

GOVERNING SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT

*Durham County Council
Waste SMART Initiative*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since *Waste Strategy 2000*, municipal waste policy (MWP) has undergone considerable upheaval. Local authorities which until recently had to concern themselves with little more than the collection, planning and disposal of waste, and a relatively narrow range of regulations, today have a radically broadened agenda with progressive statutory performance targets for recycling and composting, as well as responsibilities for diversion of waste from landfill, recovery from waste and waste minimisation. In the wake of these developments, the *Governing Sustainable Waste Management*¹ project seeks to examine what facilitates, and what prevents, the development and implementation of sustainable MWP in the North East of England, and the wider lessons which can be learned across the UK. The project involves an overview of MWP across the region, and the analysis of three case-studies: Durham County Council; Newcastle City Council; and Stockton Borough Council. In each case, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with local policy-makers and stakeholders, and a range of policy documents have been analysed. Six initiatives which aim to reduce, re-use or recycle waste have been selected for further research, involving semi-structured interviews with relevant actors, documentary analysis, and interviews and participant observation with those communities involved in the particular waste management initiative. These research 'snapshots' are intended to illustrate the range of good practice taking place across the region and the challenges facing the development of sustainable waste management policy and practice.

This report focuses on Durham County Council (DCC)'s Waste SMART – Sort, Minimise And Recycle Team - scheme. The research involved semi-structured interviews with relevant DCC staff, informally interviewing householders while accompanying SMART team door-to-door canvassers, observing a SMART school presentation and people's engagement with the scheme at community events. The report details the development and day-to-day work of SMART, and considers the impact of the initiative in terms of waste education, increasing recycling rates and for sustainable waste management more broadly. We hope that in highlighting the positive lessons and the challenges that our research has uncovered, the report will be of interest to local authorities and waste contractors, as well as to regional and national government.

The report is structured in the following way. Section 2 provides background to DCC's waste management strategy and practice, and Section 3 outlines the specific nature of the SMART scheme. Section 4 highlights the good practice witnessed in this initiative, while Section 5 considers the main challenges facing the scheme, in terms of operating within a two-tier local authority context, auditing pressures, and issues of involving the public in recycling schemes. Section 6 identifies the implications of these findings for sustainable waste management, and Section 7, in conclusion, places this report within the broader framework of the findings from the research project as a whole.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 DCC municipal waste policy

With a two-tier local authority structure in County Durham, waste management responsibilities are split between DCC as waste disposal authority (WDA) and the District Councils as waste collection authorities (WCAs). DCC also has those responsibilities associated with being the Waste Planning Authority. The main waste contractor in Durham is Premier Waste Ltd, originally established as the County's arms-length waste disposal company. Together with the WCAs and Premier, in January 2001 DCC produced a Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. The JMWMS demonstrates long range strategic thinking extending beyond immediate targets. Whilst recognising the uncertainties attached to emerging technological alternatives to landfill and incineration, it nevertheless commits to pursuing them in

¹ The project team acknowledges the support of H J Banks & Co. Ltd. funders of the project through the Landfill Tax Credits Scheme, facilitated by Entrust. We are also grateful for the support of the International Centre for Regional Regeneration and Development, University of Durham. Finally we wish to thank our many respondents for the time and support they have given to the project to date. For more details, visit the project web pages via www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/. For more information about MWP in Durham, see Watson and Bulkeley (2004).

recognition of the ongoing necessity to manage that waste which is residual to reuse and recycling efforts. In addition, DCC has identified waste as one of its corporate priorities and has a dedicated Cabinet Member for Waste Management, a level of political support which is unusual amongst local authorities².

In terms of basic municipal waste management infrastructure, the County has seventeen Household Waste Recycling Centres and Civic Amenity sites, three waste transfer stations and five operational landfill sites. Districts manage an extensive network of recycling 'bring' sites. The whole county is currently served by kerbside recycling schemes (see below), and there are a range of other waste initiatives in place – including home composting, the development of an aerobic digester, and the promotion of cloth nappies (covered in a separate report as part of this research project).

2.2 Key drivers for change

Since *Waste Strategy 2000*, and in response to the 1999 Landfill Directive, the ways in which municipal waste is managed has come under critical scrutiny and legislative pressure. The introduction in 2001 of statutory performance targets for recycling and composting waste for each local authority under the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) framework has had a significant impact on levels of recycling and composting across the UK. In 2002/03, 8% of municipal waste generated in County Durham was recycled or composted and in 2003/04, DCC exceeded their target of recycling and composting 10% of total municipal waste by achieving a rate of 17%, placing the target of 18% by 2005/06 firmly within reach. This rapid rate of increase can, in large measure, be attributed to the roll out of 'kerbside collection' schemes for recyclables (see 2.3).

Nonetheless, between 2000/01 and 2002/03, municipal waste collected increased by 2.5%³ - an increase roughly in line with the national average but significantly below the trend North East (almost 7% in the same period⁴). Although this is encouraging, while waste arisings increase, meeting proportional targets for recycling and composting becomes more difficult. In addition, as national and European targets for diverting waste from landfill become ever more stringent, and as the new Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) comes into place, there is an onus on local authorities to increase the proportion of material being recycled and re-used, as well as to reduce the amount of waste produced in the first place, and this remains the central driver to DCC's MWP.

2.3 Recycling in County Durham

When DCC decided to introduce a kerbside recycling service, Premier Waste Management Ltd won the contract. Initially, only Durham City, Sedgefield and Chester-le-Street joined the scheme, called 'Kerb-It' (collecting paper, cans and glass), reducing the cost effectiveness of the overall contract for the authorities since not all District Councils (DCs) in the county participated. Easington already had a separate kerbside collection of paper, and intended to extend this to other materials. However, as this became financially untenable, Easington joined the Kerb-It scheme. Meanwhile, Teesdale, Wearside and Derwentside DCs established the West Durham Recycling partnership, and with a grant from DEFRA initiated their own 'Green Box' scheme, arguing that their predominantly rural character made the Kerb-It scheme financially unviable and therefore not best value for their residents. The Green Box scheme collects paper, cans, glass, cardboard and textiles. Although SMART is a County Council managed project, the aim is to work closely with all seven District Councils, with Darlington Borough Council, a separate Unitary authority who also uses the Kerb-It scheme, as an additional partner.

² Audit Commission (2004) *"Inspection Report: Waste Services, Durham County Council."* London: Audit Commission.

³ DEFRA (2004) *"Municipal Waste Management Survey 2002-03."* London: DEFRA

⁴ www.wrap.org.uk.

3 IMPLEMENTING THE SMART SCHEME

3.1 Securing funding

The SMART scheme is a two year programme (2004-2006) funded by WRAP, a central government agency charged with a mission to “accelerate resource efficiency by creating efficient markets for recycled materials and products, while removing barriers to waste minimisation, re-use and recycling”⁵. One of the areas within which WRAP works is in improving awareness and education about waste issues. This work includes national advertising campaigns and information targeted at the specific initiatives it is running, including home composting and the promotion of cloth nappies (see other reports from this research project), as well as a dedicated scheme to work with local authorities to improve participation in recycling schemes. Funded through DEFRA’s Waste Implementation Programme to the tune of £30 million, WRAP’s ‘communication and awareness’ programme is designed to directly focus on ‘increasing participation in recycling and waste minimisation initiatives in England’.⁶ However, as WRAP goes on to explain, the emphasis has been on:

- ‘a national programme of underpinning messages to raise public awareness of waste and recycling issues’; and
- ‘a programme of support for locally-focused awareness schemes directly supporting local authority recycling, to offer further communications support as they enhance or develop new infrastructure’ to complement work to establish new recycling initiatives

Funding for the SMART scheme was secured through a bid to the ‘monitoring and evaluation’ arm of this stream of funding. DCC were seeking funding to conduct an awareness campaign and responded to the invitation to tender for funding under this initiative. Initially designed to encompass a wide range of educational and monitoring initiatives, encompassing both waste minimisation and recycling, the focus of the scheme was reduced in the light of the funding made available by WRAP and their stipulation as to what should be included. In this sense, SMART is driven by a central government agenda focused on particular forms of engaging the public and the need to evaluate the impact of kerbside recycling schemes.

3.2 Establishing the scheme

The resulting SMART initiative consists of a door knocking campaign – through which information is disseminated and feedback about the kerbside scheme collected by means of a survey – together with education events. In order to run the scheme, a team of eight staff have been employed: one project manager, one team supervisor and six door-to-door canvassers. DCC took the decision to employ SMART staff via an employment agency. This was based on experience with a previous scheme undertaking door-to-door canvassing, in which staff employed directly by the council took well above average sick leave, and left abruptly for ‘better’ jobs. Given the lengthy council recruitment procedure to replace staff, lower operational numbers than intended placed more pressure on the remaining team, resulting in more sick days and people leaving employment, and so on in a negative spiral. In addition, DCC wanted to ‘hit the ground running’ as soon as funding for SMART was received. Management recognised that it was necessary to enable the agency staff team to develop a sense of ownership of the project, thus, once recruited, staff were given training on waste issues, including visits to landfill sites and recycling facilities. They were also asked to decide on a staff ‘uniform’ and have input into the promotional literature design and branding of the project.

Following liaison and preparation of work with each District’s waste minimisation/recycling officer, all of the eight partnership authorities were offered three weeks of canvassing time in Year 1 (April 2004-05), to be followed with six weeks in Year 2 (2005-06). In addition, the project manager and team supervisor also developed and produced a presentation and information pack to take into primary schools in each area during Year 2. Letters offering the SMART initiative to visit schools have gone out to one area after another (again after liaison with local waste minimisation/recycling officers), but trips to schools are on demand rather than necessarily geographically sequential.

⁵ http://www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities/local_awareness/index.html

⁶ http://www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities/local_awareness/index.html

3.3 Awareness raising and education

One of the key rationales for the SMART scheme is that of awareness raising about the kerbside collection services on offer in each District. This is achieved through the door-to-door canvassing by means of handing over a SMART information leaflet promoting recycling, plus any additional materials the DCs wish to be included that are relevant to local services. If householders are not present, the promotional leaflets are put through the letterbox. The leaflets have a short questionnaire about current recycling practices, with a prize offered as an incentive for people to complete and return it.

Public education also takes place through SMART's work in local schools. Each primary school in the partnership areas is offered one visit from the SMART team, which involves using school assembly time to deliver a short talk on the benefits of recycling and the facilities available in their area. The schools work was originally planned to be area by area, but in practice this is not proving the case. Not least given the long summer holidays, SMART are reliant on headteachers to offer available dates for presenting at assemblies. The presentation involves the children in a 'hands up' quiz, and they are encouraged to take part in a drawing competition, for which a small cash prize is offered. A 'teachers pack' has also been prepared so that school staff can follow up on the assembly. In addition, following approaches from members of community groups, SMART undertook two community talks during the first year, which also sought to educate the community about the potential for recycling.

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

In addition to its educational role, the canvassing involves completing a questionnaire with householders as a means for monitoring the uptake of the kerbside recycling services and for assessing the potential barriers to increasing levels of participation in schemes. Central government funding has become increasingly onerous in terms of feedback and auditing requirements, which are often opaque until after the funding is granted, putting increased pressure on local authority staff to fulfil the necessary paperwork and provide statistics. For this reason, DCC decided to contract much of the data analysis of the SMART project to a company used by WRAP itself – a decision featured in the funding bid. The canvassers are, therefore, required to complete a questionnaire with householders designed by the contracted company. Originally, the intention was to 'hit' 13,000 houses in each area during the first year, but that figure was revised to 6-7,000 houses as in practice it took longer to get



Image courtesy of www.recyclenow.com

to each house and complete the survey than was anticipated. At the same time, an evening telephone survey has been undertaken across householders canvassed door to door (both those present and absent when the SMART team were in their street), by the same company contracted to undertake monitoring.

Despite these auditing measures, there is not as yet a clear picture about the impact of the initiative. It is notoriously difficult to assess how honest people are being about their recycling habits through telephone or door-to-door surveys (see below). At time of writing, while Premier/West Durham reported some increases in tonnages of recyclable materials collected in areas where the SMART team had canvassed, there had also been increases in areas SMART had not been. DCC and the data analysis company are still attempting to correlate changes in recycling practices to the specific impacts of the SMART initiative.

4 GOOD PRACTICE IN COUNTY DURHAM

4.1 Partnership working in a two-tier authority

Recognising the difficulties involved in two-tier working, the SMART team have been careful to ensure that they tackle geographical/council differences efficiently and effectively. The Premier and Green Box schemes collect different materials for recycling in different receptacles - black boxes, green boxes, blue boxes, as well as a variety of wheelie bins have all been used at some point across the county, and varies across DCs. To address this situation, SMART has developed two leaflets, one for Kerb-It and one for Green Box areas, and in addition liaise as closely as possible with local waste officers. The canvassing team are briefed on the local political issues regarding recycling collections, and hand out any relevant literature that the District would like passed on to householders.

In addition, every endeavour is made to 'be fair' to all Districts, in order to avoid potential 'political problems'. For example, the area canvassed immediately prior to Christmas in Year 1 (a traditionally bad time to undertake questionnaires), or over the winter period (when people are less likely to spend time talking on their doorstep) will be worked at different times in Year 2. It has also been recognised that the team are learning and developing their techniques/skills, so those areas canvassed early in the first year will be worked later in the second year in order that they benefit from the knowledge accumulated through the project. The importance of funding for the SMART scheme in creating an arena within which partnership working can develop has been fully recognised by DCC:

"The communication fund has enabled a two tier local authority to come together to work in a successful partnership, focused on raising awareness of the kerbside recycling infra-structures in operation. Without the funding we would not have been able to develop such a comprehensive programme for tackling this issue."

Claire Charles, Durham County Council (WRAP website, September 2005)⁷

However, the degree to which such local sensitivity may be successful is dependent on SMART staff developing good working relationships with the relevant authority officers in the DCs – a two-way process. In reality, closer liaison has occurred in some districts than others, and getting/keeping DCs 'on board' is a constant consideration and challenge for the initiative. We return to these issues below.

4.2 Creating an impression

One of the key tasks for any awareness raising initiative is to have a clear message and visible presence within those communities which it seeks to influence. The SMART scheme has achieved this in three ways. First, members of the canvassing team were involved in the design of the SMART logo and uniform, creating a buy-in to the project. Second, when going from door to door, the team and their message are clearly identifiable. The initiative has a particularly strong physical presence, in that the team get around in four black 'Smart' cars, inherited from a previous project. They immediately send a message concerning good

⁷ See Waste Watch <http://www.recyclezone.org.uk> and Recycle More <http://www.recycle-more.co.uk/>

environmental practice (low fuel use), and the name of the initiative was developed to utilise this. Parked four in a row, covered in recycling and the DCC and District Council logos, they are quite an eye-catcher and raise interest. Third, the project branding is consistent and effective, from the ‘uniforms’ of the staff to the promotional materials produced.

Beyond first impressions to the public, the research found the SMART members of staff to be dedicated to their tasks, despite their recruitment via an employment agency. In particular, the project manager and team supervisor are putting over and above the personal effort and enthusiasm into their work than may be expected, in particular regarding designing the schools presentation and teachers pack. Despite the cold weather experienced while researching the canvassing team in action, all staff remained courteous and committed as they spoke to householders. This is in part due to DCC endeavouring to enable the team to have ownership of the scheme, but also due to the individuals themselves. However, there are long term issues around staff motivation that we return to below.

5 KEY CHALLENGES

5.1 Auditing pressure and public engagement

The need to audit and account for the resources deployed in promoting household recycling effectively shape the way in which the SMART scheme have sought to engage the public. Two specific challenges emerged from this situation. First, SMART staff are unhappy with the questionnaire itself, stating that while it attempts to capture people’s kerbside recycling habits, it is over-simplistic (not able to capture recycling habits beyond kerbside, for example) and an obstacle to raising awareness. Staff believe that the questionnaire dictates their encounter on the doorstep, and leaves them no opportunity for addressing issues of waste minimisation. Despite having revised the target number of houses SMART hits in each district downwards, staff still feel under pressure to curtail time spent at each door in order to achieve the numbers influenced by funding requirements.

Second, and linked to the issue of limited time at the doorstep, the SMART team believe people give responses that they think they *should* (that they are keen/regular recyclers) when visible evidence is often to the contrary – such as recycling boxes filled with rubbish in the garden or binliners filled with glass and plastic bottles. SMART staff have been unconvinced by reports coming back from the data analysis company who, in addition to the questionnaires completed at the doorstep, undertake a ‘follow-up’ telephone survey. For example, the report regarding Easington (Year 1), stated that 87% of householders surveyed were ‘dedicated recyclers’, totally in contradiction to the team’s experience (both regarding verbal comments and visual observation) on the doorsteps.

Moreover, although going door-to-door does bring a visible presence to the recycling message (as discussed above), what is more problematic is the *practice* of door-to-door canvassing and the extent to which it serves as a means through which to undertake the sorts of forms of engagement which can lead to behavioural change. The research found, for example, that:

- some householders resent being questioned on their doorstep (their private space), and are “fed up” with surveys in general;
- staff do not like to keep residents talking for long in bad weather, especially older people, as they worry the cold/wet may cause illness;
- doorstep engagement does not, in general, enable discussion beyond a brief, superficial level;
- targets for completing questionnaires appear to deter debate regarding issues other than kerbside recycling.

The SMART scheme also has targets regarding the number of schools involved, thus each school gets only one visit. While the ‘teachers pack’ has been developed to promote the uptake of waste education in schools, this is ultimately dependent on (already overstretched) individual teacher’s enthusiasm and commitment. Similarly, although a positive outcome from the drawing competition has been the ‘joining up’ evident between the SMART campaign

locally and the national 'Big Recycle' initiative, there is little feedback for the children involved. There is a long period between entry into the competition and prize giving (end of SMART project, April 2006), which risks losing the recycling message among primary age children. In addition, there has also been a lack of imagination in terms of offering a financial prize for children – something linked with waste minimisation/recycling would perhaps have reinforced the message. One member of the SMART team believed that a lack of follow-up and only superficial relationships with schools decreased the potential for meaningful or lasting waste education work to be achieved by the project. Little time to develop relationships with schools/teachers, and follow up on SMART assemblies, is a significant challenge to the effectiveness of the scheme.

5.2 Taking local knowledge and concerns into account

A further challenge brought by the focus on monitoring and evaluating public recycling behaviour by means of the survey questionnaire is the lack of scope for feedback to those implementing educational programmes and the kerbside scheme itself.

Although the SMART team were consulted initially as to what they thought would be relevant in the questionnaire by DCC, they did not feel that their ideas had been included in the final design by the contracted market research company. Most stated that they are restricted by the questionnaire and de-motivated by the resulting reports. Equally, observations and comments which they have gathered through their door-to-door encounters cannot be fed back into the process of seeking to develop policy in order to increase public involvement in kerbside recycling schemes. At the same time, members of the public who raise concerns on the doorstep with the SMART team often feel frustrated that their views will not be taken into consideration.

In terms of the issues which are raised at the doorstep and which could be incorporated into further policy design, evidenced during the course of this research, householders commented mostly on what they found difficult/inconvenient with regard to the kerbside schemes, in particular that:

- full boxes are too heavy to lift;
- paper in lidless boxes blows away, littering the local environment;
- dogs/cats/children tear bags/get into boxes and litter streets;
- the time of collection is inconvenient;
- there is a lack of care by collection staff – gates left open, boxes not replaced where they were left, additional carrier bags of recyclable material not collected;
- confusion regarding the type/range of materials to be separated – especially when people had moved from another area where different materials were collected and/or had knowledge of family/friends living elsewhere with different facilities offered;
- irritation that plastics are not collected, often leading to a reticence 'to bother' separating other materials.

While a few individuals stated that it was the responsibility of the council to separate waste "that's what we pay council tax for", most people understood themselves to have a role to play in separating materials – whether they actively recycled or not.

5.3 Preaching to the converted?

During Year 1, SMART canvassing occurred between 9am and 5pm. This appears to have had a significant impact on the respondent profile. The majority of householders present during these hours are either retired/over 60 or mothers with young children. This research found that, in general:

- recycling among the retired/over 60 group was high, with individuals stating that they had time to undertake waste separation plus the inclination to do so based on a generational cultural proclivity, often linked with living through rationing during the war and not wasting resources;
- mothers of young children either reported having little time for waste separation, and appeared unconvinced that they would change their habits, or were already keen recyclers linking environmental sustainability to a better future for their children.

The challenge for the initiative is that SMART becomes little more than an affirmation exercise if it is only engaging with those already convinced and committed recyclers, especially in view of the limited nature of public engagement outlined above. While the telephone survey achieves a wider spread of respondents, it is purely an information-gathering exercise and does not attempt to influence behaviour. This drawback has been identified by SMART management, and canvassing in year 2 is starting to include evening and weekend work to increase the project's effectiveness. However, the bulk of staff time remains concentrated in the 'working week'.

Furthermore, the project's stated aim is to focus on 'middle band' housing: that is, DCC has specifically set out to target middle income/middle class households. DCC believe that this social group is likely to yield most increase in recycling percentages – and most value for money in terms of funding outputs – because they are perceived to be more likely to listen to the message and act. This middle band are compared with deprived neighbourhoods/ working class areas, where householders are expected to not be concerned about waste/ environmental issues due to more pressing social concerns such as unemployment, education, and drug misuse. Certainly, SMART staff reported that in Easington, an area classed as 'deprived', there had been little interest among residents in completing the questionnaire, and many houses were boarded up – the area was "a waste of time". With regard to 'upper band' housing, one member of staff commented: "it takes too long to get around the posh housing estates, they're all detached with long drives, and no one's ever in".

Such neighbourhoods may be targeted in the future, but currently DCC consider them to offer low returns for SMART team effort. This represents a challenge, though, in both environmental terms – low recycling rates are completely unaddressed – and social terms – the potential that groups marginalised from majority society through socio-economic positioning may be further excluded from wider community activity and belief systems in terms of engagement in changing environmental practices. In addition, the decision to target only primary schools means that the waste agenda is missing at secondary school level. Again, SMART is limited by time and money in how much it can attempt, but there is a significant trend across environmental waste initiatives to focus on younger children, in a perceived belief that they are more open to information (and also, then, offer better 'results' in terms of auditing and BVPIs). Organisations such as Waste Watch and Recycle More provide dedicated education materials predominantly aimed at primary school children – on the Recycle More website, for example, three times as many ideas/examples of educational materials were offered for this age group than for secondary school children, while on the Waste Watch recycle zone, the 'Wise up to Waste' resource pack aimed at older secondary school students was no longer available⁸. While beyond the scope of the current SMART initiative, the challenge will be to ensure that that good work achieved at the primary level is not lost through a failure to reinforce the waste minimisation/recycling message throughout teenage education.

5.4 Policy fragmentation

Despite the efforts which have gone into making the SMART scheme work across the two-tier landscape of County Durham, issues of policy fragmentation remain a challenge to the initiative. There are still underlying tensions in the area, especially due to the split across the county in terms of recycling provision: Kerb-It in Durham City and the east, Green Box scheme provision in the west. Given that the West Durham partnership was enabled to start its kerbside scheme through a DEFRA grant, it appears that central government's rhetorical support for joint working is undermined by the practices of its constituent bodies. Such

⁸ See research into 'pro-environmental behaviour', Hobson, K. (2003) "Thinking Habits into Action: the role of knowledge and process in questioning household consumption practices", *Local Environment*, 8(1), pp. 95-112.

disunity in terms of municipal waste management/practice is further evidenced through two other funding outcomes. First, the West Durham partnership (Derwentside, Teesdale and Wear Valley DCs) were successful in securing funding in the first round of DEFRA's Waste Minimisation fund, and DCC were not, exacerbating tension across the county. Secondly, West Durham also have a public education scheme, the 'Roaming Recycler', running concurrently with SMART, enabled by money from the 'performance improvement and communications' part of the WRAP communications fund. This initiative is different from SMART, and specifically addresses the rural nature of west Durham by taking a vehicle around village community centres/libraries/schools rather than door knocking. Both initiatives are aware of the potential confusion for the public receiving two sets of information. However, there is minimum communication between the two project team leaders: at the time of research, there had been no feedback across the schemes regarding positives, negatives, or learning outcomes of the different approaches, which seems an opportunity lost for both. In addition, DCC were concerned that west Durham project was attempting to 'poach' one of the SMART members of staff, creating further tension rather than a closer relationship between the local authorities and projects.

The second area of fragmentation is that of the day to day delivery of the project by different organisations and individuals. The contracting out of the surveying and monitoring parts of the scheme – and the challenges discussed above – can lead to tensions between what is happening 'on the ground' and what appears in the District reports. Using agency staff to deliver the project is also not without its challenges. The canvassers, working as agency staff, do not get Bank Holidays, or paid double time for working them. Going into Year 2, many were not looking forward to upcoming evening and weekend work, in particular the members of staff who hold other part-time jobs at those times. While two of the team have completed further education courses in environmental management, both considered the job as a means to make money (to pay off student debt/save to travel) rather than a job they found vocational. Only the team manager and supervisor reported being inspired to put "more of ourselves" into the job – specifically as they had the opportunity to take ownership and have input into the direction of the project through developing the schools education pack and presentation.

Staff motivation is exacerbated by the third area of fragmentation, the short term nature of the project (two years). As with most external funding, SMART is limited in its capabilities by a finite timespan, and DCC are aware of the need to look to how SMART may be continued - the team manager has been tasked to set out an exit strategy in the last six months of the project. The difficulty lies in finding imaginative ways to re-invent projects for further funding (given that funding for repeat initiatives is virtually non-existent), and such short termism severely limits the focus of the project – exacerbating the tendency for the scheme to focus on monitoring current kerbside recycling practices rather than raising awareness of waste minimisation issues. This is a challenge that central government must address through review of its funding mechanisms, and local authorities through review of core budget expenditure. As the SMART team manager stated, public education is "really something you have to keep on at, going over and over, to really change people's habits – they slip back easily into the old ways."

6 IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT

6.1 Including and engaging the public

The SMART initiative is clearly raising awareness regarding kerbside recycling services among some sections of the population. However, our research suggests that if future projects are to be successful in including a wide range of communities in changing their waste practices, and engaging them in the process, changes will be necessary.

First, the doorstep approach – while effective in getting the message that recycling is important across – often fails to facilitate long term changes to waste behaviour or to gain an understanding of the factors at work locally which prevent people participating in recycling schemes. One way forward would be to redesign the survey on the basis of interviews with local people in County Durham to assess what the locally significant issues are. An alternative is to move away from the doorstep and into arenas where more deliberation can take

place. For example, re-directing resources to work with community groups not only addresses problems surrounding canvassing in cold/wet weather, but enables more in-depth discussion that can highlight the variety of impacts waste has on local environments and people's everyday living, such as implications of waste disposal, health issues, social well-being, etc. Increased awareness of these impacts, and benefits of waste reduction/recycling is vital to change attitudes to waste and shift waste habits.

Second, moving away from the doorstep allows education initiatives to move from being paper-based exercises to actually engaging with the physical processes through which material separation and recycling takes place. Having the relevant materials physically present at meetings/presentations, so that demonstrations can take place of even the most straightforward activities – such as which materials go in the kerbside box - can translate abstract information regarding recycling/minimisation into concrete knowledge, increasing recognition among individuals as to what they can recycle and how. This has been shown to increase the likelihood of changes to everyday practices among the public⁹.

Third, future projects should aim to engage with a wider cross-section of society, in order to ensure that the waste agenda is not only publicised among those already aware, to some degree, of the issues concerned, and that communities perceived 'not to care' about environmental matters are offered equality of service rather than excluded from specific initiatives. If local authority waste management is to be sustainable, it needs to engage with all residents.

Finally, in terms of working with schools, the research suggests that 'quality not quantity' is a more effective approach to facilitating real change. Any projects initiated to follow-on from SMART should consider targeting a lower number of schools and building relationships with teachers to ensure that the waste agenda is well integrated through school activity, from the implementation of recycling and minimisation activities within the school to linking waste issues to wider education through the national curriculum. This will require a long term strategy able to roll out such a program to more schools over time. Here again, 'hands on' activity is important, and in order to ensure that the 'waste message' is not lost through the teenage years, future waste education initiatives should look to secondary school work, to further develop and reiterate thinking on environmental impacts of waste.

6.2 Design of facilities and materials collected



Image courtesy of www.recyclenow.com

One practical means through which to start new forms of public engagement could be through the design of kerbside recycling facilities. On a day to day level, the predominant concerns voiced by the public surround the design of kerbside collection infrastructure. Community consultation as to preferred containers for materials could be undertaken (wheelie bins for recyclables, boxes with lids, etc) to identify those most likely to be utilised. Such consultation should also incorporate public views as to the range of factors affecting kerbside participation (timing, same/different day of the week as ordinary 'rubbish' collection, for example). Through these practical consultation exercises, more information could be given to communities to allay their concerns. For example, most authorities offer 'pull-out' assistance for those physically unable to put bins out for collection – residents can register their address which is passed on to collection companies. This service is not currently advertised, and the promotion of these and other issues could be linked to a 'hands on' public consultation exercise.

6.3 Joining up and sustaining activity on the ground

While SMART works hard to liaise with District Councils in terms of its intended activities, more could be done to join-up with other initiatives seeking to change everyday waste practices. For example, there is the potential to network with the 'Roaming Recycler' project in West Durham, and with waste minimisation projects, such as those targeting composting and cloth nappy use, which are currently separate. In addition, existing initiatives among the community and voluntary sectors to address waste issues may provide an entry point for new networks – and certainly, working with these organisations will be particularly crucial in achieving sustainable waste management across more deprived areas. Undertaking this sort of 'joining up' will provide a degree of continuity that one project cannot achieve within the current funding climate.

Nonetheless, many of the proposals documented here ultimately rely on improved funding, and the ***onus must be placed on central government to enable local authorities to implement long term strategies and resource intensive projects***. This will entail shifting the emphasis away from only evaluating projects on the basis of auditing measures and numerical/accountable outputs – public education may be difficult to quantify, but government needs to look to giving local authorities a more *enabling role* in this area. Equally, a focus on longer term funding may be able to avoid some of the pitfalls of employing agency staff with little job security, satisfaction or vocational commitment to a particular project. While these have not been critical issues to this project. Grant giving should also ensure that it supports rather than divides regional partnerships, putting the principles which underpin central government policy into practice.

6.4 Moving up the waste hierarchy

In focusing on capturing and encouraging residents' kerbside recycling habits, SMART largely fails to address waste minimisation as a message, despite WRAP's commitment to this issue as part of its overall remit and demonstrable interest in waste reduction initiatives within DCC. Interestingly, several of the SMART staff understood waste minimisation to be minimising what goes to landfill/incineration, and recycling therefore as a waste minimisation activity. In the sense of sustainable waste management, however, 'reduce' is intended to mean minimisation of materials consumed in the first place, and hierarchically placed above 'reuse' and 'recycling' in preferable waste practices. Encouraging participation in recycling schemes only goes so far in addressing the sustainability of DCC's waste management, and greater emphasis needs to be placed on minimisation. SMART is undoubtedly engaging with large numbers of residents across County Durham, and significant numbers of children through primary schools. Any follow up initiative would therefore be well placed to push the sustainable waste management agenda up the waste hierarchy by explicitly addressing issues of waste minimisation.

7 CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the introduction to this report, the SMART scheme in County Durham was one of six initiatives researched for the project *Governing Sustainable Waste Management*. In conclusion, we list here the broader recommendations for managing waste sustainably that have emerged through the study in order to place this case-study within its wider context. While our comments are directed primarily to the local authority level, due to their central role in municipal waste management, we believe that they will also make relevant reading for central government, and the business and community sectors.

7.1 Enhancing the policy framework

- *Critical mass* – the effective delivery of MWP across any one local authority demands a certain number of people and level of resources – a 'critical mass' – to work effectively and proactively across the increasing range of responsibilities that MWP entails.

- *Institutional integration* – progress with the new waste agenda is easiest where waste management is integrated into the local authority; for example, links with active LA21 sections can integrate waste concerns into a broader environmental remit and enrol competencies, such as engagement with the public and voluntary sector, traditionally absent in many waste management sections.
- *Strategic priority* - specifically, a division of responsibilities needs to be established to free up dedicated staff time for strategic issues: identifying and pursuing funding stream; and establishing and maintaining contacts and networks across and beyond the authority. Clearly, any such ‘division’ needs to be done carefully to maintain suitable integration between strategy and operations.
- *Political support* - committed officers can do much in an ambivalent political environment, but with effective political support, progress can be faster and more far reaching.
- *Active networking* – locally engaging relevant partners, nationally providing links to key gatekeepers, and internationally learning from other local authorities helps to provide critical resources.
- *Embracing change* – a readiness to take on new challenges and to ‘think outside the box’ can yield dividends; this demands the creation of a culture in which there is a willingness to experiment and to take appropriate risks in response to a dynamic policy environment.

7.2 Moving up the waste hierarchy

- *Process alongside progress* – activities such as partnership building, engaging with the public, and developing new channels of communication should be valued by local authorities as much as monitored outcomes, with the recognition that these processes lead to longer term sustainable waste management. It is also important that central government actively support authorities endeavouring to put such mechanisms in place.
- *Rethinking monitoring* – the relevance of re-use and reduction need to be recognised within monitoring regimes, and the ways in which waste is ‘measured’ creatively re-imagined in order to make these behaviours ‘count’. Unless re-use and reduction are brought within the ‘target’ sphere, there remains little incentive for North East authorities to seriously engage with or commit funding to them.
- *The importance of the intangible* – re-considering the social and economic benefits of re-use and reduction will enable authorities and other bodies to bring waste issues into other areas of policy and practice, and address waste more coherently and effectively.
- *Moving beyond formal mechanisms* – recognising the informal networks and deliberative processes through which waste reduction and re-use occur at a day-to-day level, there is a need to enable the social space/climate for them to develop, and encompass informality and discursive engagement within waste management.
- *Challenging waste ‘norms’* – the image of waste as dirty, and secondhand as inferior, must be changed, if as a society we are to really engage with the waste debate, adopt sustainable attitudes towards waste management and alter waste habits. Such a paradigm shift in how waste is imagined may be aided by a move to considering ‘materials’ rather than ‘waste’ as the basis for policy interventions.

For further information about the research project and its findings, please follow the links from: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/>

