

## Taking The Public With You When Restructuring Services: Overcoming Opposition and Changing Behaviours

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### ABSTRACT

Public policy has a long history of service changes failing to be fully implemented or not reaching their full potential, with associated costs, both in terms of underachievement and financial impact. However, the changing nature of policy making in the UK towards 'open policy making', is grounds for optimism. Engaging in dialogue with the public at the early stages of a significant service change is an important, but often neglected and misunderstood part of maximising the positive impacts of change. This paper looks at two issues where investing in engagement can:

- 1) smooth the way for potentially difficult service changes;
- 2) increase acceptance and active engagement with service changes; and
- 3) also result in a valuable evidence base to deliver better quality service decisions.

The first type of issue the paper covers is the development of a new waste management facility, while the second issue covers waste collection service change.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

Public policy in the United Kingdom has a long history of decisions that either, hugely under-deliver once implemented, or fail to be implemented at all. Often, there are substantial financial and other costs to both these failures and under-performance. However, there is good reason to think that recent changes to how policy is made in the UK, from being a closed inward looking model to an 'open policy making' one, is grounds for optimism. There is a growing consensus that a key ingredient to good policy is public and stakeholder engagement. The public, as the end users of many policies, can often bring important additional evidence and service level information to improve the quality of decisions and outcomes. They are also adept at spotting policy flaws, as they, after all, have to live with the consequences. But also, crucially, where a policy is likely to be contentious, their buy-in is needed if it is going to be implemented at all, or if it is to reach anything like its full potential.

Too often policy makers have viewed public engagement as an optional extra, or an inconvenient procedural requirement that delivers little of real value to the final decision. In these cases the decision making process has often already occurred, and engagement is used merely as a means of satisfying corporate processes, or as a means of communicating how decisions have been arrived at. In both instances, little or no engagement has actually taken place. However, over the last 20 years or so there has been a growing body of evidence that supports the view that public engagement is a vital component of good policy. To look at it another way, the cost of public engagement activities should be viewed as a small investment compared to the costs of what can happen if a policy fails at the implementation stage, or is rolled out but under-achieves (Clarke, 2015).

## 1.2 What does engagement add?

For public engagement to work it needs to be well planned and executed. What matters, when it comes to getting public engagement right, is knowing:

- What engagement means;
- When engagement is important;
- Who to engage with;
- Which engagement processes to use; and
- How to use the outcomes from engagement.

In many public sector organisations communications and engagement are often bundled together. This makes perfect sense as they are complementary processes with both being required for the effective delivery of projects. However, often there is confusion about the difference between the two, and a clear understanding of how they can work together to deliver better quality outcomes is essential for a successful engagement programme. All too frequently, what happens is that engagement is subsumed by communications, with the result that communications tools are presented as engagement activities. This can have a huge impact on how the public feel about a policy: if they feel that they are just being told what will happen, but the approach is masquerading as engagement, they will quite likely, and justifiably, feel short-changed and angry. The crucial, and simple distinction between the two is that communications is a one-way activity that involves providing information to the target audience, whereas engagement is a two-way process and is about developing a dialogue between policy makers/service providers and service users.

The timing of engagement activities is also a critical success factor. Too often, engagement happens very late in the policy making process, and in the worst cases after the final decision has been made. In contrast, best practice is when engagement happens at a very early stage and then is sustained throughout the policy making cycle. There will be peaks and troughs in the volume of engagement activities, different processes used at different stages and for different issues, but overall, the public should feel that they are co-producers of the policy. If this does not happen, the public may well not buy-in to the policy and the policy may not be optimal in terms of its evidence base as it will be missing an important perspective.

Deciding who to engage is more than just announcing that a new policy is imminent and inviting responses within a specified timescale. This type of approach has been the norm for many years in the UK and for many processes remains the default position. This is not to say that this approach is wrong, but engagement usually needs to be more thorough. Generally speaking, the more complex and/or contentious the policy, the more the engagement approach should be multi-method (i.e. used a range of communication and engagement approaches). Usually in such cases engagement should be both 'open' and 'closed'. An open engagement is where any interested parties are provided with the opportunity to give their views. A 'closed' engagement is where only specific members of the public/stakeholders are targeted to obtain their views.

There are many different approaches to public engagement. There are strengths and weaknesses to each approach and there is no quick and easy answer to which approach to use - beyond ensuring that the *method should always be fit for purpose*. However, it is important to understand that public engagement is not market research and, although it borrows from the latter in many areas, it has developed its own suite of approaches, particularly deliberative<sup>1</sup> ones. These deliberative methods lend themselves well to complex and/or contentious issues.

The outcomes from engagement should be used alongside other forms of evidence to inform the policy making process and the final decision. Evidence resulting from engagement should be given the same weight as that from other stakeholders, including experts. However, what often happens is that policy makers feel uncertain about the robustness of engagement outcomes and, as such, down play them in policy formulation. There are two main reasons as to why this happens:

- 1) the outcomes are usually qualitative and policy makers prefer the certainty of numbers; and
- 2) engagement processes lack quality standards that would help reassure policy makers that the outcomes are robust.

<sup>1</sup> Deliberation is an engagement process which seeks to move public opinion beyond top of mind responses. It provides people with accessible and balanced information about complex and often controversial issues. It helps people to understand the information and to use it in their discussions with fellow participants. The outcomes from deliberative discussions are more informed and robust.

### 1.3 Aims

This paper looks at two types of waste issues where investing time and other resources in engaging with the public and service users can:

- 1) smooth the way for difficult service changes;
- 2) increase acceptance and active engagement with service changes; and
- 3) result in a valuable evidence base to deliver better quality service decisions.

The first type of issue is the introduction of a new waste management facility. For people who live near to a proposed facility there are likely to be considerable levels of concern and, most likely, opposition. The usual policy approach to an issue such as this is *Decide, Announce, Defend (DAD)*. However, this does not guarantee success. Delays and even postponements can be the result if public opposition is particularly strong and sustained. In this paper we present a multi-method engagement approach, which aligned with communications, can help build buy-in for the policy and result in better quality decisions.

The second type of issue is where a change to an existing service is introduced - in this instance waste collection services - but does not deliver its potential. The usual approach to making a change of service like this is to, once again, simply announce the change, assuming that service users will understand it and modify their behaviour accordingly. However, this type of approach lacks an understanding of how people behave in practice and what is really needed, to not only guarantee a change in behaviour, but to sustain that change.

Engagement has similarities to market research consultation approaches, but usually happens at a different stage of a service change, uses different tools and involves a different relationship between the public, service users and providers. This paper will tease out those differences, but also highlight how engagement and research can work in tandem.

In the case of a new waste management facility we will describe how using deliberative engagement processes can help decision-makers better understand public opinion and build acceptance of proposed development. In the second service delivery example, a change to a waste collection, we will set out how engagement with a behaviour change lens can maximise the potential of the change. In both scenarios, communications has a pivotal role to play. Engaging with the public and service users is crucial to scoping, testing and refining the communications message so people understand and accept a service change, and play their part in making it a success.

A good understanding of the role of engagement, when and how to use it, is important as well as the recognition that it is not an expensive undertaking, especially when weighed up against the costs of getting a service change wrong.

## 2. SITING OF A NEW WASTE MANAGEMENT FACILITY

In the UK, a combination of European legislation has been driving change in the waste management field. The EU Waste Framework Directive has driven recycling targets up by imposing a duty to provide separate collection of paper, glass, metal and plastic by 2015 and setting a 50% preparing for re-use and recycling target by 2020. In addition, there is a target for a 75% reduction (on 1995 levels) of biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) going to landfill by 2020.

Furthermore the proposed EU Circular Economy Package includes common EU recycling targets of 65% for municipal waste and 75% for packaging waste by 2030, a binding landfill target to reduce landfill to maximum of 10% of all waste by 2030 and a ban on the landfilling of separately collected waste.

The siting of a new waste management facility, however it is handled, is never going to be a popular policy, particularly with those residents who live nearby. But local authorities cannot afford to go through lengthy planning appeals, so they must find ways of working with their local communities to build buy-in as early as possible. This section of the paper will present ways of working with local people that ensure that plans do go ahead and don't get mired in delays or are stopped completely.

The traditional approach to policy making in the UK has been a light touch on engagement with the focus of most effort on communications. As stated earlier, in many instances the model used is: *'Decide, Announce Defend'*. In practice, this means that a decision will be taken, often with minimal openness and transparency or public and stakeholder engagement, and then communicated. From then on the approach is to 'tough-it out' and defend the decision in the hope that it will be successfully implemented. It should not be a surprise to learn that this approach often results in policy paralysis together with the costs and delays referred to above (and looked at in more detail later in this section).

By contrast, our approach, particularly, where the issue being decided is contentious is: *'Engage, Deliberate, Decide'*. At an early stage we seek to 'bring the whole system into the room' – this includes the public, experts and policy makers. For those engaged in this type of approach there needs to be clarity about what is on the table for discussion. In short, it needs to be at a time when the issue is still 'live' and open to influence. On this latter point, those engaged in a dialogue about an issue need to understand that what they say is part of informing the policy making process - they are not there to make the final decision. It is also important that the process is seen as independent particularly in the design, delivery, analysis and reporting of any dialogue activities.

The outcomes from this type of approach is that it opens up the potential for movement on controversial areas of policy, particularly where public knowledge brings new insight to the issue and participants feel that they are genuine co-producers of the policy. If done well and the buy-in is secured, it can also deliver significant cost savings.

For this type of approach to work there needs to be engagement in at least five stages of the policy making process:

- Making the case for change - this needs to happen at a very early stage of policy making, explaining why the status quo is no longer an option. From our experience, the public is usually willing to accept change if the case is made strongly enough and the evidence presented is seen as impartial and compelling.
- High level vision about the future - this is usually done at the same stage as making the case for change. What the public usually looks for is not just an explanation of why policy needs to change, but also a vision for what the future might look like. An important element of this stage is to keep the discussion focused on the type of solution that might be needed and not start to explore site specific options.
- Development and weighting of assessment criteria – to help whittle down a list of potential sites it is usual to develop a list of criteria against which the site options can be assessed. This should be an iterative process, with the options being continuously refined over time. It can also be helpful to think about whether the criteria should be treated as being of equal importance or a particular weighting applied.
- Appraisal of shortlisted options – public engagement at this stage is optional. There are two main reasons for this:
  - i. it can be difficult to identify and agree which members of the public to involve in what needs to be a small intensive working group; and
  - ii. it might require particular expertise to be able to apply the criteria effectively to shortlisted options.
- Site selection consultation – this is often a formal part of the process and is the opportunity for those who live near the selected site option to feedback their views on the recommendations. Even though the preferred site has been selected at this stage, respondents should be allowed to help improve the detail; in other words, elements of the decision should still be open to influence and improvement.

Alongside engagement processes there is always a need for an appropriate communications plan.

Communications are there to inform people about:

- the proposed plans;
- the opportunities to voice opinions;
- feedback on what has been said; and
- any changes to the policy as a result.

As highlighted earlier, the one thing communications approaches absolutely must not do is to brand themselves as consultation or engagement. Communications are a one-way relationship where information

is provided to people, whereas consultation (and particularly engagement) are about a two-way relationship, giving participants the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with policy makers.

Table 1. Communication, consultation and engagement approaches

	Communications	Consultation	Engagement
Case for change	Press release announcing the project Website launched	-	Workshops with the public and stakeholders (closed) One-to-one meetings with key stakeholders (closed) Public meetings (open)
High level vision	Website to have (short) vision document	-	As above (parcelled together)
Criteria identified	On website and continuously updated	-	As above (parcelled together)
Option appraisal	Press release Methodology on website Outcomes on website	-	Workshop with stakeholders and possibly public (closed)
Site selection	Press release Downloadable consultation document on website Online option to submit views (open) Roadshows (open)	Formal consultation document inviting views (open)	Workshops or focus groups with local people (closed) One-to-one meetings with key stakeholders (closed) Meetings with other affected groups (open)

Table 1 presents the types of information, consultation and engagement approaches that should be considered for this type of issue. The 'open' approaches are those where anyone is allowed to contribute their views, whereas 'closed' is where specific participants are invited to do so.

Figure 1 presents a communications and engagement spectrum from '*inform*' to '*delegate*' (Pollard, 2015). The important factor is that the relationship between the commissioning body (the large circle) moves from being one-way ('*inform*') to intense, working together ('*collaborate*'). It is also important to note the subtle distinction between '*consult*' and '*involve*' - essentially the former is a research approach where respondents are asked for their views but there is no two-way relationship with the commissioning body, whereas the latter sees a dialogue between the two parties.

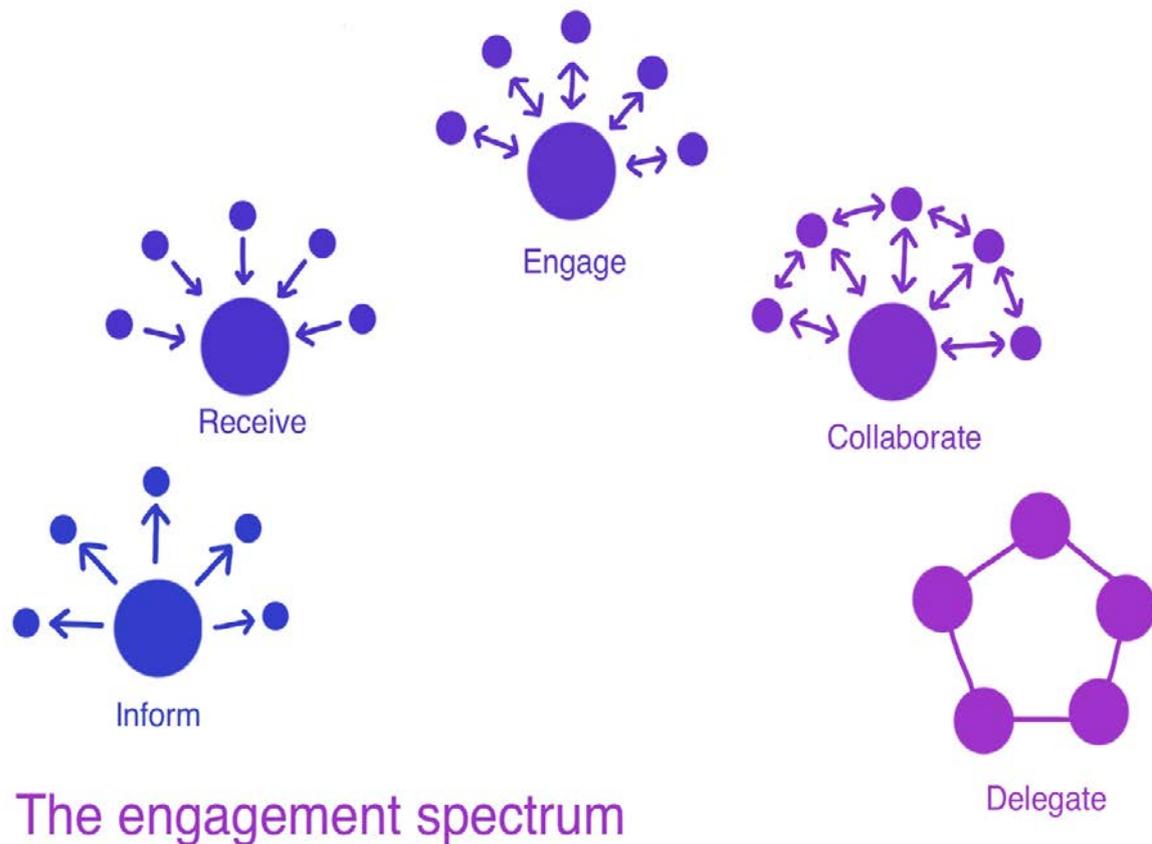


Figure 1. Communications to engagement spectrum

One of the factors worth considering as part of the consultation and engagement activities from the start is the idea of 'voluntarism'. This is an approach that the UK Government is using in the search for a geological disposal facility for radioactive waste. The idea is that if a community 'volunteers' to host a waste management facility there will be an incentive for them to do so, for example, the provision of additional services or other benefits for that community.

Ricardo Energy & Environment (Widdowson et al, 2012a and Widdowson et al, 2012b) produced a waste infrastructure community engagement toolkit for the Welsh Government in 2009 and followed this up with training for local authority officers and Environment Agency staff to:

- Provide appropriate community engagement tools;
- Give details of when, how and with whom to engage throughout the procurement of new facilities;
- Advise on how to manage the media; and
- Provide the means to create appropriate communications plans.

The development and use of the toolkit in Wales appears to have been effective. Despite the controversial nature of building new waste treatment facilities, to date there has been very little delay in waste infrastructure procurement programmes in Wales. In contrast, in England where there is currently no practical toolkit or guidance, strong public opposition to some schemes has led to long delays.

These delays often have significant financial costs, for example: contract penalties of £100 per tonne; ongoing Landfill Tax and gate fees of £120 per tonne; and planning appeals and enquiries costing anything from £0.5 million to £2 million.

Similar to the above, the toolkit identifies the stages when engagement and communications are most effective in the development of local waste infrastructure. As with all contentious policy areas, it recommends that engagement and communications need to start early and be sustained throughout the policy making cycle:

- Make the case for a facility - inform and discuss with the public why the status quo is not an option.
- Development of selection criteria - engage the public in discussion about how siting options will be evaluated, what the criteria are that should be included, and how these should be weighted. The public should have an active role in developing, reviewing and weighting the criteria.
- Options appraisal process – involve the public directly in appraising and scoring shortlisted options.
- Site selection consultation – when a preferred option has been identified, local residents should have every opportunity to view and comment on the plans.

To build and maintain buy-in from the public, all of the above stages should be open, transparent and accompanied by a well-planned and executed communications strategy.

When thinking about who should be consulted and engaged the toolkit recommended it should be *'all those who have rights, responsibilities and interests in the issues'*. It is also valuable to keep in mind that activities need to be well planned and delivered. Poor delivery will likely result in the very delays that consultation and engagement are intended to avoid.

Recently, plans for a £500 million waste incinerator in Kings Lynn (a town in the east of England) were terminated. The cost to the council of terminating the contract was £30.26 million. Permission was first granted in 2012 and since then it has faced substantial and sustained local opposition, including a local referendum where 65,000 people voted against the scheme. The council's engagement with local people about defining the challenges the area faces in managing its waste, and the options available to address this should have been better. Rather than work together with local people to find an acceptable solution, the council adopted a very formal public consultation approach which did not go through the recommended stages we have outlined. Unsurprisingly, local residents felt that the council was not working in their, or the area's, best interests and they protested strongly against the plans with the resulting expensive policy failure.

### 3. CHANGES TO A WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE

When a change to a waste collection service is planned, what looks good on paper can, all too often, under-deliver in practice. The public is supportive of the idea of recycling more of their waste, but recycling levels in many local authority areas have plateaued at a much lower level than that needed to meet EU targets. The desire to recycle more is not being translated into high enough levels of behaviour change.

Looking into what seems to be happening when it comes to 'claimed' levels of recycling:

- 1) Users need to be confident about what they can recycle; and
- 2) The recycling needs to be convenient for them to do.

This means they want clarity about what they can recycle and for the process to be as hassle free as possible. We know that there is a very big difference between what people claim they do and what they actually do in practice, but the important bit here is the user perspective about what the barriers are to recycling.

In recent years behaviour change techniques have been the focus of considerable attention in the UK. A Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was set up in the Cabinet Office to introduce these techniques into policy making. Its approach is particularly relevant for a service change where success is largely reliant on service users changing their behaviours. A good behavioural change approach can address the barriers to recycling and consequently help raise the level of recycling.

BIT said that the starting point for an effective service change is to step back from the detail and gain a good understanding of the nature and context of the issue.

It highlights four stages to this (Owen et al, 2012):

- 'Define the outcome' – what is the behaviour to be influenced, how this will be accurately measured, and over what timescale.
- 'Understand the context' – observe how people actually behave in the situation you are interested in changing. From these observations start to design an intervention.
- 'Build your intervention' – use an iterative process using the EAST framework (discussed below) to build the intervention.
- 'Test, learn and adapt' – implement the intervention, measure the effects and modify to maximise impact.

At the heart of the intervention is the EAST framework – if you want to change behaviour make it *Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely*:

- **Easy:** this is the core bit to changing any behaviour: make it as easy as possible to do. The smallest details need to be focused on and any 'friction costs' removed or minimised. If there is an option of changing the 'default setting' then do this. People are often too lazy to change from their default. If you cannot change the default, then reduce the 'hassle factor' - make the effort required to change behaviour as little as possible. And when it comes to communicating a change, keep the messaging as simple as possible; include only the essentials and be crystal clear early in the message what it is you want people to do.
- **Attractive:** people are more likely to respond to attractive messaging, for example, thoughtful use of colours and images. Also, make the message personal – it is increasingly easy and cheap to tie in a message to a named user rather than a generic 'Dear service user' type greeting. Incentives can also be part of encouraging a change in behaviour - interestingly a 'lottery' style competition can be more effective (and cheaper) than individual payments.
- **Social:** if you show what most people do regarding a service this is likely to have an effect on many of those who are not demonstrating the desired behaviour. Do not do the opposite and highlight how many people are not doing what you want. This is because it is likely to make those people feel less guilty about their own behaviour because many others 'appear' to be acting in the same way. Also, use the power of networks to encourage peer pressure to change behaviours. Another aspect of 'social' is to make public pledges to do something – if people have made an open commitment they are more likely to follow through with it.
- **Timely:** introduce the change when people are most likely to be receptive. Behaviour is easier to change when habits are already disrupted, such as around major life events e.g. moving house. However, of more relevance to a service change like waste collection, is to work with people to identify the barriers to action and work with them to overcome these.

Public engagement is a core component to the BIT approach. An effective service change is one that is co-produced with the intended users from start to finish. The public often have a very different insight to a service (and the barriers) than service providers. Although they may misinterpret what their likely behavioural response will be, they are very good at spotting barriers and enablers.

One of the most innovative and interesting aspects to the BIT approach is that, wherever possible, it uses a random controlled trial (RCT) to test the effectiveness of an intervention. This approach can make evaluation of policy easier and more accurate, but in an era of cash-starved public services this might not gain much traction, particularly with smaller public bodies.

At Ricardo Energy & Environment we use a similar behaviour change model to EAST – the 4Es approach: *Enable, Engage, Encourage and Exemplify*:

- **Enable:** identify what stops people adopting the behaviour you are seeking to encourage, and then remove those barriers. Also, educate people about what you would like them to do, and train up staff to support them.
- **Engage:** communicate clearly (using a range of approaches) to service users about what the service change is and means for them. Work with them so they are involved in designing the new intervention.
- **Encourage:** provide incentives to change behaviour and de-incentivise continuing with the status quo or not actively embracing the new service.

- Exemplify: lead by example - 'walk the talk'. This can use peer pressure to demonstrate what the new expected behaviour is.

The simple message underpinning the Ricardo Energy & Environment approach (originally developed by Defra) is that the desired behaviour is simply *'the way we do things round here'*.

Our own experience of working with many local authorities in the UK to review and improve their recycling services has found that households are very good at recycling key materials such as newspapers and magazines, but less good at 'minor' materials such as office paper and paper packaging. When reviewing their existing schemes, local authorities need to evaluate whether households understand the full range of materials they can and cannot recycle. The design of their scheme, its operation and the communications used are also keys parts of any evaluation.

We know that the design of the scheme impacts on the quality of what is recycled. For example, an open container design is not good as it encourages people to add litter and can also result in water contamination. The size of a container is also important: it needs to allow for sufficient storage of recycled materials. This is becoming more important in the UK as many local authorities have fortnightly collections and a trend is underway towards three (or even four) weekly residual waste collections. What can actually be recycled also matters. If a broad range of materials are collected, then this helps tackle the 'confidence' issue that puts many people off recycling as it means they have to put less effort into thinking about what can and cannot be added to their container(s).

To improve the service collection and the quality of materials recycled, it is important to have an effective feedback loop in place. There needs to be a regular and easy feedback loop for both staff and service users to raise any issues they may have. This feedback loop needs to be simple and obvious, for example, by giving service users a single contact point by phone, website or e-mail. On the quality side, there needs to be investment in crew training so that a lower level of non-target materials is collected and contaminated loads rejected.

When it comes to communications, a wide-ranging, multi-channel approach should be used, for example, stickers on bins, leaflets to households, targeted home visits, roadshows, internet information, including the use of social media and online videos. Different people are more receptive to different communications approaches so it is important to keep it varied. Research and experience shows the most important communications channels are stickers on bins and service leaflets as these ensure the message gets to every household. Also, think about whether pushes on recycling could be tied into wider initiatives such as national recycling or environmental awareness days or weeks. To keep on top of communications and make it both timely and effective, develop a communications plan and keep coming back to it and revising it.

We have found that several key messages are critical to raise awareness and influence behaviour:

- Explanations – what is recycling and why it is important;
- Instructions – basic 'how to recycle' information;
- Education – to dispel myths such as materials are not actually recycled;
- How recycling works – what happens once the materials are collected;
- Effectiveness – how well the scheme is performing; and
- Cost benefits – what are the gains to the local authority and council tax payer through recycling.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Recent experiences in the UK have demonstrated that, if significant changes in waste management services and infrastructure, particularly controversial ones, are to progress, there needs to be a change in many organisations' approaches. Instead of just communicating to the public what will happen and hoping for the best outcome, they need to work with the public from a very early stage of the policy making process. If this does not happen, many changes will fail to progress at all, or those that do will fail to meet anything like their full potential.

In an era where public spending is being squeezed, policy makers need to get things right first time. Timely public dialogue may appear to be a costly investment but it is nothing compared to the costs of policy failure.

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