

Water Services and Environment S.P.C.

Minutes of Meeting held on 6th December 2023

In attendance:

Committee Members:

Cllr. Suzanne Doyle (Chair), Cllr. A. Breen, Cllr. Íde Cussen, Cllr. V. Liston, Cllr. B. Dooley, Evan Arkwright, Emer Conway, Tom O'Connor

KCC Staff:

Ken Kavanagh, Chris Galvin, Dara Wyer, Mark Byrne

Apologies:

Marian Higgins (Director of Services), Cllr. B. Wyse

1. The meeting commenced by observing a moment of silence in remembrance of Marian Kenny, Mother of Councillor Brendan Wyse.
2. The Chair opened the floor to any declarations of pecuniary or beneficial interests under Section 177 of the Act, as amended. No declarations were made.
3. The minutes of 10 May 2023, previously circulated, were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Anne Breen, seconded by Evan Arkwright.
4. The committee received an update from Chris Galvin, Senior Engineer, on the EPA Annual Report on Environmental Enforcement Performance of Local Authority for the year 2022. The report noted that Kildare County Council was the only Local Authority to achieve the required standard across all grades.

The Chair acknowledged the exemplary performance achieved by the Council and notes that resources such as staff retention may be a key issue for the future.

Cllr. Liston queried how some of the Air Statistics reports were calculated. Chris Galvin provided details on how the numbers were generated and how noise complaints are tackled across multiple departments depending on the nature of the complaint.

5. A brief overview of Household Waste Collection was presented by Dara Wyer, Environmental Awareness Officer. The report included details of waste segregation, pricing bands and landfill levy increase to €85 per ton. DW also advised on how citizens should review their requirements of service providers and highlighted that current service providers provide a range of pricing categories to reflect differing requirements. Customers are also able to obtain service usage records from their current service provider.

In addition, DW advised from 1st January 2024, Waste Service providers are obliged to provide a separate food or garden waste bin to all households which may result in a lower overall charge per kilo of domestic waste with increased use of the “brown” bin, minimizing the amount of food waste going to landfill.

From 1st February 2024, a national Deposit Return Scheme on drinks bottles and cans, up to 3 liters in size, will come into effect. The Scheme is overseen by RE-TURN – www.re-turn.ie. All “in-scope containers” will have a branding in the form of a logo and serial number and/or a QR code. A deposit is payable at point of purchase, 15c for bottles or cans from 150ml up 500ml, inclusive, in size and 25c for containers exceeding 500ml (Maximum of 3L) in size.

All retailers that sell the in-scope containers must register with Re-turn in order to fulfil their environmental and legislative responsibilities and are obliged to accept returns of in-scope containers, regardless of point of purchase by the consumer, so long as they are in good condition. Retailers can opt to have an automated system in place, known as Reverse Vending Machines or RVM, but these are not mandatory. DW clarified that if a person receives a voucher from such machines, they can request it be converted to the cash value should they wish to. The Consumer will have the choice to use their refunded Deposit Fee against a store-bought purchase, receive in cash or put towards a charitable cause.

Small retailers can apply for a certificate of exemption from the scheme but must meet eligibility requirements and apply to Re-Turn directly. Where exemptions are granted, a certificate of exemption must be on display.

Cllr. Anne Breen and Cllr. Íde Cussen raised some concerns on disposal of medical waste. DW advised that at present it is deemed as general waste. Cllr. Cussen also queried if income-support is available in this area of waste and was advised that charging structures are a matter for the service provider and any income support issues may be better directed to the Department of Social Protection.

Cllr. Íde Cussen suggested that the design of the new reverse vending machines may present accessibility difficulties to a person with a disability. Despite attempts by volunteer groups to obtain an answer from RE-TURN to these concerns, no communication has been forthcoming from their communications team. Cllr. Cussen requested that the SPC issue a letter to the Department of the Environment seeking answers on this issue.

DW noted that some of RVM models demonstrated that may be used by the Re-turn scheme, meet the minimum specifications as set out in legislation, but not all models have been finalized. In previous months, some retailers have trailed stand-alone machines as a pilot scheme which may have given rise to concerns raised regarding accessibility issues, but that these stand-alone machines may not be in operation once the Deposit-Return scheme commences.

KK reminded the Members that a public consultation was held for the Draft Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy, and the opportunity to make a submission or comment was flagged to the SPC at the time. The Chair confirmed that this option was not taken. The final version of the Plan may address some of the concerns raised by the Councilors.

The Chair supported the idea that, with agreement of the Members of the SPC, a letter is issued directly from the SPC Members to the Department to express concerns over universal access to the Reverse Vending Machines.

Evan Arkwright raised questions on the National Deposit Return Scheme and how segregation issues may affect commercial interests. DW acknowledged that it may be challenging but all commercial interests need be in compliance with legislation. Waste Service providers should also be assisting and providing applicable services for commercial needs. Also noted that there will be a time period for changing over of stock to the newer branding under the scheme.

6. Agenda Item 5 – The Chair’s end of year review of the SPC 2022-2023 was circulated previously and the Chair put it to the floor that it be noted. All were in agreement.
7. Agenda Item 6 - Referred motion, implementation of QR codes on public street bins, from Cllr. Noel Connolly, Plenary meeting 29th May 2023. It was noted that a report was provided at the Plenary meeting, by the Director of Transport, which covered the topic of QR codes in full.

Cllr. Liston observed that simply placing QR codes be placed on the bins would not result in service improvements as expressed in the report provided to the Plenary by Celina Barrett, Director of Services.

The Chair noted that the topic was referred to the SPC but noted that opinions differed between the committee members with regard to QR codes.

The Chair recommends that the Transport Department, when carrying out a review into the overall bin services, considers the feasibility of introducing QR codes on bins as part of that review.

8. Agenda Item 6 – Consideration to referred motion from Cllr. Íde Cussen, Celbridge-Leixlip Municipal District meeting 16th June 2023. Accessibility of bring back sites in the County.

Cllr. Cussen highlighted some concerns that people with disabilities may find difficulties with using existing bottle bring back facilities in the County.

A discussion was facilitated, and Dara Wyer highlighted that the bottle banks are compliant with existing legislation, referencing the access point at 1.4m from the ground. He further noted that as Cllr. Cussen identified with the pilot scheme in

Dublin, the main obstacle is that the pilot units are smaller, and as a result are usually the first to be filled therefore rendering them inoperable by members of the public until the bins are serviced.

Cllr. Dooley raised issues of the location of the bottle banks within Athy town center and whilst the facilities are welcome, it is a challenge to maintain the location to a high standard.

9. The date of the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 7th February 2024, with a site visit to Glassco Recycling Ltd under consideration.
