

Equalities Impact Assessment on the Municipal Waste Management Strategy

Officers used the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment methodology to form a view about how the draft Waste Management Strategy related to different groups, and to identify any changes to policy or practice that might be necessary as a result. This document summarises the main issues and subject areas covered by the Assessment. The document is intended first and foremost to be an EIA of the Strategy and the associated Action Plan, but inevitably it is impossible to separate this from the practices of the Waste Management Division more generally.

1. Potential areas of inequality: based on work for Mayor of London

In scoping out the potential equalities considerations for a waste collection authority it is helpful to refer to the Mayor of London's own Municipal Waste Management Strategy, published in 2003, which contains a section on equalities in waste management. This makes a number of points, some of them more relevant to the Royal Borough's circumstances than others:

1.1 Accessibility of services

We agree that waste and recycling services should be equally accessible to all sectors of our population. We offer 99% of households in our Borough the opportunity to present waste for recycling on their premises (in addition to public recycling facilities on the highway). The Mayor wants recycling services to be equally convenient for people who live in flats as for those who live in houses. In practice, this will be hard to achieve, as it implies waste collectors going into premises to collect from individual flats' front doors. We are trying to do this with our estates recycling scheme, but our strategy is based on continuing to increase the number of communal blue recycling bins on estates – located close to stairwells - until cost-effective means can be found of collecting from individual households on estates. With our coverage of doorstep recycling services, communal recycling bins and bring sites we believe that non-car owners (around 50% of people in the Royal Borough) should not find it harder to recycle than car-owners. And with our proposed improvements to our Too Big for the Bin service, (see strategy) non-car owners will find it easier to dispose of bulky items. We agree with the Mayor that women should not have to go into places that feel unsafe to store their waste. We are working with housing associations to ensure that their communal waste storage areas are in good condition, and that all their tenants, including women, feel safe using them.

1.2 Equal levels of street cleansing

The Mayor's Strategy notes the common perception that councils provide better street cleansing services in affluent areas than in deprived areas. In the Royal Borough, we are improving our street cleansing across the Borough but especially in the north of the Borough¹, where deprivation levels are higher. This part of the Borough also has more people from black and ethnic minority communities (29% non-white compared with 17% in the rest of the Borough). It is worth noting that the Municipal Waste Strategy's ambitions for clutter-free streets should be of particular benefit to people with restricted vision or mobility.

1.3 Communications

Perhaps the biggest equalities challenge facing the Waste Management service is to find ways of communicating effectively with all sections of the population. The diversity of languages spoken in the Royal Borough is an obvious challenge (and

¹ As part of our LPSA agreement, we will improve cleanliness by 30% in the north, and 20% in the south of the borough.

we also produce much of our literature in a number of foreign languages), but it is not the only one. We need to be sensitive to other cultural needs too when we promote our messages about recycling, waste presentation, litter, and so on. The Communications Strategy that is being produced by the Media and Communications Office will need to address the huge diversity of audiences for our messages. The waste communications campaign that will be launched in the early autumn will feature a large amount of non-textual information. The theme of 'loving the streets you live in' and the heart logo that goes with it, should have a more universal appeal than more traditional, municipal styles.

For people with visual impairments, we will need to make information available using large print formats, Braille or CD. But they may also find it particularly useful to have the face-to-face contact that is offered by our team of recycling wardens.

1.4 Other issues

The Mayor's Strategy mentions dietary customs, which may affect waste composition. We have an extremely diverse population and our food waste is probably among the most cosmopolitan in London. However, we do not see this as presenting any particular waste management issues.

2 What we know from consultation and research

2.1. Take-up of services

The only core waste management service to which the question of take-up really applies is recycling. We clean the streets without the residents' involvement and we collect their refuse provided that they present it correctly (and since we still clear dumps, arguably we provide that service to people who do not present it correctly). With recycling, we know that take-up – or participation – is slightly higher among white groups than among BME groups, and among older people. Our recent Recycling Roadshow survey showed that 77% of White British respondents claimed to recycle compared with under 70% of all other ethnic groups. Over three quarters of people aged 45 or over claimed to recycle, compared with just under two thirds of those aged 15 to 29.

We also know that recycling is higher among people who live in houses and converted flats than those in estates and mansion blocks. The strategy contains a number of initiatives that are designed specifically to increase recycling in these types of accommodation.

This relationship between recycling participation and ethnic background and age are not peculiar to the Royal Borough. A report by Brook Lyndhurst (see Strategy) found evidence of similar patterns across London. In the Royal Borough, our new communications campaign will be of particular benefit in encouraging recycling among those groups that have had low levels of recycling. We think that a significant increase in the availability of orange sacks, and of (paper-only) bring facilities will help to attract those 'time-poor' individuals, particularly younger people, who may be less likely to request green bins.

2.2. Satisfaction with services

We want all our residents to be happy with the services we provide. The Strategy sets out how we aim to increase satisfaction levels overall. The evidence from our most recent satisfaction survey (MORI 2003) shows that there is no difference in satisfaction between BME groups and White groups on street cleaning or refuse

collection. However people from White groups were more likely to say they were satisfied with doorstep recycling than people from BME groups. We do not know the reasons for this disparity, but again, we believe that a much stronger communications effort on recycling should raise satisfaction levels, as well as participation, across the board.

Comparisons of satisfaction among people with or without a disability do not suggest that people with disabilities are any less likely to be satisfied with waste services. Indeed, they appear to be more likely to be satisfied with their waste collections than people without disabilities.

2003/4	Ethnicity		Disability	
	White	BME	Yes	No
Street cleaning	68%	68%	70%	68%
Waste collection	72%	71%	80%	71%
Doorstep recycling	61%	50%	61%	57%

3.0 Consultation and engagement

Appendix C of the Strategy lists the large number of consultation exercises carried out either by the Council or by its partners, which provide a wealth of information about residents' perceptions of waste management services, particularly recycling. One of these was a 'listening event' at the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre. We have maintained good links with the Centre, and we are actively using it as a 'way in' to the local community to talk about, for example, the Golborne Road Market. We have also been in contact with the Migrant and Refugee Community Forum to explore how we might open a dialogue between the Waste Management department and local ethnic minority communities. Waste Management will also be one of the areas included in a proposed corporate project to include local community groups in evaluations of Council services.

Perhaps the best practical example of how Waste Management engages with diverse communities is its work on Notting Hill Carnival. Over many years, Waste Management officers have forged good working relationships with the various community groups involved in the Carnival. In doing so they have shown a great deal of cultural sensitivity in their regulation of a massive event with a history, albeit an increasingly distant history, of public disorder.

4.0 Conclusions and future action

This impact assessment has reinforced the Division's determination to find more effective ways of communicating its messages to all residents. The new leaflets, posters, signs, stickers and other literature that are being produced as part of a major new communications programme will make much more use of non-textual information and of branding.

But to make full use of the new promotional literature, we will need to ensure that it reaches everyone. We will not rely only on traditional methods of communication. We will look for community leaders who can take our messages back to their own neighbourhoods – our links with the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre are a good example of this.

Ultimately, our aspiration is that no-one should fall foul of our enforcement operations, or be unable to use our recycling services, because of language barriers.

Whilst the difficulty of communicating with diverse and changing communities is a clear challenge that we are attempting to address, we still have some work to do on other areas. The Royal Borough Review of Waste Management made a commitment to check whether:

- certain groups are over- or under-represented as users of the service (this includes people who face enforcement action by us)
- the service is operating in a discriminatory manner
- different ethnic groups have different needs, experiences, issues or priorities

We have made a start on this work. For instance we are now recording the ethnic appearance of everyone against whom we take enforcement action. We have not yet begun to analyse this data, and indeed, we need to think carefully about how we will do this.