. Whether a weekly or alternate system is best for a particular area is a matter of local circumstance and a matter for local choice. (Paragraph 49)

The Government agrees it is not right to prescribe from the centre how collection is done in different parts of the country. That is a matter for local authorities. The evidence does not suggest alternating collection of recyclates with residual waste is the only way to boost recycling but equally experiences from authorities in both the UK and abroad suggests that such schemes can work well, and can contribute to significantly higher recycling rates, provided they are well designed and implemented.

Government agrees that the collection of residual waste on a less than weekly basis may not be suitable for all circumstances. Local authorities are best placed to consider such issues with their local stakeholders.

13. The phrase 'alternate weekly collection' is bureaucratic and confusing, and a good example of how a potentially effective policy can be damaged by jargonistic terminology that is meaningless to most householders. Local councils would do well to find more straightforward descriptions of their own local arrangements. (Paragraph 50)

The Government agrees and encourages local authorities to use descriptions that accurately reflect the collection systems proposed or in place when engaging with local residents and stakeholders.

14. Our clear conclusion on collection methods across England is that there is no single system suitable to all authorities in all the range of local circumstances that pertain. (Paragraph 51)

The Government agrees. Local authorities are best placed to decide local waste collection arrangements in consultation with their residents and other stakeholders. However, local authorities are key to delivering national waste reduction targets and the Government will continue to provide advice and support through WRAP.

15. We recommend that the Government work with the Waste and Resources Action Programme and local government to agree a core definition of what householders should expect from their refuse collection. This should include no complicated rules, rubbish collected when the council says it will be and schemes that suit every household from the largest rural home to the most crowded urban area. (Paragraph 52)

Given the need for authorities to reflect their local circumstances and the risk of stifling innovation, there are limits to how far a standard definition of what householders should expect can be produced. However, the Government has asked WRAP to look at what constitutes a good recycling service. It also recognised that this definition would be necessary in its consultation paper on whether a power to put in place incentive charging should be given to local authorities.

The statutory requirements on local authorities for waste collection are set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and it is for local authorities to determine how they carry out their responsibilities. However, in a time of rapid change consumers may well be confused as to what standard of service they should expect and the government will encourage the LGA and WRAP to see whether some common principles can be developed and communicated to local residents.

16. Several councils have spoken of a need to change the attitudes of residents so that they accept responsibility for the waste they produce rather than seeing it simply as something the council will come and clear up. If there is such a need, the change can only come from councils themselves, implying that they need to develop programmes to educate, inform and persuade the public of the need to cut household waste. They have argued that they are best placed to choose how, when and what to collect in their local areas; the clear corollary is that they share with central Government the responsibility for persuading their council tax payers how to minimise waste in the first place and how to influence retailers and others. (Paragraph 55)

The national Recycle Now campaign and associated Behaviour Change Local Funding programme managed by WRAP have been key in promoting behaviour change in relation to recycling. The programmes are complementary in that the national campaign raises awareness in general about the need to recycle and the local programme provides funding and advice to local authorities to help them communicate to residents what they can do at a local level and what services they have access to.

It is recognised by WRAP that these campaigns have to broaden in scope to include waste reduction and reuse as well as recycling. Consequently WRAP is developing the campaign to cover other areas such as waste minimisation and a schools programme. It will put these proposals to Defra for possible funding in the near future.

On behalf of the Government and local authorities WRAP has engaged with the retailers at a national level to develop programmes and targets for waste minimisation through the Courtauld Commitment.

17. Revenue-neutral financial incentive schemes aimed at improving local recycling will raise no money for councils and will therefore do nothing to help them manage their waste budgets in the face of rising costs. Indeed, since ‘revenue-neutral’ does not mean ‘cost-neutral’, and since any scheme introduced by a local authority will require substantial administration and enforcement costs, they may in practice, run directly counter to the intentions Sir Michael Lyons expressed in recommended local charging schemes, by adding a further cost to the growing burden local authorities must carry. (Paragraph 71)

The purpose of incentive charging is to encourage householders to minimise waste and to recycle more. There should therefore be disposal cost savings. This is borne out by the international evidence on financial incentive schemes

The Government has proposed giving authorities a power, not a duty, to introduce incentive charges. Authorities will only do so if they feel it will be financially beneficial in achieving their desired outcome at a lower cost than other available options. The proposal does not therefore represent a burden

The Government recognises the pressures faced by local authorities arising from waste management responsibilities and has undertaken a review of waste funding, with the close involvement of the LGA, as part of the evidence base for the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Government’s recent consultation on introducing a revenue—neutral financial incentive scheme is distinct from these discussions on waste funding. Revenue neutral schemes, such as those proposed, are aimed at changing behaviour and are not intended to address waste costs by providing a means to raise extra revenue locally.

18. It is hard to see how a resident faced with a ‘financial incentive scheme’ bill for even the indicative £30 contained in the Government’s consultation will see it as anything other than a charge, or a tax. (Paragraph 72)

Government is not specifying in these proposals what the level of charge or rebate should be. Any figures in the consultation (£30 or £50) were used as examples only. Authorities would decide whether to introduce a financial incentive scheme or not and they would set the level that they judge to be suitable for the area.

The Government has not opted for a waste charge as seen elsewhere in Europe to avoid increasing the burden upon local residents. As such, financial incentive schemes are purely designed to encourage behaviour change; they would not provide a new or alternative charging system for funding waste services.

In addition, financial incentive schemes would have to be revenue neutral - all revenue would have to be returned to residents in full. In effect, individuals who produced less non-recycled waste would receive a financial reward, or rebate, paid for by those who produced more. There would be no overall increase in local charges or taxes.

19. It is hard to see why any council will want to set up a complicated charging scheme that earns it no money and risks widespread public disapproval. (Paragraph 78)

For local authorities, the Government's proposals provide a new way for authorities to work with householders on tackling waste and reducing the need to use landfill, with its ever-increasing environmental and economic costs. As the costs of landfill rise, the cost savings for the local authority from reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill will also increase.

For residents, the Government's proposals include safeguards to ensure that schemes are fair, and impacts are positive rather than negative. There are requirements in the proposals for a good recycling service; for authorities to take into account the needs of groups that may potentially be disadvantaged by the scheme; and for anti fly-tipping provisions to be in place.

Ultimately it would be up to individual authorities, working in their community, to decide whether or not they wished to introduce a financial incentive scheme and to design their local scheme as best fits the local need.

20. We recommend that the Government clarify how financial incentive schemes for recycling will interact with council tax. We seek a detailed explanation of why the introduction of incentive schemes should not be accompanied by reductions in council tax. In particular, we are concerned by the suggestion that schemes "should not" require additional funding from council tax. Whether a local authority raises or reduces its council tax to fund schemes or incentives to local householders is a matter for individual councils. (Paragraph 79)

Under the Government's proposal, schemes would be separate from Council Tax. This is because, as an incentive not a charge, all the revenue collected by local authorities must be returned to residents so residents as a whole will not be paying any more. Payments in and out of the scheme do not therefore affect the level of Council Tax.

It is not intended as a measure for authorities to raise additional funds, in fact under the proposal they would not be allowed to do this. Rather, financial incentive schemes are another tool for engaging the public in waste minimization, composting and recycling.

Authorities would have the same freedom to set Council Tax as at present. Overall incentive schemes should lead to a reduction in costs due to the reduction in waste for disposal.

21. The Government recognises the risk that new financial incentive schemes to increase recycling and minimise waste may result in more fly-tipping or in people attempting to cut their bills by putting their rubbish in their neighbours' bins. We are not convinced that enough work has been done or guidance given to local authorities on how to prevent such risks from blighting areas and causing disputes. Nor are we convinced that local authorities already faced with increasing waste costs will be adequately funded to deal with increased administration, clear-up and prosecution costs. (Paragraph 89)

Evidence on charging leading to an increase in fly-tipping is inconclusive. It remains important that all authorities crack down on fly-tipping, regardless of whether or not they chose to introduce an incentive scheme.

The Government would therefore encourage authorities in the design stage to ensure that incentives and opportunities for fly-tipping are minimised and, as suggested in the proposals, authorities would be required to make provision to avoid fly-tipping, littering and illegal disposal of waste. However, this is good practice for all authorities.

The Government agrees that this requirement is important and would need to be explained further in guidance. Any guidance would be developed in partnership with experts and practitioners.

22. We welcome the Government's recognition that specific groups, such as large families or those on council tax benefit, should not be disadvantaged by the introduction of financial incentive schemes for increased recycling and waste reduction. (Paragraph 90)

The Government is pleased to receive this endorsement from the Committee.

23. The Government needs to clarify what will happen to householders who refuse to pay additional charges levied under any new financial incentive scheme. Given the small sums involved, prosecution seems an unlikely answer. Given the impact on other householders, councils cannot be allowed not to collect rubbish left out by non-payers. We are unconvinced that councils possess any adequate sanction against refusal to pay and question whether that might not substantially undermine schemes that local authorities may wish to introduce. (Paragraph 91)

The Government accepts the key role that enforcement plays in the successful implementation of any scheme. Under the proposals, it is envisaged that Local Authorities would largely be able to rely on their existing powers but Government would need to consider this further.

Under the Government's proposal, authorities would still be legally required to collect waste from households.

24. The financial incentive schemes proposed by the Government offer individual householders very little reward for good behaviour and offer councils no immediate financial incentive. We cannot believe that giving some households £20 or £30 a year will remotely outweigh the negative psychological impact of making other households pay more for a service they believe they already pay for through taxation. Breaking the link with council tax and establishing refuse collection as a utility, like gas or sewerage, might have the radical impact the Government say they want. The half-hearted tilt in the direction of charging contained in their current proposals will not. (Paragraph 93)

The Government proposals are for a new behaviour-changing instrument for local authorities. The incentive is not a charge linked to the cost of services.

The Government has not proposed mandating a 'right' price for the incentive and figures in the consultation were used only as examples. Under the proposals authorities would set the incentive at a level that they judge to be suitable to change behaviour locally. However, evidence from overseas does suggest that relatively low levels of charges can change household behaviour.

The Government has no plans to make waste a utility.

25. We conclude that the introduction of a power allowing councils to form joint authorities where they wish to do so is welcome. (Paragraph 97)

The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion on this. Joint waste authorities are another tool to help local authorities deliver more cost effective waste services and potentially reduce unnecessary variation in the standard of service provided.

26. The move towards greater joint working will be even more welcome if it brings about cost efficiencies, an increasing degree of shared practice and, possibly, some standardisation of approach to collection of different recycling streams and such things as a colour-coded system for different streams. (Paragraph 99)

The Government believes that joint working on waste, including through joint waste authorities, has the potential to bring about all the things suggested by the Committee and more, not least of which is greater diversion of biodegradable waste from landfill.

27. The Government has made it clear that substantial infrastructure development will be necessary if waste diversion targets are to be met in the coming decades. In its coming implementation of the proposals in its planning White Paper, the Department for Communities and Local Government will need carefully to balance the desire for simplification in the obtaining of planning permission for major waste-related infrastructure projects with the objections of local communities to new facilities, including incinerators, desired by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to boost energy-from-waste production from its current 10 per cent to 25 per cent. (Paragraph 102)

Planning policy on waste management was substantially revised in recognition that planning is pivotal to the adequate and timely provision of the new facilities needed to meet waste diversion targets.

Planning Policy Statement 10: Planning for Sustainable Waste Management is already providing a positive influence on planning's contribution to delivering sustainable waste management and providing more certainty for developers. However, Government recognises that while the planning application approval rate for waste developments is high—at around 90%—it is not complacent about the planning risks associated with delivering the waste facilities needed. For example, in August 2007 Defra's Waste Infrastructure Delivery Programme published guidance on improving the interaction of infrastructure promoters with waste planning. This identified actions that will facilitate favourable determinations of planning applications and speed the delivery of waste infrastructure. The guidance underlines that the approach to community engagement taken by those seeking to secure permissions for waste infrastructure projects is critical to all stages of both the planning process and preparation of the municipal waste management strategies prepared by local authorities.

Government reforms for nationally significant infrastructure projects represent a major step forward for the delivery of major waste-related infrastructure projects, with more timely, transparent, predictable and accountable decision-making, including greater opportunities for public participation and engagement.

The proposals for reform set out in the white paper *Planning for a Sustainable Future* (Cm 7120) will involve the public at every stage: on the development of national policy, on project proposals as they are being developed, and at the inquiry stage. There will for the first time be a statutory duty on applicants to consult communities, and better inquiry processes will make the system more accessible to all, not just experts or those with the deepest pockets.

Proposals to simplify the provisions governing how planning applications are made, streamline information requirements for applications, and reduce the burden on parties involved in the planning process will benefit those smaller-scale developments which will be decided under the Town and Country Planning Act. The great majority of waste proposals will fall into this category.

The Government does not generally consider it appropriate to express a preference for one energy recovery technology over another, aside from encouraging local authorities and businesses to consider anaerobic digestion. Government wants to maximise energy recovered from unavoidable residual waste (that would otherwise go to landfill) so as to make the greatest contribution to energy policy. There is no specific target to increase energy recovery, however there is a target for municipal waste recovery which includes recycling, composting and energy recovery. The Government has also set targets for the recycling and composting of household waste. While Government would like to exceed both of these targets if possible, meeting them precisely would mean an increase in energy recovery to about 25% of municipal waste in 2020 compared to around 10% today. Recovering energy from waste which cannot sensibly be recycled remains a sound environmental objective. Many other European countries have shown that a vigorous energy from waste policy is compatible with high recycling rates. Defra research shows that recovering energy from residual waste (including by incineration) is a much better option than landfill.

28. Those authorities that decide to invest in producing more energy from waste will need to develop strategies to send only unrecyclable material for incineration and to use the flexibility in the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme to trade incineration capacity with other authorities who may otherwise find it difficult to reduce their landfill to the extent required. (Paragraph 103)

Energy from waste includes more than just incineration—there are other thermal treatment technologies such as gasification and pyrolysis, as well as anaerobic digestion which is the Government’s favoured EfW technology. The Government agrees, however, that authorities should develop strategies to avoid sending material for EfW which would be better recycled, and that LATS affords those who do invest in EfW of any kind the flexibility to trade with other authorities as suggested by the Committee.

29. We recommend that the Environment Agency prioritise the audit of London local authorities in its current waste disposal audit programme, because of the higher-than-average proportion of non-household waste collected and disposed of in the capital. We recommend that the Government ensure that reported reductions in municipal waste being sent from the capital to landfill sites are in fact occurring. If a loophole does exist in the current reporting requirement, it must be closed forthwith. (Paragraph 111)

The issue of accurate waste reporting has national implications. The Environment Agency (EA) audit programme is risk based and guided by evidence. The EA has completed detailed audits of seven London authorities. These have been published at <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/1745440/444663/landfill/1764524/693182/986852/1102546/1848019/?lang=e>. There is no evidence that London boroughs are deliberately evading their reporting responsibilities. There are however a number of lessons learnt from the audits that will improve the consistency and quality of future reports. The EA is in the process of publishing additional guidance on reporting collected municipal waste.

The aim is to ensure that local authorities are left in no doubt as to the monitoring authority's views on what should be reported as collected municipal waste. From 2007/8 onwards the Agency will use this guidance in the audit process.

It is the intention of the EA to conduct audit visits to all remaining authorities over the next two years, which will include the remaining London authorities.

30. With the bulk of England's waste far beyond the control of local councils, we recommend that the Government urgently investigate means of improving financial incentives to reduce the amount of commercial, industrial and construction waste that will otherwise continue to fill our rapidly diminishing landfill space. We recommend the rapid roll-out of a programme of affordable recycling services for businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. (Paragraph 113)

The Government agrees that it is important to reduce the amount of commercial, industrial and construction waste that is produced and currently goes to landfill. The Waste Strategy for England 2007 sets out the Government's policies to achieve this, including financial incentives.

The most important of these is the announcement by the Chancellor in the Budget 2007 that the landfill tax will increase by £8 a tonne, each year from 2008 until at least 2010/11 – doubling the tax from £24 per tonne this year to £48 per tonne in 2010/11. On the basis of this change to the landfill tax escalator and policies set out in the Waste Strategy, the level of commercial and industrial waste sent to landfill is expected to fall by 20% by 2010 compared to 2004.

In Waste Strategy 2007 the Government committed to setting a new national target for the reduction of commercial and industrial waste going to landfill and work is already underway to achieve this.

The strategy also includes proposals to help develop recycling services for small and medium-sized businesses.

In April 2005 the Government indicated its intention to regulate construction industry waste and a series of consultations since then have informed the development of site waste management plans (SWMP) for the construction industry. The most recent of these, which closed in July 2007, outlined a number of current problems surrounding the generation, treatment, and disposal of waste from the construction industry, and set out draft regulations to make SWMP compulsory for all construction and demolition projects with a value exceeding £250k. The outcome of this consultation is a clear body of support for the Government's proposal and the analysis along with the written responses and

workshop findings will be used to inform the development of a final set of regulations and Impact Assessment. It is hoped to introduce regulations in April 2008 as well as supporting guidance.