

ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 17 September 2003
(Morning)

Session 2

£5.00

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ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE 5th Meeting 2003, Session 2

CONVENER

*Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP)

*Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Mr Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Dan Barlow (Scottish Environment LINK)

Penny Cousins (Forward Scotland)

Dr Richard Dixon (Scottish Environment LINK)

Alan Farquhar (Scottish Environment Protection Agency)

Ian Galbraith (Glasgow City Council)

Councillor Alison Hay (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Councillor Russell Imrie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Calum MacDonald (Scottish Environment Protection Agency)

Alan Millar (Argyll and Bute Council)

Joanna Muse (Scottish Environment Protection Agency)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Tracey Hawe

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Brough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Catherine Johnstone

Roz Wheeler

LOCATION

The Chamber

Scottish Parliament

Environment and Rural Development Committee

Wednesday 17 September 2003

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 09:33]

The Convener (Sarah Boyack): I welcome members, witnesses, members of the press—if any are watching in their rooms—and members of the public, who are arriving as I speak.

Before we kick off, I advise members that it was brought to my attention that bits of papers were flying between members and people in the public gallery at our last meeting. I raised the matter at the Conveners Group, which will take up the issue and come up with guidance on whether such behaviour is permitted or not.

My view as convener is that it is pretty disruptive to have people flying around with bits of paper at meetings. I did not want to interrupt last week's meeting and make an issue of the matter at that time; rather, I wanted to reflect on it. I will return to the matter but I think that, as a general principle, we should not pass information backwards and forwards at meetings. All the papers are in front of us, so we should just get on with our work.

Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Are you likely to ban mobile phones, with which people can text each other just like jockeys?

The Convener: I was about to ask members to turn off their mobile phones so that—

Mr Gibson: I am talking about a situation in which someone—

The Convener: As a matter of courtesy, we should not text people while the committee is meeting.

Mr Gibson: I am talking about another means of communication—the convener spoke only about “bits of paper”.

The Convener: The problem is physical—staff had to come and go from the committee table with those bits of paper. I am not aware that people have been texting during our meetings.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Mobile phones are supposed to be switched off, as are pagers. If members want to speak to people in the public gallery, they should leave the committee room, talk to those people outside the room, then return to the meeting.

The Convener: As a matter of courtesy to each other and to the members of the public who watch our meetings, I think that we should focus on the job in hand.

I remind members to switch off their mobile phones.

Item in Private

09:35

The Convener: We have a paper on sustainable development in front of us, which relates to the inquiry that we want to conduct next year. Given that the discussion will lead to the awarding of a contract, are members happy to discuss the item in private at the end of the public part of the meeting?

Members indicated agreement.

National Waste Plan Inquiry

09:36

The Convener: We move to the main item of business, which is our inquiry into the national waste plan. Today's meeting is the first of four planned evidence-taking sessions. We issued an open call for written evidence from which we tried to select as representative as possible a selection of agencies and people with whom to explore the funding mechanisms and co-ordination of progress on the plan.

Three panels of witnesses will sit in front of us today and the first is from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. We have Alan Farquhar, waste strategy area co-ordinator; Calum MacDonald, acting director of strategic planning; and Joanna Muse, waste and resources manager. I thank the witnesses for attending today.

As we agreed previously, we will not ask witnesses to make opening statements. Fortunately, we received submissions from all today's witnesses in advance of the meeting. Members should have a copy of the SEPA paper in front of them—I thank SEPA for a thorough piece of work.

I suggest that we move straight to questions. I hope that members and witnesses will keep their discussions fairly tight. I also hope that members do not kick off by asking millions of questions. We will try to include supplementary questions after the initial round of questioning.

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I have a lot of questions that I want to ask. I will start by working through the paper, for which I thank you. You say:

"An interim review will be carried out after the first 6 months".

Has that happened as yet?

Calum MacDonald (Scottish Environment Protection Agency): No. We have not yet conducted the six-month review, but it is just about due to happen. At the moment, the review is a work in progress.

Eleanor Scott: That is fair enough. You said that the process of working out the area waste plans "facilitated local stakeholder participation". Can you tell me how many of the 11 waste strategy area groups included representatives from community recycling or waste groups?

Calum MacDonald: Yes, we can do that. It would be fair to say that the overall picture was mixed. Some of the area groups had more by way of community representation than others did. My colleagues will be able to give you specific information about individual groups.

Joanna Muse (Scottish Environment Protection Agency): We have pulled together information on group involvement. The problem that we found in quite a number of areas was of finding one representative body that could sit on a group in which we were trying to include a wide range of stakeholders. That was the case because of the number of community network members out there who cover a wide range of activities. We facilitated community sector involvement in a number of different ways; for example, through extensive consultation and through provisional working groups and fora. Although some community groups might not have become members of area groups, we tried actively to engage those groups at various stages of the area waste planning process.

We are working with the likes of Community Recycling Network Scotland, which is establishing a network of community sector organisations. That network allows the identification of one representative body that can sit on the area group to represent the wide interests of the community sector.

Alan Farquhar (Scottish Environment Protection Agency): A good example of that is the Argyll and Bute waste strategy area. When the waste strategy work started, that area already had a network in place, which meant that a community representative was able to join the waste strategy area group at the beginning of the process.

I also work in the Glasgow and Clyde valley area, which is a large waste strategy area comprising eight local authority areas. To begin with, it was impossible to find one group that could represent adequately the whole community sector in that area, which meant that we had a lot of one-to-one dialogue with community groups. However, more recently, because of the formation of Community Recycling Network Scotland, one body has represented all the community groups in the area and is part of the waste strategy area group. The issue is about having a network in place.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I think that you have answered my question, but I would like to know whether the recycling network is based on the 11 waste strategy areas or whether it is a Scotland-wide organisation.

Alan Farquhar: It is Scotland-wide, although some local groupings exist. I am not entirely sure how Community Recycling Network Scotland will be set up—the network's representatives could answer that question.

Nora Radcliffe: Did the initiative for the network come from community groups? Did they see the necessity for an umbrella organisation?

Alan Farquhar: Yes. The network is being developed through the Recycling Advisory Group Scotland, with funding from the Scottish Executive.

The Convener: To what extent will SEPA monitor the contribution of community recycling projects before and after implementation of the national waste strategy? Coverage in the newspapers has suggested that local authorities' gearing-up processes and relationships with community projects—which include wider projects with added value and which provide training—have not been totally smooth. How will you examine the impact on the community sector?

Calum MacDonald: We would be happy to ensure that that specific point is part of the review that we carry out. It is worth mentioning that we are reviewing the membership of each of the area groups, and that we hope to take any opportunities to engage more with the community sector.

Alan Farquhar: I am not entirely sure about this, but I expect that, if the Executive provides funding for CRNS—

The Convener: Could you tell us what that is short for?

Alan Farquhar: It stands for Community Recycling Network Scotland. I expect that one of the deliverables that the Executive will measure will be how the funding impacts on communities' ability to engage with local authorities and others in providing services.

The Convener: We will move on to targets, on which a few members have questions.

Maureen Macmillan: I am not sure whether my question is about targets. I am interested in the issue that is raised in SEPA's submission about whether the waste strategy area approach is working appropriately. The submission states:

"For example the issues to be addressed in the rural Highlands and Islands are very different from those in the urban central belt of Scotland."

How are the targets working across urban and rural areas? Argyll and Bute Council's submission expresses concerns that the targets are not working. It also states that that council has problems with SEPA closure notices on Mull and Islay because they have thrown the council's strategy out of kilter. Are the targets working everywhere? Where are the rubbing points or difficulties?

Calum MacDonald: We are only six or seven months into the implementation phase, so a significant number of bids for funding from the strategic waste fund are still to come in. It is a wee bit early to say anything accurate about progress towards the targets.

The other week, SEPA had a meeting with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and with representatives of a number of individual local authorities, including Argyll and Bute Council, at

which the closure of landfill sites was discussed. The worry is that alternative facilities will not come on stream in time to enable waste's being dealt with properly. At that meeting, SEPA undertook to consider the extent to which we can exercise discretion without putting Scotland in a position of directive infraction. We are considering the matter and will meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities within the next two weeks, we hope with some positive information.

Maureen Macmillan: I am interested to hear that; it is necessary to be flexible when dealing with some parts of the country, especially with the remoter rural areas. I am pleased to hear what you are saying about discretion.

09:45

Mr Gibson: I would like to hear witnesses' comments about their consultation of people in order to work out what is the public's view of the way in which the plans should be implemented, which seemed to overlap with the targets that the Government was setting for local authorities to make progress. For example, although the consultation in the Highlands was not completed, the council had agreed certain waste disposal contracts. Does the way in which the Government has set targets for local authorities work in tandem, or otherwise, with SEPA?

Joanna Muse: The targets issue is difficult; we are starting with a low baseline for Scotland. We have consulted communities widely, as you said. National targets have been set and we have been working closely with the Executive to bring together all the area waste plans and best practicable environmental options so that we can establish a sensible target that will allow us to kick off the process. Such a target is required in order to focus the minds of local authorities and the public on making headway in increasing the amount of recycling and composting that we do.

We have been working on the national integration process and we are working with the Scottish Executive to set targets. Trying to put a number on or projecting what activity could be taken on in the next few years is difficult. We have to start somewhere; although 25 per cent might be seen as challenging, it is a target that will focus the minds of local authorities, politicians, the public, and business on getting cracking and making progress.

Mr Gibson: How much are local opinions taken on board? In some cases, local authorities' views on removal of waste seem to be different from those of communities, which would like more local recycling and composting to deal with a major part of domestic waste.

Joanna Muse: Public consultation has formed a major part of developing the area waste plans. Throughout their development, the best practicable environmental criteria of public acceptability and public opinion have been a major factor in consideration of best practicable environmental options. That is one of the reasons why we have taken our time in developing the plans. We wanted to consult people in the wider community, to take their opinions on board and to reach consensual and workable best practicable environmental options.

Calum MacDonald: It is fair to say that local authorities have all bought into the idea. They played a vital role in each of the area groups and have signed up to the area plans and the integrated national plan. They are on board and, although the targets are challenging, the conclusion that we have reached through the rigorous planning process is that the targets are achievable—they are not easy, but they are achievable.

Nora Radcliffe: How did you set the targets? What ideas were fed in so that you could arrive at those targets? Were they well founded on robust data? Do we need more information in order that we can quantify targets and monitor how they are being met?

Joanna Muse: We started off in the area waste planning process. It has been difficult to get data projections on waste arisings or on how much growth in waste there will be. The problem is moveable.

When we went through the process of setting the best practicable environmental option, we tried to identify dates in the future and to project waste arisings for those by estimating what effect education awareness would have on public participation. We could do that only by looking at work that has been done elsewhere, in this country and in Europe, in order to make what I suppose was an informed estimate. All the data that had been gathered on an area basis were pulled together to provide what we have called the best practicable environmental option—or BPEO—for Scotland. From all the data that were pulled together from the area waste plans, we have established targets for Scotland, which are set out in the national waste plan. The targets for Scotland are very much based on a bottom-up approach, because they come from what can be achieved locally. The targets are based on sensible local data that have been aggregated for Scotland.

Nora Radcliffe: Your written submission states:

“SEPA are promoting the annual Local Authority Waste Arisings Survey as the most appropriate monitoring data source.”

Will you tell us a wee bit more about what that survey is and how it is carried out?

Joanna Muse: Basically, as there is a recognised need for a consistent monitoring data source, SEPA has established the local authority waste arisings survey that every local authority in Scotland inputs into. We collect a wide variety of data on arisings that are managed by the councils. The survey gives a detailed breakdown of waste types, of how much arises and of what happens to the waste. It also takes into account community sector recycling, in which councils work in partnership with the community sector. The survey tries to build up a profile of data of local authority-managed waste throughout the whole of Scotland. At the moment, the survey is a voluntary data source, but we would like it to be the definitive data source so that we can have one consistently recorded data source, which would be verified by all the councils, for council-collected waste in Scotland. That would avoid the confusion of going to different data sources involving different people and management systems.

Nora Radcliffe: Is the system coherent throughout Scotland? Do all the local authorities count the same things in the same way?

Joanna Muse: Yes—we have detailed guidance about what can and cannot be counted and the data go through a very thorough verification process in all the councils. That should avoid the situation in which different figures are being reported. Basically, we are working towards having one definitive and fully verified data source.

Nora Radcliffe: How long has the system been in operation?

Joanna Muse: I think that we are just about to finish compiling and verifying the third year of data. The system is getting there. It has got through its teething problems. We had to tweak it here and there to sort out some problems that arose and to make it the most suitable data collection source for everyone, but we are now getting quite a good data profile.

Nora Radcliffe: It seems to be quite a robust system and a good baseline for measuring progress.

Eleanor Scott: You said that the targets were quite challenging but one target, on the face of it, does not seem to be particularly challenging. It is accepted that there will be growth in waste until 2010. Only after that time will there be a requirement for waste arisings to be stabilised. One imagines that the first approach to reducing the amount of waste should be to stop producing it.

To follow up on what you said earlier, is there a sense that there is a certain distortion in what

councils are doing because they are working towards targets that are expressed as percentages of an ever-increasing volume? For example, in order to meet composting targets, which are relatively easy to meet, waste arisings might actually increase if councils collect green waste that they did not previously collect rather than encourage home composting. Correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that home composting does not count towards the data that you have mentioned, yet home composting would, where it is possible, be the obvious and best environmental option for treating green waste.

Joanna Muse: Let me deal with the waste prevention aspect first. We are in a society that is very over-consumptive and that is producing more waste. We have worked with the Scottish waste awareness group to carry out a baseline survey of attitudes towards waste, and we start from a very low level of awareness out there. When the public find it hard to get their heads round even participating in recycling, the waste prevention concept is quite a hard one to get across. A lot of the public do not feel that there are real alternatives to buying all the packaging that is out there.

There is a lot of work to do in educating the public and in educating businesses, manufacturers and retailers. We need to educate people about doing what they can as responsible consumers and responsible households to prevent waste. Manufacturers and retailers also need to be educated about what they can do to help consumers to reduce waste and to reduce the amount of resources that they consume. We need to start working on a significant culture shift through education and awareness, which will take time.

It is also difficult to quantify and measure waste minimisation. The target in the national waste plan is very aspirational, but we want a system that allows us robustly to quantify and measure waste prevention activities in a way that might allow us to review the target and bring things forward. Indeed, we are working with the national resource and waste forum on a household waste prevention strategy for Scotland to find out how we can engage local authorities, manufacturers and retailers and educate the public.

We agree that home composting is a significant aspect of waste management; indeed, it is probably one of the best practicable environmental options for waste management. It comes higher up the waste hierarchy, and we should be promoting it more than recycling and composting. The targets have been set, but we recognise that waste prevention is a high priority and are working to produce a strategy for Scotland.

Alan Farquhar: On the 2010 target, the Scottish waste awareness group found that one of the main

problems was that people in many cases have a hard time understanding basic concepts of recycling let alone waste prevention or reduction. As a result, it was judged that going straight to a waste reduction message would not be effective. Instead, we should get waste recycling and composting programmes up and running well, get the public to buy into them and then, on the back of those primary messages, move towards secondary and tertiary messages about reducing waste and changing consumption patterns. Without question, we are looking at a major cultural change, and it might take longer to achieve that than it will to meet recycling and composting targets, which people will probably find a lot more straightforward.

Eleanor Scott: I have found that the public tend to be somewhat ahead of both commercial interests and local authorities in their awareness of waste and their willingness to do something about the problem. They are crying out for recycling facilities. It would be a great pity if the better environmental option of home composting were to be abandoned in favour of community or centralised composting—which has its own environmental impact—simply because one can measure the latter and not the former.

Alan Farquhar: That problem has been recognised. It is not the case that collecting such material so that it can be measured is preferred to reduction at source. The waste prevention strategy seeks to address the question of how we accurately measure outcomes for all sorts of waste prevention initiatives, of which home composting is only one. In the past, the different ways of measuring such matters was distorting our picture of the success or otherwise of the initiatives and leading to the collection of spurious data that were clouding instead of helping things. We will address that issue very shortly.

Maureen Macmillan: Will we ever reach the stage where we have zero waste? Surely there are some things that cannot be composted or recycled and that might be indestructible even if they are not packaged. I have this horrible vision of hundreds of lorries scouring Scotland for the last landfill site because no one wants one in their area and of incinerators beginning to spring up. What is your vision of what will happen to the waste that cannot be dealt with by recycling, reusing, composting or whatever?

Joanna Muse: The concept of zero waste is very high level and quite difficult to define. In fact, I am working with the Recycling Advisory Group Scotland on a conference on zero waste that will be held in November to establish what the concept means for Scotland and any practical steps we can take on it. We need to get a balanced discussion going with those who are very pro-zero

waste, because as you have pointed out, some people find it difficult to grasp the idea of complete zero waste.

The issues for us to address are what zero waste means for us in Scotland; whether we can realistically achieve it; and who we need to engage in going about that. We are looking into the concept and working on it for a seminar.

10:00

For the future, we are trying to push as much waste as we can up the waste hierarchy. First, we want to eliminate the waste through waste minimisation. Secondly, we want to recycle and recover. Then comes the question of what to do with the residual waste. Last year, we consulted on the idea of producing energy from waste and asked whether that would be acceptable if no other form of treatment—such as recovering, recycling or composting—was possible. A large percentage of respondents said that if the process could be monitored and run to the highest environmental standards, they would rather see energy recovered from waste—especially if that energy could be put back into such things as district heating schemes—than see waste just go to landfill.

As part of the area waste planning process, we will review a wide range of technologies in the coming years. Those may relate to the production of energy from waste, gasification or pyrolysis or some form of mechanical biological treatment. We are looking to push as much waste up the waste hierarchy as possible, so that the waste that we have to dispose of through landfill will be the very minimum.

Maureen Macmillan: Does SEPA have any preferences about landfill sites, rather than incinerating waste, perhaps using the methane gas for district heating schemes? Or would you prefer not to get into the argument of what happens to the waste that is left?

Alan Farquhar: The whole waste strategy is built on the best practicable environmental option—BPEO. In some situations, one specific technology, technique or waste handling method may be preferable to another because of local circumstances. I do not think that one solution would fit all scenarios in Scotland.

The roots of the zero waste concept are in the total quality management systems that were developed in Japan. It is a matter of achieving maximum resource efficiency. Although the waste strategy will play a part in that, zero waste is a much wider concept, concerning the whole of Scotland and Scotland's economic growth rather than just the handling of waste products.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con):

From the answers that we have heard so far, I think I know the answer to my question, but I would like to put it to you anyway. Do you feel that the practice of setting targets for waste management is, in itself, distorting? In your response to Eleanor Scott's question, we heard a bit about the fact that distorting effects could be creeping in at one end. First, is target setting a distorting practice in that it creates apparent increases in waste in certain sectors? Secondly, is the practice of setting targets causing distortions, especially in what I perceive to be a rush to regard incineration as an early solution to the problem?

Joanna Muse: We need to take action, and—as I have said before—setting targets really focuses the mind on making progress.

It must be remembered that the targets are a percentage of the waste that arises. Even if waste levels were decreased through waste minimisation and waste prevention, the targets would still be for a percentage of the residual waste to be treated through recycling rather than a percentage of all the waste that arises. A council will count the waste that it collects. Waste prevention and recycling can go on beforehand, but that should not distort the recycling targets that the council has to meet.

Sorry, could you repeat the second part of your question?

Alex Johnstone: Are the targets that have been set causing a rush towards incineration as an early solution?

Joanna Muse: The targets that have been set are for recycling and composting. If anything, they are causing a rush to recycle and compost more waste instead of incinerating it. At the moment, the focus in the short-term targets is on maximising the recycling and composting of waste.

The Convener: I will ask a linked question about targets. Several of the submissions that the committee has received state that people are trying to meet the targets, which they know are challenging, but might have to consider other approaches if they cannot get access to markets. That is particularly the case in connection with recycling. Does SEPA have a view on how stable markets will be for recycling? What can we do to ensure that the strategy does not fail because of a problem with access to markets and the ability to secure stable prices?

Calum MacDonald: The development of markets featured prominently in the thinking behind and development of the plan. That aspect has an important role. My colleagues can tell you about the work that is currently being done in that direction.

Joanna Muse: We are working actively with the likes of the Waste and Resources Action Programme—WRAP—and Remade Scotland to investigate markets. We are also working actively with the Scottish Executive to examine the waste that is projected to be collected through the area waste plans. We feed that information to WRAP and Remade Scotland so that they can investigate markets. I believe that WRAP is providing evidence to the committee at a later stage. I hope that it will be able to provide the committee with more detail about the stability of markets.

We recognise that a fundamental issue within the national waste plan is the fact that we can collect all the waste we want, but if the markets are not there, we will not succeed. Therefore, the issue is right up there among the ones that we want to address as a high priority. We are working actively with the Executive, WRAP and Remade Scotland on the issue.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): I am sorry for arriving a little late. I am also sorry if some of the issues that I ask about have been covered.

How many councils still collect undifferentiated waste from households and businesses? I know that a number must still do so. If the collections are undifferentiated, as I suspect they still are throughout most of Scotland, how can the waste be dealt with in any way other than straightforward landfill? What monitoring do you carry out of the information that councils disseminate about the services that are available to those who are resident in or run businesses in their area? There is a paucity of simple information.

On the regulatory framework, I am aware of a decision that was taken some years ago in the council area in which I live—I still bear the scars locally—to remove the 24-hour availability of skips on the basis, as I understand it, of information that SEPA gave out about unmanned skips running a huge risk of legal liability for the council. The result is that there are skip opening and closing times, which have to be sent out to people. There has obviously been a reduction in the use of skips and, I fear, an increase in kerbside dumping.

I realise that those issues might have been discussed before I arrived at the meeting, but I would like to have an indication of the answers to those questions.

Joanna Muse: I do not have to hand specific data on the number of councils that collect unsegregated waste. Most councils have been running some form of pilot kerbside segregated collection scheme, often in alliance with the community sector. All councils have some form of recycling site. They can all publish information on waste that they collect for recycling. We do not have the information to hand on the extent that

that extends to businesses, but a significant number of bids are going in and strategic waste fund money is being allocated to councils to extend schemes to kerbside collection and ultimately to commercial waste, and to investigate how councils can integrate such services with commercial waste.

From the data that we receive from all councils about the waste that they collect for recycling, we can assume that they have some form of recycling collection—be it kerbside collection or community recycling sites.

Roseanna Cunningham: But you do not know what the councils are doing?

Joanna Muse: We have the data, but I do not have it to hand now. I can get that data for the committee from the local authority waste arisings survey. We get data from each local authority on the number of community recycling points that they have and the number of households that participate in kerbside collection schemes.

The Convener: That would be useful.

The other issue is that there are different ways of separating waste. We will talk to representatives from Glasgow City Council later. It is possible to collect waste and separate it afterwards. Are there issues about the cost-effectiveness of that or the environmental choices that are involved?

Joanna Muse: I suppose that there could be such issues. A wide range of possibilities exist and technologies are getting better. How materials are collected is part of the BPEO appraisal process. In many rural areas, consideration is being given to collecting waste and sorting it later because of transport and collection costs. Technologies relating to that approach are being considered in some areas. It would be best to discuss with Glasgow City Council the issue of cost and why it has chosen to go down that route. The technologies exist to recover waste, either through at-source segregation or once it has been collected as a commingled waste stream.

Eleanor Scott: The ultimate objective of the national waste plan is to reduce the amount of waste that we dump in landfill sites, but the targets are for the process rather than the result. The targets for composting and recycling are being used as a surrogate. Perhaps this question is unfair, but would the targets have been better if they were simply for each council to have a reduced amount of waste going to landfill over time? Within that, councils could have worked out how much they wanted to compost or recycle, as long as the ultimate end was achieved. Are the targets for composting and recycling the wrong targets? Are they an accurate surrogate for targets to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill?

Joanna Muse: We worked with councils in developing the best practicable environmental option. Our fundamental driver was the minimum target of meeting the landfill directive requirements to divert waste away from landfill. Given that driver, we wondered how to take the matter further through recycling. The local targets are based on sensible projections of participation rates and amounts of waste.

We were not driven by setting targets and asking how they could be achieved; instead, we approached the issue the other way round. We knew that, under the landfill directive, we were legally obliged to divert waste from landfill, so we asked how we could push that further and what we could realistically achieve through recycling and composting. From that point, we set the targets. We took a bottom-up approach by establishing what could be done and then setting targets, rather than setting targets and wondering how we could achieve them. Sensibly, we began by gathering data and then projecting what local authorities could achieve.

The Convener: The strategic waste fund is one of a range of available pots of money. Do those funding methods provide the correct approach to targeting initiatives and helping targets to be met?

Alan Farquhar: One aspect of the strategic waste fund with which we are pleased is that it is extremely flexible. In the past, available funds tended to be strictly for capital funding and were to be used only for certain purposes, whereas the strategic waste fund is flexible. Local authorities that bid for funds can use them for capital or revenue expenditure, to support community sector groups or for education and promotion programmes. That is a good feature of the fund.

Mr Gibson: Are there too many types of funding for the strategy. Are there enough or should there be more? Is the money that is raised through the landfill tax in Scotland spent here through those funds?

Calum MacDonald: You will have to direct your final question to the Executive or to the minister when he gives evidence to the committee. I cannot say whether the landfill tax money that is gathered in Scotland is spent here.

On the general funding issue, from a selfish point of view, we would like as much money as possible to be put into delivery of the plan, which, we believe, is important for the country. However, we must acknowledge that significant amounts of money are being made available and that the situation is being kept under review.

Mr Gibson: Are there too many different types of funding to achieve the aims, or are the different types of funding well targeted? We are talking about the strategic waste fund, grants for recycling

market development, the landfill tax credit replacement scheme, European regional development funds and so on. A range of funds apply. Do those funds work well together, or would it be easier if they were amalgamated?

10:15

Joanna Muse: The different types of funding are quite targeted. For example, the strategic waste fund is for local authorities, the transforming waste fund is for the community sector and the landfill tax fund is open to community businesses and not-for-profit voluntary groups. The different funds are targeted at the activities of specific groups. If we amalgamated all the funds into one fund, how could we apportion funding to the activities of the various groups in an equitable and fair way? Having separate funds for specific groups focuses the minds of the people who apply for funding—it lets them know that a particular fund is specifically for them and informs them about the criteria that they must follow.

We have come from a climate in which there was not enough funding. That is probably why we have not made as much progress as we want. The fact that there is now a lot of funding is great news. We just need to be able to give as much support as we can to local authorities and voluntary groups to make the process of applying for funds as efficient as possible, so that we can get the money out there to start making some real progress.

Eleanor Scott: Is all the money being taken up?

Joanna Muse: I could not comment. I know that bids have been submitted and are still coming in for the strategic waste fund. How much will be spent is being projected. The transforming waste fund is a three-year rolling programme of funding and it is receiving a significant number of applications. Alan Farquhar might want to comment on that.

Alan Farquhar: The Executive will be able to answer in greater detail on how far forward it is with spending on the strategic waste fund and I know that Forward Scotland will talk about Transforming Waste Scotland. I represent SEPA on the management board of that group.

If the relevant bodies communicate and work together on funding, that will help to ensure that funds do not overlap unnecessarily and that there is a joined-up view of how funding is applied. Those bodies should use the national waste strategy as their reference document, where applicable. Applicants to Transforming Waste Scotland must refer to the area waste plan and indicate how their project will fit with it. Applications under the strategic waste fund must also fit with the area waste plan. Co-ordination of

the different funds would be greatly assisted by such references to the area waste plan and the national waste plan.

Calum MacDonald: It might be helpful to make it clear that SEPA does not administer any of the funds, but our views are sought for many of them. In particular, SEPA has a significant input to decisions that are made about the strategic waste fund. Our interest is to ensure that the money is spent on delivering the area waste plans.

Nora Radcliffe: My question is funding related, although I am not sure that it is entirely appropriate to address it to SEPA. Do you think that there is a future in using money as a lever, as was done in Ireland by putting 10p on supermarket bags? That had an impact. Will such initiatives be part of continuing planning for waste reduction?

Calum MacDonald: I think that we should consider all possible methods of promoting the message about moving waste up the hierarchy, which is what the issue is all about. That is a personal view; it is not necessarily SEPA's view. I am aware that there has been some success in that direction in Ireland.

The Convener: We had a visit from people in Schleswig-Holstein last week and they were stunned that individuals did not have to pay separately for their waste. The approach in Schleswig-Holstein is that individuals pay for the amount of waste that they produce, which means that the less waste they produce, the less they pay. That is a very different approach from ours. Is it likely that we will move to such an approach in the future? The submissions that we have received from local authorities give a strong message that meeting targets will be increasingly expensive in the long term. Should all the money come from government or do we need to rethink the issues? Is SEPA doing any work on that at a strategic level?

Joanna Muse: We have been working on that with the Scottish Executive. The Scottish Executive commissioned a report on household incentives, which looked at a range of incentives, charging and economic instruments that aim to raise public awareness of how to manage waste. We want to incentivise the public to reduce the amount of waste and to participate in recycling. The report is due for publication soon. There are a range of fiscal and voluntary incentive schemes and pilot schemes will be initiated to see how those might be implemented throughout Scotland.

The public perception is that we pay an awful lot for waste management, whereas the fact is that waste management is relatively cheap at the moment. Reducing the amount of waste that people throw away will not result in too much of a saving at the moment, but as the whole economics

of waste management change, reducing waste could become a more viable option for people to consider.

The report considers a wide range of incentivisation schemes. As I said, it will be interesting to see what emerges from the pilot studies about how those schemes can be implemented across the wider Scottish community.

Maureen Macmillan: On that point, the delegation from Schleswig-Holstein also spoke about their problems with fly-tipping, which is an issue with which we are familiar in Scotland. If we start to charge people for the amount of waste that they put out for collection, I am worried that they might put it where it cannot be traced. Should we consider ways of penalising fly-tippers even more swingingly than we do at the moment?

Calum MacDonald: It is a question of balance and of covering all the angles. We need to be aware that the introduction of certain measures could also produce negative effects. There is always a danger of an increase in fly-tipping. It increased when the landfill tax was first introduced. A concerted effort is required, as is vigilance on the part of the authorities that are involved in regulating fly-tipping, to ensure that the subject is taken seriously. Both SEPA and—to a great extent—the local authorities have a role to play in that respect.

Alan Farquhar: If waste charging were to be introduced, the key measure that could prevent a rise in fly-tipping would be for people to have an opportunity to do something other than just put their waste in their bins. At this stage, it is a little pre-emptive to pose the question whether waste charging would solve the waste problem. We need to put in place a well-developed recycling network that allows people to take their bottles, newspapers and so forth to a bank or to utilise a kerbside collection. People need to be more aware of the waste prevention measures that they could use to reduce the amount of waste that goes into their bins.

The work that the Scottish waste awareness group carried out showed that people feel that they do not have much of an option at the moment. People feel that they have to put all their waste into their bin because they are not given the opportunity of using kerbside schemes. If a waste charge were to be slapped on people at the moment, perfectly law-abiding citizens might say, "To heck with that. I am not going to pay extra. I will just drive out to a lay-by and leave my rubbish there." In order to avoid that situation, we need to give people a range of alternative services.

The Convener: When I asked you about where we are going on waste, it was in the context of the

long term. The fact that quite a few local authorities have put a strong caveat on funding suggests that they think that there is not enough money on the table as yet. As local authorities ramp up the targets, managing waste will not become cheaper—indeed, it could become more expensive. My question was whether a long-term consideration of the issue should be put somewhere on the agenda. I want to reassure you and your colleagues that I did not mean to suggest that everything should be done tomorrow.

Nora Radcliffe: I will skip to the subject of market development, but I have a question on one small detail of composting. If local authorities are giving out home composting bins, do they get a notional allowance for the composting that is taken out of the waste stream?

On the wider composting issue, I liked your comments about the quality of the product, the risk of contamination and methods of composting. What problems are involved in composting if a marketable product is to be produced?

Alan Farquhar: First, I will address the question of home composting. The issue is the subject of debate, with some authorities feeling that they are getting a very high diversion rate and others saying that the rate is considerably lower. There is no question but that we have to establish what the reasonable yield per home composter is. It is also crucial that the units are not simply given out and forgotten about. Composting is not straightforward if people have not done it before.

WRAP plans to promote what I believe is to be called the master composting system. The key point about the system is that local people, either from the local authority or a community group, will be on the ground to keep in touch with and assist everyone who is issued with a composter. Once a scheme like that is up and running, we will be able to measure better what people put into their composters. The scheme will give us a much better idea of what is a reasonable yield and of how much waste is being diverted from landfill.

Maureen Macmillan: I am concerned about how recyclable goods in rural areas and the islands are got to market. Surely by the time the goods reach the mainland and go on to Falkirk or wherever for recycling, the environmental benefit of people on Colonsay or Tiree recycling tin cans and newspapers is negated. Where is the benefit in that process?

Alan Farquhar: The key thing is to utilise existing transport links and not undertake special collections. I appreciate that the logistics in rural areas and on the islands are not the easiest to manage. However, the work that we have carried out through the development of the area waste plans suggests that there is an environmental

benefit to recycling tins and newspapers as opposed to landfilling them.

Calum MacDonald touched on the problems of the local island sites and the degree of discretion that will be required to keep those sites operational given the stringent environmental controls that are to be introduced. The other important issue is the need to maximise the amount of landfill capacity that we have for the future. We do not want to fill up landfill sites with materials that could be usefully recycled elsewhere.

Joanna Muse: I have been in direct communication with the waste strategy area co-ordinator for the islands. A fundamental part of the best practicable environmental option is to try to take the self-sufficient option. Taking that option has led to some quite innovative thinking about how to recycle and what to do with waste products. With the exception of scrap metal, the solution that they are considering is to keep recycling and reprocessing within the islands. That will do a lot to encourage the local economy and job creation. People on the islands are considering self-sufficiency as an option for the treatment and management of the waste that is produced on the islands.

The Convener: We might want to return to those things when we talk to the witnesses from Argyll and Bute Council and when we come to the witness from Shetland in our last session.

Mr Gibson: Would there be a greater incentive for people to reuse things if there was a national strategy on the manufacture of reusable bottles or vessels of various sorts? If people had to return waste—say in lorries that were taking food to the islands—the transport would have to be organised to maintain the right conditions for the transport of food. If more items were to be reusable and could be returned, that might best be done by changing the way in which we create the packaging in the first place. What do you think of that suggestion?

Joanna Muse: We are working with the Executive on the various policy instruments that might need to be introduced to close the loop. We are considering the reuse of materials in products and take-back and refund schemes. Many European countries are promoting widely the sort of deposit refund scheme that existed on lemonade bottles years ago. It is a case of examining policy instruments and working actively with retailers and manufacturers, all of which have various targets and obligations to recover and recycle the waste that they produce. If they reuse the waste, the amount that they are obligated to recover is reduced.

We must help and support retailers and manufacturers with the logistics of refund and

reuse schemes. We are working actively with the Executive and nationally with manufacturers and retailers on such schemes. The Scottish waste awareness group is considering how Asda and other major supermarket chains can promote returnable packaging in their stores. Many projects that we hope will feed into a national strategy are under way. I agree that the matter needs to be pursued on a national basis.

Nora Radcliffe: I want to ask about the regulatory aspects of composting, relating to quality, contamination and where compost can be spread and leached.

The Convener: We can put that question to the minister. I am being brutal because we have spent an hour on this evidence-taking session. Our witnesses have been excellent and have tried to answer our questions. I take Nora Radcliffe's point that there might be issues that we want to explore further and questions to which we would like to have a range of answers, but we can address those to some of our other witnesses.

Thank you for attending and for trying to answer all our questions. We will take a two-minute comfort break during the changeover of witnesses.

10:31

Meeting suspended.

10:37

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome our second set of witnesses. Councillor Russell Imrie and Councillor Alison Hay are from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; Alan Millar is the principal waste management officer at Argyll and Bute Council; and Ian Galbraith is the waste disposal and recycling manager in Glasgow City Council's environmental protection services. I hope that every witness is on my list, because I see more people in the room than I named.

I thank the witnesses for coming and for providing written evidence before the meeting. That is useful for members because it helps us to log your thoughts and to explore issues on which you have expertise when we ask questions.

Members will kick off with questions. As I said, if members and witnesses are tight in their remarks where possible, that will allow more questions and answers.

Maureen Macmillan: I am interested in the different challenges that the targets present for rural and urban authorities, which I am sure must look for different ways of meeting the targets. What are the challenges in an urban area and in a rural area? SEPA told us about the challenges for

rural areas and how they are being met. Will you elaborate on that? We have not heard much about the challenges in an urban area, so I am interested in what urban representatives have to say.

Ian Galbraith (Glasgow City Council): The biggest challenge in Glasgow is that 65 per cent of our properties are tenemental and high-rise flats. Providing each household with recycling facilities will be a major challenge. We have been involved in providing such facilities for four or five years and we targeted tenement properties last year. There has been an encouraging participation rate of 75 per cent. Removing that waste is more expensive than it would be in a rural area. We have implemented a lockable blue bin, which guarantees segregation. That is working successfully with segregated waste. We will now expand participation to every house in Glasgow.

Maureen Macmillan: What goes in the lockable wheelie bin? Does it contain mixed rubbish?

Ian Galbraith: No, the rubbish is segregated. The rubbish in the blue bin is commingled, which means that it includes paper, plastics and aluminium and steel cans. That rubbish is taken to one of our waste treatment plants, which has a materials reclamation facility, and it is segregated there.

As SEPA rightly said, there must be an outlet for such waste. Last year, Glasgow City Council secured a 10-year contract with a paper mill in the central midlands, which will give us a guaranteed return for that 10-year period. That is important, because a high proportion of the segregated waste will be paper.

The Convener: I want to check whether I understood correctly your answer to Maureen Macmillan. You will provide a facility for every household in Glasgow that will be a mix of a bin for putting certain types of materials in, from which organic kitchen waste will be separated out.

Ian Galbraith: That is correct. Our implementation plan to the Scottish Executive indicates that, by 2006, we will target every household in Glasgow.

Ten years ago, I would not have seen us going down this road. It is encouraging that the public are contacting our main call centre to ask when they are getting their blue bins. As a waste manager, I am encouraged by that. The area waste plan in Glasgow will be based on the hierarchy, so waste segregation will happen first. In the implementation plan, we will not attain the 25 per cent target by 2006 through segregation alone. We will have to implement waste treatment, which we are speaking to the Scottish Executive about.

Maureen Macmillan: The blue bins are lockable so that one person does not dump unsuitable rubbish in another person's bin. What happens if people lose their keys?

Ian Galbraith: The bins are locked automatically and they open in the collection vehicle.

Maureen Macmillan: Right. I had thought, "My goodness, Glasgow must be worse than I thought if they are going to pinch each other's rubbish."

Ian Galbraith: The bins are like postboxes. Tenement properties can have about 10 bins in a bin set. It would not be possible to have chained bins—what would happen on a dark night? That is why the local bin is a success.

Maureen Macmillan: Okay.

Councillor Russell Imrie (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): I would like to say something about targets, on which there seemed to be a lot of emphasis in the session with the first panel of witnesses. The 25 per cent target, which was set by the Scottish Executive, is an indicative, pan-Scotland target. We do not have individual targets at the moment; they will come only when we have integrated waste management plans for each authority. It might help the committee to understand that there could be a big difference between the targets for rural councils and those for urban councils. That will form part of an integrated waste management plan that will be submitted to the Scottish Executive and will be signed off through the due process. There will be targets for individual authorities. COSLA has resisted having a pan-Scotland target without input from the 32 local authorities. We all know that there will be great variation in the way that the authorities will be able to tackle waste minimisation.

Maureen Macmillan: So you want an all-Scotland target, which could be made up of the sum of what the different local authorities can do.

Councillor Imrie: The all-Scotland target was set by the First Minister when he was going to a summit. A journalist stuck a microphone to his mouth and asked what he would bring back for Scotland from the summit meeting. The First Minister replied that the Executive would deliver on a 25 per cent target by 2006.

As has been said, certain authorities might struggle to meet the 2006 target, but others will be able to meet a higher target. The overall aim is to get 25 per cent of Scotland's waste recycled or composted by 2006.

Maureen Macmillan: Thank you. Perhaps we could hear from the rural authorities.

Alan Millar (Argyll and Bute Council): The challenge in Argyll and Bute lies in the fact that a

number of facilities are needed across a wide geographical area, not just one landfill site, one composting plant and one recycling facility. What is needed will not be the same in every area of Argyll and Bute. We must find a solution that meets the local need, whether it is on a small island or on a larger, more heavily populated island such as Bute. It is horses for courses. The challenge is that one solution does not fit all and that a wide range of facilities is needed across Argyll and Bute. What works in one area might not work in another area.

10:45

Nora Radcliffe: My question has been partly answered. I wanted to ask about how the targets are set; whether you think that the methodology that is used is acceptable and based on robust data; whether you are happy with the targets; and whether you think that the targets are achievable. Do you see the more disaggregated targets applying per area waste plan grouping or per local authority?

Councillor Imrie: The targets will have to meet the BPEO in the 11 area waste plans. Within that, the targets for local authorities will differ. For example, the Lothian and Borders area contains the city authority and rural areas, and the targets that are set for City of Edinburgh Council will be quite different from those that are set for the councils in East Lothian and Midlothian, where there are more rural communities. Different methodologies will have to be used in conjunction with the BPEO, which has been signed off.

The process has been rigorous. Tripartite meetings have been held, involving the Scottish Executive, SEPA and COSLA. We all came together in feeling that we could sign up to and sign off the national waste plan. The process has been joined up and transparent, and the public have had the opportunity—through the consultation process—to have their input, which, in some cases, placed a different emphasis on the area waste plans. The collective views are contained in the national waste plan, which is the plan for Scotland.

Nora Radcliffe: Ian Galbraith mentioned blue bins in Glasgow. Does every flat have a blue bin, or is there a blue bin for every tenement block?

Ian Galbraith: The number of tenemental bins that we are introducing will be based on the number of properties per tenement and will be about 25 per cent of that number.

Our single properties—as in the rural areas—have the traditional brown bin for organic waste as well as the blue commingle bin. We are working with Alloa Community Enterprises Ltd and trialling glass recycling from household collections.

Nora Radcliffe: Is the glass bin the green one?

Ian Galbraith: You are right. The recognised colour for commingled waste is blue and the recognised colour for organic waste is brown. For five years previously, 40,000 properties had a smaller box bin. Those bins are now being utilised for glass collection, rather than being lost, and we are working with the community on trialling glass collection.

Nora Radcliffe: You seem to imply that there has been significant public acceptance of the scheme and that people are using the bins properly.

Ian Galbraith: The scheme can work only if the public accept it. That has to be encouraged. If the community is given the resource, people will utilise it. It would be wrong to penalise at the moment.

Technology is moving on a long way just now. At the moment we have separate collection facilities, but the waste could be coming and going by a split-bin vehicle. A vehicle that would collect both bins on a weekly basis would save a lot of collection costs, but that is one for the future. A vehicle lasts for seven years, so there will be seven years before it can be changed. However, I can see that coming in three or four years' time, when authorities start to use split-bin vehicles.

Nora Radcliffe: You have not said so explicitly, but are you finding that the public are co-operating and that people are putting things in the right bins?

Ian Galbraith: Initially, I expected a participation level of 50 to 55 per cent, but every scheme that we have started has had a participation level of above 70 per cent. That is not in hand-picked areas either, I assure you.

Councillor Alison Hay (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): The public are ready and willing to help us with the national waste plan.

Whenever you provide facilities for the public, you will find that people are ready to accept them. As the previous witnesses said, the public are well ahead of us. They are waiting for the facilities to be put in place, and we would be helping the whole process if we could make those facilities available in the sites where the public want them. We have found at local level that the public will help. If you install a glass bank for three types of glass, people will separate out the bottles. They are ready and willing; we are lagging behind.

Mr Gibson: The partnership between councils and communities has been raised before. Sometimes, as you have admitted, the public and the community groups are ahead of what the council is doing. Do you feel that, in Argyll and in an urban context, councils have built on the work of community groups for composting, or are you taking over? The remarks that were made by

witnesses from Glasgow and from Argyll suggested that the provision of facilities is obviously a local government function. How well are you building the partnership to enhance the work that community groups have done?

Ian Galbraith: Our submission lists all the people with whom we are working in Glasgow. I mentioned that we are working with a community group on glass recycling. You mentioned composting, but even with the quantities of organic waste that Glasgow collects there are economies of scale, and the council must get best value. Small areas may do the same thing collectively, but our organics go to the private sector, which has the expertise, and that pays because there are economies of scale. With new legislation going through, that may not be the case. We have an area waste plan and we work well with neighbouring authorities, and one of those authorities has that expertise in house. As long as it represents best value, we might sign a deal to send all our organics to that one authority. There is a place for community activity, but if activities overlap there is no economy of scale and best value is not achieved.

Alan Millar: There are six community recycling groups in Argyll and Bute, all of which we work with, and their facilities range from a small industrial unit, for collecting cans and separating steel from aluminium, to Campbeltown Waste Watchers Ltd, which has a depot for recycling paper, cardboard, cans and plastics on a far larger scale. We deal with groups in Islay, Mull, Bute and Helensburgh, some of which operate on a very small scale and some of which organise kerbside collections for recycling. All of them are represented on our area waste group and in our implementation plan bid. We meet them all quite regularly and it works quite well.

Maureen Macmillan: Do you want more community groups to be set up, or will you just work with the ones that you already have? Would it be possible for more community groups to be set up and to work with you?

Alan Millar: We are always open to new community groups that come to us saying, "We want to do something in relation to waste in our area. What can we do?" Of the groups that we deal with at the moment, some have been around for 10 years and others have just got off the ground in the past year or two. Sometimes you might think that you already know all the people who are interested and that nobody new will approach you, and then you get a phone call from somebody else who is keen to do something. We are always open to such approaches. There are a lot of community councils in Argyll and Bute and we deal with them on waste issues.

Maureen Macmillan: So there is not a closed door.

Alan Millar: No.

Councillor Imrie: From an overarching point of view, local authorities would welcome community groups coming in. However, given that the authority is the funnel for getting access to the strategic waste fund, it is important that the community groups come via the councils. That also fits in with the area waste plans. It is a question of partnership working right across the spectrum, from the community groups through to the business sector. It is about engaging everybody. It is not about excluding or including, but about trying to get as many people as possible to work together and overcome any problems that might arise.

The jury is still out on the issue of composting and mixed waste. The regulation is on one side and practicality is on the other. We are working with the Scottish Executive, SEPA and the private sector to ensure that we can find a way to get the end use that is fit for purpose. The example of landfill cover or contaminated land cover would go a long way towards helping us do that. We should be talking about using not something like John Innes No 3, which is on the supermarket shelf, but something that is fit for purpose. The regulator should come a little distance towards us and we will meet them at that point.

The issue is not what goes in, but the end product that comes out. That is terribly important if we are to meet the overall target for Scotland.

Eleanor Scott: What are the authorities doing on waste minimisation? Are they educating people and encouraging them to produce less waste and to start home composting?

Ian Galbraith: The long-term implementation plan for Glasgow that we submitted in April included proposals for education officers and waste minimisation officers. The Scottish Executive has accepted those proposals in principle. That policy has been adopted through a committee and the posts are now ready to be advertised.

Previously, we have encouraged school groups and so on to visit our facilities, such as our material recycling facility. We also have two officers who visit schools. However, they have to cover the entire Glasgow area. We have requested funding to enable us to further our work with SWAG.

Based on the area waste plan, we expect that there will be a 2 per cent increase up to 2010 and a 1 per cent increase up to 2020. However, it would be nice if we could do more.

Alan Millar: We part fund and work closely with the group for recycling in Argyll and Bute—GRAB. The group has one full-time and two part-time

officers who go round all the schools, community groups and community councils, when asked, to speak about what the council and other groups are doing in relation to recycling and to give advice about matters such as home composting.

About 25 per cent of households in Argyll and Bute have home compost bins as a result of our policy of selling them at subsidised rates or giving them out free.

On the commercial side, we apply a producer-pays principle. The producer pays us less to use our recycling facilities than they would to use a landfill site.

Next month, in Mull and Islay, we are starting a scheme involving paper and cardboard collections from domestic householders. We will also offer that service to commercial customers. If they use that service, they will be charged 30 per cent less than they would pay if their waste were going to a landfill site, but they will have to take the time and trouble to sort their waste and arrange to have a separate bin for cardboard and paper.

Roseanna Cunningham: I want to ask about the regulatory framework in this area, which affects all aspects of the business. The fact that that framework is always changing is problematic and, sometimes, regulation can have an effect that is opposite to the one that is intended—as I mentioned earlier, SEPA's skip ruling some years ago caused great difficulties in a number of council areas.

The submissions from Glasgow City Council and Argyll and Bute Council refer directly to the problem that I am talking about and, by way of an example, list upcoming European Union directives that will further impact on the situation. Could you expand on the difficulties that are arising in that regard and speak about the longer-term impact that there could be on target achievement? Is it just a question of finances, or is there another way of handling the problem?

Ian Galbraith: It is mainly financial, because we have to pay for things now. That is why we are talking to the Scottish Executive. Whatever we do will have to be funded. As I said in our submission paper, future legislation, such as the directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment, is not included in the waste strategy but will incur further costs for local authorities. Although future legislation will lead to higher costs, no submission by any local authority has taken that into account.

11:00

Councillor Imrie: I want to answer the question directly. Last year, fridge funding hit local authorities. All of a sudden, legislation was upon us and we were not geared up to deal with it. That

admission applies at all political levels—the UK Government, the Scottish Parliament and local authorities. We managed to persuade the Scottish Parliament that funding had to be made available for us to get over that particular problem. People in the private sector, of course, were rubbing their hands. They loved the situation of being able to charge local authorities whatever they wanted. We wised up to that and started to work in partnership. A group of local authorities came together to negotiate a price, and the price did indeed come down. That was tough on some authorities that had entered into contracts early doors.

The WEEE directive will soon be upon us, and we have spoken to the Scottish Executive about how we will overcome it. Not only the retailers and producers will be affected; as always, the residue will fall to local authorities. We have been speaking to community businesses to give them an opportunity to play their part in refurbishing and reusing some equipment. That will be a big task for us, but at least this time we have had early notice. The situation with the directive on end-of-life vehicles will be exactly the same.

Roseanna Cunningham: You say that the submissions that are already in did not take account of some of those issues. Does that mean that we will be in permanent negotiations, year on year, as each directive hits home? Is there any way of minimising that effect? Such uncertainty makes it difficult to consider overall costings.

Councillor Imrie: On Monday, I gave a presentation to a group of local authorities. We tried to emphasise that local authorities should be able to get involved early in discussions on EU legislation. By that, I do not mean that local authorities should try to adjust legislation, but that local authorities have to implement the legislation and should therefore have an input from a practical point of view. More than 45 bits of legislation are coming down the road and we will have to deal with them in some way or other over the next few years. We are in constant change. The national waste plan and the area waste plans do not take account of some of that upcoming legislation.

The answer to your question is that work will be on-going and constant. We will all face financial penalties somewhere along the line. That is the only way that we can do things. Unfortunately, we live in a changing world in which new legislation will always come along. In some ways, we should embrace that legislation, because it will make for a better environment for all of us. However, that has a price.

Councillor Hay: It is not just a question of embracing the legislation; it is a question of being there to try to influence the legislation at its inception. Local authorities do not have enough

say in what is coming out of Europe. They are often not even aware of it. I know that COSLA has an office in Brussels, but I accept that we have perhaps not been at our most effective there. In future, we will have to make better use of that office. We need to be in there influencing what comes out of Europe.

However, once the legislation arrives, what matters is how it is interpreted by the various bodies in Scotland before it lands in our statute book. What is good for an urban area or for one particular council will not necessarily work in a more rural area. We should consider European legislation much more flexibly, so that we do not penalise one sector or another.

So far we have been talking about municipal waste, but we must decide how to engage with the private sector, too, so that we work in partnership to ensure that both sectors are operating a good national waste plan and that we are not sending mixed messages.

The Convener: The need for partnership with the private sector was mentioned earlier. Can you tell us about the initiatives that you have established with the private sector at local authority level? You have the statutory responsibility for private waste, but are there economies of scale or other ways in which people can work together in a coherent way to solve the problem?

Ian Galbraith: One of the major problems with the directive is the fact that MSW includes commercial waste, but only if it is collected by local authorities; commercial waste collected by the private sector is not included. Therefore, a large percentage of the commercial waste that is collected in Glasgow is not accounted for in the directive. As I have said, according to the spirit of the legislation, that loophole should be closed.

The Convener: That is the kind of detail that we are keen to tease out. One of the reasons why we wanted to conduct this inquiry was to see how the national waste plan was working in practice, but we also want to think about what is coming downstream to us from Europe. The committee has agreed how we will scrutinise the environmental and rural measures coming out of Europe, which will require a bit more effort from us, but we also need a buy-in from people such as you, as you watch our agendas and see when issues are arising. This is a huge issue for us all and we are keen to find out what opportunities there are to improve the situation.

Ian Galbraith: It is important that local authorities work with the commercial sector in considering the waste arisings. What we can do at this stage is encourage those in the commercial sector to divert and recycle their waste. However,

it would be nice if there were legislation to give them targets, as well as targets for householders.

Nora Radcliffe: What does MSW stand for?

Ian Galbraith: Municipal solid waste.

Nora Radcliffe: Thank you.

Can we come back to the comments that were made about what is not in the waste plan and the waste strategy? The plan and the strategy are about domestic municipal waste, so we should scrutinise them on that basis, but the implication of what has been said is that we should be investigating waste in total, rather than trying to segregate commercial and domestic waste.

Councillor Imrie: Yes, that is the main point that we must not lose sight of. The national waste plan covers municipal solid waste streams, which are the remit of the local authorities, but it does not go further. The national waste plan mentions extending the coverage, but only in terms of taking the idea forward; it does not yet say what should happen.

In Scotland, we are lucky with the relationship between local authorities and the private sector, but it was a wake-up call for all of us when we found out how bad Britain—never mind Scotland—was in dealing with waste compared with the rest of Europe. The private sector found that it, too, had to suggest new ideas.

The partnership between the private and the public sector has changed significantly. Previously, there were long-term contracts and nobody wanted to talk to anyone else. The attitude was, "To hang with you; that's the way it goes. Tough." Now there is a new awakening, in that everybody is prepared to sit down at the table to try to find a way through, whether by compromise or otherwise.

For example, we have made a suggestion about the present building boom. I do not want to rely on regulation; I would rather that people bought into the idea that there is nothing wrong with 20 per cent, for example, of building materials being recycled. I am not setting targets here today, but that is my suggestion. The Confederation of British Industry is prepared to talk that through with the building industry.

This is a real opportunity for us to get a bit excited about where we are. We should not sit back and say, "Well, we've launched the national waste plan—aren't we all good?" Rather than letting that document sit and gather dust, we should take it out to the world at large, from the individual householder who thinks that their commitment to recycling is a wheelie bin that takes all their waste for someone else to recycle, to the private sector, which deals with local authority and commercial waste. There is a good story to be heard.

The Convener: We could probably usefully test that out with the private sector, because we will be speaking to the organisations that deal with waste and to some wider industry representatives. We will hold that thought for when we come to those witnesses.

We have not asked you much about markets. In all the submissions, there are worries about long-term markets and the money that you get back. Glasgow talked about a 10-year deal, which put it ahead of the game, but a clear message is coming through about instability in terms of the money coming in. Do you have views on how that might be changed for the future or on how the situation might be stabilised?

Ian Galbraith: In a city the size of Glasgow, it is important that we have long-term contracts based on the infrastructure that we are building. The main contract is for paper; that contract can include neighbouring authorities within the area waste plan and two or three of them have shown interest in it. All paper goes south of the border; we just have the brokers up here. The infrastructure for other commodities will come on stream once we have sufficient quantities of waste products in Scotland. It is early days. If there is sufficient tonnage in Scotland, there will be proximity, but currently most of the waste goes south of the border.

Mr Gibson: There is potential for new streams of work in waste and recycling. First, do you have any involvement with the local enterprise network in flagging up the potential for people to get involved in the new jobs that that can bring about? Secondly, do you have any idea of the number of jobs that are being created through that new type of work?

Ian Galbraith: We utilise new deal employees on the materials recycling facility in Glasgow. They do a six-month training scheme. We have a high turnover of waste collectors, so if the employees successfully complete that training they are given a job in the environmental protection services department.

The Convener: Are the job-creating opportunities being considered by other councils?

Alan Millar: Argyll and Bute Council is taking on five new employees for recycling. Campbeltown Waste Watchers is a community group that employs a lot of people with special needs. It gets various sources of funding—I think that the enterprise network is involved. It employs up to 20 people on recycling schemes, having started off with one employee a few years ago. It has given jobs in can and plastic bottle collections to a lot of people who would not otherwise have jobs. Every time I am there, I see people who have perhaps not had a job for 10 years—some of them were in

my year in school. They are now working and feel part of a team. It always does my heart good when I go there and see people working who have not worked for some time. That is a good example of another area that works well.

Mr Gibson: To what extent has local government worked with the enterprise network to show private industry the business opportunities or to encourage proximity-type approaches to getting local people involved in this sort of work?

11:15

Councillor Imrie: The local enterprise networks have been involved in the area waste plan groups. On the market side, five years ago, the Minister for Transport and the Environment—I make that acknowledgement, convener—set up Remade Scotland, which develops markets for waste recycling. The private sector has a place at the table in that organisation, as does Scottish Enterprise.

I am vice-chair of Remade Scotland, so I am allowed to say this: if there is one slight criticism of the organisation from a local government perspective, it would be that the fact that Scottish Enterprise is not the responsibility of the minister who holds the environment portfolio means that, sometimes, things are not as joined up as they should be. Scottish Enterprise thinks that it would be better off getting involved at a local level. That is fine by me, but the organisation must consider the issues that Mr Gibson raised. There are a lot of entrepreneurial people in the country who must see that the waste resource presents business opportunities. The point is to turn those opportunities into something real. We are all working away at that.

Remade Scotland has been successful to some extent in bringing in the private sector. For example, we went to visit a glass-recycling plant whose managers were desperate to get more glass into the industry from the waste stream. They wanted to build a new plant but would do so only if they knew that they would have a guaranteed supply of glass. We did not sign on the dotted line that day, but, as a result of the work that Remade Scotland did with that company, a number of councils in the area are drawing up agreements to take glass out of the waste stream and direct it towards that facility. That means that a new plant will be built and there will consequently be new job opportunities. That is a good example of partnership working. There seems to be a new realisation that we can sit down together and come up with solutions to the problems of Scotland's waste.

Mr Gibson: What has happened in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area?

Councillor Hay: That is a bit more difficult. The Highlands and Islands are spread out and there are different solutions in different areas. Some islands would prefer to crush waste glass and use it as material for building roads, for example. The economies of scale that Russell Imrie has just talked about are fine, but, in the Highlands and Islands area, it is definitely a question of horses for courses. Some people ask what the benefit is of taking all the glass and paper off the islands and suggest that it would be better to find ways of recycling the waste in situ. For example, some islands have paper-shredding machines, as shredded paper is a great bedding material for wintering cattle. As I said, bottles can be used to make aggregate and cans can be used in yet another way.

Mr Gibson: However, the point is this: is Highlands and Islands Enterprise helping in that regard?

Councillor Hay: It is difficult to say. I do not have evidence of that.

Mr Gibson: Message understood.

Alan Millar: A number of schemes in Argyll and Bute are part funded by European regional development funding through the Highlands and Islands partnership programme. One such scheme is the Campbeltown Waste Watchers facility that shreds paper for animal bedding. There are still two years' worth of funding for such projects.

Maureen Macmillan: On Skye, HIE supports a firm that recycles waste products. I presume that it supports similar firms across the area.

I have had all my questions answered. I wanted to find out what was happening with recycling at a local level. Obviously, taking waste paper from Wick to Manchester is a different proposition from taking it from Glasgow to Manchester.

The Convener: We should contact Scottish Enterprise and HIE to allow them to comment on the work that we are doing before we write our report.

Your evidence has been helpful. We could keep you here for a long time, but we will not, as we have another group of witnesses. Thank you for attempting to answer our questions and for giving us written submissions.

11:20

Meeting suspended.

11:30

On resuming—

The Convener: We shall now hear evidence from our third panel of witnesses. Dan Barlow and

Richard Dixon represent Scottish Environment LINK and Penny Cousins is the chief executive of Forward Scotland.

Thank you for coming along. As with other witnesses, we will not take opening statements from you; however, you have all given us extremely helpful written statements, which we have looked at in advance. I would like to move straight to questions from members. As before, if members keep their questions brief and witnesses keep their answers brief, we should be able to cover the maximum number of issues.

Roseanna Cunningham: How achievable is the 25 per cent target? What real obstacles do you envisage in achieving that and what obstacles do you think are just red herrings—compostable or otherwise?

Dr Richard Dixon (Scottish Environment LINK): There are occasional mutterings that the 25 per cent target for recycling and composting by 2006 is in some way unachievable or unattainable. However, if you were to examine the situation from a logical point of view, you would say that that really cannot be the case, because those targets have been derived largely by adding up the regional targets in the area waste plans, although that is not exactly how they came about. That process involved the very rigorous BPEO calculations about what was possible both technically and economically. A lot of rational thought has already gone into considering whether we can do it, and the answer that has been arrived at is that we can achieve a target of about 25 per cent by 2006.

From a European perspective, however, it seems to be rather laughable to say that that is an unachievable target; almost every country in Europe is already doing more than that and many are doing twice as much as that, so it is clearly not unachievable. In fact, we heard just last week that Denmark has set itself a target of 63 per cent for recycling and composting by 2008.

One of the great advantages of being almost at the very bottom of the European league is that you can learn from everyone else, because they have all done it first. If you want to know whether split-lorry collections work, someone has done it. If you want to know how to make a lorry that weighs the rubbish before you put it on, someone has done it. If you want to know whether you can charge people for each bag of rubbish they give you, someone has examined that. There is so much experience in Europe—in technology, techniques and messages to the public—that we can learn from and are learning from that it seems to be laughable to suggest that 25 per cent is something that we should not aspire to or believe is perfectly achievable.

Penny Cousins (Forward Scotland): From a community perspective, I would like to draw the committee's attention to the fact that the Transforming Waste Scotland initiative alone will deliver something like 5 per cent of the national waste plan targets by 2006. That is an unorchestrated output and not one that has been driven terribly hard. The initiative is run through a scheme for community groups that want to seek funding. A lot more could be done to gear up that process, as we are in the very early stages of it. Community groups cannot do a huge amount individually, but together, and if encouraged strategically to develop at a higher level, they could contribute quite a lot on their own, let alone what they could do through local authorities.

Dan Barlow (Scottish Environment LINK): If we consider examples from elsewhere—even examples from the UK—we see that some communities have been able to increase recycling from 4 per cent to 53 per cent in two years. We therefore have enough time to meet a 25 per cent target in Scotland.

We know that people in Scotland want to recycle; recent polls suggest that 80 per cent want to participate. We also know from experience elsewhere that it is fundamentally important that we allow people to do that through kerbside collections, which are one of the best mechanisms for ensuring that we reach the 25 per cent target. Clearly, such collections should be done in consultation with those who are working on current community and voluntary initiatives.

Eleanor Scott: With previous witnesses, we spoke about the waste minimisation initiatives of some local authorities—initiatives such as education programmes. Can you elaborate on the concept of zero waste? How can we work towards reducing the amount of waste that is being produced, rather than just do more recycling and composting of an increasing amount of waste?

Dan Barlow: The zero-waste concept involves a fundamental shift in mindset, in which we look at waste as a resource. It also involves considering the materials that we produce and where resources come from. If we cannot recover materials after they have been used, we should not produce them in the first place. Through time, we should progress towards a situation in which we talk not about waste, but about a resource that can be used for something else.

A number of cities in other countries have adopted the concept of zero waste. Cities in Canada, for example, are working towards a 60 per cent reduction in waste arisings. That is achievable, and is being achieved, but the concept involves a fundamental shift so that we think in terms of resources rather than in terms of waste.

The Convener: Over what period is Canada considering making that level of reduction? The shift from business as usual to that level of reduction is massive.

Dan Barlow: Halifax in Canada achieved a 60 per cent diversion of waste by 2000 or just after it. Canada as a whole set itself a target of 50 per cent by 2000. Some areas have met the target and others are meeting it now.

Mr Gibson: In the various papers, much emphasis is placed on the lack of an effective mechanism to encourage local authorities to engage with the community sector, and on the threat to existing community recycling businesses as local authorities set targets and attempt to achieve them. If we take that as a given, how do you square it with the idea of creating new green jobs as a Scottish Executive strategy? Are there inconsistencies? How could they be ironed out?

Penny Cousins: A fundamental question arises about the role of community organisations and about the relationship between those organisations and the local authorities. As we develop critical mass, the roles of communities will separate out. For the past few years, until now, communities have operated across all areas of reuse, recycling, composting and awareness raising. That will not happen in future; their role will tend to crystallise in certain key areas and, in the short term, composting will be one of those areas and it will continue to be a key area for them until issues to do with standards and the technical treatment of compost are sorted out. At that point, there will be a significant volume and the private sector will become interested.

Another area in which communities will continue to have a significant role is reuse—where we take things out of the waste stream. I am thinking in particular of white goods and furniture. We will have many opportunities for considering increased jobs and training opportunities to do not only with collection and sorting, but with processing. Recent research by the jobs in the environment support unit indicates that as many as 12,000 jobs could be created. As far as community groups are concerned, a very interesting and significant element of those jobs is likely to be at the reuse end of the spectrum.

Dr Dixon: Penny Cousins has highlighted the large number of jobs that could be created. However, the national waste plan is not working—we might call it a teething trouble—when it comes to existing enterprises. We heard about Campbeltown Waste Watchers Ltd, which is a tremendously successful initiative and, I think, the largest employer in the town. We also have Alloa Community Enterprises Ltd, which won a UK national award for its community recycling business. It has provided services for more than

10 years—kerbside collections and bank collections—for a large part of the central belt in the Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannan area. As councils have received money from the strategic waste fund and have considered their plans, a problem has been that existing community recycling businesses have not been integrated. Either they have put in a bid that could not compete with that of a commercial company and have lost out, or they have not been part of the process at all.

There is a bin war in Stirling in which, for example, bins are being turned round. Apart from the problems for the community recycling businesses, the public have a problem—people do not know what on earth is going on. They get used to a recycling service's being provided by a community business, which they know has a social aspect, when suddenly that service is thrown away and replaced by a new service. People find bins that they cannot put stuff in. Bins disappear while others appear with different messages about what can be put in them, so confusion has arisen. That is one of the main teething troubles of the national waste plan and some of us have been warning about the problem for some time.

The reason behind the problem lies in the way in which the strategic waste fund rules were written. The rules made it clear to local authorities that their bids for cash from the fund would be looked on more favourably if they were made together with community enterprises. However, that suggestion was not enough. Something a bit more coercive—something that perhaps considers the social benefits of community enterprises as well as the prices that they charge—would have led to a much better outcome. There is an urgent need to consider the rules and how we spend money from the fund.

Maureen Macmillan: I want to move on to a completely different topic, although it does go back to something that was said earlier about zero waste. Our aspiration, for some day in the future, is to have zero waste—through minimisation, recycling, composting and so on. However, we will never achieve zero waste, will we? What will we do with the waste that is left after every other avenue has been tried? Will we incinerate it, or use it for landfill? Everybody seems to want to duck this question, but what will we do in the end with what cannot be recycled, reused, composted or whatever?

Dan Barlow: In the longer term, it will be possible to work towards a zero-waste strategy—assuming that full consideration is given, when materials are produced, to what will happen at the end of their life. You are right to suggest that, in the shorter term, it will not be possible to minimise

or recycle everything, but we know from local authority waste-arising surveys that 70 to 80 per cent of what ends up in individuals' rubbish bins can actually be recycled or composted. That leaves us with a fairly small fraction.

Technologies are available that involve, for example, mechanical or biological treatment. Those technologies come into play after whatever can be taken out at the first stage of recycling has been taken out. They allow a second stage of recycling to remove anything else by way of metals, plastics and paper. You then end up needing a final biological stage to render the remainder—which may be about 15 or 20 per cent of the waste—biologically inactive. In the short term, that 15 or 20 per cent may, in theory, be available for landfill. If that material is used for landfill, the advantage is that it is biologically inert. Many of the current problems that we associate with landfill do not arise with material that has been screened and sorted in the way that I have described.

Maureen Macmillan: How far away are those technologies? What sort of time scale are we looking at, and what can we do in the meantime? Some local authorities have run out of landfill sites.

11:45

Dan Barlow: There are plenty of examples of those technologies' being used internationally. We know from comparisons with other countries that mechanical and biological treatment facilities are being used in Germany, Austria, Italy and Flanders. We expect that Scotland would look to those examples and try to go down the same route, rather than simply increase the number of incineration facilities that we have. With incineration, you still end up with about 30 per cent of the waste volume, which has then to be landfilled. Incineration may reduce the waste, but it does not get rid of it and the material that has to go to landfill is often toxic.

The Convener: Perhaps the phasing has been moved to meet the 25 per cent targets and we should be thinking about what is possible beyond that. Several witnesses have talked about the concept of technological change, and you have mentioned future options in your written and oral evidence, but local authorities must in the short term work out how to meet the targets and what financial commitments to make for the longer term. Have you given thought to a phased approach that would allow authorities to cope with the problem?

Maureen Macmillan is right to say that the default position seems to be that, if there is no immediate solution or you are worried about the markets, you will just burn the waste. That will not

necessarily be the best environmental option but it is what might happen. Do you have an alternative suggestion for how local authorities might cope?

Dan Barlow: As things stand, incineration is not a quick option. The planning stages that any incinerator proposal has to go through can take years and years. It is not likely to be any quicker to build incinerators than it is to consider more advanced technologies, such as mechanical and biological treatment or smaller-scale pyrolysis or gasification technology. Local authorities should be looking to those options, as well.

Dr Dixon: The authorities involved in the Forth valley area waste plan have taken what seems to be a very sensible approach. They have said that they will have a review half way through the period to see how they are doing and, if they believe that they are on target without any kind of energy recovery—from an incinerator or other form of energy-from-waste plant—they will carry on without such a plant. However, if they decide at that review that things are not going as well as they had hoped and that there will be a problem in meeting future targets, they might consider such technology. That is the approach that the three councils in the Forth valley area considered; it is an approach that could also be taken nationally.

Dan Barlow: We would be very concerned if local authorities were not cautious in signing up to contracts. Contracts for energy-from-waste facilities are often for 25 years. Aberdeen City Council is currently signed up to a 25-year contract with a company that could require it to produce waste to feed that incinerator. In the longer term, that will not contribute towards a sustainable waste or resource-use strategy, because it will require Aberdeen actually to find waste to feed the incinerator. In 25 years' time, that will not be seen as progressive. It is difficult to see how it could be perceived as progressive now, but in 20 years' time it will look very out of date and will have been overtaken by more efficient and better examples in other local authorities. I therefore urge caution with regard to the length of the contract that councils may be required to sign for things that will rapidly become out of date and inappropriate.

Eleanor Scott: Is the fact that many authorities—possibly all of them, for all I know—are entering into public-private partnerships with waste management firms to undertake all their waste management distorting the process in any way? Those firms will have their own agendas and, if they are contracted for 20 years, they want something that will be economically viable.

Dan Barlow: That is certainly an area of concern, particularly because there exists the potential for local authorities to rely too heavily on some of the existing voluntary and community-

based initiatives, or simply to sign up with large-scale commercial operators. We need some big operators so that we can deal with the scale of the challenge that we face and to help to implement the technology, but local authorities should be very cautious about that.

The Convener: You talked about international comparators, and we all know that we are at the bottom of the list and have the opportunity to learn. How do you see those international experiences being fed into the next stage of the waste plan? Richard Dixon has talked about reviewing the situation in the future. How do you see that process happening in such a way that we can learn lessons from other places and move ahead?

Dr Dixon: Quite a bit of work is being done. Some of that work is funded in Europe—often by the European Union—and is looking into different waste technologies, waste management techniques and the broader issues of resource use. In some cases, that involves consideration of the specific details of how a certain kind of waste collection works in one area of one city in Belgium, and whether there is a lesson that others can learn from it.

One of the specific issues for Scotland is recycling in tenements and how it can be done in such a densely populated area. We heard about that earlier, from the representative of Glasgow City Council. There are specific problems with, for example, being able to install recycling bins. However, there are tenements, or similar buildings, in other places in Europe and some of those cities have cracked the issue. We must, therefore, find out how they have done it and whether it would be possible for us to do it here. There are obviously limits to how much we can learn from another culture, in which there might be different attitudes, financial systems and legal requirements. However, there are things that we can learn and I am glad that we seem to be doing quite a bit of that, although I am sure that there is more that we could do.

The next stage, in reviewing the national waste plan, will be to raise our sights and turn it into a national resource plan, recognising the broader picture. I suggest that a few key elements will have to feed into that. First, although we are now serious about recycling and composting and are putting real money into those schemes, waste minimisation is still difficult, and slightly out on the edge. The waste plan says that we will adopt an aspirational target of 0 per cent growth in waste by 2010, but I am very concerned about aspirational targets. We might aspire to them, but we will not necessarily attain them. The figure in the waste plan that 55 per cent of our waste will be recycled and composted by 2020 is predicated on the

amount of waste growing by 1.5 per cent a year between 2010 and 2020. So although the Executive aspires to have no growth in waste in that period, it has not incorporated that aspiration into the figures. If we could stop waste from growing by 2010, that 55 per cent could be 64 per cent by 2020. That is the difference between letting waste grow and increasing recycling to deal with the increased waste, and tackling waste growth and then using recycling to reduce the total quantity.

Aberdeen City Council has said that it will aim for a target of reducing waste by 1 per cent a year. Already, someone in Scotland is being ambitious about this. We should learn from that and help them. The first thing is to say that the target in the waste plan is not aspirational, but what we are going to do. That will drive the development of the waste prevention strategy for Scotland—which is already happening—with much more urgency towards a target that SEPA has to meet, that the Government knows that it will be called to account over, and that the local authorities understand and know about. That would be much better than simply saying that we aspire to zero growth in waste, but not building it into the figures because we are not serious about it.

Secondly, we need to broaden our view and use the concept of the global ecological footprint. We have sustainable development indicators for Scotland, three of which relate to waste. One concerns total municipal waste; one concerns the recycling rate for household waste—something that we have talked about a lot today; and one concerns the amount of waste that we send to landfill. I would like another indicator to be added to those three: the ecological footprint of Scotland. That figure would reflect our total resource use—not just waste, but how much material and energy we use and what we are doing to get our food. It would be a big-picture measurement that would put our domestic resource use in a global context.

It is all very well for us to say that we are at the bottom of the European league with, on average, 6 or 7 per cent of our waste being recycled and that that is not very good. If the global footprint were used, however, it would show that if everyone in the world lived as we do, we would need another two planets to keep everyone going—which we clearly cannot have. That global picture would help us to raise our sights from the problem that we are now taking seriously and really tackling—with some teething troubles—to the bigger issue, which is total resource use including the use of energy. I hope that Scotland's ecological footprint will be introduced as one of the sustainable development indicators, as that would allow us to call the Government to account and say, "You have identified this figure; what are you doing to reduce it?" Some proposals, and some of the money that

is spent on recycling and composting, can feed in to reduce a global ecological footprint. That global impact concept was used in York, where it allowed local councillors to realise that, despite their recycling and composting, they were really just standing still, because the amount of waste was growing so quickly. The global ecological footprint concept opened their eyes to the bigger picture.

Maureen Macmillan: I was thinking about what goes into my dustbin and wondering what kind of waste would be minimised. The waste that we would minimise is the waste that we would recycle or compost anyway, but what we want to minimise is the waste that is usually incinerated or sent to a landfill. How do we minimise such waste? What exactly is the waste that we cannot deal with by recycling and the other schemes to which you referred? Are disposable nappies an example of such waste? Should we go back to using the pail of Napisan and the terry towel instead?

The Convener: We are cutting to the chase now.

Dan Barlow: We need to review fundamentally the materials that we use and how we live our lives. Such a review will be driven not only by forthcoming European directives, but by existing directives that have not been fully implemented yet, such as directives on packaging or on waste electronic equipment. Those directives will take some materials out of the waste stream and require them to be recycled. There are difficult fractions for recycling or reducing at the moment, but they tend to be fines associated with fine organic, plastic or metal materials. Those materials are difficult to extract in bulk through recycling facilities, but they can be extracted at a second stage through the mechanical and biological treatment system. It is possible to reduce the waste that finally must be disposed of in some way to in the region of 15 or 20 per cent.

Maureen Macmillan is right to imply that there must be a fundamental shift in how we lead our lives. Moving away from using disposable nappies is a good example. We must recognise that the use of such products is not sustainable.

Dr Dixon: On that point, an action that might seem trivial, but which is important—certainly symbolically—is the introduction of the plastic bag tax in Ireland. Overnight, there was a tremendous reduction in the number of plastic bags sold or used and, consequently, a reduction in the amount of bags that ended up in landfill sites or blew around the countryside. Even a simple measure can make a big difference. A symbolic action is important because much of the problem is changing people's behaviour. We can legislate and use financial incentives, but the major task is to change people's buying habits. The plastic bag tax is a good example of something simple that has made a big difference.

Mr Gibson: On that point, perhaps we should consider using incentives and, indeed, penalties to change people's behaviour and improve their individual ecological footprints. Is there scope in Scotland for taking direct initiatives like the Irish example? Do you have other suggestions about direct methods that we could use in Scotland to affect people's behaviour?

Dr Dixon: I regard the ecological footprint as initially an awareness-raising tool that would identify our environmental impact, which we would measure year by year to assess whether it was getting better or worse. If our impact was getting worse, we would need to do something about that. If it was not getting better quickly enough, we would need to do something about that. However, Rob Gibson is right to suggest that we can apply the ecological footprint to the individual as well as to the country, a local authority, a city or a business. An individual can look at their personal footprint and consider how to reduce it. We could combine doing that with initiatives that we talked about earlier—for example, the continuing education work, particularly the large amount of work with which SEPA is involved.

We could consider a plastic bag tax as one way in which we could all reduce our impact. We could also consider something that SEPA has previously discussed, which is charging people for waste that they produce. That would make people aware in a real way of how much waste they produced, because it would cost them money. That is one way in which to concentrate people's minds. However, we would also have to consider the social implications of such a move.

Penny Cousins: We are getting into an interesting area. We are here to discuss the national waste plan, but we are moving towards discussing wider sustainable development issues. Through one of our schemes—the fresh futures scheme—we have funded projects in which communities have said that they would like to do a community-level footprint or audit, part of which would relate to waste, and, on the back of that, to develop a sustainable development strategy for the community that addresses a number of different issues. Waste management would certainly be part of that strategy. The scheme is tangible and gives communities opportunities to engage at an early stage. Communities can see how to do things. There are examples of practical projects in other communities. It is interesting that we are getting into that debate. Ecological audits and ecofootprinting are topical issues in which many communities are interested.

12:00

Roseanna Cunningham: What engagement do you have with the packaging industry? What is

that industry worth for Scotland and for the United Kingdom as a whole? I do not have the figures with me. We may have to introduce a slightly more punitive regime for consumers. How would we handle the scenario that I would be keen to introduce, which is to stand at a supermarket checkout and strip all the packaging off a product before taking it away in my costly carrier bags? I am only half joking. There is a massive industry out there producing what most of us would regard as wholly unnecessary packaging—I am thinking of the bubble wrap on the cardboard in the shrink film on whatever. What engagement is there with the packaging industry and how should we handle a significant long-term reduction in that industry's work?

Dan Barlow: There is a European Community directive on packaging and packaging waste, which requires member states to recover 50 per cent of packaging waste by June 2001. However, the implementation of that directive throughout Europe has not yet fulfilled expectations. I cannot comment on engagement with the packaging industry, although I am sure that SEPA is engaged with it.

Dr Dixon: The packaging directive has led to a system of trading waste permits and packaging recovery notes. That means that companies that are under an obligation under the regulations must prove that they have had a certain percentage of the type of waste that they produce recycled.

There is therefore something on recycling; there is also something on minimisation. Legislation has been in force since 1998, but almost no one knows about it and almost no one has used it. The legislation says that if a person buys a product and believes that it is excessively packaged—that is, that it has more packaging than is really necessary to protect it in transport or to keep it fresh—a complaint can be made to local trading standards officers, who can use the legislation to take action.

Roseanna Cunningham: Really?

Dr Dixon: The question is, are local trading standards officers seriously going to take on a multinational company or a large UK food retailer? The answer is no.

Roseanna Cunningham: Can the committee have more information about that legislation?

Dr Dixon: Yes—I can send members information about it.

The Convener: I am interested in what you are saying. I think that Friends of the Earth ran campaigns on removing wrapping from products at supermarkets when those products are being bought. The idea was that, rather than carting wrapping home and stuffing it in a rubbish bin, people should leave it to be tidied up by the

company. If many people did that over time, less packaging would probably be used. There are questions about consumer awareness and power and the extent to which people would be interested in doing that.

The committee would be interested in the legislation that has been mentioned. We will certainly discuss business and packaging when the business reps are in front of us in the next couple of weeks.

Penny Cousins: I have a point of information. We are currently scoping a project with Scottish Enterprise, SEPA, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Water to develop a Scottish sustainable business initiative. An early issue that must be addressed is how the work programme for that initiative would pick up on some of the priorities that members have identified. The initiative could provide a mechanism for engaging with businesses, the packaging industry and supermarkets at an early stage.

The Convener: That is useful to know. I have lost track of who is next. I think it is Eleanor Scott.

Eleanor Scott: I did a quick and dirty calculation that shows that if we continue to increase our waste by 1.5 per cent each year, we would double it by 2050, which is a bit scary.

We have talked a lot about waste minimisation, which is dear to my heart. Some of the local authority people we talked about previously had some input into that, but it is fairly variable. Maureen Macmillan's example of the nappies was a good one, because there is a campaign for real nappies. They look like disposable nappies—they are plastic on the outside and terry on the inside and have poppers—and they behave like disposable ones, except that you put them in the washing machine instead of in the bin. The Highland real nappy group asked Highland Council for support and was told that that was not the sort of thing that the council got involved in and that it was not really interested, which was a bit sad.

EU packaging rules and other EU matters were mentioned. I am aware that we were caught on the hop by the fridge mountain when the fridge disposal rules were introduced. Is there anything else from the European Union that is about to bite us on the ankle and that we need to prepare for?

Dan Barlow: The two issues that we need to be aware of are the packaging waste directive and the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive, which requires the collection of 4kg of such material per capita per year. I am not aware that we are ready to implement that directive, but we will have to be ready by 2005. That will have an impact on the waste stream, because while we are making decisions now about how we dispose

of material, whether by incineration or landfill, we should be considering the impact of the implementation of the forthcoming European directives, because they will take material out of a mixed-waste stream, thereby reducing the material that is available for incineration. Yet again, that will not take us down the right route and will not help us to meet the requirements of the European directives.

The Convener: Do you have a view on the future European regulations on the redesign of products and the integrated product approach? Do you have a view on the separation of waste and the reuse of potential waste so that there is much less waste in future?

Dan Barlow: That is fundamental. Any movement towards the concept of zero waste will require us to take a fundamental look at how materials are produced, their components, how easy it is to recycle what is left at the end, whether it can be reused, and whether that can be done locally instead of exporting it elsewhere. That will be required to enable us in the longer run to move towards what we could class as a more sustainable resource-use strategy. If we are going to be serious about delivering environmental justice in an international context, we have to move beyond just a waste strategy. We know at the moment that 20 per cent of the world's population uses 80 per cent of the world's resources. This is one of those areas in which, if we do not take fundamental action, that imbalance in equality will continue.

The Convener: I will take one last question, from Nora Radcliffe.

Nora Radcliffe: I have a fundamental overall question. There has been a lot of positive feedback on the waste plan and the waste strategy, but their limitations have been mentioned. Are local authorities taking their eye off long-term strategic thinking about waste, and are things happening in the short term, because of the waste plan and the waste strategy, that might inhibit long-term strategies that would be more effective?

Dr Dixon: My view of what has happened so far is that we have taken the issue seriously and put some money into it. We have run a process that has involved a great many stakeholders, and that has been done on an area basis, which is a terribly sensible approach. We are having some teething troubles. There will be some winners and losers because we are, in a big way, changing what we have done in the past, but we need to ensure that some of the most vulnerable organisations or initiatives that might be losers are protected, so that they are winners instead. So there are some things to do, but we are going in the right direction. Now we need to examine the

bigger picture of total resource use, and take a wider perspective of our global impact.

The Convener: That is a good point on which to end this morning's session. I thank you all for coming and for giving us your written comments in advance, which was useful for the committee, and for having a go at answering the varied and wide-ranging questions.

We now move into private session to agree our proposal for external research to assist our committee work on sustainable development. I invite the official report, the broadcast media, members of the public and any visiting members to leave the room.

12:09

Meeting continued in private until 12:20.

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