

# Communications campaign to increase participation in County Durham's 'Kerb-It' recycling scheme

## Introduction

The 'Kerb-It' scheme was introduced in County Durham in 2003 for the separate collection of glass, cans and paper. Four of the seven districts within Durham County Council are signed up to the partnership; these four councils – Durham City District Council, Easington District Council, Sedgefield District Council and Chester-le-Street District Council – were also the partners in the communications campaign to promote Kerb-It. The campaign was aimed at all residents but with targeted messages in areas identified as low performing. In this way the partners hoped to improve capture of materials from those already recycling and encourage participation from those residents who had not previously been recycling at all.

## Key Facts

- Participation in Kerb-It increased in all four district council areas. The highest increase was 14% in Durham City.
- Numbers of committed recyclers increased in all but one of the four areas.
- The campaign ran from November 2006 to December 2007.
- Campaign funding was £237,600. The project team costs were £112,300 (including expenses, canvassing, surveying and participation monitoring).
- Cost per household was £1.69.

## About County Durham

- County Durham is a two-tier authority consisting of Durham County Council (the Waste Disposal Authority) and seven district councils, which are responsible for waste collection.
- County Durham occupies 226,000 hectares and has a population of 493,470, of whom 98.6% are white British.
- The Kerb-It partnership serves 140,543 households.

## Background to campaign

Communications have been limited in the past to broad brush promotional materials such as calendars and leaflets. Historically these materials were produced by the individual district councils and, as such, messages across the Kerb-It scheme members were mixed with variations in style and brand. This was felt to be one reason why participation in certain areas was identified as being low.

Two types of property were identified as forming a large proportion of households in low performing areas:

- student housing in the City of Durham; and
- housing estates in areas with low literacy scores, particularly in the towns of Peterlee and Easington.

### Communication objectives

The objectives of the general communications campaign were to:

- increase participation by 10% in the lower performing areas of the Kerb-It scheme by December 2007; and
- increase the tonnages of dry recyclables recovered through the Kerb-It scheme in the low performing areas by 10% by December 2007.

The objectives of the campaign aimed specifically at students were to:

- increase participation in the student areas of the Kerb-It scheme by 10% by December 2007; and
- reduce the levels of contamination in recycling boxes in the student areas by 10% by December 2007.

### Approach

#### Identifying low performing areas

The district councils produced a profile of their areas based on:

- local knowledge of council staff, recycling crews, university staff and waste contractors;
- data on tonnages collected and waste composition; and
- demographic studies.

Following the monitoring of local round and tonnage data, low performing areas were matched against specific collection rounds. Using these indicators, a total of 9,626 households received specific campaign materials with targeted messages.

#### Promotions team

A team of four staff and one supervisor was employed via an external recruitment agency. The team initiated pre-campaign monitoring, undertook door-to-door canvassing, attended 114 roadshows, delivered the six-week Arriva bus advertising campaign, and collected and logged all the monitoring and participation data.

#### Campaign materials

All design materials were managed by the lead partner with sign-off by all four partners. Design and printing was managed by an external design agency using WRAP brand guidelines. The campaign included the following elements.

- **Initial leaflet to all properties.** This leaflet was designed to explain how recycling worked and to encourage residents to recycle more. It was delivered to all properties in January/February 2007.
- **Staff training packs.** A hundred training packs were created and distributed in March 2007 to front line staff to ensure they understood all elements of the campaign and were equipped to answer questions from members of the public.



- **Newspaper advertising.** An article giving information about the Kerb-It scheme was placed in March 2007 in three papers delivered to households in the four districts.
- **Promotional advertising trucks.** To support the newspaper advertising, five vehicles travelled around the target areas in March 2007 branded with the same messages to encourage residents to participate in recycling.
- **Bus advertising campaign.** This took place over a six-week period between May and June 2007. Promotional panels were displayed on 35 bus sides and backs and there was a two-week 'adshel' campaign at a number of frequently used bus stops. On-bus face-to-face campaigns involved members of the promotions team travelling on buses talking to passengers and giving out leaflets and advice twice a week for eight weeks.
- **Newspaper wrap-around.** This was placed on free newspapers in the four districts in June 2007.
- **Bin hangers.** The hangers thanked all residents for participating in the recycling scheme and were distributed in June 2007 to 141,000 households.

### Targeting literacy issues

From March 2007 separate materials were distributed to tackle possible literacy issues using large text and pictures where possible and having a clear call to action. Social locations, including pubs and clubs, were targeted. The Arriva bus campaign also reached residents in the low performing areas in an informal way.

Different types of promotional items were distributed:

- 15,000 beer mats to clubs and pubs in the areas of the target collection rounds;
- 2,000 leaflets; and
- 500 posters to working men's clubs.



### Targeting students

Campaign messages were tested on university staff and at small student focus groups. The results of these meetings were used to tailor the messages and information within the leaflets for students.

- **Face-face canvassing.** Visits to 36,000 properties in the student housing area resulted in canvassers speaking to 12,000 people. A second 'door knock' was carried out at a later stage.
- **Posters.** These were distributed to key student 'hot spots' such as Durham University buildings, three campus libraries, the students union, shops, bars and student accommodation.

### Results/Conclusion

There was a marked increase in participation in the Kerb-It scheme in all areas by the end of the campaign (Table 1). The number of committed recyclers also increased in all but one of the areas (Table 2).

Student participation in the Kerb-It scheme rose from 49.6% before the campaign to 66.4% afterwards – an increase of 16.8%. Contamination of recycling boxes filled by students fell from 17.5% to 5.8% as a result of the campaign – a reduction of 11.7%.

Authority	Pre-campaign	Post-campaign	Overall improvement
Chester-le-Street DC	60.2%	69.3%	+9.1%
Durham City DC	57.9%	71.9%	+14.0%
Easington DC	34.7%	42.6%	+7.9%
Sedgefield DC	51.6%	58.6%	+7.0%

Table 1: Participation in Kerb-It scheme low performing areas

Authority	Pre-campaign	Post-campaign	Overall improvement
Chester-le-Street	74.2%	69.9%	-4.3%
Durham City	74.9%	81.9%	+7.0%
Easington	55.7%	71.3%	+15.6%
Sedgefield	76.2%	77.9%	+1.7%

Table 2: Results of committed recycler surveys

### Key Learning Points

- Use of Recycle Now branding provided a consistent message and allowed economies of scale.
- Testing the target literature for the students gave Durham City Council confidence the materials were appealing and that the messages would be well-received.
- Using staff recruited via an external agency but managed internally proved cost-effective and enabled their quick employment.
- Using internal staff for canvassing speeded up the process of giving feedback to the partners and made an immediate response possible. However this method required a significant amount of management time.
- The project created a new partnership with the local university, enabling targeted campaigns to coincide with the arrival and departure of students.
- The success of the face-to-face Arriva bus campaign, a first for the partners, should ensure future promotions of this kind.

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