

PRESS RELEASE

23rd February 2023 – For immediate release

Report raises warnings about commercial waste service “zoning”

A new report, released today (Thursday 23rd February 2023) by the Environmental Services Association (ESA) has warned against the undesirable unintended consequences of adopting commercial waste service “zoning” models in towns and cities across the United Kingdom.

The research report, compiled for the ESA by independent consultants 360 Environmental, suggests that limiting the number of waste service operators allowed to compete and operate in urban areas could be costly and complex to implement and would raise service prices for waste producers while putting waste collectors out of business – which in turn could undermine the viability of local waste infrastructure.

Adopting a zoning approach for recycling and waste collection in urban areas has been under consideration by Defra and the Scottish Government as part of wider policy reforms, with the latter legislating to introduce trial schemes in the future. As such, ESA commissioned 360 Environmental to learn from, and report on, experiences and outcomes where waste service zoning has been implemented in other comparable markets – for example in Los Angeles and New York in the USA – and through modelling to indicate how such an approach might work in practice in the UK (using Glasgow as an example city).

Interviews with stakeholders from other areas where zoning has been implemented found that the approach had been highly complex to implement, taking up to ten years in some cases, and had led to increased costs to waste producers while also reducing resilience, increasing risk and stifling innovation.

The modelling work for Glasgow also concluded that more waste producing businesses would see higher waste service costs under zoning; that a single operator may struggle to cope with one-off large-scale events (such as COP26) and that significant variation in the service requirements of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) compared with national multi-location and corporate businesses makes a one-size-fits-all service challenging.

Executive Director of the ESA, Jacob Hayler, said: *“Commercial waste service zoning has already been implemented elsewhere and we wanted to learn from the experiences of others to assess the opportunities of this approach in the UK as well as its potential pitfalls. From the research findings it is clear that there is significant potential for a range of damaging unintended consequences which run contrary to policy objectives, and that zoning is likely to be highly challenging to implement as well as being extremely disruptive to the waste sector, local authorities and waste producers.*

However, the findings do recognise that a more structured approach to commercial waste management could provide some benefits and meet similar policy objectives. We look forward to discussing these findings with Scottish Government and Defra officials and to working with them to develop an alternative approach which delivers the beneficial outcomes intended by zoning while avoiding the negative consequences experienced elsewhere.”

The report's author, Phil Conran, introduced the findings to an audience of recycling and waste sector delegates at the ESA Conference in London on Wednesday 22nd February.

Director of 360 Environmental, Phil Conran, said: *"I hope the report will give those considering zoning an insight into the practical issues that would need to be faced in the development, implementation and long term impact of such a concept. Waste management in the UK is a mature and well-developed sector under tight regulatory control that is widely undermined by lack of clear policy direction and poor enforcement. The research has indicated that zoning would add cost, minimise choice and create uncertainty that would stifle investment and innovation."*

ENDS

Notes to editors:

A. The report, *Commercial Waste Zoning: Implications for the United Kingdom* is available to view and download on the [publications page](#) of the ESA website.

B. About the ESA

The Environmental Services Association (ESA) is the trade association representing the UK's resource and waste management industry. Our members are directly delivering the UK's transformation to a more circular economy and are leading the sector's efforts to decarbonise recycling and waste management operations.

The ESA works with government, regulators and the public to deliver sustainable and high-performing waste and resource management solutions for the UK. Our strategic priorities are to set high operational standards for the sector; to deliver more recycling and focus on up-stream interventions to eliminate waste; and to decarbonise our sector by 2040. You can find out more about the ESA and our members' work in our [Annual Report for 2022](#)

C. For further details please visit www.esauk.org

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