



House of Commons
Northern Ireland Affairs
Committee

**Waste Management
Strategy in Northern
Ireland: Government
Response to the
Committee's Sixth
Report of Session
2004–05**

**Fourth Special Report of Session
2004–05**

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The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

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Fourth Special Report

The Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2004-05 on 28 February 2005. The Government's response from Angela Smith MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office, was received in the form of a letter and a memorandum on 23 March 2005. The response is published as an appendix to this report.

Appendix

Thank you for copying me your Sixth Report of Session 2004-05 entitled 'Waste Management Strategy in Northern Ireland'. The 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section of the Committee's Report contains 39 points to which I understand I may respond formally. I am grateful for the work of the Committee in examining these important issues, and I have pleasure in enclosing the formal Government response to the points raised in your Report.

I should like to reiterate the Government's commitment to delivering good waste management strategy and practice in Northern Ireland. By doing so we will ensure that Northern Ireland plays a positive role in helping the United Kingdom to deliver on the European Union waste obligation, and that Northern Ireland becomes a model of good practice in waste management.

I trust that the Committee find this response helpful.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following text details Government's response to the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Committee's report.

This document responds to the conclusions and recommendations in the order they are numbered in the Committee report.

"Northern Ireland's poor record of converting EU Directives on waste into regulations has changed recently. The Minister confirmed that some 45 pieces of legislation had been implemented which had "brought Northern Ireland up to date with the UK and our EU partners". We welcome this progress. (Paragraph 15)"

Government welcome the Committee's acknowledgement of the effort that has been put into clearing the backlog of untransposed EU Directives in Northern Ireland.

"Some progress in implementing the Waste Management Strategy has been achieved, but overall it has been slight. The crucial issue is the pace of change, and whether Northern Ireland can achieve even its statutory obligations in the remaining time

available, far less a major shift to the sustainable management of resources. (Paragraph 19)”

The main focus of the first phase of Strategy implementation has been the development of waste management plans which has been achieved through the work of the 3 sub-regional waste management planning groups. Government agree that the pace of change must now increase rapidly to achieve our goals. The current review of the Waste Management Strategy will bring forward mechanisms to ensure that the new Waste Management Strategy’s aims and statutory objectives are delivered.

“If the 2010 and subsequent targets for the amount of household waste sent to landfill are not met, significant EU financial penalties, estimated to be of the order of £180 million per annum for the United Kingdom as a whole, may be imposed, and could be passed on to Northern Ireland. (Paragraph 21)”

“The race is on to meet the first major target in 2010 for reduction of waste going to landfill. However, the excessive delays in the planning process, the lack of appropriate infrastructure to provide alternatives to landfill, and the absence of a clear funding strategy mean that this target may not be met. (Paragraph 23)”

Government acknowledge the very considerable challenges Northern Ireland faces in meeting the 2010 diversion targets of the EU Landfill Directive and the recycling targets of the current Northern Ireland Waste Strategy.

The UK Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003 apportioned landfill diversion targets amongst the devolved administrations. The Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme provides a statutory basis for Northern Ireland to meet its contribution, with stiff penalties for non-compliance. The scheme provides a robust and closely monitored system for ensuring year on year improvements towards targets.

To accelerate progress in the planning and procurement of waste management infrastructure, the Department of the Environment has established an Infrastructure Task Force to bring together all key stakeholders, within central and local government, to focus on planning issues, procurement capacity, financial provisions and delivery mechanisms with a view to identifying options for inclusion in the new Waste Management Strategy.

“The Planning Service has been widely criticised for inordinate delays in reaching decisions on applications for waste management facilities. We were astonished to learn that it can take up to ten years to get planning permission for waste management facilities, and we were given details of a specific application by a private sector company for an extension to a landfill site on which no decision has been made more than eight and a half years after it was lodged. (Paragraph 24)”

“We are deeply concerned that the continuing substantial delays in dealing with planning applications for waste management facilities are having a major impact on the provision of infrastructure to implement the Waste Management Strategy. We also have concerns that the Department appears to be limiting landfill applications at a time when disillusionment with the planning process is deterring applications for alternatives to landfill. (Paragraph 30)”

“There is a pressing need to restore confidence in the waste management sector if Northern Ireland is to create the infrastructure necessary to fulfil its obligations. We appreciate that the Planning Service is currently involved in a major review of process. However, we believe that the diminishing time available for implementing the Waste Strategy demands action now. We call on the Minister to take immediate steps to ensure that decisions are taken on existing applications, and that future planning decisions relating to waste management are made within a reasonable time. Such decisions also need to be made following adequate public consultation, not only with statutory consultees. (Paragraph 31)”

The Committee has mentioned that Planning Service has, for some time, been seeking to improve the processing of planning applications by a number of measures set out in its Modernising Planning Processes Implementation Plan. Progress continues on these measures.

As regards the Committee’s comments on existing landfill applications, the application at Aughrim was submitted in late 2002. Cottonmount and Mullaghglass have been in the system since the mid 1990s, but processing of these applications was unable to commence until the decision framework had been cleared and the applications updated to comply with the Landfill Directive. In view of these unavoidable requirements, processing of the applications has taken just over 2 years. These applications are likely to be determined in the very near future.

Planning delays result not only from the planning process itself. Due to the contentious nature of some landfill applications, delays can be caused by a number of factors, including inadequate information submitted by applicants, lack of timely replies to consultations, and the impact of Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, relevant Departmental publications and the EC Landfill Directive. Some landfill applications have also been subject to Judicial Review.

Government do not agree with the Committee’s view that applications for alternatives to landfill are being deterred. Indeed, the majority of current applications for waste management facilities are not for landfill.

Regrettably, adequate public consultation is not necessarily compatible with a speedier planning process. Major landfill applications already require an Environmental Statement involving detailed consideration of all the significant environmental effects,

their presentation in a concise form, advertisement of the statement and public involvement.

Potential changes to the planning regime may focus on compulsory pre-application scoping and screening. This is likely to incorporate public involvement in pre-application screening, which determines the significant effects on the environment which must be considered by the applicant. The Environmental Impact Assessment process provides for a consistent standard of public involvement throughout the EU on environmental cases. It also introduces the associated delays associated with the formal presentation of information, comment and reworking of statements that can be significant sources both of cost and delay.

“We believe that the efforts to remedy the absence of alternatives to landfill may be hindered by current work to develop a Northern Ireland-wide Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO). (Paragraph 36)”

“If the intention is to defer decisions on planning applications for facilities still further on the basis that these might not be part of some future Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO), then the likelihood of those facilities being procured, let alone becoming operational in the short to medium term, will be reduced radically. Delays in procurement processes compound this problem. It is also difficult to see how a regional level BPEO exercise can overcome the problem identified by the Department in respect of site-specific BPEO justifications. (Paragraph 38)”

Government do not agree with the Committee’s conclusion. An interim report on options for municipal waste in the Northern Ireland-wide Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) was published in February 2005. The final guidance will be published in June 2005. This provides a clear steer on integrated network of facilities for Northern Ireland and is aimed at supporting planning decisions and waste management plan reviews. It does not in any way constrain current planning applications and/or the decision process for facilities identified in the current waste management plans.

Current planning decisions are not dependent on future regional or sub-regional BPEO assessment. Applications already in the system are tested against the current adopted plans. The Northern Ireland-wide BPEO aims to assist future decisions by making the process more transparent and robust and therefore provide more confidence to both applicants and the public. Whilst a regional level BPEO exercise cannot wholly overcome site-specific and community concerns, it can contribute to a rational decision-making process which provides a defensible position for decisions made in the best interests of Northern Ireland as a whole.

“There is a danger of confusion over the level at which decisions should be taken about the type, scale, and location of facilities for dealing with waste. If the regional

level process is not prescriptive, then its local impact will be limited. On the other hand, if the intention is to be prescriptive, the process runs the risk of excluding local input. A delicate balance must be found if an inclusive, transparent, and effective process is to be put in place. (Paragraph 39)”

Government are taking full account of the need to address the gap between the prescriptive nature of the waste management targets and the securing of support at local level for the methods adopted for meeting those targets. The two key factors in bridging that gap are the high level of local participation in the process of selecting the Best Practicable Environmental Option for Northern Ireland, and the newly-established Infrastructure Task Force, both of which draw upon the full spectrum of key stakeholders’ views and expertise to identify preferred strategic options for meeting waste targets.

“We are concerned that waste management infrastructure planning and procurement processes are seriously behind schedule. The Department seems fairly confident that Northern Ireland is on track to meet the 25% recycling target by 2005. However, as planning applications take at least a year to determine, and procurement processes have barely begun, the prospect of meeting the first Landfill Directive target in 2010 looks bleak. (Paragraph 42)”

Government are addressing all the areas specified to enable Northern Ireland to meet its responsibilities with regard to recycling targets for 2005 and the first Landfill Directive target in 2010. Local authorities, acting either individually or collectively, have already initiated a number of procurement contracts, and waste management is a high priority for the Strategic Investment Board, with which the Department of the Environment is working closely in taking all the steps necessary to expedite both planning and procurement processes, including the establishment of the Infrastructure Task Force (see Recommendation 4 above).

“We call on the Minister to identify quickly the required infrastructure taking account of the shortening timescale available for planning, procurement, and construction. An analysis of the views of would-be providers should also be undertaken to establish why greater investment in the sector is not taking place. (Paragraph 43)”

A primary function of the Infrastructure Task Force is to elicit from the three regional waste groupings a clear statement of the waste infrastructure they require in order to meet landfill and recycling and recovery targets. The remit of the Strategic Investment Board is to provide advice in relation to the formulation and implementation of a programme of major investment projects (including waste management), and the Department of the Environment is working closely with the Board to help deliver the required investment.

“We welcome the recognition of the need for investment in waste management infrastructure included in the recent draft consultation document 'Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2015'. However, the level of investment needed has not been developed in any detail. We call on the Minister to draw up urgently a robust and realistic funding plan to provide the necessary infrastructure over the life of the Waste Management Strategy. (Paragraph 50)”

The draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland has identified a waste infrastructural deficit in excess of £250 million. This figure will be further refined after publication of the final version of the Best Practicable Environmental Option and a definitive statement of regional waste infrastructure requirements. The new Waste Management Strategy, scheduled for consultation in September 2005, will include proposals for financing this infrastructural deficit. The proposals will draw on expert advice from a range of sources and on discussions with regional waste authorities, with the intention of ensuring that published proposals are viable and have the support of key stakeholders.

“Within this overall funding plan clear lines of responsibility for the provision of local infrastructure by District Councils need to be identified. The Minister must clarify the extent to which this local infrastructure will require to be funded from local rates, and make a firm commitment to provide an adequate level of central Government funding for future years. (Paragraph 51)”

As the Department with overall responsibility for waste management strategy in Northern Ireland, the Department of the Environment is taking a lead role in identifying which funding route, or combination of funding routes, provides the most appropriate mechanism for meeting infrastructural costs. Available funding options, developed in close co-operation with key stakeholders, will be spelt out clearly in the new Waste Management Strategy, along with a detailed implementation action plan.

“We recommend that a review of the relevant legislation is carried out to ensure that adequate powers exist to enable District Councils, either individually or collectively, to enter into appropriate arrangements with the private sector and community sector providers of waste services. (Paragraph 52)”

Government have already initiated steps to ensure that there are no legislative restrictions to taking forward the procurement of waste infrastructure. The powers of local authorities in Northern Ireland to enter into contracts with the private sector, either individually or collectively, are currently being evaluated. Government are also examining the legislative issues arising in relation to any other partnership arrangements that might be proposed.

“The Waste Management Strategy contained fifteen key targets on strategic leadership, but the Waste Management Advisory Board Report shows positive progress has been achieved in only four targets, three of which relate to the

establishment and work of the Advisory Board itself. This is a lamentable performance and remedial action must be put in hand at once to ensure substantive progress. (Paragraph 54)”

The Waste Management Strategy contains six key actions on strategic leadership. Three related to the establishment of the Waste Management Advisory Board and were met. Progress on two of the other key actions, green procurement and integrating requirements for sustainable waste management into construction and maintenance contracts, are outlined in the responses to recommendations 17-19 and 22. On internal resource audits, a Department of the Environment Action Plan was published in October 2004. This approach is being used as a model for other Departments. The new Waste Management Strategy will include a reappraisal of the strategic leadership role of Government. In addition, an Environmental Management System is being developed within the Department of the Environment.

“The Department of the Environment established a waste management steering group in early 2004 to co-ordinate implementation of its Action Plan, although this should have taken place much earlier. Other Departments appear to have taken little action to date, and this is unacceptable. We look to the Minister for the Environment to set appropriately rigorous milestones for action within Government. (Paragraph 55)”

Since the publication of the Action Plan, the Department of the Environment has been collating responses from all Government Departments on progress to date. The Department of the Environment aims to publish a review of progress in May 2005 and is currently liaising with other Northern Ireland Departments to assist them in the production of their own Action Plans.

“We are deeply concerned at the Government failure to provide strong leadership in implementing the Waste Management Strategy. The Minister must address this issue at once, and ensure that all Government Departments are fully aware of their joint responsibility for the successful implementation of the Strategy. (Paragraph 59)”

Government accept that Northern Ireland Departments have a key role to play in driving forward the implementation of the Strategy and the achievement of a number of its main objectives. This will be a major element of the new Waste Management Strategy.

“The failure to live up fully to its commitment to develop and implement green purchasing policies and practices was a major missed opportunity for the Government to lead by example. The recent issue of a low-key internal guidance note (the Green Procurement Guide) is too little too late, and we believe Northern Ireland cannot afford to wait a further year to judge its impact. We urge the Minister to consider the introduction of a strong code of practice, incorporating clear targets. (Paragraph 60)”

The role of those making policy on procurement centrally in Government is to advise Departments about the considerations bearing on their procurement decision-making. Within this environment, the Government is investigating the mechanisms available to encourage wider application of sustainable development principles to Departmental procurement practices, and of monitoring the degree to which such principles are applied.

It is the intention of the Department of the Environment to produce a thematic strategy for dealing with the sustainable development impact of its own operations, which will include a target-led section on procurement as a central thread. It is the Department's intention to promote this strategy as a model for other Northern Ireland Departments to take similar measures of their own, thereby providing leadership within Government in the area of sustainable procurement.

It is intended that sector-specific guidance documents such as these will supplement the generic guidance mentioned in the recommendation to provide more practical and specific guidance for procurement practitioners.

“Commercial and industrial waste processing is not receiving adequate attention. While the regional BPEO (Best Practicable Environmental Option) exercise may help to identify appropriate treatment options for non-municipal waste, we are concerned that the absence of firm proposals to process such waste places a question mark over the ability of the present arrangements to deliver the infrastructure required at the appropriate time. Poor data is undermining the integrity of targets for non-municipal waste and the Government must take steps now to improve the quality of such data. (Paragraph 63)”

New data surveys are scheduled to be carried out in 2005. These will enhance the baseline for non-municipal waste. In addition, Government is reviewing legislative proposals to enhance the Duty of Care of those who produce waste to periodically return records they are already required to keep.

“Given the relatively low cost of waste management relative to turnover for most industrial sectors, it remains to be demonstrated whether any increase in such costs would diminish Northern Ireland's attractiveness to inward investors. Furthermore, significant social benefits are likely to flow from improvements by the commercial and industrial sectors in waste management. (Paragraph 65)”

Government must be sensitive to industry costs, as Northern Ireland's small scale, geographic position and large number of Small-Medium Enterprises mean that increases in waste management costs can have a disproportionately large effect on business compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. Through InvestNI, Envirowise, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), NetRegs and new waste prevention initiatives, Government are seeking to emphasise all benefits from

improvements in waste management, including profitability and environmental and social advantages.

“The establishment and work of the Aggregates Recycling Task Group is a positive development and there is a belief within the industry that this is likely to enhance sustainability. The role of the Central Procurement Directorate in instigating the Task Group has received recognition. (Paragraph 66)”

Government are working, in partnership with the Waste and Resources Action Programme, to produce a version of *“The Quality Protocol for the production of aggregates from inert waste”* for Northern Ireland. This publication is already available in other United Kingdom jurisdictions, supported by each of the relevant environment agencies and departments. The document sets out a protocol for recycling inert construction and demolition (C&D) waste into high quality and high value aggregate products for use in range of construction projects.

The *Quality Protocol* seeks to underpin the work of the Aggregates Recycling Task Group by providing a UK-wide standard for aggregate materials produced from inert waste. Producers of recycled aggregate can use this protocol to prove that their product can compete on quality standards with virgin materials in the marketplace. Conversely, procurers of these products, including Government, can be assured of quality standards of materials produced from recycle using this protocol.

“We are concerned that non-municipal wastes have not been given the priority they warrant in the sub-regional plans. We recommend that clear consideration should be given to ways in which the relevant facilities can be created. When mechanisms for procuring municipal waste facilities are being developed, consideration must be given to how these can incorporate non-municipal wastes in ways that are attractive to the partners involved. (Paragraph 68)”

Government are providing further guidance to the waste management groups undertaking reviews of their waste management plans to ensure that these will fully reflect all controlled waste streams. Detailed schedules, the Northern Ireland-wide BPEO and a clear context to be published in the new Waste Management Strategy will assist this.

“We received no evidence that higher costs in the management of commercial and industrial waste would necessarily undermine the economic competitiveness of Northern Ireland or deter investors. We recommend that the Department of the Environment and Invest Northern Ireland cooperate in the development of a coherent strategy for dealing with such wastes in which the efficiency of energy and materials resource management has a central place. We believe this is necessary if Northern Ireland is to develop expertise in resource management in commerce and industry for future export. (Paragraph 69)”

The Department of the Environment and InvestNI are already co-operating closely through a number of programmes and initiatives, including the Waste Management Industry Fund, membership of the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), a North South Market Development steering group and the new Business Resource Efficiency and Waste programme to ensure effective integration of energy, waste and materials management throughout the business sector. A coherent approach to dealing with the management of commercial and industrial waste will be reflected in the new Waste Management Strategy.

“We are concerned at the absence of specific measures to reduce the growth of municipal waste. We recommend that the Department undertakes a thorough review of potential measures, including charging. (Paragraph 71)”

Government agree with the Committee’s recommendation and will bring forward a Waste Prevention Framework as part of the new Waste Management Strategy. This will examine specific measures to reduce waste growth, including the potential contribution of fiscal measures such as charging.

“We believe there is a need to develop a clearer and more sophisticated understanding of markets for recycled materials, and to identify those materials for which it is desirable to develop local markets. The aim should be to avoid giving undue support for investment in local reprocessing capacity which has little chance of survival in competitive global markets. (Paragraph 73)”

Government concur with this recommendation and are enhancing support for the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP).

“Participation in the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has helped to develop processing capacity, both inside and outside Northern Ireland, for materials collected in the region. The Department must continue to support WRAP in Northern Ireland as its range of activities develops. We welcome the work that is taking place with the Republic of Ireland to develop markets on an all-Ireland basis. (Paragraph 77)”

Government are proposing to double the contribution to the Waste and Resources Action Programme in 2005-06 to continue to support and enhance the range of activities accessible in Northern Ireland. Specifically, this will add new elements of advice to local authorities on collection and management systems, contribution to the capital organics programme and business efficiency resource.

“We call on the Minister to undertake an urgent review of the Waste Management Industry Fund, and market development funding generally, with a view to ensuring greater participation by the private sector and the involvement of the community and voluntary sector. (Paragraph 80)”

Government are working closely with InvestNI to ensure best use of new funding under the Business Resource Efficiency and Waste programme. In the last 12 months, Northern Ireland has levered £500,000 capital investment through the Waste and Resources Action Programme. The Department of the Environment also launched its revised Community Waste Innovation Fund in February 2005. This will make available funding of £1 million per annum to the community and voluntary sector over the next three years.

“In making use of the work underway by WRAP, Northern Ireland must seek to develop new markets for materials extracted from the waste stream by supporting the establishment of standards which use secondary materials. For example, the PAS100 standard can provide assurance about the quality of compost; and the Quality Protocol is able to provide confidence that quality aggregates can be produced from inert wastes. The Department should consider linking recycling and composting targets to the PAS100 standard to ensure the production of good quality products for the market. (Paragraph 83)”

Government recognise the importance of consistent quality standards that provide consumer confidence in new products derived from recovered materials. The PAS100 and other Quality Protocols provide valuable tools in this respect.

“We recommend that the Department clarifies the status of existing guidance by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs on the production of compost following the recent Animal By-Products Regulations. If the term 'Draft' no longer applies to the guidance, it should be dropped. If it is the intention to develop the Guidance, an indication of how and when this will be done should be given to enable equipment suppliers to tender for contracts on a sound basis. (Paragraph 85)”

Government agree with the Committee’s recommendation and will work closely with the Department for Food and Rural Affairs to clarify the status of existing guidance and provide greater certainty for equipment suppliers.

“We were encouraged to hear from the Southern Waste Management Partnership that "in recent months there have been some very firm measures taken by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána with regard to illegal trans-frontier shipments. To some extent this has been quite effective and has dealt with the large movements of waste across the border”. (Paragraph 87)”

Government has been encouraged by the effectiveness of recent actions taken with regard to illegal trans-frontier shipments, many of which have been joint operations organised by Environment and Heritage Service and the Organised Crime Unit of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and carried out with the support of the Garda Síochána. Information sharing between Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda is a vital element in the success of such actions.

Responsibility for administering and enforcing the Trans-frontier Shipment Regulations transferred to the Department of the Environment on 1 March 2005, and will result in a more central role for the Department in controlling the legal and illegal cross border movement of waste.

“We welcome the action that has been taken to tackle illegal dumping, including the high level of cross-border co-ordination and co-operation, and meetings at Ministerial level. We recognise the difficulty that the difference in landfill costs on either side of the border raises for Northern Ireland. We strongly support the bid by the Department for additional resources to tackle illegal dumping activity and we urge the Minister to proceed with urgency to assess whether legislative changes may be required. (Paragraph 91)”

Government welcome the Committee’s comments regarding action already taken to tackle illegal dumping. A recently established interdepartmental Task Force has been charged with considering the existing arrangements for inter-agency co-operation, the range of options for legislative change, and the resources allocated to tackling illegal cross-border trafficking.

Implementation of any new arrangements and powers will have significant resource implications, and part of the Task Force’s role is to consider the resource implications of the proposed enforcement provisions, and prepare a business case to support any future bid for additional resources.

“Fly tipping is a growing and insidious problem, and we are pleased that the Department of the Environment is considering a range of measures to deal with it more effectively. We urge the Minister to ensure that this work proceeds without delay and that the existing regulatory powers are enforced fully. (Paragraph 96)”

Government fully recognise that fly tipping has the potential for both environmental damage and a despoiling of the natural heritage. The interdepartmental Task Force, mentioned at Recommendation 32, will examine existing powers and consider how they can be harnessed most effectively, and whether new measures and legislative provisions are necessary to deal with this issue.

“We support the calls for the establishment of an Environmental Protection Agency for the Northern Ireland although we recognise that its remit would extend well beyond the issue of waste management. We are pleased that the Minister appears receptive to this, and call on her to undertake a review to identify the best option for Northern Ireland. (Paragraph 101)”

In the summer of 2003, a coalition of environmental NGOs commissioned a report by Professor Richard Macrory on “Transparency and Trust – Reshaping Environmental Governance in Northern Ireland” for public consultation. An analysis of the responses was published in October 2004.

Since then, the coalition has put its proposals to the Department of the Environment for consideration. In particular, they were anxious that there should now be a formal, independent process of review. The Government are considering the views of the coalition.

“We commend the commitment of those working to develop and implement a strategic approach to waste management in Northern Ireland. We recognise that much good work has resulted. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland's response to the challenge of managing waste and compliance with EU Directives has been patchy and much too slow. (Paragraph 102)”

The new Waste Management Strategy will address those areas of waste management where progress to date has been slow. In particular, the work of the new Infrastructure Task Force will be instrumental in making progress with the planning, procurement and funding of major waste management infrastructure.

“We believe that mere compliance with the EU Waste Management Directives is insufficient. Northern Ireland must strive to develop a strong indigenous waste management strategy. Only by doing so can the vision for Northern Ireland set out in the Strategy as a "centre of excellence in resource and waste management" be realised. (Paragraph 103)”

The new Waste Management Strategy will continue to reflect the foundation and ambitions of the original Strategy in its vision for resource and waste management.

“The development of the Strategy through the involvement of stakeholders, and the co-operation and partnership achieved among District Councils, have been positive achievements. However, the failure of Government departments to provide strong overall leadership is disappointing, and has put in jeopardy the likelihood of meeting the EU targets, and realising the strategy's vision. (Paragraph 104)”

The new Waste Management Strategy will provide an opportunity for Government Departments and all stakeholders to make and honour their commitment in line with agreed Implementation Action Plans.

“There are a number of immediate challenges facing the Government. A revised Strategy cannot wait until the end of 2005. The crisis in planning is delaying the provision of infrastructure and endangering the further involvement of the private sector. The absence of a clear funding plan must be addressed, and better guidance on procurement provided. (Paragraph 105)”

Whilst the new Waste Management Strategy will not be finalised until the end of 2005, implementation of the existing Strategy will continue. The current funding scheme is in line with the requirements identified by local authorities.

“To enable overall progress to be made, strong Government vision and leadership is needed. The Minister for the Environment should adopt the role of 'waste champion' in Government to ensure that all Departments and public bodies play their full part. However, Government action alone will not ensure a sustainable environment. A strong response from Government needs to be matched by timely and effective action from all stakeholders. (Paragraph 106)”

Government welcome the Committee’s recognition that all stakeholders have a part to play in ensuring a sustainable environment. The Minister with responsibility for the Environment will continue to play a lead role in promoting sustainable waste management practices both within Government and by other stakeholders. The new Waste Management Strategy, and its associated Implementation Action Plans, will be a key driver for progress.