

Incentives for recycling by households – Frequently Asked Questions on Guidance, June 2008

Q. When is the deadline for commenting on guidance?

- For most of the guidance the deadline for comments is 25 July. However, we are asking for comments on the piece of guidance covering a good recycling service by 11 July. This is to give us time to consult formally on this one, which has a slightly different legal status because the legislation requires us to produce it.

Q. Will there be a formal process after this informal one? When?

- We will be consulting formally on the piece of guidance covering a good recycling service. This is because this guidance has a slightly different status from the rest as the legislation requires us to produce it.
- We would hope to run this formal consultation between about August and October, depending on the progress of the Climate Change Bill through Parliament.
- The pilots will give us the opportunity to test out how useful and effective the guidance is and how it might be improved. If, following the pilots, we decide to roll out the powers, we would expect to consult formally on *all* of the guidance.

Q. How can you consult on guidance when the legislation hasn't been passed yet?

- The legislation has been scrutinised by the House of Lords and is now being considered by the House of Commons.
- Although it has not yet finished its passage through Parliament – and is still subject to revisions – we wanted to share our thinking early on how waste incentive schemes could work on the ground.
- We think this will help both Parliament in scrutinising the legislation, and local authorities in developing proposals to run pilots.
- We are keen to gather comments on the draft guidance so that we can factor this into our thinking early and update the guidance in time for pilots to begin as soon as possible. This will help to make it as useful as possible for pilot authorities.

Q. When can local authorities start submitting proposals to run pilots?

- We have written to local authorities inviting them to start work on, and submit, proposals from now onwards.

Q. When is the deadline for local authorities to submit proposals?

- We have set a deadline of 8 weeks after Royal Assent to the Climate Change Bill for local authorities to submit proposals.

Q. When will the Government select/ designate pilots?

- The Government will not be able to formally designate pilots until the powers come into force - 2 months after Royal Assent. So we would expect to do so some time after this, having considered the proposals from local authorities.

Q. Will the Government release the names of authorities which submit pilot proposals?

- The Government has informed local authorities that their names may be released if they come forward with explicit expressions of interest in piloting.

Q. How many authorities have come forward so far?

- We have not had authorities coming forward yet to declare themselves potential candidates to run pilots. But we have written to local authorities inviting them to come forward from now. (We intend to publish the names of local authorities who do now come forward.)
- We have had several informal conversations with authorities wanting further information but we cannot be in any way sure that those authorities asking for further information now will be the ones who come forward to apply formally to be pilots.

Q. Which of the 4 models (sack, bin volume, frequency or weight) is the most effective?

- Local authorities, working closely with their communities, are best placed to make a decision about which model – or combination of models – would work best in their area. There is no single “right” answer.
- Different sorts of schemes are likely to be suitable for different areas, based on, for example, what systems and contracts are already in place, the type of housing and preferences locally. The guidance on technical issues discusses some of these considerations.

Q. How does revenue neutrality work in practice?

- Revenue neutrality means that local authorities don't make any profit from the schemes. Nor can they recover the costs of running a scheme. So, for schemes where householders make payments to the authority (for instance for bigger bins or large amounts of waste), all this revenue for the local authority must be paid back through rebates to people throwing away low amounts of residual waste. Local authorities would not keep any of the revenue for themselves. However, they would be able to make savings as a result of having less waste to dispose of. Evidence suggests that there could be savings of up to £18 per household per year.

- There are many different ways of running an incentive scheme and local authorities will be able to come forward with their own schemes, within the legal framework, to suit local needs and circumstances. Some examples of possible schemes can be found on the factsheet on Defra’s website.

Q. So people will get two bills – one for council tax and one for the waste charge?

- Not necessarily. Local authorities can choose to show waste charges and rebates on the council tax bill if they wish. This is rightly a decision for authorities to make on the basis of what would be most efficient and most suitable in the light of preferences locally.

Q. Is it only council tax payers who will pay the waste charge?

- It would be up to local authorities to decide which households and which residents should be covered by a waste incentive scheme. They may decide – particularly, perhaps, where charges and rebates are shown on the council tax bill – that those exempt from paying council tax should not be included. Alternatively, it may be that there are groups who are exempt from council tax whose waste behaviour the authority does want to target. In this case they may decide to extend the scheme more widely beyond those who pay council tax. The guidance discusses in more detail the various considerations around this issue.

Q. Which groups would be “unduly disadvantaged”?

- The guidance describes such groups as comprising either those who cannot take action to reduce their waste or recycle more of it or those who will produce larger than average amounts of waste whatever they do. They could include, for example, large families and people with disabilities.
- It is ultimately for local authorities to determine which groups in their area would be unduly disadvantaged and what special measures should be taken. We are also asking local authorities to tell us about their plans for disadvantaged groups in their proposals to run a pilot.

Q. How could an incentive scheme work for blocks of flats, or multiple occupancy households where bins are shared?

- In these sorts of properties there may be issues in identifying who has produced the waste. We recognise that a “one size fits all” approach will not be appropriate here. The legislation allows authorities to decide which sorts of households their scheme will cover and the guidance discusses this in more detail.
- However, some schemes - for instance sack-based schemes, where each household buys sacks for the waste they produce – could work effectively for blocks of flats. Ultimately, it will be up to local authorities to determine how they wish to approach the different types of properties in their areas.

Q. The standards for a “good” recycling service are set very low – 20% recycling and composting is not “good”. This won’t give people

adequate opportunities to reduce the amount of residual waste they throw away.

- The guidance sets out an essential floor – 20% - and other desirable criteria which are much higher. It is difficult to set a universally agreed standard for what counts as a good recycling service in this case but we have to draw a line somewhere. The key point is for people to have the opportunity to reduce their non-recycled waste in part by diverting it for recycling. However, we very much welcome comments on the standards we have proposed here.
- The draft guidance makes clear that these standards for a good recycling service apply only in relation to waste incentive schemes and not more widely to local authorities. It also makes clear that beyond these minimum requirements we would ideally like to see authorities performing at at least 40% recycling and composting, or with plans to deliver this by 2010. We would also like them to collect plastic and food waste at kerbside, or have plans to do so within 12 months.

Q. Why is the Government stopping authorities with low recycling rates from introducing a waste incentive scheme – surely the schemes are meant to help improve recycling rates?

- It is absolutely right incentive schemes are designed to increase recycling. Evidence suggests that they could increase recycling to around 55%.
- On the other hand, it would be seen as unreasonable to introduce an incentive scheme in an area where people have little opportunity to divert waste for recycling in order to reduce the amount of non-recycled waste they put out for collection.
- This is why we have said that pilots should already have a recycling and composting rate above 20% and kerbside collections for at least 2 materials. We have tried to strike a balance here between providing adequate protections for householders and not setting too high a hurdle for local authorities wishing to run pilots. However, we very much welcome views on the standards we have proposed here for a good recycling service.

Q. Shouldn't authorities have to actually do something on fly-tipping, not just have a strategy? Shouldn't they at least have to have regard to their strategy?

- Absolutely. A strategy is there to be implemented. However, it is not government's role to police local authorities. It is for good reason that we don't micromanage elsewhere on waste nor on other service areas. Our role, instead, is to set direction, which is what we have done for flytipping. Local authorities will not be able to introduce these schemes unless they have a strategy in place to prevent and deal with fly-tipping. The draft guidance sets out what is expected to be in a strategy and we welcome comments on this. Local authorities running pilot schemes will have to have regard to the updated version of that guidance. It will follow that the

strategy should set out the action that the local authority plans to take should fly-tipping happen when a scheme is in operation.