

A guidance document for local authorities

The Waste Collection Commitment



The Waste Collection Commitment sets out in plain English the principles which should underlie domestic waste and recycling collection services.

WRAP helps individuals, businesses and local authorities to reduce waste and recycle more, making better use of resources and helping to tackle climate change.

Written by: Brook Lyndhurst and WRAP



Supported by: The Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee and Improvement and Efficiency South East



Front cover photography: Kerbside collection of recyclables in the London Borough of Camden.

WRAP and Brook Lyndhurst believe the content of this report to be correct as at the date of writing. However, factors such as prices, levels of recycled content and regulatory requirements are subject to change and users of the report should check with their suppliers to confirm the current situation. In addition, care should be taken in using any of the cost information provided as it is based upon numerous project-specific assumptions (such as scale, location, tender context, etc.).

The report does not claim to be exhaustive, nor does it claim to cover all relevant products and specifications available on the market. While steps have been taken to ensure accuracy, WRAP cannot accept responsibility or be held liable to any person for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading. It is the responsibility of the potential user of a material or product to consult with the supplier or manufacturer and ascertain whether a particular product will satisfy their specific requirements. The listing or featuring of a particular product or company does not constitute an endorsement by WRAP and WRAP cannot guarantee the performance of individual products or materials. This material is copyrighted. It may be reproduced free of charge subject to the material being accurate and not used in a misleading context. The source of the material must be identified and the copyright status acknowledged. This material must not be used to endorse or used to suggest WRAP's endorsement of a commercial product or service. For more detail, please refer to WRAP's Terms & Conditions on its web site: www.wrap.org.uk

About the Waste Collection Commitment

This work flows directly from recommendations made by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2006-7. The Committee said that: *"There is a strong case for moving towards a basic understood standard, if not for collection methods or timings or frequency or type, at least for what the householder who pays, at least in part, for refuse collection through his or her council tax should be able to expect from the local authority."*¹

In their response to the Select Committee the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs invited WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) and the Local Government Association to develop a set of principles for a good collection system. The project has been supported by a steering group which also included representatives of the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee and Improvement and Efficiency South East.

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmcomloc/536/536i.pdf>

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction 3
- 2.0 The Waste Collection Commitment 4
 - Principle 1 We will... explain clearly what services you can expect to receive 5
 - Principle 2 We will... provide regular collections..... 6
 - Principle 3 We will... provide a reliable collection service 7
 - Principle 4 We will... consider any special requests that individual households may have..... 8
 - Principle 5 We will... design our services and carry out collections in a way that doesn't produce litter..... 9
 - Principle 6 We will... collect as many materials for recycling as we can and explain to you what happens to them 10
 - Principle 7 We will... explain clearly what our service rules are and the reasons for them .. 11
 - Principle 8 We will... tell you in good time if we have to make changes to your services, even temporarily..... 12
 - Principle 9 We will... respond to complaints we receive about our services 13
 - Principle 10 We will... tell all our residents about this commitment to collecting waste 14
- 3.0 Demonstrating your support for the Commitment 15
 - 3.1 Monitoring existing indicators 15
 - 3.2 General survey questions 15
 - 3.3 A more detailed survey 16
- 4.0 Supplementary detail 17
- 5.0 Further guidance on the issues covered by the Commitment..... 19

1.0 Introduction

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide residents with waste collection services, including the collection of materials for recycling. Geography, population, housing stock, historical infrastructure, funding levels and differing local priorities all influence the development and delivery of services at a local level. Councils are therefore properly responsible for deciding how services can best be delivered in their areas.

This need to match local waste collection services to local circumstances has resulted in enormous variation in the services offered by local authorities, creating the potential for householders to lose sight of what constitutes a 'good' standard of service. The ongoing change from traditional waste disposal to integrated waste and recycling collection for an increasing range of materials has led to further variation.

The Waste Collection Commitment aims to clearly set out, through a number of general principles, the standard of service that every household in England should expect from their waste collection services and provide councils with advice on how to improve their services. It is hoped that this clearer understanding will help to deliver improved customer satisfaction and increase participation in recycling schemes.

Developing the Commitment

This Commitment is consumer focused. It has been developed from the findings of comprehensive market research which was undertaken in the autumn of 2008. The purpose of the market research was to better understand the aspects of waste collection services that English householders considered most important. The research involved a telephone survey of 2,083 householders, weighted to reflect the national demographic profile of England, followed by four focus groups that further explored some of the emerging issues.

The findings from the market research were shared with local authority representatives by means of two workshops in spring 2009. The key themes that emerged from the market research were developed with local authority involvement into a number of principles that define a good collection service.

How it will work

The Waste Collection Commitment is a voluntary, service-level agreement. By signing up to the Commitment, a local authority is committing to ensuring that the needs of its residents are central to the design and delivery of their waste and recycling collection services. We hope that it will lead participating local authorities to review not only how they design and operate their services but how they communicate with their service users. Ultimately, we hope that the level of service that residents can expect to receive will be made clearer and that satisfaction with collection services will be improved.

Support is available from the Local Government Services Team at WRAP to help Local Authorities develop services that comply with the principles of the Waste Collection Commitment, if that isn't currently the case.

The structure of this document

Following the structure of the Commitment itself (see next section), the remainder of this document provides guidance and support on each principle in turn. This outlines:

- The market research evidence in support of the principle; and
- Practical considerations to think about when assessing whether your authority is delivering on each of the principles.

Three further sections at the end of the document provide advice on:

- Demonstrating your support for the Waste Collection Commitment to residents;
- Sources of further guidance, tools and training; and
- Supplementary detail to help better understand how the Commitment fits into your waste service.

2.0 The Waste Collection Commitment

"We are committed to providing waste and recycling services which are good value for money and which meet the needs of our residents.

This means we will:

- 1 Explain clearly what services you can expect to receive;
- 2 Provide regular collections;
- 3 Provide a reliable collection service;
- 4 Consider any special requests that individual households may have;
- 5 Design our services and carry out collections in a way that doesn't produce litter;
- 6 Collect as many materials for recycling as we can and explain to you what happens to them;
- 7 Explain clearly what our service rules are and the reasons for them;
- 8 Tell you in good time if we have to make changes to your services, even temporarily;
- 9 Respond to complaints we receive about our services; and
- 10 Tell all our residents about this commitment to collecting waste."

Principle 1

We will... explain clearly what services you can expect to receive

The background to this principle

WRAP's market research suggests that satisfaction with local authority communications concerning waste and recycling is lower than many other aspects of collection services.

- Only 65% of respondents were satisfied with council communications about changes to the day of their collection(s);
- Only 58% of respondents were satisfied with council communications about any alterations to their collection service (e.g. in what could be recycled); and
- Only 54% of respondents were satisfied with council communications about the reasoning behind the rules of their collection service.

Additional focus group work revealed concerns among some residents that they receive differential treatment according to the area – or even street – they live in. It is important that councils convey to all residents the specifics of the service that they can expect to receive.

Practical considerations

- Is information readily available to all residents regarding the waste and recycling services available to them? Remember, not all residents will have access to the internet;
- Do you clearly explain what residents need to do in order to participate in your recycling service?
- Do services differ across the authority? E.g. do collections from flats differ from those from houses? If so, are your communications clear about who can expect what?
- Are there alternative options open to particular types of household? Do you offer a range of containers for different types or sizes of households? Do you offer an assisted collection service? Do you publicise these options?
- Are there ways of providing households with only the information that is relevant to them?
- Do you need to make information available in other languages or in Braille? Do communications about collection services meet your council's policy on communications with residents?
- How do you ensure every household receives information about their services?
- Do you have a transient population? How do you ensure new residents receive all the information they need?
- What steps do you take to ensure that your call centre is informed about collection services, including any service options such as assisted collections?

Principle 2

We will... provide regular collections

The background to this principle

A 'regular' collection can be broadly interpreted as one that is 'recurring at fixed times'². In this case, on the same day of the week. Ultimately, this commitment and **Principle 3** are about giving residents *certainty* about their collections.

Regularity emerged strongly from the market research that fed into the Waste Collection Commitment:

- When asked what aspects of their collections they liked, 17% of respondents mentioned the **regularity** of the service (making this the most popular answer to this question). 4% also said they liked the fact that their service was 'consistent', supporting the suggestion that what residents really value is certainty; and
- When asked about the most important things that mark out a good rubbish and recycling collection service, 22% mentioned regular collections.

Practical considerations

- Do you strive to ensure that a waste or recycling collection will always occur on the same day of the week for a given household?
- How do you deal with disruptions to collections i.e. bank holidays, road closures or inclement weather?
- How do you manage missed collections?
- Do you have a timescale for rectifying missed collections? Is this information communicated to residents?
- How do you monitor the performance of your collection crews?
- What feedback do you have from residents on your services?
- What steps do you take to make sure call centre staff are up to date with service schedules?

² Random House Dictionary, 2009

Principle 3

We will... provide a reliable collection service

The background to this principle

A 'reliable' collection is one that always occurs at a *consistent* time and in a *consistent* manner. Ultimately, this commitment and [Principle 2](#) are about giving residents *certainty* about their collections.

- Regularity and reliability emerged strongly from WRAP's market research:
- When asked what aspects of their collections they liked, 17% of respondents mentioned the **regularity** of the service (making this the most popular answer to this question) – while 8% of respondents said they liked the **reliability** of their collections. 4% also said they liked the fact that their service was 'consistent', supporting the suggestion that what residents really value is certainty;
- When asked about the most important things that mark out a good rubbish and recycling collection service, this time **reliability** was the most popular answer – given by 28% of respondents - while 22% mentioned regular collections.

When respondents were asked to rate the reliability of their rubbish and recycling collection, 79% said they were satisfied.

Practical considerations

- Do you strive to ensure that a waste or recycling collection will always occur on the same day of the week for a given household?
- How do you deal with disruptions to collections i.e. bank holidays or road closures?
- How do you manage missed collections?
- Do you have a timescale for rectifying missed collections? Is this information communicated to residents?
- How do you monitor the performance of your collection crews?
- What feedback do you have from residents on your services?
- What steps do you take to make sure call centre staff are up to date with service schedules?

Principle 4

We will... consider any special requests that individual households may have

The background to this principle

There was insufficient space on the market research questionnaire to explore satisfaction with local authority arrangements for, say, residents with physical disabilities. However, the focus group work revealed a strong sense that collection services need to be sensitive to the particular circumstances of individual residents and households. This view was perhaps most frequently expressed in concerns about the level of flexibility offered by councils to larger (or smaller) households. Other respondents complained about lack of storage space for containers, or about restrictions on where and when they could leave containers out as a result of living in conservation areas or listed buildings.

Frustration at services that do not respond to the particular needs and circumstances of particular householders may have been reflected in lower levels of satisfaction with the size of rubbish and recycling containers amongst larger households. 86% of single person households agreed that the rubbish and recycling containers their council provided them with were an appropriate *size*, compared with only 58% of households of five or more people. Similarly, 82% of single person households agreed that the *number* of rubbish and recycling containers supplied to them by their council was reasonable, compared with only 63% of households of five or more people. This link between household size and satisfaction was replicated when it came to recycling and rubbish collections more generally.

It is important that local authorities give consideration to the different types of households they serve and strive to ensure that their collection services accommodate the specific circumstances of residents wherever possible.

Practical considerations

- Do you have sufficient flexibility in your service design and delivery to accommodate the needs of individual households? Some households may have a genuine need for a larger waste container whilst others may prefer a smaller size.
- Do you have clear policies that support the delivery of your services e.g. in relation to capacity made available for waste and recycling? If a household requires additional capacity for recyclables materials, is this provided?
- Do you have provisions in place for different types of property (e.g. sheltered accommodation, flats above shops, homes with a shortage of storage space for waste and recycling containers, etc.)?
- Do you have a policy for providing assisted collections?
- How are service options communicated to the residents that might need them?
- What policies do you have in place for dealing with resident enquiries?
- What steps are in place to make sure that call centre staff are kept up to date with any policies/rules for responding to such requirements?

Principle 5

We will... design our services and carry out collections in a way that doesn't produce litter

The background to this principle

When asked about the most important components of a 'good' rubbish and recycling collection service, 23% of respondents mentioned the cleanliness of streets after collections have taken place. Only reliability of service was mentioned more often. In addition, 15% of respondents said they were dissatisfied with the way their local authority had dealt with litter in the streets following collections.

Whilst not technically littering, the survey also suggested that some residents are annoyed by crews leaving containers in the wrong place after collections have taken place. 6% of respondents said containers being returned to the correct position was an essential component of a good collection service, while 3% listed containers being left in the wrong place as one of their top dislikes. The same percentage mentioned the placement of containers as one of the key areas in which their service could be improved.

Practical considerations

- Has adequate capacity been provided for residents to safely store and present their waste and recyclables for collection?
- Is additional capacity available to those that can demonstrate a need?
- Are containers providing sufficient protection from the weather, animals or vandals so as to prevent litter?
- Do you have a closed-lid policy to prevent waste blowing out of bins?
- If you accept side waste or additional recyclables, are you clear on how they should be presented for collection?
- Are crews briefed to clean up any spillages that happen during collection?
- Is street cleansing scheduled after waste and recycling collections where possible?
- Are crews encouraged to replace containers correctly after emptying?
- Are all collection crews aware of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005)? [Part three](#) contains details of the offence of dropping litter.

Principle 6

We will... collect as many materials for recycling as we can and explain to you what happens to them

The background to this principle

The public desire to maximise the range of materials collected for recycling is clear - 15% of survey respondents said their service would be improved if more materials were collected for recycling and 16% listed the limited range of materials collected as one of their dislikes about their service. At the other end of the spectrum, 11% listed the range of materials collected among the things they liked most about their collection service. Requests for a wider range of materials to be collected were often directed at particular materials, the most common being plastics and glass.

Stories in the media about materials put out for recycling being shipped to the far east, sent to landfill, or incinerated have fed scepticism about what happens to materials that are collected for recycling. Such sentiments emerged regularly in the focus groups and are closely linked to the pledge to explain how materials are used after collection. That part of the principle is also partly linked to concerns about crews' treatment of recycled materials, particularly when residents have been asked to separate these before leaving them out for collection. Almost a third of respondents (31%) agreed with the statement, 'It's pointless separating out different types of recycling because the council puts them all in one lorry anyway'.

Practical considerations

- Do you explain why you are able to collect the range of materials that you do?
- If you don't collect a key material such as glass or plastics for recycling, do you provide information on how residents can recycle these materials through other outlets such as bring sites or at Household Waste Recycling Centres?
- What systems are in place to ensure that all service information is updated with any changes to targeted materials?
- Can you track the recyclables collected by your authority to their final destination?
- How do you convey this information to residents? Is information available via your website as in this example from [Somerset](#)?

Principle 7

We will... explain clearly what our service rules are and the reasons for them

The background to this principle

As described under [Principle 1](#), satisfaction with council communications about waste and recycling collections is lower than for many other aspects of the service. Nonetheless, four out of five survey respondents (81%) agreed that the rules of their rubbish and recycling collection are “clear and simple”. Only around one in ten (11%) disagreed.

While this question related more to perceptions of the rules than the manner in which they are conveyed, there is clearly a link between effective communication of rules and a public belief that those rules are ‘clear and simple’. This was supported by the focus groups that followed the survey, although there was more uncertainty about rules when it came to some of the specifics, such as whether bottle tops should be screwed on, or whether packaging should be rinsed out.

Irrespective of current understanding and perceptions of collection service rules, the essence of this principle – that those rules, together with the reasoning behind them, should be clearly set out for residents – remains vitally important. With respect to explaining the reasoning behind rules, there was clear evidence from the survey that some local authorities have some way to go on this issue. Only 54% were satisfied with their council's explanations about why rules are the way they are.

The public attitudes survey also asked how fair respondents felt a range of rules were. Rules relating to where containers should be left for collection were generally thought to be fair (82% of respondents), as were those relating to the time of day waste (81%) and recycling (81%) should be left out. Four fifths (80%) of respondents also believed rules about the condition recyclables should be left in were fair. Other rules, however – namely those relating to side waste and the presentation of waste and recycling containers (e.g. whether lids are closed or not) – received lower levels of support. It may be that explaining the reasoning behind service rules could also increase public support for some of these less popular aspects of collections.

Practical considerations

- Are you clear on your rules relating to side waste, over-filled bins, contamination of recyclables etc? Have these policies been agreed by elected members? Have these been communicated to residents?
- Are your messages kept simple? Do you explain why you require things to be done in a certain way?
- Do you explain what residents need to do in order that they participate correctly and why?
- How consistent are the instructions you issue?
- Is information readily available to residents regarding the rules of your service?
- Do the instructions issued to residents reflect the service specifications in your collection contract(s)?

Principle 8

We will... tell you in good time if we have to make changes to your services, even temporarily

The background to this principle

As described in [Principle 1](#), survey respondents expressed much lower levels of satisfaction with council communications regarding their collection service than they did in relation to other aspects. More specifically, a significant proportion of respondents (15%) were dissatisfied with either their council's communication of changes to the day of collection, or communication of alterations to services (e.g. which materials are recycled) (18% dissatisfied).

Residents' demands for clear communication about alterations to services are clearly linked to their desire for collections to be regular and reliable (see [Principle 2](#) and [Principle 3](#)).

Practical considerations

Temporary changes (e.g. due to bank holidays or road closures)

- How do you ensure that the highways department informs you of any imminent road closures?
- Are you up-to-date with any planned road works/utility works?
- What is your policy for dealing with bank holiday collections?
- Do you have an up to date schedule on copy deadlines for council communications? E.g. resident newsletters; website updates in order that you can advise residents of any planned changes?
- How do you make sure that your call centre staff are kept up to date with all changes to service and are made aware of operational difficulties so that they are well-informed to deal with customer enquiries?

Permanent changes to the nature of the service

- How soon before a change is introduced do you send out leaflets introducing the changes? WRAP guidance recommends a lead time of around six weeks.
- Do you provide practical guidance with new containers?
- Do you support changes to the service with a PR campaign before, during and after roll out?
- How easy is your website to find and use? How detailed is the information you provide on it?
- Do you make use of service calendars and container branding (including basic service rules) to make the changes easier to follow for residents?
- Do you have a helpline to provide advice to householders with queries regarding the new service?
- How do you ensure that all staff, from collection crews through to your communications team, understand the new service and describe it in a consistent way?

Principle 9

We will... respond to complaints we receive about our services

The background to this principle

Along with communications about collections, some of the lowest levels of public satisfaction with collection services were recorded in relation to the way councils respond to problems³. Only 66% of respondents were satisfied with their council's response to litter on the streets after collections, while 65% of respondents were satisfied with their council's response to collection crews throwing recycling in with general waste. Satisfaction levels were still lower when it came to councils' response to containers being left in the wrong place by collection crew (61% satisfied) and fell to 50% when it came to councils' response to fly tipping. It is important that residents know how to bring problems to the attention of their local authority, and that councils have procedures in place to respond to problems and communicate with residents about that response.

Practical considerations

- What is the council corporate policy for dealing with complaints?
- Are enquiries separated from complaints?
- Is there clarity on who has responsibility for dealing with any enquiries or complaints received? If you have an external contractor, are roles and responsibilities agreed by way of a service level agreement within the contract?
- How long should a resident have to wait for a response to an enquiry or complaint?
- What options to residents have if they are not happy with the initial response?
- How are these procedures communicated to residents?

³ It should be noted that the wording of this question does leave some ambiguity. For example, being satisfied with the way in which a council has dealt with the problem does not necessarily suggest that a respondent complained to the council themselves.

Principle 10

We will... tell all our residents about this commitment to collecting waste

The background to this principle

The original starting point in drafting the Waste Collection Commitment was to help households better understand the sort of standards they should expect of their collection services. In order for it to be effective, local authorities need not only to sign up to it, but to communicate their involvement – and the Commitment itself – to their residents.

Practical considerations

- Have you briefed your elected members and staff regarding the Waste Collection Commitment and what it means for them?
- Have you discussed the Commitment with your contractor, and addressed any issues that arise from it?
- How will you communicate the Waste Collection Commitment to your residents in a way that they are most likely to absorb it? You could consider:
 - Displaying the signed Commitment in council buildings;
 - Posting the Commitment on the council website;
 - Including an article on the Commitment in the council newsletter or magazine;
 - Issuing a press release to local media; and
 - Including a note in parish or town council meetings and newsletters.
- Will you integrate the Commitment into all communications relating to collection services?
- How frequently will you remind residents that you are signed up to the Commitment and what it means for them?

3.0 Demonstrating your support for the Commitment

The Waste Collection Agreement is voluntary and there are no reporting requirements associated with signing up. In doing so, though, you make a commitment to households in your area that you will strive to meet the standards it describes. This section therefore explores the sorts of approaches you could take to collecting evidence of your support for the Commitment's principles.

We suggest that there are three main sources of evidence which could be used to demonstrate your support for each principle, each requiring a different level of time and resources.

3.1 Monitoring existing indicators

Most local authorities monitor various aspects of their performance, be that through National Indicators⁴, the Place Survey⁵, the Customer Service Standard⁶ or local, bespoke indicator sets. Many of the existing national schemes are relevant to particular principles from the Commitment. For example, the Customer Service Standard requires certain levels of performance in communicating with residents and it may be that data you are collecting anyway through that scheme could be used to demonstrate that you are living up to some principles of the Waste Collection Commitment (e.g. 1, 6, 7, 8 and 10). Another good example is Question 8 of the Place Survey, which asks residents to rate their satisfaction with refuse collection, doorstep recycling and local tips/HWRCs.

You may also be collecting (or have access to) other data that could be linked to one or more of the principles. For example, you may have figures on the number of enquiries from the public about waste collection services. If the number of enquiries is low (or falling), this will help demonstrate your fulfilment of principles 1 and 7. Be wary of reading too much into this type of data though, and be prepared for improvements in service to actually result in negative shifts on a given indicator. Improving the way you communicate with residents about the service options available to them, for example, could result in the number of collection-related enquiries going *up*, as householders get in touch to make use of those options.

The more detailed the data your authority collects, the more helpful it can be in both demonstrating your support for the Waste Collection Commitment and in signalling where services can be improved. If you can map collection-related enquiries, for example, you may be able to pinpoint areas where communications are proving less effective or where service quality is poorer.

For those principles that involve communication with residents, it may be worth thinking about whether you can identify (and possibly even produce copies of) the communication materials you have used.

3.2 General survey questions

Since the Waste Collection Commitment is essentially about communicating your minimum standards of service to households, the best way to show that you are fulfilling the Commitment is to ask residents. It may be that you are able to commission a bespoke survey for this purpose or – the cheaper option – you could include questions relating to the Waste Collection Commitment on a more general household survey you are commissioning anyway (e.g. the Place Survey). If so, it will be important to limit the number of questions asked to avoid making the questionnaire overly long.

The simplest approach would be to ask a single question about awareness of the Waste Collection Commitment. The overarching goal of the Commitment is to ensure that residents are aware of the standards it sets out. If you are able to demonstrate that residents have heard of the Commitment, the battle is half won. You might follow this with a second question asking residents who have heard of the Commitment whether or not they think the council is delivering on it, though you will need to frame your answer responses carefully to take into account the variety of responses you might receive. You might, for example, use options along the lines of, 'It is delivering on

⁴ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator>

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/placesurveymanual0809>

⁶ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/news/final_standard.aspx

all of the commitment'; 'It is delivering on most of the Commitment'; 'It is delivering on some of the Commitment'; 'It is not delivering on most of the Commitment'; 'It is not delivering on any of the Commitment'; and 'Don't know'.

A more in-depth solution would be to ask specific questions about those principles you believe are most important (or that you will receive most publicity about). You might, for example, ask residents how reliable they believe their collection service is (Principle 3).

3.3 A more detailed survey

For some principles, a single question as outlined above is more than adequate. For others, however, exploring residents' attitudes is likely to take a more involved approach. Take, for example, Principle 6 ('We will collect as many materials for recycling as we can and explain to you what happens to them'). If you were to ask residents to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement, "My council collects as many materials for recycling as it can and explains to me what happens to them", you might well get some strange results. How should someone answer, for example, if they believe you *do* collect as many materials as you can for recycling, but *don't* think you do enough to explain what happens to them? In cases like this, you might want to ask several questions relating to a single principle.

When using surveys, bear in mind that it may be helpful to be able to compare your performance with that of other councils, or with a national average. This means using questions from other, previous surveys wherever they suit you needs.

Advice on specific principles

This section outlines some tips on demonstrating your support for the principles of the Waste Collection Commitment.

Principle 2 – 'Provide regular collections'

Our research suggested that respondents often confuse 'regularity' (e.g. collections occurring at standard intervals) with 'frequency' (e.g. the length of those intervals). As a result, survey questions about performance on 'regularity' may be skewed by attitudes to frequency. To overcome this confusion you could ask whether residents are satisfied that collections are always made on the expected day.

Principle 5 – 'Design our service and carry out collections in a way that doesn't produce litter'

National Indicator 195⁷ may be of use with this principle, though it is focused more on overall incidence of litter and graffiti rather than the specific causes of litter. That is to say, it does not draw a distinction between collection-related litter and other forms of littering.

Principle 8 – 'Tell you in good time if we have to make changes to your services, even temporarily'

If no permanent changes have been made to your collection service in the last two years or more, you could probably restrict any monitoring you decide to carry out in relation to this principle to the communication of *temporary* changes such as alterations due to bank holidays or broken-down vehicles.

⁷ <http://cleanliness-indicator.defra.gov.uk/>

4.0 Supplementary detail

Making sense of the research

Both the survey and the focus groups commissioned by WRAP in support of this research were geared towards developing an understanding of the issues that matter to households in relation to their waste and recycling collections. While there was a strong sense that some issues (such as reliability and regularity) would prove significant, relatively little was known about others (the importance attached to clean streets, for example). It is important to remember that the final ten principles that make up the Waste Collection Commitment were born of the research, rather than defining it. As a result, the questions asked in the research sometimes do not line up perfectly with the final principles, but even where this is the case, the findings do provide useful background material in explaining why a given principle is necessary.

The relationship between different principles

Try to avoid thinking of each principle as a distinct entity. Rather, they highlight the often overlapping issues that are important to residents. For example, **Principle 4** requires authorities to be responsive to the particular circumstances of different households. **Principle 1** requires councils to communicate the collection services they offer to their residents. This will obviously include any options provided under **Principle 4**. Wherever possible, this type of cross-over is identified in the text.

Communicating with residents

A number of the principles expect certain policies and practices to be communicated to residents. We have provided links to guidance and support on communications at the end of this document, but the following paragraphs provide some overarching tips and suggestions for effectively conveying information to households.

■ Use different formats

There is no 'one size fits all' answer when it comes to communicating with residents – some will read their local paper; others won't. Some will read a leaflet on recycling and stick it on their fridge; others will just recycle it. Some will visit a website; others wouldn't dream of it.

■ Keep it simple

As a general rule of thumb, the more concisely you can convey information, the more likely people are to read and remember it. The Commitment itself has been awarded a Crystal Mark by the Plain English Campaign. Where additional detail is available, this can be clearly signposted (to a website for example). You could also consider having publicity materials certified by the Plain English Campaign⁸.

■ Make use of images

Images are often far more effective at conveying information than the printed word and can make communications materials look much more inviting. Try also to avoid materials looking too cluttered – empty space can feel like a waste, but can make communications much easier to digest.

■ Provide information at the point it is needed

Your communications will be most effective if you provide them at the point – or at the time – that they will be needed. Information about changes to services should be delivered not long before those changes occur. Similarly, focus group respondents showed great enthusiasm for outlining the rules of services on collection containers – by printing on bags or placing stickers on bins, for example.

■ Clearly explain how you can be contacted

Try to minimise the number of different contact points available to residents and clearly communicate these to households.

⁸ <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>

■ Repetition, repetition, repetition

Remind residents regularly about your service commitments and households' obligations. Make sure that messages are consistent, although changing the means by which you convey them can help to maintain interest.

Value for money

During WRAP's consultation with local authorities on the development of the Waste Collection Commitment, it was suggested that the Commitment offers a useful opportunity to 'close the gap' for residents between their council tax and the local services it pays for. Fulfilling many of the principles of the Commitment may go some way to reassuring and reminding residents that services are designed to give *them* optimal value for money. For instance, explaining the reasoning behind the rules of the service may require mention of the cost of landfill to demonstrate why side waste rules or limits on bin capacity are necessary.

Value for money in services is valued by residents, though they may not think of it in exactly those terms. When asked to list the 'must haves' of a good collection service, 11% of respondents mentioned "an efficient service".

The need to be sensitive to local conditions

This Commitment has been drafted to allow local authorities the room and flexibility to design services in a way that best meets local conditions. It is acknowledged that a good solution in one area may be a very poor one thirty or forty miles down the road. The principles therefore deliberately steer away from being prescriptive about the specific components of collection services e.g. method of containment or collection frequency.

5.0 Further guidance on the issues covered by the Commitment

This section outlines some of the guidance available to you in implementing the Waste Collection Commitment. These tools are arranged under broad, thematic headings. In addition, note also that tailored support for local authorities is available from the Local Government Services team at WRAP in the areas of collections, communications and waste prevention. Further information is available at www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities.

Communicating with residents

■ [Improving recycling through effective communication](#)

This guide has been prepared to help you plan your local recycling awareness campaign in line with the national Recycle Now campaign.

(http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/Developing_recycling_communications_campaigns.68a23e89.2732.pdf)

■ [Door-to-door canvassing](#)

WRAP's Step by step guide to door-to-door canvassing uses experience gained from canvassing projects and offers advice to ensure canvassing campaigns are successful. Local authority case studies illustrate how campaigns can be run locally.

(http://www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities/research_guidance/communications/guide_to.html)

■ [Good practice communication examples](#)

Good practice examples on using communications to improve recycling performance funded through WRAP's Behavioural Change Local Fund 2006 - 2008. These contain useful methods of communications.

(http://www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities/research_guidance/communications/wrap_funded_local.html)

■ [Improvement & Development Agency 'Connecting with communities' communications toolkit](#)

This toolkit aims to help councils improve communication with residents (as well as staff and other stakeholders) and includes tips on communicating in a recession, strategic communications and community engagement.

(<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=7816073>)

■ [Improving Low Participation Areas Guidance](#)

This decision making process assists with the identification of low participation areas and the development of an effective communications approach.

(http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/2009.02.16_FINAL_Improving_Low_Participation_Areas_-_Effective_communications_planning_-_Guidance_Document.2a4a5295.5360.pdf)

■ [Local Government Association & the Improvement & Development Agency – 'Communicating Cohesion: Evaluating Local Authority Communication Strategies'](#)

The study, which looked at experiences in six local areas, considered the relevance of myth-busting to managing tensions and experience of local and national media. (<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=1568757>)

Service design

■ [Alternate Weekly Collections](#)

This guide aims to provide practical advice for waste managers and elected members within local authorities. It is designed to help them determine whether AWC is a suitable option and, if so, to support the planning and

delivery of a successful service. Valuable experience and lessons learned by authorities that have introduced AWC are highlighted throughout in case studies. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/AWC_Revised_Final_Report_-_130707.fb5a407f.4070.PDF)

■ Choosing and improving your glass collection service

This Good Practice Guide provides essential information to local authority waste managers on the collection and recycling of glass. Whether planning new glass collections, or making alterations to existing schemes, it can help you introduce the most sustainable service. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/Final_version_-_Glass_best_prac_-_May_2008.dd8d872e.5715.pdf)

■ Choosing the right collection system

This fact sheet compares different kerbside collection systems. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/Choosing_the_right_recycling_collection_system.c6a4ded3.7179.pdf)

■ Food waste collection guidance

Guidance document on collecting household food waste for recycling. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/downloads/food_waste_collection_guidance_-_final.48e88895.7323.pdf)

■ Recycling collections from flats

This guidance has been developed specifically to assist local authority officers to launch, manage and improve recycling and food waste collection schemes for blocks of flats. (<http://www.wrap.org.uk/flats>)

Monitoring and evaluation

■ HSE - Safe waste and recycling collection services

Guidance to help duty-holders identify hazards and ensure that sensible risk management is practised – includes reference to assisted collections. (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/waste23.pdf>)

■ Monitoring and evaluation guidance

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of your schemes and initiatives is essential if you want to improve them in the most cost-effective way. This area of the WRAP website gives you access to detailed, step-by-step guidance on a range of monitoring techniques. (<http://www.wrap.org.uk/monitoringandevaluation>)

■ Waste Improvement Network

Information, guidance and advice available at <http://www.win.org.uk/default.aspx>

Clean streets

■ Defra - National Indicator 195 (Cleanliness) guidance manual

Website is designed to provide a comprehensive and straightforward guide to planning, carrying out and reporting the NI 195 National Indicator for Cleanliness. It also provides information on how to use the data as a management tool, and how and where to get assistance if you are unclear. (<http://cleanliness-indicator.defra.gov.uk/>)

Training courses and workshops

■ [Communications planning and design](#)

This course aims to enable delegates to develop a communications plan for increasing householder participation in collection schemes and improve the quality and effectiveness of local authority waste and recycling communications material. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/wrap_corporate/events/comms_design.html)

■ [Local Government Ombudsman: Good complaint handling - identifying and processing complaints](#)

A one-day course to share expertise in identifying complaints, putting and keeping them on the right track. Specifically for local government staff who have direct contact with members of the public and who receive complaints as part of their day-to-day work. (<http://www.lgo.org.uk/training-councils/good-complaint-handling--gch-/>)

■ [Monitoring and evaluation](#)

This course aims to enable delegates to plan and implement monitoring and evaluation to inform and facilitate continuous improvements in service provision. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/wrap_corporate/events/me.html)

■ [Recycle Now Design](#)

This course aims to enable delegates to improve the overall design, development and cost efficiency of local authority waste and recycling communications. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/wrap_corporate/events/recycle_now_design.html)

■ [Reviewing and retendering your services](#)

This course aims to enable delegates to evaluate, recommend and implement changes to improve the performance, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of collection systems and lead the development and implementation of effective contract arrangements. (http://www.wrap.org.uk/wrap_corporate/events/contracts.html)

**Waste & Resources
Action Programme**

The Old Academy
21 Horse Fair
Banbury, Oxon
OX16 0AH

Tel: 01295 819 900
Fax: 01295 819 911
E-mail: info@wrap.org.uk

Helpline freephone
0808 100 2040

www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities

