

Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, 31st August 2023 - Motion – Item 14, Waste: Persistent Organic Pollutants

Rural areas and communities like Argyll and Bute make a significant and invaluable contribution to the economic and social identities of both Scotland and the United Kingdom. The opportunities our region offers are embraced with enthusiasm – whether it is our value as a tourist destination, our multi-million pound contributions to the global economy through export of our local produce, our scope to generate renewable energy and offset carbon emissions, our culture and heritage, and so much more.

However, it is very often a different reaction from both the Scottish and UK Governments when it comes to recognising the unique challenges with which rural areas must also contend – with both Holyrood and Westminster often pursuing one-size-fits-all solutions based on an urban, central-belt model and without full regard to the rich socio-economic and geographic picture that truly is Scotland.

The latest example is new guidance relating to the handling of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) often found in discarded household furniture like sofas, mattresses and other upholstered goods. While authorities know that the guidance is due to be issued soon, they have no clarity about precisely when – and this is crucial because what they do know is that they will have to adapt immediately, with no grace period afforded to find solutions or funds. This could happen as quickly as the first week in September.

For rural authorities like Argyll and Bute Council there is no straightforward solution to allow compliance with the new guidance, not least because of the potential costs involved and the fact that change must be implemented immediately. This could mean that this council has to find an additional £0.5m at extremely short notice indeed, to cover the revenue and capital costs that would be involved.

The Scottish Government says that this is being led by the UK Government but neither government is providing any extra funding to support councils to comply within such challenging and unrealistic timescales. While national governments argue back and forth, therefore, hard-pressed local authorities are left to find new solutions and hundreds of thousands of extra pounds within a few days.

Following consideration of the report from officers, this committee therefore:

- a) Calls upon the Scottish Government to introduce a grace period following the publication of its new guidance on handling POPs rather than requiring immediate implementation;
- b) Formally requests that the Scottish Government provides full funding for Argyll and Bute Council (whether directly or by seeking this from the UK Government) given the particular challenges and burdens that fall upon this authority given its remote, rural and island geography;
- c) Notes that the potential cost for Argyll and Bute Council could reach £0.5m in revenue and capital costs which, given the current pressured financial context, presents real affordability risks;
- d) Agrees that the Policy Lead for Climate Change and Environmental Services writes to the Minister with responsibility for Circular Economy to convey the views of the Committee;
- e) Requests that a further report is brought to the November meeting of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee to update on any legislation changes, associated costs and the Scottish Government's response to the Committee's formal request.