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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Waste Management debate

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Context

- Our current patterns of resource use are unsustainable. Globally, if we all consumed resources at the rate we do in Scotland we would need three planets to supply the resources and absorb the waste.
- Scotland produces 20 million tonnes of 'waste' each year, 17 million tonnes of commercial, industrial, construction and demolition waste and 3 million tonnes of household waste. The majority of our waste currently ends up in landfill. This pattern constitutes a huge one way flow of valuable raw materials and is a significant contributor to our climate emissions as a result of both landfill methane and huge quantities of energy consumed in extracting, processing and transporting new materials.
- Much of this 'waste' could be avoided with greater efforts to minimise the amount of waste materials we produce and maximise re-use and recycling of these valuable raw materials.

Waste Prevention

- Much greater action is required to reduce the amount of waste generated in Scotland from household, commercial, industrial and construction sectors. No comprehensive programme or targets have been established to reduce waste arising from the commercial, industrial and household sectors.
- Many countries have established ambitious programmes to tackle household waste. The Welsh Assembly Government has introduced a target to cut waste volumes by 1.5% per year until 2050, with a 27% reduction by 2025.
- Scotland needs to adopt a target to cut waste volumes with a plan to deliver this.

Recycling and re-use

- Scotland has made good progress in improving household recycling levels, however, it fell short of the target to recycle 40% of household waste by 2010 and is currently not on track to deliver the target of a 50% recycling rate by 2013.



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Improving recycling and waste prevention

The following measures would help increase recycling and cut the amount of waste generated:

- **Landfill and incineration bans:** The introduction of landfill and incineration bans for unsorted waste and for recyclable waste streams would incentivise waste reduction and encourage much greater levels of recycling. Such bans have been shown to work elsewhere (e.g. Austria, Germany, the Netherlands) in achieving higher levels of recycling and composting. This approach would help address the issue of commercial and industrial waste and further incentivise separation, re-use and recycling.
- **Variable waste charging:** Introducing 'pay as you throw' schemes for residual non-recycled or composted waste should accompany the further roll out of recycling provisions to stimulate maximum recycling and waste reduction. Research elsewhere has shown that these schemes can help significantly cut waste volumes and increase recycling levels.
- **Maximising the quality of recyclate:** Greater segregation at source will reduce residual waste and maximise the value of the recyclate, collection systems which enable e.g. paper, plastics and glass to be separated at source should be the longer term goal rather than systems based on co-mingling. For example:
 - The paper industry has noted that the development of co-mingled systems is having a negative impact on the quality of the recovered paper and separation by materials recycling facilities alone does not deliver the input quality required.
 - The glass industry highlight that glass collected after a material recycling facility crushing process is only suitable for low grade use e.g. replacing road aggregate material and as such offers relatively little environmental benefit. Colour separation and broken, rather than crushed, glass can be used to produce glass again and offers greater environmental benefits.
- **Nationwide deposit return schemes:** The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 containers powers to introduce deposit return schemes. Elsewhere, these systems are very common and result in very high take up and re-use, avoid packaging waste and reduce litter. Examples of where such systems have been introduced include New York State, South Australia, Germany, Sweden and Denmark. The introduction of a deposit return system in Germany resulted in 98.5% of refillable bottles being returned by consumers. Sweden's container deposit system has achieved recovery rates of 86% for cans and 77% for PET bottles. Such a system should be adopted in Scotland.

Energy from waste

- The scale of proposals coming forward for energy from waste facilities in Scotland risk undermining efforts to reduce waste volumes and jeopardising Scotland's ability to achieve high levels of recycling by locking local authorities into contracts to feed waste into these facilities.
- Government must have a strategic role in ensuring that residual capacity across Scotland is consistent with delivering total recycling rates well in excess of 70% by 2025 and achieving significant reductions in total waste volumes.
- The Government Zero Waste Plan states that 'the Scottish Government will introduce regulatory measures to support the delivery of landfill bans, by ensuring energy from waste treatment is only used to recover value from resources that cannot offer greater environmental and economic benefits through re-use or recycling.' Local authorities and the Scottish Government must ensure that energy from waste proposals coming forward are consistent with this commitment.

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