TRIPARTITE ADVISORY ON ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY OF THE WASTE MANAGEMENT SECTOR IN VIEW OF COVID-19

Introduction

1. This advisory provides recommendations on measures that service buyers and providers should adopt to ensure the sustainability of the waste management sector in view of COVID-19.

Crucial to Ensure Sustainability of Waste Management Sector

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant disruptions to the demand and supply of waste management services, and affected the livelihoods of waste management personnel. All stakeholders need to cooperate closely and make the necessary adjustments to ensure the sustainability of the waste management sector, with the support from the Government.

3. Notwithstanding that waste management is an outsourced service, service buyers play a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of service providers and the waste management sector. This includes making reasonable business arrangements that enable service providers to continue to employ their workers and retain their capabilities even during any Circuit Breaker period or in a downturn. This is so that essential waste management services can be maintained, and scaled up as businesses reopen and the economy starts to recover.

4. As the COVID-19 situation may likely be long drawn, unsustainable practices will compromise the ability of service providers to carry out waste management activities during this crucial period and in the longer term. Such an outcome would be detrimental to service buyers, service providers and waste management personnel, as well as the wellbeing of the general public.

Recommendations

5. **Maintain baseline level of waste management services.** Even when there are decreases in waste management services required (e.g. less waste is generated due to a reduction in footfall), it is recommended that service buyers comply with the existing Code of Practice on Environmental Health (COPEH) and Acts by maintaining some baseline level of waste management services to guard against potential public health or environmental issues, so that their premises/facilities can resume operations in a timely manner thereafter.

6. **Pay service providers appropriately**. Both service buyers and service providers should endeavour to honour existing contracts. Service providers should be paid as per contract terms, if there is no change in waste management services required. Specifically, service buyers should not ask for reduced contract fees on the basis that their service providers are receiving wage support through the enhanced Jobs Support Scheme which is intended to help enterprises retain their local employees during this period of economic uncertainty. If there is any significant

change in waste management services required, service buyers should engage service providers to reach a mutually agreed revision to payments for services. This also applies to instances where minimal services are required (e.g. due to temporary closure of premises), or conversely, where significant additional services are required.

7. **Exercise restraint in penalising service providers.** Service buyers should demonstrate understanding towards service providers during this period, by exercising restraint in activating contract clauses to penalise service providers, should there be any shortfall in service level due to circumstances beyond the service providers' control.

8. **Remunerate waste management personnel appropriately**. If there is any significant change in waste management services required, service providers should remunerate their waste management personnel appropriately:

a. For waste management personnel with higher workloads (e.g. due to increased frequency of waste collection), service providers should consider increasing their wages, and/or providing them with allowances. This is also in recognition that waste management personnel face additional exposure when collecting, handling and disposing waste.

b. For waste management personnel with reduced workloads, service providers should comply with the advisories related to salary and leave arrangements[1], including taking into consideration Government support[2] to retain and continue to pay their employees, even during periods of reduction in business activity.

9. **Seize opportunity to upskill workers.** Service providers should consider taking this opportunity to send waste management personnel, particularly those with decreased workloads, for training and upskilling. They can tap on Government support, such as the Workfare Training Support[3] and Enhanced Training Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), to help defray training costs as well as receive absentee payroll funding.

10. **Continue to ensure workplace safety and health of waste management personnel.** Our waste management personnel are at the frontline in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic; they face additional exposure and increased workloads. These risk factors reinforce the importance of service buyers and providers ensuring that workplaces are made safe for them. Employers must comply with requirements on Safe Management Measures at the workplace[4]. They should also ensure that workers are given sufficient rest to minimize fatigue-related accidents/incidents.

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[1] This includes the advisory on salary and leave arrangements during Circuit Breaker, issued on 6 Apr 2020 – www.mom.gov.sg/covid-19/advisory-on-salary-and-leave.

[2] The Government's Jobs Support Scheme provides companies, including waste management service providers, with wage support amounting to 75% (during the Circuit Breaker period), and at least 25% (other periods) of local employees' wages for 9 months.
www.iras.gov.sg/irashome/Schemes/Businesses/Jobs-Support-Scheme--JSS-/

[3] Enhanced as the Workfare Skills Support scheme from 1 Jul 2020.
www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/budget2020/factsheet-workfare-skills-support-scheme.pdf

[4] For more information on these requirements, see www.mom.gov.sg/covid-19/requirements-for-safe-management-measures.

Employees should be provided with suitable personal protective equipment and cleaning/disinfecting agents (e.g. sanitisers) and be reminded to practise good personal hygiene at all times.

Conclusion

11. The COVID-19 pandemic is a difficult period for service buyers and providers, as well as waste management personnel. All stakeholders should share the responsibilities arising from changes in waste management services required. The tripartite partners urge stakeholders to work together, to review waste management needs and explore voluntary renegotiation of contracts or payments for variations in waste management arrangements. Waste management personnel should be appropriately recognised and remunerated for any increased workload and risks they shoulder. This will help ensure the sustainability of the waste management sector and keep Singapore's environment clean during and after this COVID-19 situation.

12. For further queries, please contact:

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