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Local Government Group support for councils on tackling litter

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction

Summary

In March 2010 Government brought together private sector manufacturers and retailers, Keep Britain Tidy, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Local Government Regulation and major landowners to consider how to make greater progress in reducing litter. At the meeting participants from all sectors agreed to work together to drive a coordinated approach to significantly reduce litter in England. This paper provides an update on progress made to date, highlights significant outstanding issues and seeks steer from members on a key points.

Recommendations

Members to consider the issues in this report and provide steer on how the Local Government Group can best support councils in this area; specifically:

1. How can councils make best use of the new anti-litter brand currently being developed to help drive sustained behaviour change, reduce litter and cut their costs? What, if anything, do councils need from the Government or others to support this? What, if anything, do councils need from the Government or others to support this?
2. How does the Environment and Housing Board want to be represented at the national "Litter Convention"?
3. How can local government ensure that members of the voluntary sector who want to get involved with councils' work to improve the local environment (and also other areas of volunteering) are easily able to engage with councils?

Action

As directed by Programme Board.

Contact officer: Nick Clack
Position: Policy Team Leader, Local Government Regulation
Phone no: 020 7665 3876
E-mail: nick.clack@local.gov.uk

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Background

1. Councils in England spent around £860 million last year on clearing up litter. Over 30 million tonnes are collected from the streets of England every year. At a time when councils are having to provide vital services to residents on increasingly stretched budgets, this increasingly seems an unnecessary expense – one that can be avoided if the litter is not dropped in the first place.
2. There has been good progress in recent years in securing greater engagement across all sectors to reduce litter, but considerably more remains to be done and there is strong pressure from the general public to further address this highly visible issue. There is a shared responsibility between central and local government, other land managers and businesses who produce products or packaging, and the public.
3. In March 2010 the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Hilary Benn, brought together private, public and voluntary organisations to take stock of what has been achieved, listen to views and ideas, celebrate successes and identify what more can be done to address the issue. All parties signed up to a high profile summit later in the year to involve more organisations and obtain sign up to a set of commitments. Since then there has been a change of government, but the coalition government decided it would continue to support a national event and included a commitment to reduce litter in its “Programme for Government”. The national event has been termed the “Litter Convention”.
4. Local Government Regulation (LG Regulation), Keep Britain Tidy (KBT), Defra and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) formed a co-ordination group to gather evidence from a variety of stakeholders to explore in more details some of the issues raised at the March meeting.
5. Between May and August 2010 individual members of the group had discussions with stakeholders in the public, private and civil society sectors. LG Regulation met with two major landowners that have a significant influence on how a place is perceived by the public – the Highways Agency and Network Rail, and also fast food retailers, to identify options for closer working with local government. This scoping exercise identified themes such as education, communications and partnership working and a range of suggested actions.

Key issues

6. One specific action identified and supported by all organisations was the development of an over-arching anti-litter brand to replace the “tidy man” logo displayed on food packaging and elsewhere. It was felt that this has now become “wallpaper” and has lost the power to inspire behaviour change. Businesses contributed towards the development of a replacement logo and message (“Love where you live” – see **Appendix A**) which will be launched at the Litter Convention event.

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7. Defra feels that the brand needs to have a value and meaning and have developed a draft set of easy-to-sign up to high-level principles – “Loving where you live” means:
 - 7.1 Making it easy for people not to drop litter
 - 7.2 Working in partnership with neighbours to reduce litter
 - 7.3 Taking responsibility for keeping your own immediate area clean
 - 7.4 Raising awareness and education about not littering
 - 7.5 Encouraging personal responsibility and positive action
 - 7.6 Being an active ambassador for clean places.
8. These principles support the logo and message and can be applied across all sectors. We believe that Defra is proposing that to use the logo participants would have to publish on a website specific actions they are taking or propose to take to underpin each principle. Discussions are ongoing to clarify this.
9. Some points for discussion:
 - 9.1 How can councils make best use of the new anti-litter brand currently being developed to help drive sustained behaviour change, reduce litter and cut their costs? What, if anything, do councils need from the Government or others to support this?
 - 9.2 How does the Environment and Housing Board want to be represented at the high-profile Litter Convention? LG Regulation has suggested to Defra that it may be appropriate for Councillor Tony Newman, who sits on this Board and also LG Regulation’s Board to provide a link.

Engaging the voluntary sector

10. Voluntary sector organisations are important local partners for all councils and this role will become even more important over the coming years as spending cuts are translated into visible reduction in some council services and the Government continues to push the “Big Society” approach. Monitoring and maintaining streetscene environments supported by the community prevents further environmental crime and vandalism as well as an escalation into more serious crime.

Effective relationships with the voluntary sector are vital, but they are sometimes hindered by a lack of ease of access to relevant personnel within councils.

11. How can local government ensure that members of the voluntary sector, who want to get involved with councils’ work to improve the local environment (and also other areas of volunteering) are easily able to engage with councils?

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Littering from vehicles

12. Litter thrown from vehicles is a major source of litter. A Keep Britain Tidy study found roads and verges are some of the most littered parts of the country. The research showed 22 per cent of lorry drivers and 20 per cent of all motorists admitted to throwing rubbish from their vehicles in the previous six months. As well as being unsightly, road litter is difficult, costly and dangerous to remove as it requires staff to stand on or by the side of a carriageway putting them at risk from oncoming traffic.
13. Behaviour change is again vital to solving this problem and effective campaigns and education – such as finding a powerful replacement for “tidyman” mentioned above – are an important part of this. But effective enforcement when the message is ignored by some also important.
14. Current legal powers to tackle the problem of littering from vehicles are almost unusable because of the difficulty of positively identifying the person that dropped the litter. Currently if a council officer reports litter being dumped from a moving vehicle a fine can be posted to the vehicle’s registered keeper, but if they deny the offence and no one else comes forward the authority must prove in court who littered. Such a difficult and expensive process means most councils cannot pursue the case. Over 100 councils signed up to a campaign to highlight this problem.
15. Councils have been raising this problem with Defra for several years. A number of potential solutions have been identified – including enabling action to be taken against the registered keeper if the litterer cannot be positively identified – but all require a change to primary legislation. Defra has said on a number of occasions that it will look at it and try to find a suitable legislative opportunity but none has been found.
16. The Local Government Group is exploring the possibility of using the forthcoming Localism and Decentralisation Bill as an opportunity to make the necessary change to primary legislation in the absence of any prospect of positive action from Defra. Officers will keep members updated with any progress.

Conclusion and next steps

17. The current push by Defra with the LG Group, KBT, CPRE, large businesses and others gives an opportunity for local government to help secure some real progress in changing behaviour and reducing litter. With input from the Board, the LG Group will progress work to take advantage of this opportunity and ensure proposals are workable for councils and their communities.

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Financial Implications

18. No significant financial implications for the LG Group. If the current proposals can be shaped to make a real impact locally then cost savings for councils could be very significant. However, sustained behaviour change is difficult to achieve and the campaign and other actions will need to be carefully thought out and planned over the coming months.

Contact officer: Nick Clack
Position: Policy Team Leader, Local Government Regulation
Phone no: 020 7665 3876
E-mail: nick.clack@local.gov.uk