



ENVIRONMENT

## Waste Management Variable Charging Scheme Blaby District Council

### Summary

Blaby District Council introduced the UK's first variable charging scheme for household waste in 2000. The scheme was designed to restrict householders to 140 litres of non recyclable waste per week, and gave householders the option to purchase additional capacity and waste services as and when required.

***“Restricting the quantity of waste collected for disposal increases recycling rates and participation.”***

The intention was that by restricting the capacity of the residual waste bin, residents would realise how much waste they produce and therefore encourage householders to make full use of the opportunities available to reduce and recycle their waste.

The philosophy behind the scheme was communicated to residents by distributing a DVD with a special edition council newspaper to all 37,500 households in the District. In addition to this a number of roadshows and promotional events were held to reinforce the message. The revised scheme successfully decreased the amount of waste to landfill by 3% within its first year of operation and the overall recycling rate has increased from 29.3% in 2004/05 to 37% in 2005/06.

## Project background

In 1998 the council recognised that the provision of an unlimited waste collection service was incompatible with sustainable waste practice and sustained a 'throw away' culture, Blaby also noted that they needed to replace their 'black sack system' due an increasing number of manual handling injuries.

Wheeled bins provided the obvious answer as they would enable a decrease in manual handling injuries, however, the council were also committed to promoting sustainable waste practices and wanted to avoid the increase in waste collection typically associated with the introduction of a wheeled bin system.

Blaby quickly realised that the adoption of a wheeled bin system would also be detrimental to it achieving its recycling target of 20% by 2003. In order to meet this target Blaby decided to restrict weekly household residual waste to 140 litres per week and introduced the following:

- 140 litre refuse bin emptied weekly
- 140 litre recycling bin and pre-sort boxes emptied fortnightly
- Assistance is provided for the frail or disabled.

The council will continue to cater for larger households and/or polluting households and have introduced a range of chargeable options for those who are producing additional waste.

## Quote

***“Our scheme has been developed with full cross party support and the co-operation of our residents through extensive trialling and publicity.***

***The outcome has been recycling performance well above current government targets together with a considerable reduction in waste to landfill levels.***

***Our policy confirms our belief that the polluter shall pay”.***

Guy Jackson,  
Portfolio Holder for the Natural and Built Environment.

## Is a Variable Charging Scheme legal?

The main barrier to the introduction of direct or variable charging in the UK is the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Section 45 of the Act makes it the duty of every Waste Collection Authority (WCA) to arrange for the collection of household waste, and states that no charge shall be made for the collection except in cases prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State. This duty is the main barrier to many types of variable charging scheme.

However, the WCA may reasonably require the householder to use specific and separate receptacles for waste. (Section 46 of the Act)  
The WCA can also specify the size of the containers, where they must be placed to be emptied and the content of each container.

Section 46 of the Act is being used by Blaby District Council to charge for additional containers, thereby allowing a Variable Charging Scheme to be introduced.

## Objectives of the variable charging scheme

- To operate a cost effective service
- To reach Government recycling targets
- To reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill
- To communicate the introduction of a new box recycling collection scheme that supplements the council's existing activities and enables a single specification of recyclables
- To maximise the recovery of recyclable material
- To communicate effectively with and to engage the public in the scheme, and to promote public 'buy in' and increase effectiveness and participation.



## Benefits achieved

- Since the introduction of Variable Charging Blaby has seen a 3% reduction in waste to landfill
- Blaby met its 2003/04 statutory 20% recycling target a year early
- Increased participation in recycling, residents can now recycle six different materials at kerbside
- Participation levels for recycling collections are currently running at 84% which is the highest level in Leicestershire
- Only 8.3% of households have larger bins, but the income generated from the rental of larger waste bins, along with income from the sale of the materials for recycling helps offset our bottom line
- Public satisfaction with the refuse and recycling service has improved since the introduction of the new system.

## Risks

- Public rejection was avoided by effectively communicating the change, by listening to residents concerns and acting upon them where appropriate
- Manual handling and Health and Safety risks were minimised by ensuring suitable waste containers were available to the public and Blaby's operatives
- Collection trials were held and questionnaires distributed to obtain customer feedback prior to the schemes district wide roll-out.

## Transferability

Blaby's Variable Charging Scheme is suitable for transfer to authorities interested in lowering their landfill rates and increasing their recycling rates. Blaby's key piece of advice is to obtain Elected Member support and brief ALL front line staff in order that a cohesive message is sent across the board and to the customer.

The following points are also key to your success:

- Fully costed trials need to take place before rolling out of scheme
- Communicate, communicate and communicate, explain, rationalise and sell the system
- Use innovative media to engage your residents. The Blaby DVD cost approximately 85p per copy which is not much more than the price of a leaflet to produce. It was issued to residents in conjunction with a special waste edition of the standard council newspaper
- Ensure there is a resolute approach to your strategy from the top of your authority to the bottom
- Obtain public "buy in" and involve your 'customers' at all stages of the process to ensure seamless integration to change. Provide feedback to residents on performance and the value their contribution.

## Contact

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