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From: [PRIVATE OFFICE OFFICIAL, DEFRA]
Sent: 27 October 2017 14:00
To: [POLICY OFFICIALS]
Cc: PS/Therese Coffey
Subject: Notes from Soft Drinks Roundtable (24/10)

Hi [POLICY OFFICIALS]

I had pulled together my notes from Tuesday's Soft Drinks roundtable but was informed by [PRIVATE OFFICE OFFICIALS] that the policy teams usually send out a detailed policy note following roundtables. Hopefully my notes are of some use to you anyway.

Regards,
[PRIVATE OFFICE OFFICIAL]

DISCUSSION

1. Government's Role

Government has a legal obligation to improve recycling rates and has an ambition to have zero avoidable waste by 2050 as part of the Clean Growth Strategy. Litter is an issue on the streets and in the marine environment, and this justifies government intervention. The aim of any intervention would be to reduce litter and the amount of marine debris.

The use of virgin resources is unsustainable. It was acknowledged that industry and government both want an improved use of resources and the promotion of the circular economy. It would be better for industry to drive the solution rather than have government impose one but clarity from government on its desired outcomes would help the industry to focus their efforts.

2. Data

Limited data presents a challenge for decision-making. Recent studies aren't helpful for Defra due to the variation of their scope – i.e. some stats include milk and toiletries bottles as well as soft drinks. Defra's call for evidence on return and reward scheme for drinks containers needs producers to provide reliable data on recycling, on-the-go consumption and consumer research. However, there were concerns among producers about the confidentiality of their data.

Action: Officials to explore a way of aggregating data so as to avoid compromising commercial sensitivity.

3. Recycling Approaches

In the past there was an expectation that an increase in household recycling would lead to increased kerb-side recycling which didn't prove to be the case. A question was raised about the cost/benefit to Local Authorities if DRS reduced the amount of household or kerb-side recycling.

It was suggested that household recycling was confusing due to different contracts. However, this represents the diversity of housing stock and local government attitudes to contamination are shifting. A call for more support for Local Authorities to bolster existing household recycling infrastructure was made, noting that there was still room for improvement and industry could encourage this approach.

Some questioned whether two systems (kerb-side and DRS) would be confusing for consumers. It was suggested that consumers' were more interested in getting rid of the rubbish (convenience) rather than incentives for doing so. Officials countered that consumer may benefit from having more choice to deposit litter while on-the-go. Furthermore, it was recognised that DRS could be used to support on-the-go recycling or anti-litter efforts.

Attendees also raised the importance of a consistent approach across the UK, citing the potential for cross-border fraud as a concern for retailers and producers.

4. Packing & Consumer Preferences

Decisions on recycled materials are based on consumer preference. Environmentally-aware consumers like the idea of less plastic but others associate softer bottles with inferior quality. Officials raised that this could be an opportunity to adjust perceptions but producers explained that the environmental impact of packaging was low on consumer's priorities when buying a soft drink. It was suggested that it may be easier to address littering than attempt to educate consumers on materials and that environmentally conscious consumers were already doing their bit.

5. Producer Responsibility

Across Europe different formats of packaging are used. It was noted that Belgium had a recovery rate of 84% due to a producer responsibility scheme which factors in use and re-use, reducing the contribution required for the latter. While it was suggested that the UK could adopt such an approach or tariffs/levies, it was acknowledge that this may feed through to consumer prices.

It was suggested that producer responsibility schemes needed to be reformed to deliver a step change in the interactions between Local Authorities and producers. Reform of PRN through greater transparency on companies' recovery spend, ensuring the consistency of reused materials and taking into account litter was also suggested

6. Other Points for Considerations

- * Improving voluntary recycling wasn't discussed
- * Should there be a focus on improving existing schemes instead of introduce new ones?
- * Should the focus be on investing in the circular economy?
- * On circular economy, how can we get more back that we can re-use?

Regards,
[PRIVATE OFFICE OFFICIAL]

PS to Dr Thérèse Coffey MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs