



# Boosting each aspect of the supply chain in bulky waste management

Funded by DEFRA's Waste Implementation Programme Local Authority Support Unit under the 2004/5 consultancy programme



---

## The projects

---

Urban Mines has carried out a number of projects examining aspects of bulky waste for 3 unitaries, a

partnership and 3 Local Authorities and a single district.

---

## Improving performance

---

### Physically Destructive Collection Practices

The dilemma is often that the Local Authorities have arranged cost efficient and logistically sensible collection systems, but usually this involves complete destruction of the intact bulky item in a crushing vehicle. Further complications arise, which is often the case in mixed collections; the mahogany table will still go in with the building rubble and grass chippings.

### Lessons in Partnership Working

Features which were observed where the cross sector partnerships were working well were as follows:-

- Shared common transparent objectives
- Sound business reasons for the relationship
- Mutual trust and respect
- Agreed roles and responsibilities

- Mutual benefits
- Mutual commitment
- Open and regular communication
- Sufficient resources.

### 'Valuing' the Community Sector Involvement

The beleaguered Waste Manager of a Local Authority has his hands full with the day to day running of operations and the constant worry of failure to meet statutory targets.

There are two impacts to community recyclers from this understandable focus from a Local Authority perspective. Firstly, the often uncoded and unconsidered social and economic benefits of a community recycling project. Secondly, the fact that community groups are often subsisting on grant support means that it is difficult to offer a fixed and reliable service to the LA. On occasions, due to State

Aid limitations, contracting for LA services would also be illegal.

Taking the first point, community recycling schemes offer social and economic benefits for the following reasons:-

- the schemes offer training and employment opportunities for those people with learning difficulties, mental health problems, disabilities and occasionally to provide a distraction for alcohol and substance misuses.
- in addition, the schemes also provide low cost or sometimes no cost furniture, household accessories and appliances, to turn an empty house into a home.

What is the social cost and benefit of a working experience that helps keep someone off drugs? What savings to the NHS to have someone with physical disabilities given the chance of learning a productive skill?

These aspects are never costed into the Committee Reports prepared by the Waste Managers for budget justifications.

In some areas partnerships with Social Services Departments have proved useful in getting the schemes valued differently.

The second issue is more tricky as it requires significant changes in the way Central and Local Government values community sector involvement in recycling. Re-use credits will help, but what is needed is a costed action plan to professionalise this important sector so that community recycling can realistically become part of the strategic delivery of recycling services. None of the community groups we worked with had a business plan (or a certainty of their existence) past 12-18 months. How can they hope to engage with a 25 year PFI contract?

### **Community Groups working together**

Many of the groups should work together much more closely for the following reasons:-

- Storage is an issue for all the schemes, being a restriction on business planning and growth.
- Specialist waste streams like WEEE do not warrant, for instance, 5 separate treatment centres. One facility, suitably kitted out, would be more efficient.
- Admin structures could be simplified and shared.
- Assets like vehicles could be better utilised.
- Peaks and troughs in supply and demand could be better managed.

Groups do not work together because teams naturally grow very protective of their resources, their clients and their patch. Due to personalities and the challenges of joint working most groups would rather 'paddle their own canoe'.

What might work is to take a natural grouping, such as at the county level, and spend some time and resources to help the discrete groups understand the 'bigger picture' and work sensibly together on delivering common goals.

### **Opportunities around WEEE**

There is considerable scope for the community groups to expand or diversify into WEEE recycling. There are again advantages in working together as groups given the specialist nature of the waste stream, and to be creative about the partnerships, which could engage with private sector retailers of WEEE.

One area of concern Urban Mines discovered was that some of the Waste Management Companies gain an income stream from selling the metal from WEEE and were unlikely to participate in refurbishment partnerships unless someone reimbursed them. This is particularly the case because metals are the most lucrative recycle.

### **Recycling Residues**

One should not forget that many of the community furniture schemes produce a residue of potentially

recyclable materials from their refurbishment activities, eg waste wood, metals and textiles

Such recycling activities should be encouraged.

### **Improved Data**

A number of studies on bulky goods and large and small WEEE show amazing breadth in their results. It is difficult to accurately predict the types and quantities of bulky goods arising, the effects of seasons, and/or the amount that is readily re-useable.

It would seem necessary to undertake further work in this regard.

### **The Implications of LATS**

In the work undertaken by Urban Mines we attempted to calculate the LATS implications of bulky goods. We estimated that bulky waste was 5% of the waste stream, and in turn 20-35% of this was biodegradable, eg chairs, tables, beds, wardrobes and other items only being 50% biodegradable.

Quick calculations show only a small benefit to LAs in terms of LATS from landfill diversion, but this is because of the low proportion of bulky waste collected.

We felt this area deserved a closer analysis.

### **Developing the Markets for Re-use**

Urban Mines have helped a number of schemes break into new markets. Particular areas which have proven lucrative are:

- Working with Housing Associations to furnish homes for low income tenants.
- Universities, in terms of supplying Halls of Residence, going onto a supply list for Private Landlords and being promoted direct to students.
- Auction Houses able to sell off in batches quantities of middle value/old fashioned furniture. These items often taking up valuable storage space at the community scheme.
- High value items being sold directly by the scheme, such as the Renaissance Centre in Ludlow, run by the South Shropshire Furniture Scheme.
- Antique shops – receiving commission for sales of high value goods.

By boosting sales for these schemes, groups have developed the confidence to collect more, thereby increasing the through flow through the entire supply chain.

---

## **Conclusion**

---

The Defra funded projects have allowed actions to significantly boost the movement of bulky waste out of landfill. There is no obvious source of funding to enable this kind of work to happen any other way – quite simply we do not believe people would push this item to the top of budgets.

Partnership working is the way ahead, but as stated this needs a common set of agreed objectives and preferably a team which is driven to succeed.

The community schemes are certainly on a stronger footing as a result of this project and alert to the opportunities which have been identified and in some cases secured.

We do not believe that LAs can meet their long term recycling targets without the involvement of the community sector.

---

## Project team

---

### **Project Manager:**

Jane Forshaw

### **Project Support:**

Glyn Jones, Environment Economist

Peter Jones, Project Support

James Horne, Researcher

Urban Mines Ltd  
The Cobbett Centre  
Norwood Green  
Halifax  
HX3 8QG

Waste Implementation Programme  
Local Authority Support Unit  
Ashdown House  
123 Victoria Street  
London SW1E 6DE

T: 01274 699400

<http://lasupport.defra.gov.uk>

F. 01274699410

[www.urbanmines.org.uk](http://www.urbanmines.org.uk)

10 May 2005