
Bulky Waste Guidance: Benefits of reusing & recycling bulky waste

Benefits of reusing & recycling bulky waste

Introduction

Reuse and recycling of bulky waste brings benefits to the local authority, the local community and the environment.

Local authority benefits of reuse

The benefits of bulky waste reuse have been documented in a number of reports and cover social, environmental and economic benefits, such as:

- contribution to local authority objectives for waste;
- reduced carbon emissions;
- reduced environmental impact from resource use;
- improved local environment;
- increased awareness and beneficial changes in behaviour;
- potential avoided collection cost;
- avoided disposal and landfill tax costs;
- strengthening the local economy;
- potential savings to households;
- increased self-esteem, self-confidence and well-being of local people;
- improved physical and mental health of local people;
- improved social / community cohesion; and
- innovation and replication potential.

Other potential benefits associated with an efficient, easy to use and well-publicised bulky waste collection include:

- reduction of fly-tipping of bulky items;
- reduction in secondary fires due to large items being less likely to be left publically accessible for any length of time;
- better service provision for residents; and
- improved cross department working in local authorities.

Reuse and recycling are important elements of the waste hierarchy, and are transposed into law in the UK under the revised Waste Framework Directive. Reuse and recycling activities support local reuse organisations. These private and third sector organisations benefit by gaining access to larger quantities and potentially better quality, bulky items in order to meet the demands of their clients and customers. These benefits and the community involvement it brings cut across more than one local authority department.

Reuse of bulky goods is important in a national context both from a waste reduction point of view, and because it helps to tackle wider social issues. Local community benefits include employment,

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training and volunteer opportunities, which can also help develop the capacity of local people and communities to be more self reliant.

Many of these benefits can be achieved by working with private sector contractors or the third sector, which lends itself to the management of bulky waste, in particular to maximising reuse. Research carried out by Defra, and reported in *Benefits of Third Sector Involvement in Waste Management* (Defra, 2009), identified case studies demonstrating a range of benefits which were assigned monetary values, termed as Social Return on Investment (SROI), including those listed above.

A bulky waste collection may originate in the waste management department, but the wider social and economic benefit may be seen in, say, social services or economic development departments. When planning a bulky waste service, waste departments should therefore endeavour to work closely with colleagues in other departments, looking for ways to join up activities across an authority. If the purchaser or funder is focussed on meeting only one department's requirements, there is a real risk that wider benefits will not be realised.

The local, social benefits of reuse may also be of interest to elected members.

The UK is seeing a growing reuse infrastructure, with a greater focus on quality control. In many areas it is now possible to find accredited service providers for the collection and processing of reusable waste streams through the FRN's accreditation scheme, which allows its members to subscribe to audited operating standards. For further information go to the FRN Enterprises section on www.frn.org.uk

Government Strategies and Policies

England

A review of waste policy was published in June 2011, and sets out the Government's commitment towards a 'zero waste' economy. The review also puts an emphasis on localism and the Big Society using as an example "the the role charity sector organisations often play in ensuring clothing or bulky items like furniture are reused rather than thrown away."

The Localism Bill going through Parliament at the time of writing aims to provide a framework for increased involvement from communities.

Big Society

New proposals, brought forward by the coalition under the title Building the Big Society, aim to empower local people and communities, building a big society¹ that will take power away from politicians and give it to people. It includes support for co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises in supplying public services, and also has strong emphasis on volunteering and charitable giving.

Many local authorities are already working with the third sector to deliver services such as bulky waste collections or furniture reuse, and this can be seen as an example of the big society in action.

¹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/total_place_report.pdf

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Wales

The Wales Waste Strategy, Towards Zero Waste – for the period 2009 to 2050 was published in June 2010. The Assembly Government is committed to reduce Wales' ecological footprint to 'one Wales: one planet' levels and reduce the impact on climate change. The Municipal Waste Sector Plan states a number of actions that relate to bulky waste for example;

Increasing reuse significantly through the setting of targets, the provision of support, and awareness/communications campaigns to promote donations and the desirability of using pre-used items.

And

Citizens are able to benefit socially (through greater social cohesion and community well-being) from 'preparing for reuse' activities – through job creation and training, and closer engagement with their communities.

In addition to the waste strategy, under the Government of Wales Act 2006, there is a duty for the assembly Government to promote sustainable development and this is a major driver for working towards zero waste.

The Act states that:

Welsh Ministers must make a scheme ("the sustainable development scheme") setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to promote sustainable development.

There are other legal duties within the Act about sustainability and regeneration. These include:

- Business (section 75);
- Equality and Diversity (section 77);
- the Welsh Language (section 78); and
- for biodiversity, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (section 40).

There are challenging standards to reduce carbon emissions and dealing with waste. For more information see

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/duty/?jsessionid=GVTYNQkhbbN0QdwwV2wPk2N2sp1Ws3ZG4HpScnn4LDj4yLPWdLbv!-1022696525?lang=en>

Scotland's Zero Waste Plan

Scotland's Zero Waste Plan aligns to the waste hierarchy and sets reuse targets for Local Authorities while recognising the role the third sector plays. Section 4, Annex A of the Zero Waste Plan states that items deemed suitable for reuse will be regulated by light touch exemptions. The Scottish Government considers that items deposited at household waste recycling centres which are checked, cleaned and repaired and thus made ready for re-use will count towards recycling targets.

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Waste Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Towards Resource Management Strategy states a greater emphasis on waste prevention and reuse and provides a framework for waste prevention. This framework looks to the community and social sector to play a part.

Community Budgeting

Community based budgets seek to show how local authorities could, by exercising leadership locally, draw together the total resources available from public and other agencies to improve services overall in an area in a way which reflected local rather than central priorities. 11 pilot schemes were established. This thinking is being put into practice in community budgeting trials in 16 areas (28 authorities).

One opportunity is the provision of low cost goods through furniture reuse organisations, especially if the furniture is collected from the local authority waste stream. Social enterprises can help to deliver more efficient and effective services, such as bulky waste collections. The successful partnership between Doncaster Council and Refurnish, who provide the bulky household waste collection, is included as an example of the Total Place way of working in this [HMTreasury](#)² report.

Social, environmental and economic benefits of reuse and recycling

The FRN "Win Win" report (2007) states that reuse can play an important role in meeting objectives around social and financial inclusion, sustainable communities, reducing carbon emissions and the use of natural resources. It has direct linkages to a number of current government policies and initiatives as discussed below.

Social benefits

Social benefits are the primary driver for many third sector organisations. The principal benefits are employment for disadvantaged workers and provision of low cost, or free, household goods to low income families. The FRN estimates that reuse charities have helped 750,000 low-income households, and they suggest that demand from such households is greater than the present capacity of third sector reuse organisations.

The sector contributes to a number of objectives³ including:

- the creation of socially inclusive wealth;
- the regeneration of local neighbourhoods;
- the development of new ways to deliver public services;
- employment and training; and
- provision of basic items (bed, fridge, cooker) for the socially excluded.

Building on the Sustainable Procurement Action Plan, published in March 2007, the potential for 'social clauses', whereby community benefits can be specified alongside the more traditional asset or service being procured is an option. The challenge for purchasers in using these clauses is joining their procurement function with the broader strategic objectives of their organisation. For the third sector,

² www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/total_place_report.pdf

³ WR0501: *Replicating Success: Social Enterprises and the Waste Sector in London*

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it is important for them to quantify the added value they offer so that it can be measured in ways consistent with value for money.

Training opportunities

Furniture reuse organisations provide a number of training opportunities, which can include retail, warehousing, furniture restoration, upholstery, electrical skills, office and IT skills. Training is usually offered to individuals that have been long term unemployed, on probation or disabled, thereby enabling them to gain valuable work and social skills. Providing these opportunities can often attract support funding, although additional income will be needed to cover all overheads. Once training placements have been completed, approximately one third go onto paid employment. According to the FRN, the sector provides training for over 8,000 trainees.

Volunteering opportunities

Reuse organisations often rely on time and commitment from volunteers, which may be recruited through referral and welfare agencies (e.g. social care organisations). As well as providing volunteer opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, volunteers can come from other walks of life, for example, retired workers. Volunteers often benefit from improved self-esteem as well as a sense of contributing to a worthwhile cause. According to the FRN, the sector supports over 10,000 volunteers.

The guidance produced by FRN on tackling worklessness, training and skills development through public procurement discusses this in more detail. The extract below is taken from the guidance, which is available online.

Extract from *Tackling Worklessness, Training and Skills Development through Public Procurement*⁴

[*Tackling Worklessness, Training and Skills Development through Public Procurement*] is aimed at local authorities, and the legal framework described applies particularly to local government. The legal framework applies to all aspects of sustainable procurement including social clauses, community benefits and targeted recruitment and training ("TR&T"), with the critical variation being the way the requirements are specified and delivery is measured and monitored. Its focus, however, is on recruitment and training, and how procurement can be used as a way to tackle worklessness and skills shortages.

Working with the third sector, for example by contracting services such as reuse of bulky waste, supports the wider community by enabling the organisation to offer training and volunteer placements to those that may struggle to find opportunities elsewhere in the labour market.

Community involvement

Social enterprises often have strong ties to local communities, which may result in greater involvement of those communities. Linked to the provision of training and volunteer opportunities, reuse projects can play an important role in community cohesion, by giving residents the opportunity to become involved as volunteers or employees in a worthwhile community service.

⁴ www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/17798359

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Provision of goods to low income families

This guidance has mentioned that one of the main benefits of involving reuse organisations in bulky waste service provision is that items can be sold or given to low-income families and individuals. While the cost of many items has reduced considerably, bulky items can still be very costly. Low income families often rely on 'sub-prime' credit shops with high APRs and a mark-up on retail prices to purchase consumer goods, such as washing machines, televisions, and large household furnishings. This means that the cost of the item can more than double for those on a low income. By comparison, many better off families have a range of means of paying for these items – including upfront, with a credit card, or hire purchase⁵.

Impact on residents

By delivering a service that maximises reuse and recycling of bulky waste, local authorities can also provide a better service to residents but this will need to be carefully communicated (see Section 3: Communications). Important points to consider are:

- As collections need to preserve the potential reusability of the items many items need to be protected from the weather and collected from inside buildings. Keeping items inside is most likely to be practical for residents if the collection service is able to respond quickly to requests.
- This may be seen to be inconvenient if collection times are not flexible.
- Charged-for bulky waste collections may encourage householders to look for alternatives. Information about these alternatives should also be offered by the local authority
- Per collection (rather than per item) pricing structures may encourage residents to dispose of more than one item per bulky collection and more items are offered for collection sooner, which could mean slightly higher waste arisings in the long run.

Environmental benefits

Research suggested that around half to two-thirds of households in England dispose of bulky waste each year (including WEEE), mostly at HWRCs. The report also suggested that around 500,000 tonnes of bulky items, WEEE and textiles are reused each year in England, of which around half is bulky and WEEE⁶. These sorts of figures confirm that reuse and recycling of bulky waste can make a significant contribution towards landfill diversion targets, waste prevention strategies and carbon savings (WRAP is currently working to determine the carbon savings of reusing bulky waste).

Economic benefits

There are economic benefits to local authorities, communities and individuals as a result of increased reuse and recycling. For a local authority these benefits are:

- reduced costs of, and LATS liabilities for, disposal;
- potential sales income to contribute to collection costs;
- reduced costs for services delivered by social service and housing departments by providing practical social benefits in the community; and
- greater efficiencies from cross department working, such as funding reuse activities through more than one department, splitting the cost between waste and other departments.

⁵ *The Poverty Premium, Save the Children and Family Welfare Association, 2007*

⁶ *DEFRA WREP household waste prevention evidence review WR1204 Re-Use and the Third Sector, October 2009.*

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These can be achieved by:

- promoting reuse activities not carried out by the council, such as the use of online exchange websites or charity shops;
- contracting a more efficient collection service with an organisation that can, potentially, add value and provide a better service at a lower cost; and
- maximising reuse and recycling to generate income from the sale of goods or materials.

There are also economic benefits through strengthening the local economy, which can help to alleviate poverty, promote financial inclusion, and sustain tenancies of those currently housed.

Summary

Focusing bulky waste management towards reuse and recycling can help meet a number of local authority objectives and bring additional social economic and environmental benefits to the community.

- It provides the opportunity to help those in need by supplying affordable furniture and appliances.
- It has potential to provide training and job placements.
- Collecting bulky items to reuse and recycle avoids disposal costs and Landfill Tax.
- Income from reuse and recycling sales can contribute to reduced collection costs.
- Reuse and recycling reduces the environmental impacts associated with disposal.
- Carbon savings are made through reuse and recycling.
- The benefits accruing from reuse can be shared across other departments within the local authority.

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