

# GOVERNING SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT

*Durham Case Study Report*

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## OVERVIEW

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the findings from a case-study in County Durham, one of a series of case-studies carried out as part of the Governing Sustainable Waste Management project at the Department of Geography, University of Durham.

After providing a background section on the development, framework and current implementation of municipal waste policy in County Durham, the report examines the challenges which have been faced in responding to the new waste agenda. Four sets of challenges to the development of sustainable municipal waste policy are identified:

- Institutional fragmentation: within the authority and beyond
- Instability and uncertainty about current and future policy directions
- Money matters: financial pressures and resources
- Public participation, policy goals and political will

In the face of these challenges, several positive features of municipal waste policy in County Durham are particularly notable:

- The integration of waste management across departmental divisions in the authority
- Cohesive relations between some key local players, particularly the County Council and its arm's length waste management company
- Political support for addressing the waste agenda
- Active innovation, particularly with regard to new technologies
- The range of schemes and initiatives which have been implemented
- An engagement with a broad sustainability agenda for waste

We suggest that three key features of the local municipal waste policy network have enabled County Durham to develop its innovative and successful approach to municipal waste policy:

- Good institutional cohesion
- High degree of political and strategic prioritisation of waste management
- Forward thinking, innovation and risk taking

In drawing lessons for the development of municipal waste policy across the UK, five key messages from County Durham's approach can be found:

- The importance of sufficient staff and resources for the expanding range of responsibilities involved in municipal waste policy
- The need to make waste a strategic priority within the local authority
- The value of political support locally and nationally
- The benefits of embracing change and creating a risk taking culture

At the same time, three issues require further reflection:

- The challenges of joint working within two-tier local authorities
- The importance of meaningful engagement with the public
- The barriers to technological innovation

Durham County Council is justifiably proud of its achievements in this dynamic and complex policy area, and its strategic and innovative approach to municipal waste policy provides examples of how sustainable municipal waste policy can be pursued.

We hope you find the report of interest, and would very much welcome your feedback.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the project<sup>1</sup>

Since Waste Strategy 2000, municipal waste policy (MWP)<sup>2</sup> has undergone considerable upheaval. Local authorities which until recently had to concern themselves with little more than the collection, planning and disposal of waste, and a relatively narrow range of regulations, today have a radically broadened agenda with progressive statutory performance targets for recycling and composting, as well as responsibilities for diversion of waste from landfill, recovery from waste and waste minimisation.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of these developments, the Governing Sustainable Waste Management project seeks to examine what facilitates, and what prevents, the development and implementation of sustainable MWP in the North East of England, and the wider lessons which can be learned for local authorities across the UK. The project involves an overview of MWP across the region, and in-depth analysis of three case-studies: Durham County Council; Newcastle City Council; and Stockton Borough Council. In each case, a number of semi-structured interviews have been conducted with local policy-makers and stakeholders, and a report produced. Further research on the particular initiatives will be undertaken in each authority in early 2005.

### 1.2 Report Purpose and Structure

This report presents the findings of a case study of MWP in the area of Durham County Council (DCC). It is based on a series of interviews with officers of Durham County Council and of several of its constituent District Councils, politicians and representatives of voluntary and commercial organisations in the area concerned with waste management. In addition to interviews a number of documents have been analysed. As a Waste Planning Authority, DCC has responsibility for planning developments affecting all waste streams, but this report focuses only on municipal waste. Although municipal waste is a small proportion of overall waste arisings, it is that waste for which the authority has a statutory duty to manage, and nationally, municipal waste bears a disproportionate weight of policy interest. This report incorporates feedback on an earlier draft from a workshop held with a number of respondents.

We hope that the report will be of interest not only to DCC and its Districts but, particularly in highlighting the positive lessons and the challenges which our research has uncovered, to other local authorities and to regional and national government. Together with reports from the other case studies in the project and with findings from previous stages of the research, material in this report will contribute to a more general analysis of the governance of municipal waste management in North East England.

The report is structured in the following way. Section 2 provides an overview of DCC, the waste policy framework, and current issues and initiatives. Section 3 examines some of the challenges which have been faced in developing a new agenda for MWP, and Section 4 reflects on the success of the DCC approach and the factors which have been instrumental in the achievements which have been made. Section 5 considers the lessons which can be learnt from County Durham's experience, while Section 6 provides a brief summary.

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

<sup>2</sup> In this project, municipal waste policy (MWP) is taken to encompass both municipal waste management (MWM) and land-use planning for waste.

<sup>3</sup> The statutory performance targets for recycling and composting were introduced by Waste Strategy 2000 and implemented through the existing Best Value framework (DETR 2001). National recycling targets have been translated into differing targets for individual authorities based on existing performance such that if each authority achieves its target, the national target will be achieved. Other responsibilities outlined are also embodied in the Best Value framework as Performance Indicators (BVPIs), but with no statutory targets applied. Consultation is currently underway for the addition of a BVPI for materials reuse. Further, targets for diversion of biodegradable municipal waste are set to become an effective statutory target through the provisions of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) in 2005/06.

## 2 DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL AND ITS WASTE MANAGEMENT

### 2.1 Overview of County Durham

County Durham covers around 226,000 hectares in the North East of England, bounded by the North Sea to the East, the North Pennines to the West, Northumberland and Tyneside to the North, and North Yorkshire and Teesside to the South (see map 1). The County has a population of approximately 492,000 and is predominantly rural. Historically dominated by extractive and heavy industries, the county has undergone major economic restructuring in recent decades. It has significant areas of serious deprivation, with almost 32% of the County's population in wards amongst the worst 10% in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 (Audit Commission 2004).

Durham County Council (DCC) has a two tier structure incorporating seven district councils. The county has historically been Labour dominated and continues to be so, with for example 53 of 61 county councillors Labour. The County Council has a net operating expenditure of c.£483 million for 2004/05 and has more than 15,000 full time equivalent staff.

### 2.2 The municipal waste policy framework in Durham County Council



Map 1, County Durham.  
(CC: County Council; DC: District Council; UA: Unitary Authority)

This section outlines the policy framework of municipal waste management in DCC, with particular attention on institutional relationships. Key institutional actors and relationships are represented schematically in Diagram 1.

#### 2.2.1 Waste Policy inside County Durham

A dominant feature of MWP in County Durham is its two-tier local authority structure in which waste management responsibilities are split between the County Council as Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), and the Districts as Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs). This split arrangement makes the institutional structure of MWP in County Durham inherently

complex, with small teams of officers in each District concerned with providing collection services to their residents and responsible to district councillors; and a central team in County Hall concerned with management and disposal of waste delivered by the districts and responsible to county councillors. The County also holds responsibility as the Waste Planning Authority (WPA), responsible for regulating the siting of waste management facilities and infrastructures.

In 2001, DCC identified waste as one of three medium term corporate priorities. Following a recent review, waste remained one of the three priorities, with Key Stage 4 Education and Social Care. A strategic objective “to reduce waste and pollution and managing waste in an environmentally friendly manner” is part of a corporate aim to “Look after the Environment”, one of four corporate aims.<sup>4</sup>

Following reorganisation in 2003, the County Council Waste Management Unit is located within Environment, one of nine Service Areas of DCC, which includes other relevant sections including Local Agenda 21 and Planning. The Waste Management Unit is structured to consist of seven officers, but is currently composed of only six: a business unit manager; section manager; contracts officer; projects officer, waste minimisation officer and an administrator. The Waste Management Unit’s budget for 2004/05 is over £13.6 million.

DCC is unusual amongst local authorities in having a dedicated Cabinet Member for Waste Management,<sup>5</sup> an indication of the political priority given to MWP in the County. A larger group of members have been actively involved in the development of waste strategy. For example, at an early stage in developing the County’s Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, members visited existing facilities and initiatives around the country and made significant decisions which gave initial shape to the strategy, particularly the commitment not to have ‘dirty’ Materials Recycling Facilities (MRFs) or mass-burn incineration plants in the county.

Apart from the County and District councils themselves, a further significant actor within County Durham is Premier Waste. The Environment Protection Act 1990 required that waste disposal operational responsibilities and regulatory responsibilities local authorities held be separated. This meant either selling off waste disposal operations or setting up an ‘arms-length’ Local Authority Waste Disposal Company (LAWDC). Durham’s LAWDC, which later became Premier Waste Management Ltd, won a 10 year contract in 1993 to handle the County’s municipal waste. This was extended for 5 years to 2008. Premier is one of a handful of LAWDCs still existing today. Its survival can in part be put down to political commitment to maintaining a regionally based and publicly owned waste management company in the belief that it will be more responsive to local needs and interests than the multinational corporations which increasingly dominate the industry. More pragmatically, its survival through the 90s was helped by its access to extensive landfill capacity enabling it to offer very competitive rates for waste disposal. With the changing landscape of MWP, Premier has moved rapidly in recent years, as an active partner with DCC, rolling out appropriate initiatives and exploring emerging alternative waste management technologies. Premier now operates well beyond the boundaries of the county, holding contracts with a number of other local authorities in the region. It also has a flourishing commercial waste section, making Premier a major player in the region’s waste management industry with a total company turnover of around £30 million.

Waste Strategy 2000 highlighted national government’s expectation that local authorities would produce a Municipal Waste Management Strategy (MWMS). This was seen as particularly important for two-tier authorities, where a Joint MWMS (JMWMS) between county and districts could facilitate coordination of strategy and practice. Durham produced its JMWMS in January 2001, following extensive discussion between County and District authorities and with Premier, and extensive public consultation, primarily via leaflets and questionnaires based on a final draft of the strategy, delivered to every household in the County. The

<sup>4</sup> see <http://www.durham.gov.uk/DurhamCC/usp.nsf/pws/Council+-+Durham+County+Council+corporate+aims> (correct 16 October 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet responsibilities for waste management are generally part of a wider environment portfolio. We are aware of only one other dedicated cabinet member in the UK, in Norfolk County Council.



JMWMS demonstrates long range strategic thinking extending beyond immediate targets. Whilst recognising the uncertainties attached to emerging technological alternatives to landfill and incineration, it nevertheless commits to pursuing them in recognition of the ongoing necessity to manage that waste which is residual to reuse and recycling efforts. The JMWMS does not engage actively with waste minimisation, admittedly a difficult area for local authorities to make progress on. However, the 2004/05 service plan for waste management has a challenging target of reducing waste by 2% pa.

As a WPA in a two tier authority, DCC also has a statutory obligation to produce a Waste Local Plan (WLP). The WLP process began in the same period as the JMWMS was being formulated, but reflecting the statutory process involved, it has been a much more involved and formalised process taking almost four years and many iterations. Active communication between the MWMS and WLP processes has helped to ensure a joined up approach to waste between the two documents. The WLP, in its current draft, sets out extensive criteria for the assessment of waste related planning applications, but very few sites have been specified. Following a public inquiry into the WLP earlier in 2004, it is anticipated that the WLP will be formally adopted in February 2005, to run until 2016.

### **2.2.2 Joint Working in County Durham**

National government rhetoric highlights the desirability of joint working between local authorities at all levels. Whereas unitary authorities can benefit from working together to achieve shared aims in waste management, the two-tier structure makes effective joint working between the constituent authorities of the County a necessity. In addition to day to day communication and coordination between the authorities, the County Durham Waste Partnership brings together the County, the Districts and Premier Waste. Established as part of the process to produce the JMWMS, the Partnership continues to meet to enable communication and coordination between the partners.

The success of the County in pursuing the new waste agenda demonstrates that this partnership is working reasonably well. However, the two-tier structure seems invariably to create tensions, presenting generic obstacles to making progress in waste management. Some of these tensions are present in County Durham, as addressed in section 3.1.

### **2.2.3 Local networks**

Apart from formal working relationships with other local authorities and with waste contractors, DCC has an established network of contacts involved in its local work.

One central player in the Durham MWP network has been the County Durham Environmental Trust (CDENT). Although CDENT has very close links with DCC and Premier, it is formally independent of both. CDENT was formed in 1997 as a non-profit making grant distributing body under the Landfill Tax Credits Scheme (LTCS). The Trust is unusual as a distributive body under the LTCS for having a sub-national area of operation. It is funded almost exclusively by Premier and has extended its area of operation as Premier has won contracts in new locations. Under the LTCS, grants can be made for a range of purposes. Whilst working across all such areas, CDENT put considerable effort and funds into the objective of promoting sustainable waste management. Restricted to funding pilot and research projects under this object, the existence of CDENT has provided a significant source of funds which, as they could not be used for routine operations, have been used to support pilot work with innovative schemes and technologies, including some which might otherwise have been seen as too risky to be pursued by either a local authority or its LAWDC. Through providing support, CDENT has extended the range of actors involved in the Durham WMP network, including private and voluntary groups. A change to LTCS regulations in 2003, ending the funding of waste management initiatives under the scheme, means CDENT has a reduced role within the MWP network, but through continuing projects with a range of partners it remains active, and its historical role is considerable.

A significant means of establishing and maintaining an informal network around waste issues has been the LA21 Waste and Minerals Roundtable, established for over 10 years as part of the County's acclaimed LA21 initiative. This has been a key forum for communication by the council and a ready means for consultation on strategy. Voluntary groups have a fairly low representation at the round table, and the broader community even less. It is nevertheless an open and relatively informal setting which does bring together a reasonably wide cross section of people. Whilst having few formal and identifiable specific impacts on policy, the Round Table has undoubtedly helped to open out Durham's MWP network.

Through a number of partnership initiatives, DCC is part of still wider local networks. For example, DCC is a partner in The WasteWise Project, a schools waste project, providing education, practical activities and services across County Durham, Darlington and Sunderland. Set up with funding from CDENT in 1998, WasteWise is administered by the Groundwork Trust in close collaboration with Durham LEA and the DCC Environment section. DCC also has links with local businesses and initiatives promoting more sustainable waste management. For example, significant promotional support has been provided to Durham Happy Nappies, a washable nappy laundry service in the area. The County, but perhaps more especially Districts, have active links with a range of smaller community and voluntary sector initiatives. Support for such initiatives has occasionally been a cause of tension between county and districts, largely related to difficulties with the Recycling Credits system, considered further in section 3.

### **2.2.4 Regional, National and International links and networks**

Officers of DCC and its Districts participate in a number of key networks beyond the County. At the regional level these include the North East Recycling Forum (NERF), the Northeast Regional Waste Awareness Initiative (NERWAI) and NE Officers Recycling Group, and DCC has representation on the North East Technical Advisory Board (NERTAB). The NERTAB is tasked with informing the development of a Regional Waste Strategy (RWS) by the North East Regional Assembly (NERA). At the national level, officers participate in the Local Authorities Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC) and the Chartered Institute of Waste Management (CIWM).

## 2.3 Waste management in Durham County Council

Image courtesy of www.recyclenow.com



### 2.3.1 Overview of waste arisings and management

The County deals with approximately 277,000 tonnes of municipal waste annually. In 2002/03, 8% of municipal waste generated in County Durham was recycled or composted (DEFRA 2004). Indications are that the County will hit its challenging Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target for recycling/composting of 17% in 2004/05. Between 2000/01 and 2002/03 municipal waste collected increased by almost 2.5 per cent (Audit Commission 2004) – an increase roughly in line with national averages, but well below the trend in the North East, which witnessed an increase of almost 7% in the same period (DEFRA 2004). However, unaudited figures indicate a slight reduction in municipal waste arisings in 2003/04 (Audit Commission 2004). Any reduction in waste volumes would give DCC a significant advantage over most other authorities, where increasing tonnages of recycling struggle to hit proportional targets in the face of increasing total waste volumes. Further, if DCC can indicate any responsibility for reducing tonnages of municipal waste it will be a major achievement on a fundamental aspect of sustainable waste management which so far has eluded effective policy intervention.

### 2.3.2 Current infrastructure and initiatives

In terms of basic municipal waste management infrastructure, the County has seventeen Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) and Civic Amenity (CA) sites, three waste transfer stations (WTS) and five operational landfill sites. Districts manage an extensive network of recycling 'bring' sites.

The whole county is currently served by kerb-side recycling schemes. Durham City was a pioneering authority in initially seeking to establish a kerb-side scheme. However, the City could not find the resources to fully establish the scheme itself. The County Council took the decision to implement a county wide service, for which Premier won the contract. This developed into 'Kerb-it', the kerbside recycling scheme provided by Premier in County Durham and also contracted to some Tyneside authorities, altogether serving around 365,000 homes in the region, collecting paper, cans and glass. However, Kerb-it covers only part of County Durham. Durham City, Sedgefield and Chester-le-Street joined the partnership from the beginning, and Easington is now also in the scheme. West Durham Recycling partnership, comprising Wear Valley, Teesdale and Derwentside, have their own in-house kerb side collection scheme serving around 8000 households, contracted with John Forman for the downstream management of the materials, which include paper, cardboard, cans, glass and textiles. The existence of two separate kerb side schemes in the County highlights some basic issues of coordination between the tiers of government and is considered further in Section 3.

More remarkable than the implementation of kerb-side recycling has been the exploration of emergent technologies for the treatment of waste. Recent years have seen pilot plants of both aerobic digestion and pyrolysis in the County, pushed forward through collaboration between DCC and Premier, with essential financial backing from CDENT. Two pyrolysis pilots were established but have ceased operation and the technology is not being actively pursued in the County, although there are still plans to return to the technology in the long term. In contrast, the pilot aerobic digestion plant at Thornley, opened by Tony Blair in 2002, has been widely recognised as a success. The process works essentially by the accelerated composting of mixed municipal waste such that in around six days, all biodegradable material has been rendered to a 'soil conditioner' digesterate. Remaining material, such as metals, glass and plastics, are mechanically sorted from the output of the digestion process. With optimised markets and downstream uses of materials, including refuse derived fuel

(RDF) manufacture from final residuals, the process could reach in excess of 90% recovery. However, markets for the various outputs of the process are currently the biggest obstacle to more general roll out of the technology. The organic digesterate itself has so far found very limited demand, and is primarily used in the capping of landfill sites. Thornley is currently the only plant of its kind in the UK, and Premier is optimistic about the broader commercial potential of the technology. The existence of the pilot plant is indicative of creative synergies between close partners in the Durham MWP network, and is returned to in Section 4. A second, larger, tower is under construction at Thornley, and the roll out of a number of further aerobic digestion facilities across the County is a cornerstone of current strategy.

A range of awareness raising initiatives have been developed in the County. County and Districts authorities submitted a partnership bid to the WRAP Communications fund, resulting in the award of £450 000, for a county-wide waste awareness initiative. Getting underway in late 2004, the initiative, named Waste SMART, will run for two years employing eight staff to undertake a range of awareness related activities including calling door to door, across County Durham and also in Darlington. This will build on the significant amount of work done on waste awareness, historically through LA21 and more recently by the County's Waste Minimisation Officer. Districts run a variety of awareness and incentive schemes to encourage participation, particularly in the kerb-side schemes. Districts also run a range of smaller initiatives. For example, Durham City provides a pilot project providing doorstep collection of green waste to around 4000 properties.



Image courtesy of [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com)

### 2.3.3 Overall assessment of current performance

At the end of the 1990s, Durham's performance on waste management was poor. Reflecting the County's dependence on cheap and abundant landfill capacity, waste management was a low political priority and figures for recycling and composting were amongst the lowest in the country. However, a change in key personnel in the authority and in Premier coincided with the rise of waste rapidly up the national political agenda. The presence of waste management

amongst the County Council's three corporate priorities is indicative of the turnaround in DCC's approach to MWP. More pragmatically, Durham appears to be hitting its challenging LPSA target of 17% in advance of 2004/05 and looks set to comfortably reach its statutory targets for 2005/06. Perhaps most remarkable in comparison to other local authorities has been Durham's ability and willingness to explore new means of managing residual wastes. The Audit Commission recently recognised DCC's rapid progress, assessing the authority as "providing a 'good' 2 star service that has 'promising' prospects for improvement" (Audit Commission 2004, p.4), representing a score of 3 out of 4 for current performance and for prospects for improvement. It is to the authority's credit that, whilst likely to achieve immediate targets, discussions and current initiatives indicate that it is already facing the tough challenges that lie ahead in maintaining its strong progress.

### 3 FACING THE CHALLENGES

In developing its approach to MWP, DCC has encountered, and will continue to face, a number of challenges. In common with other local authorities across the UK, rising waste volumes and dynamic policy demands are testing existing frameworks and systems of waste management. In particular, the growing complexity and increasing pace of change in policy goals and targets, including new policy instruments such as the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS), increasing specification of the collection and disposal of different waste streams, and ever-increasing targets for recycling and re-use, place considerable pressure on local authorities to adapt and adjust. At the same time, there is evidence that at both the European and national levels, waste minimisation is becoming a more important theme, for example in the forthcoming EU Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling. Yet more radical directions towards integrated resource management in the longer-term could change the whole focus of MWP. These shifts in the policy framework collectively signal the growing European and national policy intention to develop more sustainable waste management and planning, with consequent implications for the future of local policy.

As is evident from the case of DCC, many local authorities are responding to these challenges. Nonetheless, based on a review of existing literature and interviews with key actors in MWP in North East England, we find that four different sets of barriers are commonly identified as preventing progress towards more sustainable MWP: institutional fragmentation; instability and uncertainty; financial constraints; as well as the policy goals themselves, issues of political will and public participation (Bulkeley, Watson et al. 2004). In this section, we discuss the extent to which such barriers have been encountered in DCC, and their implications for the development of sustainable MWP.

#### 3.1 Institutional fragmentation

'Institutional fragmentation' refers to ineffective divisions of responsibility within and between institutions; and to unproductive relationships within and between institutions. In the UK, the institutions of MWP are inherited from the (recent) times when the issues were essentially those of local collection and local disposal. Facing a radically new agenda in municipal waste management, institutional structures at all levels of government appear fragmented.

##### 3.1.1 Internal fragmentation

In most local authorities, waste has historically been seen in terms of an 'end-of-pipe' service, and institutionally embedded in a culture which is about disposing of waste in an economically efficient a manner as is possible. This serves to define waste as an operational issue, and to confine it institutionally to the 'service' rather than 'strategic' functions of local authorities. In Durham County Council, this has been substantially overcome over recent years, through active political prioritisation of waste management together with restructuring and staffing decisions which promote active links between the waste management unit and other sections of the authority, particularly land use planning and LA21. However, as the waste agenda shifts towards integrated resource management, closer working with appropriate sections of the council to develop local industrial and commercial capacity for resource cycling is likely to become more important.

However, Durham also experiences issues of institutional fragmentation related to common difficulties in two-tier authorities, addressed in the next sub-section.

### **3.1.2 Difficulties of joint working**

In most authorities we have worked with, when questioned about the main barriers faced in making progress, most respondents have prioritised lack of money. In Durham, the vast majority of respondents have highlighted the two tier structure as the key barrier. The difficulties caused by the division of responsibilities between county and districts for effective coordination of progressive waste strategy is universally recognised. Much national government policy, such as guidance for MWMSs (DETR 2001), has focused on promoting effective joint working between Counties and their Districts. Ongoing difficulties are reflected in the provisions of the 2004 Waste and Emissions Trading Act, making Joint MWMSs a statutory requirement for two tier authorities, and strengthening the power of direction for Counties over their Districts' waste collection activities.

The County's split kerb side schemes demonstrate both the possibilities and difficulties of joint working. The County negotiated a joint contract with Premier to provide the Kerb-it scheme across County Durham. Initially, only three districts (Durham City, Sedgefield and Chester-le-Street) signed up, reducing the cost effectiveness of the overall contract for the authorities. Easington was already established with a separate kerb side collection of paper and intended extending this service to collect further materials. Meanwhile, the remaining authorities, Teesdale, Wearside and Derwentside, established the West Durham Recycling partnership. With a grant from DEFRA, they established their Green box scheme.

The West Durham authorities argued their need for a distinct service on the basis of their low density, rural character, arguing that the kerb-it scheme would be financially unviable. The West Durham authorities argue that it provides best value for residents of their districts. Such an interpretation indicates the positive implications of the local policy flexibility afforded by a two tier structure. Conversely, from the County's perspective, West Durham's separate scheme has reduced overall cost effectiveness of the intended County-wide scheme, therefore failing to maximise value for residents of the County. From such a perspective, the autonomy of the Districts is a barrier to effective strategic coordination, and the support of DEFRA, via a grant, to enable the scheme might appear to undermine central government's rhetorical support for joint working.

Easington initially stayed out of the scheme in part because they were tied in to a ten year contract on their existing paper collection scheme, and the district also expected to receive recycling credits from the County. The authority also felt that moving from the 140 litre wheelie bins they provided for the paper collection to lidless green crates would be seen as a reduction in service to their residents. In the event, the County's refusal to pay recycling credits, effectively to be passed on to an outside contractor, when the County had negotiated what it saw as a superior contract with Premier, made Easington's planned scheme financially untenable, and it joined the Kerb-it scheme. The case indicates basic problems of the two tier structure, with Districts able, and expected, to establish their own policy paths and enter into contracts, whilst Counties are expected to establish a coordinated approach across their constituent Districts.

Two particular issues have emerged in the relations between DCC and its Districts. The first is the complex role of Premier in the county's MWP network, resulting from its dual role as a going concern of the County Council, whilst also a major commercial organisation. Different valuations of the desirability of the County's company gaining the income from Kerb-it may well have played a part in conflicting evaluations of the benefits of the scheme. Affecting such valuations is a sense that in some respects, Premier acts more like a commercial organisation than like a component of the Durham local authority structure. For example, Districts across the county have expressed concern about Premier poaching commercial waste business from them without communication about such intentions. Additionally, the opaque nature of the contract between DCC and Premier came up as an issue within our own research, and was also a target for criticism by the Audit Commission. Any concerns amongst respondents that pursuing the interests of Premier may not always be the best use of resources are exacerbated by a sense shared by a number of respondents that the company is



being 'fatted up' for future sale. As discussed in Section 4 below, the relationship between DCC and Premier can be seen as a very positive one overall. However, increased openness, about DCC's relations with and intentions for Premier, and from Premier on its activities affecting Districts, could further enhance the existing benefits of the Council owning its waste contractor.

A second issue relates to Recycling Credits. Recycling Credits were established under the 1990 Environment Protection Act. In a two tier authority, WDAs are generally required to pay WCAs credits for tonnage diverted from landfill, primarily through recycling or composting schemes, at the rate of the most expensive disposal method. With escalating costs of disposal, not least due to escalating Landfill Tax, the cost of Recycling Credits has risen rapidly. It can appear that Districts are able to introduce schemes specifically to generate a revenue stream from recycling credits. In 2003/04, recycling credits cost DCC in excess of half a million pounds. However, as in DCC's dealing with Easington District, the County is able to refuse payment for services used by the District where the County has put in place a suitable alternative. A lack of clarity in these regulations underlay the tension between DCC and Easington over the scheme. The County can also choose to pay recycling credits to third parties, and a small proportion of DCC's recycling credits expenditure goes to voluntary groups in the District. However, the County is reluctant to give firm commitments to continue paying credits over a period of years, arguing that the increasing per tonne cost of the credits, the increasing provision of services by the County, combined with current institutional uncertainty makes any long term commitment impossible. The County's concerns over paying recycling credits, whether to Districts or to third parties, can be seen to reflect valid concerns about providing best value to the County's residents, and to an extent are vindicated by growing calls for the system to be reviewed (e.g., COSU 2002). However, DCC's interests in Premier are, in some quarters, seen as an additional influence, with putative interests in maximising Premier's business in the County preventing support of potentially competing schemes.

### **3.1.3 Fragmentation at other levels of government**

It is important to recognise that institutional fragmentation in waste management policy is not limited to the local level. Indeed, a key split in many local authorities, between waste management and planning, is the continuation of a split running through national and regional structures. Whilst waste management is responsible to DEFRA, waste aspects of land use planning are responsible to ODPM. At the same time, although communication between local and national government in land use planning is actively mediated by GO-

NE at the regional level, and planning issues are becoming established as part of the remit of the regional assembly, there is no significant role for regional government on the side of waste management. The progress of the Regional Waste Strategy can be seen as indicative of the limitations of regional institutions' ability to contribute to MWP. The RWS was intended to inform the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and provide the planning framework for local authorities to develop their own waste planning strategies. However, the RWS has yet to be finalised, substantially after most local authorities have established their respective waste plans and strategies, and following the publication of a draft RSS for consultation. Achieving better institutional integration at other levels of government, and establishing a role for regional government in relation to waste management could assist in improving policy co-ordination at sub-regional and local levels.

### 3.2 Instability and uncertainty

One key issue confronting the development of sustainable MWP and practice nation-wide is the instability and uncertainty in the sector, which has been created by the near ceaseless change, and associated policy-vacuum, in the institutional, legislative and financial context of waste management since the early 1990s (Davoudi 2000). DCC finds itself in a similar position to the majority of local authorities in the UK, having to confront demanding landfill diversion targets under LATS while currently overwhelmingly dependent on landfill. Few local authorities are prepared to push through a mass burn incinerator based EfW plant in the face of inevitable local opposition and without clear support from national government, and as noted above, DCC members took the step of excluding incineration from the County's strategy. Many local authorities are currently finding themselves having to commit to new applications of technologies, such as digestion, pyrolysis or gasification. The applicability of such technologies to mixed municipal solid waste remain at developmental stages. This is not least due to a notable lack of national government financial or political support for exploring new options until, rather tardily, the introduction of the New Technologies Demonstration programme. As already highlighted, County Durham has played a very significant role in demonstrating the applicability of new technologies, especially aerobic digestion. Nevertheless, with many other authorities, DCC appears to be vulnerable to potentially expensive risks with its waste management options in the near future. A significant component of uncertainty in rolling out new technologies lies in existing mechanisms of funding, covered in the 3.3.

A further source of uncertainty for making strategy based on technological choices lies in ongoing regulatory difficulties surrounding new technologies and the likely dynamism of future legislation. There has been active negotiation over regulation in establishing the aerobic digester pilot plant, and in finding uses for its products. The Environment Agency initially sought to make the plant subject to demanding Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) regulation, which would have had significant operational implications, only later accepting that Waste Licensing regulations would be sufficient for the process. Further, there have been significant difficulties over the acceptability of its 'digesterate' product as soil conditioner. A key stumbling block to standard composting processes with mixed wastes has been the Animal By Products Order 1999, as amended in 2001, which prohibits the application of composts which may include food wastes on land, unless it has undergone specific treatments. The digestion process has been shown to comply with the legislation by subjecting the material undergoing digestion to temperatures in excess of 70 C for more than an hour. Nevertheless, as licensing authority, the Environment Agency has been cautious in recognising the digesterate as suitable for application to land. These specific difficulties were overcome when the relevant regulatory responsibilities passed to the State Veterinary Agency, which was content with the qualities of the digesterate. Such negotiations over the appropriate regulation of the digester and its outputs are indicative of the regulatory difficulties likely to arise as local authorities explore new processes. Whilst it is of course essential that new processes are closely monitored and regulated, an excessively cautious approach by regulators adds to the difficulties created by the lack of a coordinated national strategy for establishing new technologies for waste management.

Apart from the difficulties presented by current regulatory approaches for emergent technologies, the prospect of future legislative and regulatory change adds to the uncertainty of making infrastructural decisions. Legislation relating to waste management has undergone

seemingly continuous change over recent years and the pace seems unlikely to slow in the future. How future regulation will relate to currently emergent technologies adds an additional layer of uncertainties for infrastructural decisions.

A further source of uncertainty for such decisions comes from the planning process. Despite its lengthy and thorough development, no sites are being considered for specification as part of the WLP. Consequently, future waste management developments are likely to meet with opposition, especially from local residents, slowing the process of gaining permission. To some extent, DCC can be expected to have limited difficulty: first as a result of excluding incineration, the most contentious of waste management technologies; secondly due to the relative availability of ex-industrial sites in the County. However, the drawn out process of gaining first permission then an operating license for a Waste Transfer Station at Stainton Grove is indicative of how much opposition waste facilities can engender (the Stainton Grove controversy is returned to in 3.4 below).

At a more general scale, the North East, and in particular the counties of Northumberland and Durham, have been subjected to considerable institutional uncertainty, particularly over recent months. In the run up to the referendum for an elected regional assembly, the North East may have been subject to considerable reorganisation of political responsibilities, with waste management one field in which there have been calls for responsibility taken to regional level. More substantially, if an elected regional assembly had been accepted and subsequently established, the two tier authorities in the counties would have been replaced with unitary structures. In Durham, respondents in both the County and the Districts have said that the potential reorganisation has had little influence on waste strategy and decision making. However, there are indications that political positioning has exacerbated difficulties of joint working between County and Districts in recent months, with some district councillors perhaps limiting their support for schemes which would ultimately reflect well on the County as WDA. That the referendum resulted in a vote against the creation of an elected regional assembly means that the two tier structure will persist for the foreseeable future.

### **3.3 Money matters: financial pressures and resources**

In interviews with waste management officers across the region, the growing financial pressure of disposing of waste is one of the most frequently cited problems. The Audit Commission (2004) reports that in 2002/03, DCC's waste management per ton increased to £37.80 per tonne, taking it above the median for all English councils, and the council expects service costs to continue increasing as more initiatives are introduced and landfill tax continues to escalate. However, the Best Value Indicator which accounts for cost of disposal, BV87, has come in for criticism (e.g., COSU 2002) because the performance demands for local authorities on waste management must inevitably increase the costs of the service. The JMWMS estimates the cost of proposed development plans at £30-£40million from 2001 to 2008.

Within DCC, increased political priority on waste has brought additional resources to the service area. However, inevitably, financial resources remain tight. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the staffing of the Waste Management Unit, which is roughly half the size of the equivalent unit in North Yorkshire, a county with comparable population and waste volumes.

An economic consideration affecting all local authorities is the lack of stable markets for materials recovered through recycling and composting operations. For authorities, the risks in volatile markets are stabilised by contractors offering fixed prices for recycling services or materials handling. However, as the supply of recyclates rapidly increases as local authorities nationwide strive to hit progressive targets, stronger markets need to be rapidly established if materials recovery is to realise its potential both economically and in terms of effective materials management. The products of new technological approaches to waste management can be vulnerable to the same market difficulties. Increasingly, market difficulties for recyclates have resulted in the export of wastes for recycling abroad. China alone is reported to be importing almost a third of UK plastics and paper collected for recycling (Vidal 2004). Possibilities of establishing plastics recycling collection in County Durham are anticipated with the expected establishment of a facility in the region to bulk up plastics for export to China. Although it can be argued that plastics exported are effectively filling up import

ships returning empty to China, the planned export of materials is in clear tension with the Proximity Principle, one of the “principle factors which have shaped” the Durham JMWMS (Durham County Council 2002).

A further financial issue relates to Premier’s situation as a LAWDC. One of the key reasons that so few LAWDCs have survived nationally is that they are bound by the same public sector borrowing limitations as local authorities, rather than having the freedom to borrow for investment open to the commercial sector with which they compete. This has been a barrier to Premier taking forward innovation. The County’s commitment to Premier has contributed to difficulties in pursuing PFI funding, the main source for major infrastructural investment on waste management. PFI would probably require collaboration with a major commercial waste management corporation, potentially displacing Premier and disrupting the positive relations between the company and the County.

The financial pressure brought by the changing nature of waste disposal has in part been offset by the introduction by central government of one-off, competitive grants for establishing new management options. Durham has had mixed success with this funding system. DCC secured a major bid of c£1.7m in the first round of the Waste Minimisation and Recycling (WMR) Fund for upgrading Civic Amenity (CA) sites, which has resulted in substantial increases in recycling from the sites. Another major success was the partnership bid briefly discussed in 2.3.2, winning £450k from the WRAP Communications fund for a County-wide awareness programme. Districts have also had success, notably the West Durham Recycling partnership, with an initial grant from the WMR Fund to set up the Green Box scheme, and a subsequent successful bid for waste awareness work in the three districts. However, finances for key infrastructure have been harder to come by. Notably, bids for help with the second tower at Thornley have been unsuccessful, and DCC has found the money from its own resources to enable its construction through a loan to Premier. The planned roll out of aerobic digesters in the County is a keystone of DCC’s waste strategy, but planning for such infrastructural investment is inevitably made difficult by uncertainty of funding through what generally seem opaque and capricious funding mechanisms.

The shift towards funding MWP by means of competitive bids to national government presents a number of issues. Even for those who are successful, problems can arise in managing the running costs of the schemes after they have been established with grant funding for capital expenditure. Further, the timescales attached to grants, either to set them up or to complete them, are usually short which makes project management difficult and can preclude schemes with a longer timescale, or can result in discontent when a service established through a grant has to be withdrawn when funding ends. Such issues are likely to be increasingly significant as local authorities move away from the relatively tried and tested schemes for recycling, into new recovery and minimisation projects. For those who are unsuccessful, the relative lack of investment may make it difficult to meet initial targets, and so be more at risk of incurring financial penalties. With the introduction of the LATS in 2005, a further financial disadvantage may be sustained by those who have not managed to gain grant income and divert waste from landfill, in terms of the need to purchase permits for disposal, while those who have been successful in winning initial grants may find that income from the LATS can help to sustain their other initiatives. The current bid culture may therefore be starting cycles of advantage and disadvantage, exacerbating differences in performances between authorities and leading to outcomes which may not be the most sustainable overall. How far DCC is able to realise its planned expansion of aerobic digestion could therefore have very serious financial implications. If aerobic digesters can be established in a relatively short time scale, Durham stands to do very well out of LATS, with a likely surplus of allowances through substantial diversion of biodegradable waste.

### 3.4 Policy goals, political will and public participation

One of the key changes in the shift towards more sustainable waste management options is the changing role of the public. Whereas previous waste policies based on local collection and disposal merely required that rubbish was put out, increasingly the public are being enrolled to sort and separate wastes, and to participate in a range of different reduce, re-use, recovery and recycling schemes. In County Durham participation rates in kerb side schemes vary widely, but appear to be generally low, with Districts reporting participation as low as 15%. There are a range of strategies operated by the Districts for increasing participation such as periodic or targeted leafleting and incentive schemes for participation. At least one District is exploring options for more active enforcement of participation. Both the County-wide and the West Durham Recycling awareness schemes will focus on increasing participation rates.

While practical participation in established schemes is generally the focus of engaging with the public over waste management, more comprehensive engagement with the public is increasingly on the agenda. Across the UK in other fields of local environmental policy, such as transport and air quality monitoring, public involvement is becoming increasingly common as a means of engaging with public views, knowledge and values about the issues and drawing this valuable knowledge into the making of strategies, and as a way of enhancing participation in the implementation of schemes and initiatives. Such forms of participation are almost absent in waste management. This reflects the framing of waste policy as an essentially technical issue in which the public have little role to play. From such a framing, processes of engaging with the public appear costly, time consuming and even as a distraction from the real work of getting initiatives rolled out. Meaningful public engagement does represent a substantial commitment of resources, and requires that

decision makers actively consider the outcomes of participation activities in the policy process.

Consequently, the costs of public engagement can seem too great where the results of it are seen simply in terms of informing the public of a decision which is essentially already made, or as means to tick a box as part of an otherwise unaltered policy process. The value of public engagement lies in its ability to achieve objectives beyond the conventional aims of traditional MWP. In the rare cases where meaningful engagement in MWP has been pursued, positive results in terms of the acceptance of controversial schemes and involvement in initiatives have been found (Petts 2001). More generally, active engagement of communities can help engender local 'ownership' of schemes enhancing participation; and can encourage participants to reflect more deeply on their own behaviour and their responsibility for the wastes they produce (NRWF 2003). The challenge of engaging the public is something which local authorities can no longer afford to neglect.

Against this general picture of poor engagement with the public on waste management issues, DCC has a



Image courtesy of [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com)

reasonably good record in comparison to other authorities. As mentioned, it has an active and open Round Table through the LA21 process, though it attracts few members of the wider community. The process of developing the JMWMS included a comprehensive consultation via leaflets to every household in the County. While leafleting to encourage feedback on a completed draft can be seen as conventional, superficial level of engagement with the community, the summary of findings from the consultation process at the top of the JMWMS seems indicative that the outcomes from the process did actively inform the final draft of the strategy.

Another dimension of engagement with the public can be through the support of community based initiatives. DCC has supported a number of initiatives particularly through paying Recycling Credits for diverted tonnages. In the North East, there have been relatively few community schemes around recycling and composting, so the strength of a green waste composting scheme, run by the Teesdale Conservation Volunteers and covering around 3,500 households is particularly notable. Besides representing the considerable enthusiasm of those involved in the scheme, its success reflects the support given by both DCC and Teesdale District. However, DCC's refusal to guarantee long term payment of recycling credits, for reasons as discussed in 3.1.2, has been a source of contention. The limits of support for community groups can be seen in part as the balance of pursuing relatively 'soft' objectives of broader community engagement and ownership of waste, against the pursuit of hard targets by most cost effective means viable.

One very visible difficulty relating to effective public engagement has been the Stainton Grove controversy. A very active local action group based on an adjacent housing estate effectively blocked first planning consent then issuing of an operating license for a waste transfer station at Stainton Grove industrial park. While a wide range of issues converged in this controversy, more active public engagement at an early stage of the planning process, highlighting general environmental and cost benefits by reducing vehicle movements but more especially guaranteeing local environmental improvements through modification of the existing waste infrastructure on the site, would undoubtedly have helped. A further potential issue returns to the complex relations of dependence involved. The planning application formally came from Premier, owned by the County Council, in line with the County Council's waste strategy, and the planning application was considered by the County Council. In such a situation, the processes in place to prevent any conflict of interests must be fully transparent to the people affected. DCC appears to have learnt the lessons of the controversy for approaching future site development issues, such as through taking residents near planned aerobic digestion facilities to the pilot plant at an early stage of the planning process.

One of the biggest challenges facing the development of sustainable MWP is the ever increasing volumes of waste. Local authorities have very limited scope to intervene in the processes of production and consumption which effectively shape waste volumes. DCC has a very active waste minimisation officer and significant awareness initiatives. However, such initiatives inevitably have difficulty in effecting significant change. More direct options open to local authorities rely on constraining the available space for the collection of domestic rubbish, such as by minimising wheelie bin volumes, refusing to collect 'side waste', or opting for a reduced number of collections of normal refuse. While there is growing interest at European and national levels in pursuing policies for waste minimisation, there is as yet no firm goal or target for waste minimisation. Clearly, such a goal represents a challenge in terms of national and local political will. However, it could be argued that in the current context the majority of local authorities will focus on the binding recycling/composting targets, and soon LATS allowance limits, to the detriment of waste minimisation. It is therefore important to not uncritically take progress towards existing targets and policy goals as necessarily representing progress towards sustainability. In DCC, there is a willingness to engage with a broader, and more politically challenging, sustainability agenda, but as yet it is unclear how this will be pursued.

## 4 DRIVING CHANGE

In the face of these challenges, several positive features of MWP in Durham are particularly notable:

- The integration of waste management in DCC
- Cohesive relations between some key local players
- The strategic priority of the waste agenda
- Active technological innovation
- The range of schemes and initiatives which have been implemented
- An engagement with a broad sustainability agenda for waste

In this section, we consider these features in more detail and the factors which have contributed to driving change in MWP in Durham. We identify three key drivers of change internal to the MWP network: institutional cohesion; political support and innovative thinking

### 4.1 Institutional cohesion

While issues of institutional fragmentation were noted above as challenges facing the development of sustainable MWP at the local level, in the main DCC has a high level of institutional integration, both within the County Council, with its Districts and through networks involving key partners outside of the authorities.

Unsurprisingly, one of the central ingredients in shaping Durham's successful MWP are the people involved. At the core, whilst arguably understaffed, DCC's waste management unit has a significant number of enthusiastic and committed staff, which allows for specialisation in the tasks undertaken and a degree of flexibility about the sorts of initiatives and schemes with which they engage.

The limitations of short staffing within the unit are overcome to some extent by the high level of integration of waste management within the authority, effectively bringing additional competences and resources to bear on waste. In many authorities, there is minimal communication between waste management and land use planning, but in DCC, communication between the JMWMS and WLP processes has provided a significant means of ongoing coordination between the two sections. Strong connections with the LA21 team have also been significant, promoting a broader view of the 'waste' issue and how it can be addressed than is to be found in many local authority waste sections. These links are strengthened by historic movement of staff between the two units. That the Environment Service now encompasses Waste Management, LA21 and Planning can only help encourage communication.

The specific institutional history of the rapid movement of waste management up the political agenda and towards more innovative approaches also indicates the importance of having the right individuals in the right place. For example, political prioritisation followed the arrival in office of a council Leader who was also chair of the Local Government Association Waste and Environment Committee, giving him substantial expertise on the changing waste agenda, and also a personal stake in overseeing the turnaround of what was at the time a low performing service area. More generally, waste management has benefited from the active support of committed senior officers.

Beyond DCC itself, strong relations with other organisations have been important. Particularly noteworthy has been the nexus of relations between DCC, Premier and CDENT. While specific aspects of the relation between DCC and Premier have been picked up above as issues of contention, whether for Districts, local residents or the Audit Commission, overall the relationship of DCC with its LAWDC appears to have been very positive for pushing Durham's waste agenda forward. Whilst Premier perhaps had a complacent reliance on its abundant landfill through the 1990s, recent years have seen the company actively engage with the changing municipal waste agenda, not least through its exploration of emergent

technologies. This in turn was facilitated by its relations with DCC, and the existence of CDENT as a means of keeping Premier's Landfill Tax Credits within Premier's area of operation, substantially for investment into experimental and pilot schemes for improving the sustainability of waste management. Landfill Tax Credit regulation of course means that the donating body cannot benefit directly from LTCS funded initiatives, so, for example, the aerobic digester at Thornley is owned by CDENT, through a separate company, not by Premier. Nevertheless, Premier has provided the management expertise to run the plant and will effectively inherit the proven technology from CDENT. The complex interrelations between DCC, Premier and CDENT have therefore created positive synergy, particularly in enabling the exploration of new technologies.

## 4.2 Political support

In DCC, waste management has substantial corporate priority, both reflecting and promoting its integration in the authority. The status of waste management as a corporate priority reflects not only the commitment of officers at all levels, but also the active political support the service area enjoys. This political support is also evidenced by the existence of the dedicated cabinet member, ensuring a voice for waste management at a high level of the county's political structure. That members are actively taking the agenda forward has been demonstrated, for example, members' substantial involvement in initially shaping the JMWMS, and by a member-led initiative to work with local retailers to reduce the use of carrier bags. Apart from providing an enabling environment for officers to pursue progress, political support has translated into additional resources going into waste management. Waste management has already been selected as one of the Council's three medium term priorities twice, and it cannot remain a corporate priority indefinitely. However, it could not have been prioritised at a more appropriate time. The investments made in waste management, as it has risen up the national agenda in recent years, may be rewarded in the coming years as government funding turns from competitive schemes to a Performance Reward Grant and, depending on progress with infrastructural development, the County stands to benefit from LATS.

## 4.3 Innovative thinking and risk taking

The third driver which has shaped the approach taken to MWP in DCC has been its ability and willingness to 'think outside the box' on waste issues, demonstrated by innovation in the development of initiatives such as in kerb side recycling and waste minimisation, and also in the pursuit of new management technologies; and through situating waste management in a broader sustainability agenda, not least within the authority's own operations.

To a large extent this innovative thinking and risk taking is a product of the features already mentioned. Innovation on technologies and initiatives has been facilitated by the institutional links highlighted above, and by active political support. In particular, availability of CDENT funds, restricted to pilots and research, enabled risk taking.

The County does not have a monopoly on innovative thinking. For example, Durham City started making progress towards kerb side recycling autonomously, and has introduced coordinated environmental service zones. Others have introduced, or are considering, initiatives to promote participation in recycling or to minimise residual waste tonnages.

Waste management has been situated within a broader sustainability agenda substantially through its location in an integrated Environment section run with creativity and commitment. In particular, collaboration with DCC's acclaimed LA21 process has encouraged integration of waste management into a relatively holistic approach to sustainability, which in turn encourages innovation and creative engagement with the public.

A key indication of 'joined up thinking' on waste is the extent to which an organisation alters its own practices with respect to resources and waste. Whilst there is of course much that could still be done, DCC has taken active steps to incorporate sustainable waste concerns into both internal strategies and in practice. A Sustainable Environment Policy aims to make the council resource efficient, specifically addressing issues of procurement and aiming to reduce internal waste. Additionally, each service area must develop an annual Operational Service Plan which must address issues of sustainability in the context of corporate prior-

ities. DCC is beginning to engage with one of the most intractable areas of local authority activities in relation to waste and sustainability, by actively encouraging positive choices in procurement, such as through the use of recycled plastic kerb stones.

## 5 LESSONS TO LEARN

Reflecting on the experience of DCC in addressing the challenges of the new waste agenda at the local level, this section considers the lessons which can be learnt by relevant national government departments, regional bodies, networks, associations and other local authorities as they seek to develop sustainable MWP.

### 5.1 Moving Forward

In our analysis, four lessons stand out as providing insights for how other local authorities could further develop their MWP by overcoming some of the key barriers:

- Critical mass – the effective delivery of MWP across any one authority demands a certain number of people and level of resources – a ‘critical mass’ - to work effectively and proactively across the increasing range of responsibilities which MWP entails.
- Strategic priority - specifically, a division of responsibilities needs to be established to free up dedicated staff time for strategic issues: identifying and pursuing funding stream; and establishing and maintaining contacts and networks across and beyond the authority. Clearly, any such ‘division’ needs to be done carefully to maintain suitable integration between strategy and operations.
- Political support - committed officers can do much in an ambivalent political environment, but with effective political support progress can be faster and more far reaching.
- Embracing change – a readiness to take on new challenges and to ‘think outside the box’ can yield dividends; this demands the creation of a culture in which there is a willingness to experiment and to take (modest) risks in a dynamic policy environment.

### 5.2 Remaining Challenges

In addition to focusing on the positive elements of the MWP in Durham, we believe it is important to reflect on the challenges which have proven to be difficult to overcome, in order that both DCC and others may learn from these experiences. In particular, we consider three issues to be worthy of further reflection:

- The challenges of joint working – Durham’s substantial progress on waste management demonstrates that County and Districts have worked together effectively. Nevertheless, coordination of waste strategy has often proved difficult, demonstrating the well established problems of two-tier authority structures.
- Involving the public - historically a service-oriented, technical field of responsibility, there is an absence of meaningful engagement with the public on issue of MWP. DCC, particularly in its consultation on the JMWMS, has a relatively good record on public engagement so far as UK waste management goes. However, even the consultation can be seen as a relatively superficial form of engagement. In the long term with the probability of increasing emphasis on the source separation of materials and waste minimisation, fully engaging the public will become ever more important. Actively involving the public in shaping basic strategy has the potential to both draw public knowledge into strategies and so ensure that initiatives are designed with the views and attitudes of the public in mind, while also giving a wider constituency

'ownership' of waste management in their local area and the ability to make the crucial moves towards taking more responsibility for the materials they no longer have use for.

- Barriers to technological innovation – the processes of pushing through the aerobic digestion pilot, and the plans to roll out the technology, have highlighted the range of difficulties confronting attempts at technological innovation, including: struggles over regulation of new technologies and their outputs; future legislative dynamism; problems of finding markets or viable end uses for products of such technologies; uncertainty over funding for future investment.

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## 6 CONCLUSION

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The strategic and forward thinking approach adopted to MWP in Durham have seen the authorities make good progress, both in terms of meeting short term targets set by central government and in pursuing initiatives oriented towards long term progress. The biggest challenges facing Durham, like many other authorities, will revolve around how to maintain this progress and adapt to changing policy circumstances, such as engaging with the challenge of waste minimisation, in the face of likely growing volumes of waste. It is clear that Durham have begun to address these issues, but much remains to be done at the local, regional and national levels if a more sustainable approach to municipal waste policy and practice is to be achieved.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BVPI	Bet Value Performance Indicator
CA	Civic Amenity
CDENT	County Durham Environmental Trust
CIWM	Chartered Institute of Waste Management
DCC	Durham County Council
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
EfW	Energy from Waste
EU	European Union
GO-NE	Government Office for the North East
HWRC	Household Waste Recycling Centre
JMWMS	County Durham Joint Waste Management Strategy
LA21	Local Action 21
LARAC	Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee
LATS	Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme
LAWDC	Local Authority Waste Disposal Company
LEA	Local Education Authority
LPSA	Local Public Service Agreement
LTCS	Landfill Tax Credit Scheme
MRF	Materials Recycling Facility
MWM	Municipal Waste Management
MWMS	Municipal Waste Management Strategy
MWP	Municipal Waste Policy
NERF	North East Recycling Forum
NERTAB	North East Regional Technical Advisory Body
NERWAI	North East Regional Waste Awareness Initiative
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONE	One North East, Regional Development Agency
RDF	Refuse Derived Fuel
RWS	Regional Waste Strategy
PPC	Pollution Prevention and Control
WCA	Waste Collection Authority
WDA	Waste Disposal Authority
WLP	Waste Local Plan
WMR Fund	Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund
WPA	Waste Planning Authority
WRAP	Wastes and Resources Action Programme
WTS	Waste Transfer Station

