

Legislation Committee No 4

Nid yw'r dudalen ar gael yn y Gymraeg

LC4(3)-07-10 : Paper 1

Proposed Waste (Wales) Measure

Written Evidence to Legislation Committee 4 submitted by Keep Wales Tidy

Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) is an independent National voluntary organisation with Charitable status working to achieve a Clean, Safe and Tidy Wales.

Key elements of our work include:

seeking to improve the quality of the local environment;

tackling anti-social behaviour such as litter, fly-tipping, dog fouling, vandalism, graffiti and fly-posting;

developing innovative ways to reduce environmental problems;

supporting people to look after their own local environment; and

developing a sense of pride amongst people for their own area.

Central to our work is dealing with the quality of local environments and contributing to the schemes and strategies of the Welsh Assembly Government such as the environment strategy, social justice, sustainable development and environmental education.

Among the programmes run by Keep Wales Tidy are:

Tidy Towns which supports volunteers across Wales to improve the quality of their local environment by keeping it clear of litter and developing projects that encourage sustainable development within communities ;

the Eco-Schools programme which supports school pupils to undertake work on education for sustainable development and global citizenship;

Local Environmental Audit and Management System - which provides a validation survey for the Streetscene Performance indicator;

Tidy Wales Week - which supports volunteers to look after their environment;

Coastal Awards - such as the Blue Flag, Green Coast Award and Seaside Award, which recognizes good practice in terms of coastal management.

Keep Wales Tidy recognise that the part of the measure relating to single use carrier bags is about the distribution of the funding raised from the proposed charge, but we would stress the importance of the charge in reducing the damage to the environment from the single use bags .

It is our opinion that the proposed charge would significantly reduce the amount of single use carrier bags in circulation, thereby reducing the amount being littered, which combined with the money raised via the charge has the potential to make genuine improvements within our communities, reduce the adverse affects on biodiversity and have positive impacts on the local and global

environment.

Questions

1 Is there a need for a proposed Measure to deliver the stated objectives of making provision to reduce the amount of waste and litter in Wales and contributing to the development of more effective waste management arrangements in Wales?

It is Keep Wales Tidy's view that there is a need for the proposed Measure to deliver the stated objectives to develop a more sustainable approach to waste management, consistent with the waste hierarchy. It will also be an important part of achieving the long term aim of the Assembly's new Waste Strategy "Towards Zero Waste", that Wales becomes a zero waste country by 2050, by designing products and services with waste prevention in mind.

Keep Wales Tidy considers litter to be waste in the wrong place, and most of the litter currently collected is sent to landfill as municipal waste. Over the past three years, dating from our 2006 paper on "Tackling plastic bag litter" Keep Wales Tidy has argued that the most effective way of tackling carrier bag waste and litter is to introduce a charge at the point of sale. It is Keep Wales Tidy's opinion that the proposed charge will significantly reduce the amount of carrier bags in circulation, thereby reducing the amount being littered and sent to landfill. However, for the charge to be successful, there will need to be participation in the distribution of the funds raised by all retailers. It is important that the Measure allows for a statutory requirement, if this cannot be achieved through a voluntary scheme.

The impact of single use carrier bags on the environment, either visually as litter or indirectly on wildlife, not to mention through manufacture and distribution, is confirmed in the Explanatory Memorandum to the proposed Waste (Wales) Measure 2010 in paragraph 8.1.5 - "Single use carrier bags impose externalities on UK society in the form of Greenhouse Gas emissions during their production and transportation and litter when they are discarded. The charge on single use carrier bags is intended to address this externality." The destination of the proceeds from a charge should therefore contribute to reducing that impact and ideally be to the most disadvantaged areas in our society. Environmental organisations within the voluntary sector that support communities and volunteers at a local level, particularly those working with disadvantaged communities, are best placed to achieve this aim.

2. How will the proposed Measure change what organisations do currently and what impact will any such changes have?

Keep Wales Tidy recognise that some retailers currently make a charge for single use carrier bags and support a range of projects with the net proceeds. We do however, feel it is important that the Measure gives the power to the Assembly Government to ensure revenue generated from the charge is passed on to support environmental community based projects. We feel this would help to ensure public support for and understanding of the charge.

Keep Wales Tidy would want to make sure that the charge and distribution of the funds raised is introduced in a way that makes it easy for retailers to implement, and that it can be fully understood by consumers. For example, some smaller retailers would appear to be excluded from the proposed voluntary scheme, which from paragraphs 3.8. and 8.1.33 of the Explanatory Memorandum would seem only apply to the largest 20-50 retailers in Wales. Currently, it is the smaller retailers who are less likely to charge for bags or have any systems in place to distribute funds raised, so one impact of the introduction of the Measure could be to ensure these smaller retailers are included.

The non adoption/participation in a voluntary scheme by some retailers could lead to confusion amongst consumers and not result in the desired change in behaviour and the reduction in bags used. It is also important to have a level playing field amongst all retailers to avoid unfair competition. The Explanatory Memorandum on page 41 acknowledges it is difficult to predict how many retailers will submit the net revenue from the scheme to environmental or other projects under the voluntary option. Others may use existing schemes to avoid costs. These schemes may not benefit environmental projects or those that promote sustainability or well-being.

Another impact of using the Measure would be to ensure these types of project do benefit.

Indeed, the responses to the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation on the proposed charge would suggest that there is support for a scheme that benefits the community as a whole through money going to charities and environmental projects. Keep Wales Tidy would suggest that the scheme used for the distribution of the charge should convey the message that the charge is going to be used for something positive to change environmental behaviour and remediate for the damage caused to the environment by single use carrier bags.

Although Keep Wales Tidy accepts that retailers can make a good case for being allowed to distribute funds to projects of their choosing, in line with their corporate responsibility agenda, we are concerned that this may mean that some of the revenue from charging may go to fund projects that will not benefit the environment in Wales or promote positive environmental behaviour.

Alternatively it may also go to small local groups, who become reliant on the funding. The latter would contradict the purpose of the charge, which is to reduce the number of single use carrier bags not generate funding.

The scheme introduced under the Measure will require retailers to make it transparent where the money is going. Consumer understanding of where the money raised is going is important and Keep Wales Tidy would support Jane Davidson's statement to the committee with regard to the public - "They do not want to see retailers charging and then keeping that money".

3. Are the sections of the proposed Measure appropriate in terms of achieving the stated objectives?

In considering this question, consultees may wish to consider the nature of the provisions in the proposed Measure that:

1.require retailers to apply the net proceeds of revenues raised from the sale of single use carrier bags to specific environmental purposes or bodies (sections 1-2)

Keep Wales Tidy can only comment on part (a) of Question 3 as we do not have the necessary expertise to comment on the other aspects relating to waste. Keep Wales Tidy believe it is important that the net proceeds from the charge should go to support positive changes in environmental behaviour and to remediate for the damage caused to the environment by single use carrier bags. It should also be of benefit to the citizens of Wales.

Keep Wales Tidy would also support the inclusion of organisations who hand out single use carrier bags at events, such as the Royal Welsh Show, in the arrangements for the charge.

4.What are the potential barriers to implementing the provisions of the proposed Measure (if any) and does the proposed Measure take account of them?

The proposed Measure considers the barrier of a voluntary scheme not delivering satisfactory outcomes by providing the option of powers to establish a duty on retailers to pass on the net revenue and it is important that these powers to introduce a statutory duty are available through this Measure.

A further potential barrier is the administration and monitoring of a voluntary scheme. At present no costs are included for monitoring the voluntary scheme in Table 1 Summary Cost Table on Page 43 of the Explanatory Memorandum. The barrier of these costs could be minimised by channelling the revenue raised through a small number of organisations in the voluntary sector such as Keep Wales Tidy, Environment Wales or the Wales Sustainability Reinvestment Trust who could provide the administration and monitoring functions and already have systems in place to provide grants and loan finance to environmental projects in Wales.

This could also alleviate the administrative burden on smaller retailers, who could pass on the revenue to an administrative body with the requirement that the funding is used to support a project in their local area. This would be of benefit both to the local retailer in terms of marketing and to the local community. It could also avoid the situation where a group becomes reliant on the funding from one retailer.

Monitoring the scheme should also be easier and cost less if there are a limited number of destinations for the money. Keep Wales Tidy would therefore support the destinations for the proceeds under the Measure. Effective monitoring is important as negative publicity could arise if it became apparent that the funds were not being used for the intended purposes or were funding projects outside Wales, which could raise a barrier to people supporting the scheme.

5. What are the financial implications of the proposed Measure for organisations, if any? In answering this question you may wish to consider Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum (the Regulatory Impact Assessment), which estimates the costs and benefits of implementation of the proposed Measure.

The 'do nothing' option has no additional costs attached to it, but in our view this is not a satisfactory option. It would undermine the public's buy-in to the charge and the added value element of the charge, i.e. using the funding to raise awareness of the environmental damage caused by single use carrier bags, could be lost.

Keep Wales Tidy supports an allocation of expenditure for a public information campaign to highlight why the charge is being introduced, what bags are covered and how people can avoid paying the charge. However, we would suggest that clarity is required on what communication strategies would be beneficial to the success of the scheme and how these will be funded.

Keep Wales Tidy recognises that there will be cost implications for retailers in collecting the charge, but understand that these can be offset against the charge. At present these seem to be estimated as a fixed amount of £15 for large retailers and £30 for small and medium retailers per return. The Explanatory Memorandum suggests these are conservative estimates compared to figures included in the Scottish RIA. An alternative which may more accurately reflect the costs incurred could be that the allowance for these costs is proportionate to the amount collected through the charge, perhaps on an agreed percentage basis.

The costs of administering and monitoring a scheme by a voluntary sector organisation/charity to allocate the funds raised could also be met from the revenue raised from the charge.