

Communications campaign to introduce alternate weekly collections in Rochdale

Introduction

The communications campaign run by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council from January 2007 to March 2008 introduced alternate weekly collections to householders in two of the four townships (Rochdale and Heywood). A minor element of the campaign was to raise awareness of the garden waste scheme among eligible residents.

Key Facts

- Recycling rose from 16.2% in 2005-06 to an estimated 25.7% in 2007-08.
- Participation increased from 28.7% in March 2007 to 77.4% in February 2008.
- Campaign lasted from January 2007 to February 2008.
- Campaign budget was £105,500 (+ £10,000 of internal funding for consultant).
- Cost per household was £1.06

About Rochdale

- Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council is a unitary authority in Greater Manchester.
- The council is grouped into four townships – Heywood, Middleton, Pennines and Rochdale.
- Rochdale has a population of 205,400 in some 90,000 households.
- 88.5% of the population is classed as white and 10% as Asian.

Background to campaign

A managed weekly collection of refuse and dry recyclables (refuse collected one week and dry recyclables the next) was rolled out to 66,000 of the 90,000 households served by Rochdale MBC in two phases (June 2007 and February 2008). Cans, glass bottles and jars and plastic bottles are collected commingled in a wheeled bin, while paper and card are collected from a reusable sack. The remaining 24,000 households received a weekly refuse collection supported by a fortnightly kerbside collection of cans and glass bottles and jars from kerbside boxes. These remaining households received the new service in summer 2008. The majority of households with gardens receive a fortnightly collection of garden waste.

Communication objectives

The overall aim of the project was to inform residents of the change in service from weekly refuse collections to alternate weekly collections. The main objective was to:

- Increase participation levels in the new scheme to an average across the borough of 60% by March 2008.

Approach

Rochdale MBC used WRAP guidance, information on the 'Recycle Now' website and discussions with other councils to identify good practice from other local authority areas.

To ensure the recycling message was fully understood and recognised by residents, full use was made of Recycle Now materials as a basis for the communications campaign. Early on it was decided to localise the branding for the new schemes by township to ensure buy-in from residents from the start.



An Asian waste consultant was employed, who could not only speak the languages used by the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population and appreciated how messages are conveyed within their cultures, but also had experience from other Asian heritage areas. The consultant had worked in the waste services department of several other local authorities and thus understood the recycling message being delivered. Rochdale MBC also worked closely with local community groups and community centres in the area and held several seminars looking specifically at the new service.

A teaser leaflet was produced and delivered 4–6 weeks before the start of the alternate weekly collection scheme which was followed by delivery of a leaflet advertising roadshows in the local area. When the new bin was delivered residents received an information pack (instruction leaflet and collection calendar in a clear envelope) which informed them about the new service.

Three focus groups were held using a specialist consultant prior to the implementation of the communications campaign. The groups looked at the target areas that were changing to the new scheme, examining barriers to recycling and exploring the best methods of communication as well as helping to inform future communication strategy.

Key to the success of the new service was consultation with residents. A bespoke, branded exhibition trailer was purchased which carried a series of panels giving residents more information on the new scheme and allowed council officers to discuss detailed concerns with residents. Over 40 roadshows were held and more than 2,800 residents spoken with.

All councillors whose wards were affected by the change were consulted and presentations were made at township meetings.

A local radio station was used to promote the scheme in the specific BME rollout areas. An advertising campaign in Urdu was devised for transmission on the radio and council officers took part in various programmes to discuss the new alternate waste collection service and recycling in general.

Over the Christmas period in 2007, a series of adverts was placed in the local press asking residents to recycle the excess waste that is traditionally generated at Christmas. A Christmas recycling leaflet was also delivered to every property across the borough as reminder to recycle.

A review of the new service took place part way through the rollout. This review used a variety of consultation methods including surveys and focus groups. It concluded that the rollout should continue further to the townships of Rochdale (Jan 2008) and Middleton (June 2008).

The garden waste campaign included an instruction leaflet and calendar delivered at the start of the gardening year, and display panels for exhibitions.



Results/Conclusion

Rochdale saw a dramatic increase in participation in the targeted areas from 28.7% in March 2007 to 77.4% in February 2008 – considerably higher than the campaign objective (60%).

The borough's recycling and composting rate also increased significantly from 16.2% in 2005-06 to 19% in 2006-07, and is estimated to have risen to 25.7% in 2007-08. The council's recycling target for 2007-08 was 20%.

The new branding has been so successful that the council has decided to carry on using it for all future waste and recycling communications.

Key Learning Points

- Tailoring of communications to target the diverse population.
- Use of an Asian waste consultant who spoke the languages used by the BME population in Rochdale.
- Consistent branding based on Recycle Now materials.
- Providing opportunities for residents to discuss their detailed concerns.

'The high participation rates achieved when the alternate weekly collection schemes rolled out reflects the success of the communication campaign surrounding the introduction of the new service.'

**Phil Tomlin, Project Manager,
Environmental Management**

'The legacy of knowledge and expertise within our team has given us greater confidence in approaching future projects.'

Andy Shaw, Recycling Officer

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