

Winning More Converts with Sustained Effort

The country discards an estimated 434 million tonnes of waste annually or to put it into context, nine times the combined bodyweight of everybody living in Britain! We are recycling more and considerable progress has been made since the Waste Strategy 2000 vision of sustainable waste management was launched. Progress has been achieved across all sectors including

- recycling and composting of household waste doubling in the last four years
- more packaging waste is recovered and recycled up from 33% to 56% in six years
- commercial and industrial waste recycling up from 39% to 45% and construction and demolition waste up from 35% to 50%
- public awareness of recycling is greater than for any other environmental issue
- new and stronger markets for recycled materials have been developed with the help of bodies such as WRAP (the Waste & Resources Action Programme)

Despite all this more needs to be done and Defra has set out the Governments view in its revised Waste Strategy. Consultation closed in early May on the development of the proposals for a revised strategy and the policies for implementing it. To meet these new challenges, Defra want to shift the emphasis to meet targets by putting greater focus on waste prevention and embedding this in the wider Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) agenda. Additionally the new strategy puts a greater focus on sustainable waste management in the non municipal sector, which produces over ten times the size of household waste. APSE particularly supports this greater emphasis on business and commercial waste and for councils to handle this waste to improve waste performance. Defra intend for this to be achieved with greater integration of planning and procurement between municipal and some non-municipal waste.

The revised waste strategy aims to consolidate current Government policies and sets out a number of proposals to tackle the new challenges. One of these is keeping the pricing framework under review through initiatives such as the landfill tax, LATS and the current local household incentive schemes. Interestingly the consultation refers to the Lyons Inquiry into local government which is also covering charging issues. A number of suggestions for local taxes on waste have been made and clearly Defra are not ruling out these issues until Lyons report is released at the end of 2006.

All this is to be accompanied with increased national targets for recycling and composting of household waste (40% by 2010, 45% by 2015 and 50% by 2020) to make a much bigger contribution to overall recovery targets for municipal waste. Despite this it was announced in mid May that that all recycling targets

for local authorities would remain stationary leading into 2007/08, with the exception of those with the lowest targets. This means that the minimum recycling target in the UK for 2007/08 will be 20% with a total of 143 councils affected by the new target. However, many of these have already achieved the targets including 5 of the current top 10 recyclers in the country (Vale Royal, Harborough, Cherwell, Tamworth and Rushcliffe).

Does the fact that Defra have ruled out new higher targets mean that local authorities are likely to slow down on the recycling? The evidence seems to indicate no - as a trawl of websites show initiative after initiative being put into place. It is hard to single out particular local authorities when practically all are introducing schemes to continue the impressive improvement in recycling rates.

The London Borough of Sutton is currently the APSE Team of the Year for Waste Management. The authority has set itself a number of challenges which have increased its sense of purpose through well defined goals and challenges. Waste collection services in Sutton are provided by the in-house team and the service's overall improvements (including a four star rating in 2004's CPA inspection) have been marked by their ability to innovate and deliver in five main areas.

1. Expanding the service to all residents within the borough (both household and flat residents) to bring the public on board and foster a sense of community by extending the scope of service into new areas.
2. Improving the quality of material delivered to the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) which achieved reduced contamination levels from over 40% in 2002/03 to 18% in 2003/04 and 12% in 2004-05.
3. Addressing the high cost of services resulting from the introduction of recycling collections. Efficiencies have been secured in an extremely innovative fashion which has stemmed from real success in attracting external funding and awards.
4. Improving customer satisfaction with waste collection services. Sutton has been pretty adept on this front deploying a PR strategy and disseminating articles and leaflets while setting up focus groups that give 'voice and choice' to users. This year satisfaction levels have reached 88% for waste collection and 86% for recycling collection.
5. Meeting its statutory recycling target of 30% for 2005/06.

All of this has been achieved by re-orienting the service in the direction of a modern working structure able to deliver solutions. Using well defined aspirations and objectives, that are challenging yet deliverable, Sutton's waste service proves just what can be achieved by responding to public concerns while reorienting services towards holistic delivery. Critically, the authority has ensured

new and creative funding streams through awards that build on an upward spiral of success proving that excellent services attract funds – they need not cut services or staff.

The second case study relates to St Edmundsbury who were officially classified as England's top recycler in the Defra Municipal Waste statistics for 2004/2005. The Council's Waste Management Service provides a three bin, alternate weekly kerbside collection of residual waste, compostable waste and a dry recyclable material to all of the 44,000 households in the Borough. In 2004/05 it was recorded as having a recycling and composting rate of 50.64%. This has been achieved through maintaining political support, introducing robust policies and ensuring a continuous education campaign to the public, the Members and both staff and crews.

The Council's approach has been adopted as the model for all Suffolk Local Authorities who are working towards implementing the 3-stream collection approach. The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy has a vision of 60% recycling/composting by 2010.

Following monitoring and evaluation carried out as part of WRAP funding, the Council intends to focus attention on improving the capture rate of key material streams. This will be done through a targeted communication campaign including door knocking the difficult to reach. The Council is also focusing on improving the quality of material collected. This is being addressed using a red/yellow card system to advise residents of what materials should be put in each bin. It is estimated that this system can achieve a 55% recycling rate through a continuing education campaign and a review of the bring bank facilities. Where necessary enforcement will be used under Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA).

This issue has become more topical since Exeter City Council became the first local authority to take a resident to court for contaminating their recycling bin. If recycling rates are to continue their upward trend then everyone has to play their part. APSE has concerns in how this is being portrayed in certain sections of the media as an extension of the "nanny state". Whilst the enforcement under section 46 of the EPA gives councils real teeth, APSE believes local authorities only intend utilising these powers after numerous warnings have been given and that this will be undertaken in conjunction with increased education and awareness raising campaigns.

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