

Local Government Association briefing

Debate on the Government's 25-year plan for the Environment

House of Lords

29 January 2018



Key messages

- On 11 January 2018 the Government launched its 25-year plan for the environment. It aims to deliver cleaner air and water in our cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. There are several elements of the plan which are due to be implemented at a local level.¹
- The Government's plan contains measures on several issues which will affect local authorities, including on minimising waste, flooding and air quality. Councils are working with the Government to improve environmental performance in these areas.
- We support the Government's ambition to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste by 2042. Producers must do more to ensure that packaging is easily recyclable. This would make waste disposal easier for our residents, and save considerable amounts of money, whilst protecting our environment.
- Recycling food waste is a key priority. We support the Government's intention to ensure there is no food waste entering landfill by 2030. Many councils have introduced separate collections of food waste, and will work to expand these services. In order for councils to do so, the Government must ensure that recycling and collection services are fully resourced.
- With increasing flood risk, local authorities have a significant role to play in preventing damage before it happens. We look forward to supporting the Government's measures to bring together different agencies at a local level to achieve this. In order to effectively implement measures to prevent flooding, the Government must devolve funding to councils, who know how best to meet local needs.
- Providing clean air is the responsibility of central government. Councils have a role to play in helping the Government to deliver this responsibility. The Government's air quality plans can be successful but they need local leadership, sufficient funding and to be accompanied by robust national action.

Briefing

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Background information

Minimising waste and its environmental impacts

The Government's plan pledges to minimise waste by:

- working towards our ambition of zero avoidable waste by 2050;
- working to a target of eliminating avoidable plastic waste by end of 2042;
- meeting all existing waste targets – including those on landfill, reuse and recycling – and developing ambitious new future targets and milestones;
- seeking to eliminate waste crime and illegal waste sites over the lifetime of this Plan. Delivering a substantial reduction in litter and littering behaviour.ⁱⁱ

We support the Government's ambition to tackle unnecessary plastic waste, by eliminating all avoidable plastic waste by 2042. Councils would like producers to be incentivised to make packaging that is easily recyclable. This would not only make waste disposal easier for our residents, but save considerable amounts of money and energy, whilst protecting our environment.

It is positive that 98 per cent of local authorities currently provide a kerbside collection scheme, which includes plastic bottles. In addition to this, over half of all councils (52 per cent) provide drop-off schemes where plastic bottles can be brought to a drop off point. The expansion of these schemes over the last 15 years helped to improve plastic recycling rates.ⁱⁱⁱ

Overall household rates have risen significantly because of the effort and resources councils have put into kerbside collection. The current plateau has a range of explanations, and there are differences between council areas. We need government, retailers and producers to work together to improve the rates of recycling. This including by supporting the funding of recycling services so that the cost of funding does not fall solely on council tax payers.

The UK is on course to exceed its EU landfill targets as a result of the extensive efforts of local authorities. The country has seen a radical reduction in landfill per household by 78 per cent since 2002/3. In large part this is due to the doubling of spend on waste and recycling facilities by councils since 2000, to £3.28 billion.^{iv}

Flooding

The Government's plan pledges to minimise flood risk by:

- making sure everyone is able to access the information they need to assess any risks to their lives, health and prosperity posed by flooding;
- bringing the public, private and third sectors together to work with communities and individuals to reduce the risk of harm;
- making sure that decisions on land use, including development, reflect the level of current and future flood risk;
- boosting the long-term resilience of our homes, businesses and infrastructure.^v

Extreme weather conditions continue to provide a challenge for both national and local government. With increasing flood risk, there are significant challenges for

local authorities in preventing damage before it happens. We hope to continue to work with DEFRA in partnership on flooding and flood prevention.

In order to most effectively implement measures to prevent flooding to local communities, the Government must devolve funding to councils, who know how best to meet local needs. Councils make considerable contributions to flood defences, but have little control over where the money is spent.

Local authorities reject planning applications which are reckless and irresponsible. Councils are generally opposed to building property on floodplains and 99.7 per cent of the new homes in 2015/16, where the Environment Agency was consulted, had planning outcomes in line with Environment Agency advice. Where building does take place on a floodplain, councils need to be reassured that adequate defences are in place, so that the risk of flooding and damage to properties is minimised.^{vi}

The Government must also introduce mandatory anti-flood requirements for new homes which are included in building regulations. These would require developers to introduce measures like raised electrical sockets, fuse boxes, controls and wiring; sealed floors; and raised damp-proof courses.

Air quality

The Government's plan pledges to achieve clean air by:

- *meeting legally binding targets to reduce emissions of five damaging air pollutants; this should halve the effects of air pollution on health by 2030;*
- *ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040.*^{vii}

Providing clean air is the responsibility of central government. Councils have a role to play in helping the Government to deliver this responsibility. The Government's air quality plans can be successful but they need local leadership, sufficient funding and to be accompanied by robust national action.

Government action in tackling Nitrogen Dioxide levels has been brought about by infringement action by the European Union and subsequent legal challenges by environmental groups. If we limit the scope of our action to simply doing the minimum necessary to comply with legal limits of a single type of pollutant, we risk repeating mistakes of the past and ignoring the wider public health ramifications of failing to provide clean air.

We are calling for a wider strategy for developing cleaner air with support for targeted local intervention and national policy to develop a greener vehicle fleet. We would also like to see the Government give greater priority to demand management, and more active travel and public transport.

ⁱ HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018

(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673203/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

ⁱⁱ HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018

(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673203/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ Local Government Association member survey

^{iv} 2 Local authority collected waste: annual results tables, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2017

^v HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018
(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673203/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

^{vi} 2 LGA responds to EFRA committee update on future of flood prevention report, January 2017
(<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-efra-committee-update-future-flood-prevention-report>)

^{vii} HM Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018
(https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/673203/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)