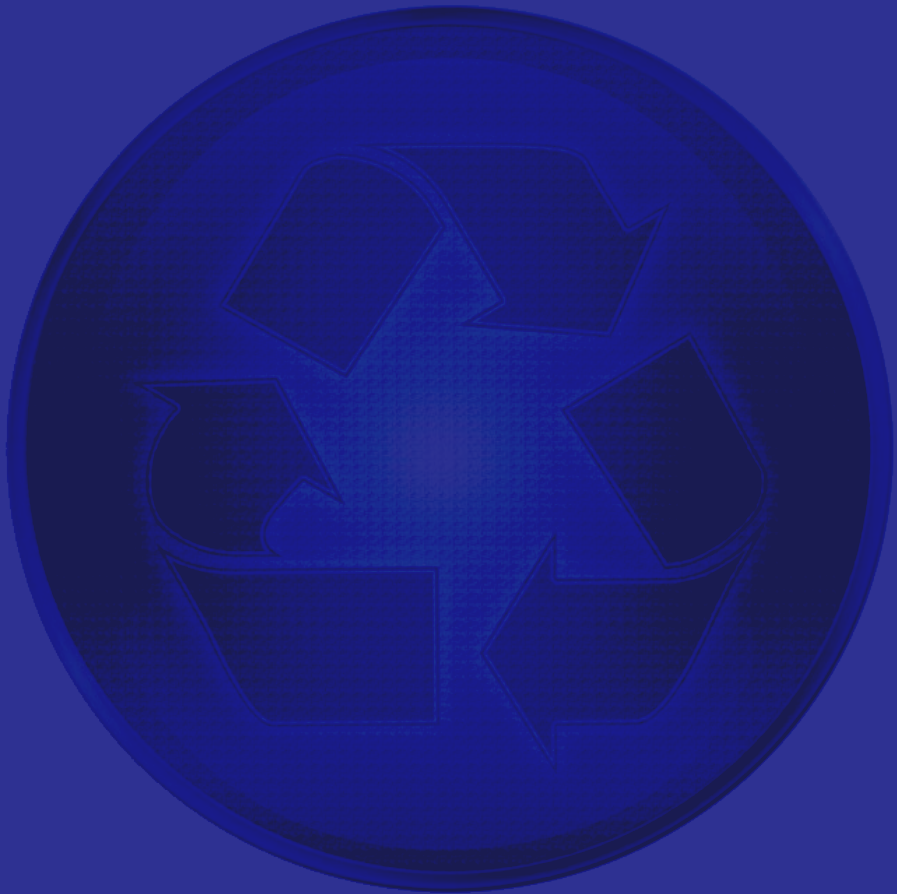




How can we refuse?

Tackling the waste challenge

An NLGN White Paper by **Anthony Brand**



New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this White Paper as part of its innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

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1 Summary

Waste is an expensive business and becoming increasingly so. Local authorities need to look for new, long-term solutions for disposal if the costs are not to be felt hard by council tax payers and other services in the next few years. Consultation is ongoing as to whether some form of charging or incentive-based scheme to encourage recycling will provide a solution.

Our analysis suggests that in its suggested form it will not. If the real aim of any scheme is for the public to recognise the costs of waste disposal and change behaviour, the costs of implementation, enforcement and administration render any incentive too small.

Rather, we suggest that if it is to be introduced, councils and their partners should **calculate, publish and distribute ward level (or similar) recycling rates. Incentives (e.g. a proportion of cost savings or charges) could then be distributed to those wards that show the greatest improvement, to be spent in a manner to be decided upon in consultation with residents from that locality.** This system would be less resource intensive and simpler to monitor with fewer unwanted side effects. It also helps build a sense of community purpose and would result in more tangible public reward – both factors that research shows are strong drivers in changing behaviour.

If, on the other hand, an incentive system hopes to raise awareness of and contribute to a wider environmental agenda, then the time and resource (as well as the social and political capital) necessary to implement a charging scheme would be better put to use in other ways. **Longer-term local and sub-regional decisions are needed on waste technologies, infrastructure investment and waste strategies.**

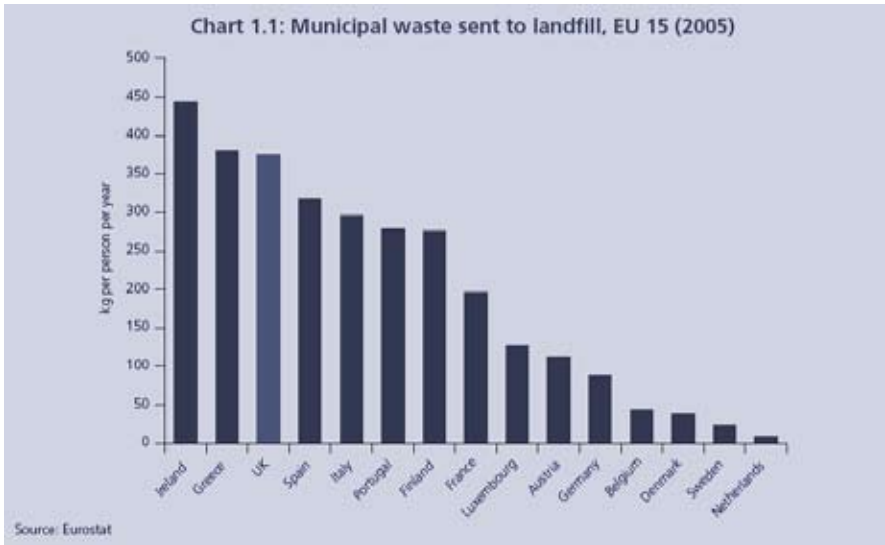
The space for debate and high media profile created by the charging agenda

can now be used by progressive local authorities to take forward this debate. This means **public consultation including a full cost-benefit analysis of all the available alternatives for the next two decades**. As a nation we remain ill-informed of the real costs of waste disposal, the techniques already used widely elsewhere in Europe and the real financial and environmental consequences of doing nothing. **Allocating a larger proportion of Landfill Tax proceeds to this cause, as well as incorporating such consultation within local waste strategies**, would help local authorities make the bolder decisions that are necessary to really transform the way we manage waste in this country.

2 *The waste challenge*

The UK currently buries more of its rubbish than most of Europe. In 2004-05 almost 30 million tonnes of waste was collected from households in the UK. Over two thirds of this is still diverted to landfill. Given changes to legislation, growing environmental concerns and increasing personal consumption, this is no longer sustainable.

The Government has set a target to reduce household waste (waste that is not re-used, recycled or composted) from over 22.2 million tonnes in 2000 to 15.8 million tonnes in 2010. The aim is to further reduce this figure to 12.2 million tonnes in 2020 – a reduction of 45%. This is equivalent to a reduction of 50% per person.



The proportion of waste we recycle has nearly quadrupled in the UK since 1996-97, reaching 27% in 2005-06. But we still do not recycle enough and lag behind many of our European peers. Some London boroughs recycle as little as 9% of their waste. The Government's aim is to increase recycling and composting of household waste to at least 40% by 2010, 45% by 2015 and 50% by 2020. The use of waste in energy production is also expected to increase, accounting for 25% of municipal waste by 2020 compared to 10% today.

3 *The role of the local authority*

Achieving these substantial reductions in waste and increases in recycling requires action on all levels, national and local, personal and commercial. Local authorities are key to this agenda. They are ideally placed to deliver and enforce national policy locally, to design and tailor local policies to the needs of differing local communities and to provide community leadership. Councils must encourage people and businesses to think more seriously about the role of waste in their daily lives.

Legally, an authority is already required by the Environment Protection Act (1990) to collect and dispose of local residents' waste. Councils, with and through their partner agencies, are responsible for the planning, collection and disposal of commercial and personal waste. As citizens, we pay an annual average of over £100,¹ through our council tax, for waste services including:

1. Planning Powers - Including identifying land suitable for waste facilities and deciding on planning applications.

2. Waste Collection - Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) decide when, how and how often waste is collected and may arrange for a contractor to do this. WCAs specify the types of waste they will collect and any special arrangements for collecting unusual, large and bulky waste. The WCA is usually the District Council or Unitary Authority in the area.

3. Waste Disposal - Waste Disposal Authorities (WDAs) manage the waste collected. They should work with WCAs to develop waste plans and arrange for places where householders can take their waste (civic amenity sites). The WDA could be the same council as the WCA or the county council. In ex-Metropolitan County Councils areas such as Merseyside and Greater

¹ <http://www.gos.gov.uk/gonw/news/newsarchive/374355/>

Manchester the waste disposal authority and associated companies cover the duties of all the unitary authorities in the region.

The effective coordination of these activities, long-term investment plans and the implementation of a wider local waste strategy are all vital to the effective management of waste at a local level.

4 *Local Action*

In order to fulfil the role outlined above, local authorities have a number of tools at their disposal, including:

Alternate Week Collections (AWC)

About a third of councils now collect rubbish one week and recycling the next, though schemes do vary. Many of the councils with the highest recycling rates now use AWC. Nevertheless, this policy is a serious local concern for many voters. AWC was seen to be the cause of recent voter swings in some areas including the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton. Residents have complained that this “cost cutting” measure is unhygienic, attracting vermin and producing unpleasant smells. This has since been refuted by Government research and the LGA and moves to bi-weekly collection are likely to continue despite continuing protest.

The Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme (LATS)

This was the world’s first trading scheme for biodegradable municipal waste. It was introduced in 2005 and in its first year all 121 waste disposal authorities traded within their prescribed limits. Nevertheless, ten waste disposal authorities only met their obligations by buying additional allowances from other authorities or by borrowing from their future years’ allowances. The scheme has been criticised by some environmental organisations for having limits set too high, providing insufficient incentive to change.

Waste Infrastructure Delivery Programme (WIDP)

This programme works with local authorities and the regions to accelerate the build of new infrastructure to handle waste that cannot be recycled or composted. It is charged with producing a comprehensive strategy for the

construction of the estimated £10billion of infrastructure needed and supporting the projects to fruition. This includes several PFI projects and encourages systems such as those which convert waste, through some form of incineration, into local energy production.² These systems are already popular and successful across Europe though only a few progressive councils in the UK have implemented them to date.

Information and Education

Councils have a wider role in educating and informing their residents about issues of waste and the environment. Providing data on the effects of landfill and waste on the environment raises awareness of environmental issues within the local community. Providing similar information on the recycling and waste disposal facilities available in each locality can encourage the public to take action to mitigate these effects. The Recycling and Organics Technical Advisory Team (ROTATE) has provided advice and some funding to local authorities for the development of effective local communication strategies.

Local Authority and Government Actions Proposed by the 2007 Waste Strategy

- Government to support local authorities with advice and information (e.g. from Waste Infrastructure Delivery Programme (WIDP)) on:
 - Collection systems and their impacts;
 - Increasing the value of recycled materials;
 - Enabling and financing new technologies.
- Government to replace local authority recycling targets with a new indicator emphasising waste prevention as well as recycling.
- Government to enable local authorities to set up Joint Waste Authorities and work together to improve local waste services.

² DEFRA website

- Government to consult on the introduction of further restrictions on the landfilling of biodegradable waste and recyclable materials.
- Government to work with retailers to reduce the environmental impact of single use shopping bags (both paper and plastic) by 25% by the end of 2008.
- ***Government to remove the ban on local authorities introducing financial incentives schemes for reducing and recycling waste.***
- Government and local government to continue and extend campaigns for recycling and waste awareness.
- Government and local government to place greater emphasis on promoting waste reduction and recycling within schools.
- Local authorities to build third sector capacity to operate in the recycling and waste sectors.
- Local authorities to provide easier access to public recycling facilities.
- Local government to help local businesses reduce and recycle their waste (e.g. funding for pilot initiatives and good practice guidance).
- Local authorities to support a “zero waste places” initiative, inviting communities to become exemplars of good practice on all aspects of waste.

5 *Charging for waste*

One of the most controversial ideas raised for reducing waste levels has been that of charging for the collection of household waste. The Government's 2007 Waste Strategy promised to consult on removing the ban on local authorities introducing household financial incentives for waste reduction and recycling.

This consultation is under way. It is likely that authorities will be free to design their own schemes, provided they meet Government requirements set out in legislation, including:

- All schemes would have to be revenue neutral;
- Waste separated for recycling or composting will continue to be collected free of charge;
- Clear communication strategies must be in place; and
- Good kerbside recycling facilities must be available (for at least five waste streams).

This idea has been raised previously in the UK, but as yet legislation has not been amended to facilitate its use. Similar schemes already operating in other countries include:

Recycling Incentives

Householders are billed throughout the year according to the amount of non-recyclable waste they throw away. At the end of the year all money raised is returned to residents with each receiving an equal amount. Local authorities keep nothing. Those who have produced less non-recycled waste than

average will be better off.

Frequency

Householders sign up to a number of collections at the start of the year (twice weekly, weekly, fortnightly, monthly) and households pay upfront, with the option of having more. At the end of the year the authority calculates the total number of collections used and returns the cost. DEFRA calculates that this would achieve recycling rates of 30-50%, with 170kg reductions per household year.

Sack-based

Householders buy special local authority sacks to fill with their non-recyclable waste. Shops return the money to the local authority, less a small commission, and at the end of the year the authority returns the money to households. Sack-based schemes would likely be most suitable for urban areas where multiple wheelie bins are not possible. This, says DEFRA, could give a 31% recycling rate.

Volume

Householders pay for a particular sized bin. If they need extra capacity, they can buy a larger bin, or extra sacks. At the end of the year the authority returns the money raised. This could give recycling rates of between 31% and 49% and a saving of 126kg per household per year.

Weight

Householders put non-recyclable waste out for collection in wheelie bins fitted with transponders. The authority records the weight and at the end of the year it calculates a bill for each household. This, says DEFRA, can increase recycling rates by up to 53%.

6 *The charging debate*

The idea of charging for waste has been positively received by many councils, though few have explicitly stated that they will introduce the system themselves. Recent consultation suggests that:

*“there was strong support for variable charging and/or making waste management costs more transparent on council tax bills for household waste.”*³

In fact, combining these issues hides the true picture. Though many respondents commented on variable charging, far more supported clearer information and awareness-raising among the public. Arguments against its introduction remain strong. Critics continue to question the publicised arguments for such a move. These arguments include:

Increasing Recycling

The most common argument for introducing charging is that it will increase levels of recycling in the home. We recycle just a quarter of the waste we produce and send almost two thirds to landfill. Proponents of charging for waste point out that charging has successfully increased recycling levels elsewhere and could reduce the amount of annual residual waste sent to landfill by up to 15% – equivalent to 1.5 million tonnes or 130kg per household.

But recycling is already on the increase. In 2003-4 79% of households were offered kerbside collection of recycling. 65% of all English households had paper or card kerbside recycling collection, 41% had cans collected, 40% had glass and 43% had compost. 11.5 million households also participate in kerbside recycling collections that include plastic bottles.⁴

³ DEFRA, *Review of England's Waste Strategy: A Consultation Document*, (2006)

⁴ Waste-online.org, *After it's been binned*, (2005)

Other reports suggest that while reductions do occur, it is not always easy to separate the effects of a charging system from wider changes in service provision. Charging systems are usually implemented in parallel with increased access to recycling services, increased awareness of recycling systems and other supporting structures. These supporting services may drive increases in recycling on their own. Certainly there remains considerable confusion among the public around what recycling is supported by local authorities in different areas.

Reports also claim that the move to charging encourages household to put inappropriate material into their recycling. Considerable time and resource is already expended by local waste disposal authorities separating material for recycling and this may further damage the effectiveness of the existing service. Similarly, charging is likely to increase incidents of fly-tipping, at least in the short-term. The additional costs of policing and responding to such incidents counteract some of the benefits and add to existing costs (over £100 million pa).

Others question the need for charging at all and claim that increases in Landfill Tax and increased environmental awareness will alone be sufficient to drive change. Local authorities must have a comprehensive understanding of the situation in their own locality and decide, in partnership with their waste collection and disposal partners and the local community, what steps would be most effective in improving recycling rates.

Finally, Government's desire for an incentive rather than charge based system may carry insufficient weight with the public. With residents paying, on average, a little over £100 a year for their waste services, a revenue-neutral system of incentives would lead to relatively low level rebates or charges for the consumer. Reports have suggested that the low levels of existing payments, coupled with the costs of implementing a charging scheme, could render any incentives insufficient to change behaviour or encourage recycling.⁵

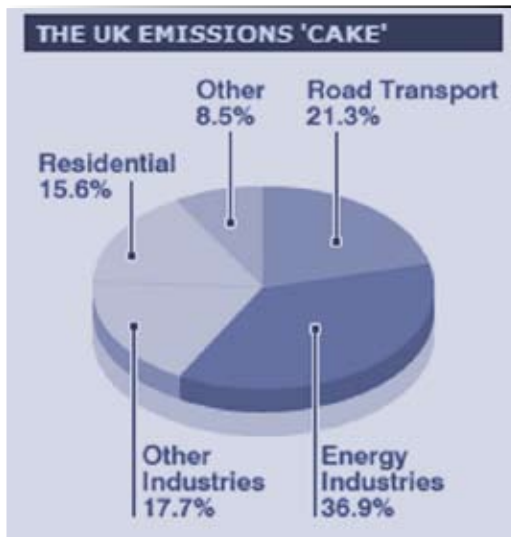
⁵ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmcomloc/536/53608.htm>

Mitigating Climate Change

Reducing carbon emissions has become an increasingly important political and public goal. The Stern Review suggested that global emissions must peak in the next 10 - 20 years and then fall at least 1 - 3% per year. By 2050, global emissions would need to be around 25% below current levels.

Current UK recycling of paper, glass, plastics, aluminium and steel is estimated to save more than 18 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year (equivalent to the annual use of 5 million cars or 14% of UK transport sector emissions). This is 18 million from a total of 153 million tonnes released by the UK in 2006, (or 11.7%). If the charging scheme was particularly successful it might convert 15% of current landfill to recycling. This could reduce carbon emissions by between 500,000 and 8 million tonnes depending on assumed calculations.

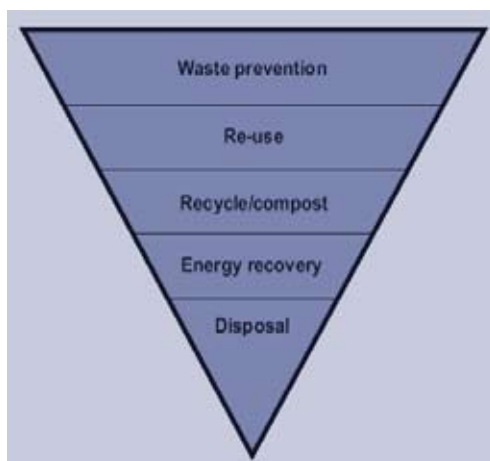
In fact, the vast majority of the UK's carbon emissions are attributed to the energy industry, transport and other industry. Together these account for over three quarters of our emissions. Emissions from waste disposal are a relatively small proportion of that total and households are only responsible for 9% of the 272 million tonnes of waste produced annually in England.



BBC online, UK to miss CO₂ emissions target, (Mar 2006)

Waste disposal focuses on the bottom half of the waste hierarchy in the hope it will influence consumer behaviour further up-stream in the cycle. If local authorities were focussed solely on the environmental impact of waste they would be concentrating their efforts on waste prevention and re-use. This was also brought up by several respondents to the Government's Waste Strategy consultation.

“Many felt it was time to move away from using economic instruments targeted at the end of pipe and instead target resource efficiency through taxation on materials/products.”



Waste Hierarchy

For example, Modbury in Devon recently hit the headlines when all forty-three traders and shopkeepers agreed to stop providing plastic bags to customers in an attempt to curtail the environmental damage they cause. Closer working with businesses and the ability to create flexible local concordats with local industry and consumers could be more effective. This would require strong political leadership, a clear communications strategy and effective partnership working, but could build local support and consensus that a charging mechanism could not achieve alone.

Punishment for Gluttons

There is no doubt that increased recycling would benefit the environment, but the move to waste charging is more likely to benefit local authorities in other ways. In 1999 the EU began phasing out landfill with a Landfill Directive. The EU Landfill Directive requires member states to cut the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill by 25% (on 1995 levels) by 2010, and 65% by 2020. By 2010 the fines for not meeting these targets will be £150 for every excess tonne of waste. The National Audit Office estimates that by 2013 £205 million a year will be paid in fines.

These fines are on top of the Landfill Tax currently in operation. The standard rate of landfill tax is £24 per tonne, increasing by £3 per tonne each year. In the 2007 Budget it was announced that this rate would be increased by £8 per tonne every year from 2008 until at least 2010/2011. The landfill tax has helped deliver a reduction of around 25% in recorded waste at registered landfill sites, but has increased the financial strain on councils. In one county council the tax has increased by over £5 million in one year to almost £20 million, against a council budget of around £700 million and expectations of a floor level grant increase.

The drive to reduce these costs is a priority for local authorities. The imminent Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07) is likely to reduce the grant increases allocated to local government and councils are also expected to deliver over £200 million of efficiency savings in the area of waste. The public and the media are also becoming increasingly frustrated by above-inflation rises in council tax leaving minimal room for manoeuvre even under the current capped system. In an era of tighter finances and continued efficiency targets local government has to balance the competing service priorities of its local area and maintain service quality. The increasing costs of waste disposal mean less money available for other vital services such as adult social care, education, crime prevention and regeneration.

Charging for waste could contribute to cost-efficiency. As a nation we already pay less per household on waste collection and disposal, in many areas as

little as 50% of European spend. DEFRA reports that financial incentive schemes could deliver cost savings of £94 million per year. In some cases cost savings of up to £18 per household could be achieved.⁶

It should be noted that charging does not guarantee cost savings. Even those local authorities with the most successful recycling regimes face rising Landfill Tax bills following the latest rate increases. Furthermore, the Communities & Local Government (CLG) Select Committee on waste recently heard evidence that the cost of administering a waste charging scheme could negate any cost savings achieved.⁷

“The costs and practicalities of collecting fees, dealing with disputes and chasing bad debts could make charging schemes unworkable.”

J. Stephenson, *MPs Warned Of Waste Charge Cost*, in LGC article, May 2007

⁶ DEFRA website, Waste Strategy factsheets, May 2007

⁷ Local Government News, May 2007

7 *Other Criticisms*

Impact on Existing Contractual Obligations

There may also be expensive repercussions for existing waste collection and disposal contracts. Many local authorities have developed long-term contracts with the private sector. The introduction of waste charging may require changes to methods, frequencies, technologies and the overall level of waste collected. This may have an impact on existing contracts.

Social Justice

There are concerns that a charging scheme may be too regressive, placing an unfair burden on those least able to afford it and less able to reduce the level of waste they create. Obviously this will depend on the system put in place but it is possible that low income households and those with young children or large families will be affected more than single person households.⁸ That is not to say a system could not be designed that ameliorated these concerns, but it does suggest further work is needed if pricing is to be used as an effective and fair policy instrument.

Two-Tier Confusion

A DEFRA-commissioned report suggested that the existing two-tier system of local government would add to the confusion around charging. At what level is it best to collect the charge and how should it be distributed between two-tier councils? For example, the costs of charging may fall to the WCA but it is the WDA that benefits from avoiding landfill costs.

National or Local Priority?

Nobody would question that national action is needed to encourage a different

⁸ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/Knowledge/findings/housing/074.asp>

approach to waste, but national policies require locally tailored solutions and local support if they are to gain traction. Local flexibility is vital if we are to create innovative solutions and momentum for change within local communities. For example, a recent report suggests that Government targets on recycling are now offering perverse incentives which actually increase the amount of waste collected and undermine the need to focus higher up in the waste hierarchy.

Critics have argued that charging may merely be passing down the blame for a national policy that local authorities will have no choice but to implement. Charging can work in some circumstances but the logistics of implementing a recycling system in a high density London estate are very different from those in a sparse rural township. Both have their own unique needs.

Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, LGA chairman Government has countered these centralising claims by ensuring consultation stresses the need for local flexibility. Time will tell the extent to which the freedom to deliver local solutions is provided and how Government responds if these schemes prove less popular or successful than expected.

“If the government introduces proposals for waste charging it must not insist on a national scheme, but each individual council working with its residents should be able to decide whether to introduce a scheme or not.”⁹

Popular Opinion and Misunderstandings

The speed with which waste charging has appeared on the UK’s political agenda has left some confused by Government’s intentions. Similar reactions were felt elsewhere in the world:

“Case studies reported adverse community reaction and also lack of understanding about specifically what behavioural changes were required of individual householders.”¹⁰

9 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6685409.stm

10 Foundation for Water Research, *Local Authority Waste Charging Scheme, Best Practice Evaluation Study* (2000)

Other misunderstandings arise around the motives for charging. Although designated as ‘revenue neutral’, it is clear that members of the public are sceptical and see charging as an additional tax-raising scheme. This is exacerbated by the fact that residents are often ill-informed about the real cost of waste disposal, its knock-on impact on council tax levels and the current use of revenue raised through the council tax.

Without a full explanation and grasp of the reasoning and expected outcomes of any charging, public reaction and attitudes are likely to remain negative, undermining the success of the policy as a whole.

Furthermore, early media reports around waste charging have highlighted and compounded concerns over the wider issue of personal privacy. With new ‘chipped’ bins, a computer inside the waste collection vehicle weighs the bin and records the weight of the contents. The discovery that these chips were already in place in some areas led to a short-lived public outcry. It was perceived by some as the “state spying on its citizens”.¹¹ Care must be taken to allay these fears and ensure appropriate safeguards are in place.

¹¹ Evening Standard, Germans plant bugs in our wheelie bins, (Aug 2006)

8 *The Added Value of the Debate*

The criticisms above outline how waste policy and particularly charging are sensitive, controversial issues. But there are also additional positive outcomes that might result from this debate that should not be underestimated.

Increasing Local Awareness

Environmental and political awareness of the waste agenda could benefit from the national debate on charging. Whether or not local authorities intend to introduce a charging system, the potential personal costs of the new powers will encourage many citizens to give more thought to their waste output. This provides new opportunities for engaging with the electorate and building understanding of the wider waste agenda, framed by a greater appreciation of the strains it places on local authorities. Ideally, this improved understanding could be harnessed to improve local decision-making and increase public support for those decisions.

Encouraging Local Engagement

Waste disposal is often cited as the most tangible local authority service. For many people it is the service most closely associated with the council tax we pay. The introduction of or consultation on a charge (or incentive) based waste system could allow local authorities to use this emotive issue to forge new, deeper links with its citizens. This might encourage people to engage more frequently and more actively with their council on other local issues.

Effective Public Private Partnership

The nature of the charging debate is that it requires technological innovation, efficiency, co-ordination and practical local solutions coupled with community engagement, political leadership and a clear, coherent long-term strategy.

The combination of these requirements points toward some private sector involvement tailored to specific local need, but tied into wider sub-regional, regional and national strategies to ensure value for money and joined-up working. This will continue to test local authorities' ability to build effective partnerships and harness the best elements of all its partners to deliver on local priorities.

9 Conclusion

There is no doubt that communities need to make a step-change in reducing the waste they produce and to rethink the manner of its disposal. The challenge of climate change, increasing disposal costs and rising environmental awareness demand it. Local authorities have a responsibility and a moral imperative to make this happen. Without it, the additional pressure of mounting landfill costs will continue to reduce the funding available for other vital local services and put pressure on already rising council tax levels. But is charging consumers the best way forward?

Firstly, even if successful, increasing personal recycling rates would have less impact on CO₂ emissions than other policies concerning housing, transport and energy. Furthermore, recycling also does nothing to minimise waste production in the first instance and so it is not a long-term solution to climate change.

In any case, evidence suggests that on its own, a charging or incentive scheme may do little to increase recycling. After the costs of implementation, enforcement and administration any incentive will be too small to drive behavioural change. Although successful in raising recycling levels elsewhere, the cultural and wider political context in other European countries means direct comparison is difficult. Its impact in the UK will depend upon the coherence of the wider strategy and public willingness to adopt its goals.

On its own, and in its current consultation format, any charging scheme is unlikely to be sufficient to change public behaviour, significantly increase recycling or deliver a long-term solution to the waste problem.

A recycling incentive scheme could still play a small part in a wider waste strategy but would be more effective if councils looked to a community-wide approach. Rather than monitor personal waste levels, councils and their partners should calculate, publish and distribute ward level (or similar)

recycling rates. An incentive (based on charging or cost savings derived from increased recycling) could then be distributed to those wards that show the greatest improvement. This would be spent, in consultation with residents from that locality, on their own priorities.

Any such system would be less resource-intensive than an 'individualised' system, simpler to monitor and measure, would create fewer unwanted side effects (e.g. fly-tipping), uses social pressure to drive competition, promotes a sense of community spirit and would result in more significant incentives and tangible rewards. Evidence from pilot incentive schemes has already shown that public recognition and a sense of 'group effort' are as strong, if not stronger, drivers in changing behaviour and encouraging recycling.

If appropriate, councils could use new charging powers to encourage recycling on a ward by ward basis. Local authorities could return a proportion of any charges, as well as Landfill Tax and EU fine savings to those wards that perform best and allow it to be spent however that locality sees fit. This scheme could be supplemented by Government funds if necessary (through the Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP)).

In its current consultation form, the best that a charging system could hope to achieve is to raise the profile of the recycling agenda - a worthy goal but not enough on its own. For many areas, the time and resource, (as well as the social and political capital), necessary to implement a charging scheme would be better put to use in other ways. A greater impact (financial, environmental or both) could be made by focussing these efforts on the development of more coherent longer-term local strategies. In fact, the charging debate might encourage authorities to avoid more difficult discussions around long-term technologies and waste infrastructure investment.

For example, long-term decisions over waste technologies and infrastructure need to be made to deliver economies of scale and allow waste markets to develop that can drive innovation and further efficiencies. As yet, too few plans have been agreed and we have yet to reach a tipping point in local

government's thinking.

A significant barrier to these decisions has been public attitudes toward many waste technologies. Yet residents must be involved in making the choice for their locality if schemes are to encourage public participation and prevent unwanted environmental and political fallout. This requires investment in public engagement strategies as well as in the infrastructure itself. In other localities, simply investing in recycling facilities and local communication strategies has already been proven to raise residents' environmental awareness and recycling rates.

Opting for any incentive or charging based system places the burden directly on the consumer without a comprehensive portrayal of the other solutions available. It is likely that in some localities, public consultation (with cost-benefit analysis of all the options) would reduce public opposition to alternative waste infrastructure investments.

Local waste strategies should place greater emphasis on public involvement, consultation and awareness raising, including clear and widely distributed information on:

- *a cost benefit analysis of the waste minimisation options available;*
- *a breakdown of existing waste costs and their impact on council tax;*
- *the future implications of national and European waste policies on council tax and public services.*

Government should reverse its decision to reduce funding for WRAP's Waste Implementation Programme (WIP). Instead, they should increase the proportion of Landfill Tax charges allocated to the Behavioural Change Local Fund element of this programme and use it to test public attitudes towards a range of long-term local waste strategies.

Meeting the waste challenge will require a raft of tools and policies, both national and local. For some local authorities this may indeed include a

system for charging. For the moment the media interest it generates provides an opportunity for local authorities and their partners to engage with the public in a wider debate. If this opportunity is used wisely by councils, innovative, effective and publicly acceptable long-term strategies can be developed. These strategies should make use of local government's unique position and:

- Utilise new technologies to measure, collect and dispose of waste;
- Provide new and improved recycling facilities for those that wish to recycle;
- Form stronger, more effective relationships with other councils and waste partners to ensure more joined-up, cost effective services;
- Create a positive relationship with local businesses which ensures that waste reduction is a common goal across the business community;
- Raise the level of awareness among citizens as to their responsibilities and the way in which they can meet them;
- Improve communication as to the rationale behind charging; and
- Tighten the policing of any system to ensure that everyone contributes what they can to a community's waste reduction goals.

For the moment Government has had the foresight to leave it to local authorities themselves to decide how and where charging schemes might be introduced. Local government should be making more of this opportunity to move the debate on.

