



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Departmental Briefing on Waste
Recyclates**

16 September 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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ENVIRONMENT**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Cathal Boylan (Chairperson)
Mr Patsy McGlone (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Willie Clarke
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Alastair Ross
Mr Peter Weir
Mr Brian Wilson

Witnesses:

Ms Helen Anderson)
Mr Denis McMahon) Department of the Environment
Mr Donald Starritt)
Ms Anne Tohill)

The Chairperson (Mr Boylan):

We will now receive a departmental briefing on waste recyclates. Members have been provided with a departmental briefing paper and the reply to Committee queries. Further papers from Bryson Recycling have also been provided, as have a reply to an Assembly question on recycling

and an Assembly Research Services paper on the quality of recyclates. I remind members that the quality of recyclable material was raised as an issue following visits to Bryson Recycling. In particular, the concern was that raising targets for tonnage of recycled waste could lead to deterioration in quality. There is also a research paper on council methods of recyclable waste collection.

I welcome Denis McMahon, Helen Anderson, Anne Tohill and Donald Starritt. I will allow you five or 10 minutes to make a presentation, and then there will be some questions from members.

Mr Denis McMahon (Department of the Environment):

Thank you very much. We are very grateful for the chance to come here to talk about recycling. It is a top priority for the Minister. He has made it clear that he expects to see us collectively deliver more in relation to recycling. He expects to see higher recycling targets and to see us achieving more, in relation to both the quantity and the quality of recyclates that are retrieved from waste. The Minister and, increasingly, everybody else see waste as a real resource and see that we need to make the best use of it.

We have worked very closely with Bryson and with other key stakeholders who are interested in recycling, and we continue to do that. We need to apply all the tools at our disposal to make sure that we get recycling rates up to a good level. We are looking at potential recycling targets of 60% or more. Even though the revised waste framework will specify a target of 50% by 2020, we are looking at the potential to set higher targets. There is a place for a number of different methodologies; for example, some of the mechanical biological treatment centres proposed by the waste infrastructure programme will deliver some recycling, as will mechanical recovery facilities. Source segregation — in other words, the use of different bins to separate materials — also has its place. We are working very closely with Bryson to build a major pilot project on that.

Members will probably be aware that the Minister has announced a number of key initiatives recently, including the £5 million Rethink Waste capital programme and a £200,000 revenue programme, to try to promote recycling. There are other initiatives, such as the quality protocols.

We are very aware of the need to work with all key stakeholders. A lot of the attention has focussed on municipal waste, and quite rightly so, but we also need to work with the business community. As recently as yesterday, I met with a representative of Michelin, who was talking about the fact that that company has increased the recycling rate to 98.5% in its plant. We need to make sure that that good practice is rolled out, because it actually makes good sense for the economy at present.

In addition, we need to work closely with councils and local government in general to make sure that we are all working together. That is something that we have tried to do. That is just to give the Committee a sense of where the Department and the Minister are coming from. We are very happy to talk through any issues that members want to raise.

The Chairperson:

The issues that we encountered on our visit to Bryson Recycling were about contaminated bales. In some council areas there is source segregation on the doorstep and in other areas there is commingling. Is that a major issue? It seems a common-sense approach to segregate and separate the different materials there and then, whereas in some council areas waste is contaminated; the material is baled together and sent away to China. Can you expand on that? The common-sense approach would be to try to encourage councils to source segregate. Obviously the commingling is accepted and meets European directives.

Mr McMahon:

The trade-off is between quantity and quality. Research suggests that you can get reasonable quality from some mechanical recycling that takes mixed waste and separates it. That will give a good volume of waste, but, on the other hand, processors and businesses that use the recyclates, quite rightly, want to see those recyclates in as clean a condition as possible. It is totally understandable. There is a balance to be struck, and one of the things we need to do is work with councils to ensure that the right balance is used in each case.

We welcome source segregation, and we are trying to increase it, but our worry is that if we drop everything else and move directly to source segregated recycling, we would not even meet the 50% target that will be set in the revised waste framework and directive. It is about trying to

get that balance right, but you are right, there is definitely a good argument for saying that there should be a significant amount of source segregated waste so that processors get material that is as clean as possible. Is there anything you want to add to that, Helen?

Ms Helen Anderson (Department of the Environment):

Nothing; you put that very comprehensively, Denis. I think that some of the Committee members have visited the Bryson Recycling facility at Mallusk. That is a good example of a recycling facility that is operating to a very high standard, producing good quality recyclates. There is a lot of research that shows that a good materials recycling facility (MRF) can produce high quality recyclates. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has carried out a lot of research into that across the UK to identify what makes a good MRF and what speed it should run at, and has been working with operators of MRFs to encourage them to apply good practice so that they achieve the maximum efficiency in quality and quantity from their facilities.

The Chairperson:

On the face of it, it seems that trying to achieve greater quantity will drive down the quality of the material.

Ms H Anderson:

To be honest, there are so many factors at play that it is widely acknowledged that those who have the knowledge on the ground at district council level and who understand the demographics and geographical spread of their population are best placed to identify the most appropriate economic and environmental benefits. They are best placed to identify the best collection method and the best treatment option.

There is no doubt about it; WRAP material says that source segregation can provide both a high quantity and a high quality. However, it is also very clear that high quality and high quantity can also be achieved in areas where there is good communication, where householders appropriately use a commingled recycling collection, and where a very efficient MRF operates.

The Chairperson:

In relation to efficiency, in the case of source separation, there is clean, quality material in good

quantities, whereas, with comingling, material goes into a shed where a machine separates it, and there is still a small level of contamination. Obviously you are saying that there are practices out there that are working, so I am content. Our recycling output is within the EC regulation at the moment. Should we look at the legislative process to try to encourage better quality in the future, or are we content to run with the current directives?

Mr McMahon:

There are a number of drivers that will help us on that. The first driver is business itself. Businesses are pushing, rightly, for higher levels of quality; they expect to see quality materials coming to them. We are keen to encourage that, for example, through the use of quality protocols. My colleagues can talk about that in more detail, but we are developing quality protocols to make sure that there are clear standards for the recyclates that are produced. That will create more of a level playing field for the market. In addition to that, whether or not legislation would be required or would assist, we want to give the market a chance to respond and to make sure that we have those quality protocols. That is our first preference, but it is unclear whether legislation over and above that would necessarily be the right way to go.

Ms H Anderson:

It is a very complex area. There certainly can be a role for regulatory requirement, because that sets a clear obligation that has to be complied with. There is also the option of advice and guidance, which the Welsh and Scottish Governments are looking at. It is interesting to note that none of the other UK jurisdictions have put in place, or are thinking of putting in place, a quality regulatory requirement, but both Scotland and Wales are interested in producing quality standards for MRF operation. That can be a very effective but non-statutory tool to encourage improvements in MRF operation.

The Chairperson:

Surely the quality element would save money in the long run. Is there no assessment or evaluation of the cost of it? It seems to me that we are just content to meet our EC targets and the requirements of the directives until they are changed or challenged through primary legislation. It is a case of operating singly and having quality as opposed to the quantity of comingled material, and there is the cost of the separation of all that. Obviously, businesses are operating viably at the

minute, but one has to question whether there is proper, effective and efficient use of public funding. I am just trying to get my head around why there are so many different operations. I am not saying that the technology is better in one area or another; it is all about getting it right collectively.

Mr McMahon:

There are a number of factors there. The first is the point about whether we are just trying to meet European targets. Clearly, one of the key things is to increase the volume so that at least 50% of waste is recycled by 2020. We are required to do that anyway under a European directive. However, the Minister has made it clear that he wants us to go further than that. Therefore, the Department will bring proposals to the Committee on aspirational recycling targets, if we may call them that, over and above 50%.

There are various studies on the pros and cons of each methodology. There is no doubt that source segregation gives high quality, and it may work better in some areas than in others. For example, experience shows that some socio-economic groups respond more than others. That is one issue that we must take into account. Over time, we want to move to a system where more of the processing involves source segregation. The question is can we raise the recycling rate through source segregation alone? The answer is that we cannot, because it simply will not provide the necessary volume. Therefore, when a council comes forward with a proposal for Rethink Waste capital funding, for example, we ask what the other options are and whether the council has thought of doing source segregation, and so on. We look at each case, and we select the best value-for-money option. It is not as simple as saying that one method is more expensive than another in every case or works better than another in every case; it will not. It varies from place to place.

The Chairperson:

The biggest element is changing attitudes.

Mr T Clarke:

You seem to be focussing on quality. I am trying to pick up on the chairperson's questions. I think you said that we are reaching targets of approximately 60%, even with commingled

material, at present. Are we really trying to help suppliers to get a better product? Can we see evidence that it is more efficient to produce a better product for the consumer and for councils to deliver that service to the end user — the likes of Bryson Recycling — or is it cheaper for councils to continue to meet targets and encourage the public to recycle and continue to commingle the material? Unless we can see a clear demonstration that one is more beneficial to the general public/local government, it will be difficult to sell it.

The Chairperson:

Some councils are doing it one way and others another. At the end of the process there must be a reasonable quality of material for reuse.

Mr T Clarke:

Chairperson, we are not in the business of recycling to benefit Bryson Recycling or other companies. We are in it because we must meet our European target. Yes; we want a product that can be used for another purpose. That is obviously part of the emphasis. However, we want to deliver it at a reasonable cost. We do not want to adopt a particular method just to get better quality material for those companies and to benefit them; it must benefit the wider public as well.

The Chairperson:

I totally agree.

Mr McMahon:

I totally agree with that point. It is about setting appropriate standards that provide value for money. For example, we are hearing reports that a certain amount of material is not of appropriate quality and that the companies would prefer better quality material. At the same time, there are companies that are operating effectively. One company that is mentioned in our paper is Huhtamaki, which has 50% of the UK iPod market. It is pushing, rightly, for higher standards. We need to know what the acceptable level of quality is to ensure that the material is used. If the material is unusable, we are not recycling. That is the bottom line. We may achieve a target of 60% in extracting materials, but if nobody is actually using those materials, we will not meet our targets.

The Chairperson:

None of us is here to support any business, we want to meet the targets and protect the public purse by ensuring that services provide value for money.

Mr Beggs:

I declare an interest because my dad owns some land that is undergoing improvement and is in receipt of some inert material.

My question relates to the issue of quality and quantity, and Mr McMahon said that there was a balance to be struck. From memory, one of the highest levels of recycling is in Banbridge, where source separation is used. That is an instance where there is high quality and high levels of recycling. Surely, that is not a case of quantity versus quality? Banbridge council is doing both. Is that correct?

Ms H Anderson:

Yes. It very much depends on the area. It is very hard to make rules. If source segregation is working well, if there are good awareness levels and if there is good behaviour on the part of householders, then the high quality and the high quantity of recyclables can be achieved. In other areas the quantity suffers simply because it is more onerous on the householder to separate waste.

Mr Beggs:

The other aspect is that there is a perception that, ultimately, you get higher recycling rates with separation at source. Perhaps you could give us more information. I understand that in Germany the target for material going to landfill is down to single figures. Ultimately, what can give higher levels of recycling?

Mr McMahon:

There are two points. First, the point you made about Banbridge demonstrates, as Helen said, the fact that different areas have different characteristics. However, to come back to the Chairperson's point about behaviours and behavioural change, that is a huge issue in the middle of all of this. Frankly, we can provide all the boxes in world to different areas, but the behavioural change programmes must run alongside that. Germany is a good example because there is a real culture of recycling there, and we need to move in that direction. I totally agree

that we need to look at that and see how it can be instigated here.

Mr Beggs:

There are different drivers. I agree with Trevor Clarke that cost is another real driver. From having examined the different methods involved, has the Department got any figures on the ultimate cost? I am getting information, but I do not know whether it is accurate. I am getting information locally from Carrickfergus Borough Council, which indicates that arc21 believes that recycling at source is the most efficient method when you consider the gate fee and the collection fee. However, I would like the Department to have a degree of independent scrutiny of all the different methods involved.

We also have to look at future costs. I perceive that, with increased levels of landfill tax, it will be important to increase the rate of recycling. There is also the issue that recyclable material should have a value. There will be more and more pressure to increase the levels of recycling, apart from European directives. We need to have a snapshot of where we are today, along with all the other factors in the future. We could adopt one system today that we know will not be the best system in two years' time. Is the Department giving that vision and that lead, and are there hard figures to back that up?

Mr McMahon:

We have done quite a lot of modelling to look at what is needed to get the recycling rate up to a certain level. Specifically, one of the things that the Minister had asked us to look at was the infrastructure programme that the three waste management groups are putting together, which will include mechanical, biological treatment and some energy recovery. The question is whether we would actually need that if we could increase recycling rates. We had a good rigorous look at the situation, and the evidence is quite clear that we are definitely going to need infrastructure if we are to increase the current level of recycling to 60%. We know that the projects that we are looking at, such as the Rethink Waste fund, should add roughly one percentage point. Therefore, £3 million would add about one percentage point. However, it is not as simple as that. We can spend a certain amount on the infrastructure now, but it may not be that a further £3 million of infrastructure, over and above that, will get the same level of result. So there is a lot of analysis in deciding what we need to do overall to achieve that. We have a fair idea of the cost, because

we know the cost of the infrastructure programme. We know what we will get through additional recycling initiatives.

The bit that we do not have is the bit that we need to focus on. How much do we need to spend altogether on recycling and behavioural initiatives to get recycling up to that level? There is a real problem in that it would be lovely to be able to say that, if we spend £1 on advertising, we will change the behaviour of so many people, they will recycle so many more pounds worth of material and that will produce a definite outcome. However, even with the evidence and the research that has been done — we worked very closely with WRAP — there has to be a level of estimation involved. It is not an exact science. We are trying to strike a balance between recognising that communication is hugely important, especially working with community engagement and local community and voluntary sector organisations, and trying to evaluate exactly what impact that might have and how many tons it will move. It requires an element of guesswork. That is what we are lacking and what we are struggling with, to be honest.

The Chairperson:

We should not be looking at just the minimum of what we can do. We should raise the bar each time.

Mr Kinahan:

The question that I was going to ask has already been touched on. I get the feeling from you that you are doing things softly-softly and nicely, whereas it may be that we need to act harder and stronger. We have mentioned legislation. I wonder whether we are putting the resources into the right areas. Should we be doing things with more stick to persuade everyone to do it?

From my time as a member of Antrim Borough Council, I know that we have nearly reached a plateau on the numbers of people who recycle. We have now to find a completely new way that has not been touched on. Should we be getting stronger and tougher, and if so, what routes can we go down? Legislation is one way. Do we need more people to work with councils, look at what they are doing and get them to do it better?

Mr McMahon:

We can look at that question on two levels. We have talked about incentives; now you are talking about the sanctions side of the argument.

There are two elements. One is the relationship between central and local government. The question there is whether we need to set more rigorous targets. The Minister has made it clear that he wants to see more rigorous targets. The question is whether one should attach sanctions to them. The feeling has been that, until now, we have been putting the infrastructure in place to avoid being fined by the European Union for violation of the landfill directive. We are in new territory. We have never before announced a £5 million fund for recycling. We want to give it a chance and see whether it can make a difference. We think that it can. You are right, however; if that does not work, we must consider whether we should impose statutory targets. That should always be an option for any Minister.

The other side of the equation is definitely more difficult as one considers whether to impose sanctions against individuals or charging for waste. That is a huge political issue, and I do not think that I can give you a nice neat answer on it, other than to say that we will be happy to look at it, but who would want to bring it forward?

Mr W Clarke:

Thank you for the presentation. We hear about evaluating which system is working best. We are looking at source separation and commingling. Have you any data on the costs of delivering those different aspects? Do you have a breakdown, by council, of how much that costs per capita, or even a rural/urban breakdown of cost? Do you benchmark which recycling rate is better for the amount of money spent on the different systems, and which is the best system? We clearly need to look at that. There is no point in continuing to operate a system that costs money but does not deliver what you want. You probably need to look at which waste management group is delivering the most uncontaminated recyclables and compare that data.

Is the Rethink Waste fund available to other statutory agencies? I am thinking particularly of the Housing Executive, because in my constituency, and probably everyone else's — I do not want to stigmatise people, but — there is a higher rate of contamination in recycling bins

belonging to flats and apartments, if the waste is recycled at all. Generally, people contaminate other people's bins, which are then rejected and the rubbish is thrown about through the estate. It is not helping anybody. The Housing Executive has an obligation to manage its waste and see how its tenants are managing their waste. Perhaps there should be some sort of communal system to deal with waste in apartment blocks, or perhaps the Housing Executive should even consider how it delivers its waste management for tenants in its whole housing stock. We need to look at that.

In order to increase the amount of recycling, there has to be a greater emphasis on the carrot than the stick. In my opinion, we should put a microchip in the recycling bins to see how much people are actually recycling, and then, when it hits a certain threshold of uncontaminated recyclables, people should be rewarded with a reduction in rates or some other measure. We could see how much households are actually recycling, and people would buy into the scheme. That is worth looking at. It is not about charging or anything like that, it is just about finding out what every household is doing and then rewarding them for doing that.

In Holland, people bring back bottles to the supermarkets, and when they make their next purchase there is a reduction on the bill. That is worth looking at as well, because, although they can go to bottle banks, people are generally very lazy. They gather a lot of bottles, perhaps after Christmas or a party or whatever, and there is a reluctance even to go the bottle banks. They say, "I am not going to the bottle bank because people will think I am an alcoholic." They generally just throw bottles into the residual bin.

Mr Beggs:

Is that a confession? *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

You do not have to comment on that.

Mr Weir:

We will read in the 'Belfast Telegraph' that Mr Clarke denies alcohol rumour.

Mr W Clarke:

There is that perception. People say that it is much easier just to throw bottles into the residual bin, as that will save them the bother of going near the bottle bank. It is an issue that we need to look at. Where am I now? I am coming to the end.

The Chairperson:

This is the thirtieth question.

Mr W Clarke:

What tonnage of recyclables is rejected? Do we have monthly figures from each waste management group? What is being rejected; what figures do we have for that? Increasing the amount of recycling, as we are endeavouring to do, reduces the calorific value of the material in the residual bin. Surely that makes it less attractive for people to buy contracts for incineration. If you are taking all of the high-calorific-value stuff out of the bin, there is less need for incineration. What are your views on that?

The Chairperson:

I remind members that that was not favouritism to a party colleague; and next week's meeting will start at 9.30. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McMahon:

I will try to cover that broad range of issues. The first point is whether we have an assessment of how much recycling costs in each council area and what we get for it. We do not have a comprehensive set of data that tells us how much each council spends overall on recycling. We have proposals from all the councils under the Rethink Waste fund. Those proposals are for additional recycling that they plan to do with funding if their bids are successful. In that way, we can say exactly what it will cost and what we will get for it. So for the bids that were successful in the first round of funding, we are able to say that 12,000 tons of waste will be recycled that would not otherwise be recycled. We can say that that is bought at a cost of £2.83 million in capital. We have some of it costed. We do not have data to say that a particular council, in addition, is already doing so much or how much that costs. That is probably information that we could get.

As to the Rethink Waste fund being made available to other organisations, it has been put out through the councils, but we have encouraged the councils to partner with other organisations and we are particularly keen on the community and voluntary sector. There is nothing to stop, for example, the Housing Executive partnering with a council. There is no problem with that, and we want to see it happening. It comes back to the point about the characteristics of different areas. In Belfast, there is a high level of homes in multiple occupancy, and that makes a difference to the sort of techniques that we can use.

Silicon chips in bins are a very topical issue. Anyone who reads the ‘Daily Mail’ will have seen plenty of correspondence about chips in bins. One of the pilot projects that we are looking at under the Rethink Waste fund is to use chips to record the waste going into bins. That is a possibility, but it is a step further. It would initially be a data-gathering exercise, and it will take a lot of work with local communities to ensure that it is acceptable. We cannot impose this idea on councils; rather, the idea must come from councils. It is important that each council can work with its local communities on that to ensure that it will work.

Mr W Clarke:

Are resources available to implement it and to put data-collecting devices into vehicles?

Mr McMahon:

A cost is involved, and we are looking at it as a project under the Rethink Waste fund. We are considering the possibility that one or more councils could take it forward on a pilot basis.

Mr W Clarke:

That will help us to target our resources. If we see weaknesses in specific areas, we can tailor resources accordingly.

The Chairperson:

I must ask you to do deal briefly with Mr Clarke’s 35 issues. Two other members wish to ask questions and we have another briefing.

Mr McMahon:

You asked about the level of tonnage rejected.

Ms Anne Tohill (Department of the Environment):

The overall amount of rejected material from Northern Ireland's MRFs is 6.3%. That is the average reject rate. There are different rates, depending on the waste management group. For the North West Region Waste Management Group (NWRWMG), it is 5%; for SWaMP, it is 5.9%; and for arc21, 7.4%. That is our latest data.

The Chairperson:

Can you send the details to the Committee?

Ms Tohill:

Yes.

Mr W Clarke:

If I may comment on that, arc21 probably has the greatest proportion of social housing and apartments and flats. There were other questions; I asked about supermarkets taking back their bottles and offering refunds and so on.

Ms H Anderson:

That concept is applied in Europe, and we have looked at a type of return-and-deposit regime in a policy context in the past. Currently, there are no proposals in that regard. As Denis explained, we are trying to put in place a comprehensive communication programme, so that people are aware of the types of behaviours that are necessary to support the infrastructures that are in place. Councils can fund and develop incentive schemes to try to encourage those types of behaviours. At present we are not thinking about a return-and-deposit scheme, but that does not rule it out for future consideration.

Mr W Clarke:

We will deal with incineration on another day.

Mr T Clarke:

I am glad to hear that your party is supporting that now.

The Chairperson:

Is that everything? Mr Clarke is very welcome to the Committee.

Mr McGlone:

There you are Willie. What about that?

I have a brief question, but it is a very important one. We have received some documentation, and I heard you referring to the levels of waste being dealt with by the various collaborative groups. Some of the documents contain views sought from a variety of various companies across the North and in Britain. They were asked to rate the quality of the materials that they received for reprocessing. The ratings that are given show that for companies in the North, such as Huhtamaki, Aylesford and Cherry Polymers, the situation is getting noticeably worse. Huhtamaki reported:

“a dramatic deterioration in the quality of the commingled waste paper sourced in the North West Group ... over the last 12 months we have had to switch almost completely away from this material due to the high waste levels in this supply”.

First, were you aware of that situation? Secondly, what measures would have been taken? The reports coming back indicate that, for the various companies involved, the situation is either staying static or the materials that they are receiving are deteriorating. Those companies are at the coal face. Many have made various claims, which, I am sure, will be relayed to the Department. If you are not aware of those claims, you need to be. There are probably some wee games going on, too. It worries me to read those details from the people who deal with those matters daily. Were you aware of the claim that was made 12 months ago about the quality of the material sourced by the north-west group and that it had deteriorated so dramatically that the firm involved had to stop taking it?

Mr McMahan:

I was not aware of the details of that, nor was I aware of the situation as far back as a year ago. We deal closely with Bryson Recycling and have had some feedback on the quality of the

material that is received by some companies. I had not received the specific details that you seem to have. I would be happy to look at those.

Mr McGlone:

You would need to be aware of them, if the situation is as bad as is being claimed.

The Chairperson:

We ought to forward that response paper to you.

Mr McMahan:

We were aware that there were some complaints but not that they were as specific as that and not that they were received 12 months ago. I had not realised that the situation had changed.

Ms Tohill:

The Minister visited Huhtamaki in early March and was made aware that the company had concerns about the level of contamination. As a result, we have been looking at how that can be addressed. Some of the recent research and analysis that WRAP has done on MRF quality shows that if a reprocessor, such as Huhtamaki, sets a contamination threshold on the MRF operator, that is far more likely to have an impact on the quality of material that Huhtamaki receives than if the MRF operator sets a standard for the local authority. There is a role for the reprocessors; they can help to change the situation.

Mr McGlone:

I do not see how they can help to change it if the rubbish that comes in their direction is not of high enough quality for recycling.

Ms Tohill:

The research shows that if they set standards —

Mr McGlone:

With respect, they appear to have set the standard. They have said that they will not take certain waste anymore because of the dramatic deterioration of the quality of waste paper. All I am doing is considering what is before me here today. You were, clearly, not aware of that. We

should forward that information to the Department, because the picture from you is, by and large, quite rosy, but the picture that is outlined in the paper is quite different. That tells me that somebody does not know something or that somebody is not doing something to try to address the situation.

The Chairperson:

To be fair, the officials have not seen the paper that we have seen. It comes back to the quality issue. The contracts are there, and whoever wants to do so can tender for those contracts. That is good enough. At the end of the day, we want better quality. However, we operate under EU directives at the minute.

Mr McMahan:

We have received some feedback through companies such as Bryson. However, in fairness, it is important that, if people have specific issues, they raise them in that way. We will be happy to look at them. We have raised the issue with the North West Region Waste Management Group, and it has a different view on the quality of recycling. It would be very helpful to receive that information as a formal response from the Committee, because we can take it forward on that basis.

The Chairperson:

Then we can respond accordingly to Mr McGlone's point.

Mr B Wilson:

Mr Willie Clarke touched on my question. I am very concerned about the amount of glass that goes to landfill. Do you have any figures on how much glass we recycle? Do we have any other methods of increasing the percentage of glass that is recycled?

Ms Tohill:

The estimates are that around 63,000 tons of glass per annum goes into the municipal waste stream. Of that, around 23,000 tons is being recycled at the minute. As Dennis mentioned, we have engaged with the waste management group to look at the potential to recycle more of a number of waste streams. However, glass is one product on which we have come to an

agreement whereby we reckon that we could recycle an additional 14,000 tonnes to 18,000 tonnes each year. Through the Rethink Waste fund, we have had a number of applications for glass recycling schemes. Those have been successful and, at the minute, we are in discussions with councils about funding for that. That should, hopefully, have an impact.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for the presentation. We want you to furnish us with some figures. The Committee Clerk is writing away frantically, but, if we have other written information, I will get the Committee staff to send it to you. You could maybe respond in writing. Thank you very much.