



Press release

Embargoed until: 00.01 25/11/11

Fresh thinking required to change attitudes to waste and recycling says new Localis report

Local government think-tank Localis, in partnership with Westminster City Council, today launched **'The Big Green Society'**, the latest pamphlet in their Big Society Series. The pamphlet sets out a number of recommendations for councils to both help encourage residents and local businesses contribute to improving their local environments, and change attitudes towards waste and recycling.

[Click here to see the full report](#)

'The Big Green Society: Empowering communities to create cleaner, greener neighbourhoods' uses a series of case studies from across the UK and overseas to derive a number of practical suggestions for reforming and improving the way in which waste management and cleansing is carried out by local government. It explores the applicability of 'nudge theory' to engender greater levels of personal responsibility among residents and illustrates how local government can form beneficial relationships with businesses and public sector bodies to tackle waste and recycling issues and improve the maintenance of the streetscape.

The following are some of the **key recommendations** outlined in the pamphlet.

Local authorities should:

- **broaden their role from that of service provider to 'enabler' – providing the opportunities for those residents that want to contribute to do so, while continuing to deliver on the councils' core responsibilities**
- **consider using 'nudge' strategies to bring about cultural and behavioural shifts in their residents towards local environments, for instance through positive reinforcement of community participation and making residents feel that they are part of the solution**
- **be innovative in enabling two way communication between resident and council, so allowing residents to report problems, and councils to better communicate their green message**
- **target their messages to reflect each communities specific needs and wants**
- **consider rewarding the community as a whole for its combined efforts in order to create a virtuous cycle which benefits local authority and resident alike**
- **seek to develop mutually beneficial relationships with the private sector, including working with businesses to provide appropriate financial incentives for residents in order to encourage behavioural changes.**

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, **Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP** said:

"This report shows that by working in new and creative ways with residents and businesses councils can incentivise and encourage, rather than penalise and punish people into going green and improving the environment."

Alex Thomson, Chief Executive of Localis said:

"Dealing with waste and recycling is one of the costliest front-line services councils provide. And whilst local authorities must continue to fulfil their responsibilities to their local communities, fresh thinking is required to change the mindsets of those who believe councils are simply there to clean up after them."

Local authorities should be thinking innovatively about how best to change these attitudes by acknowledging and rewarding the work of those who contribute and by working closely with businesses and other public sector bodies to incentivise and stimulate better attitudes to waste amongst those who do not. This pamphlet provides practical suggestions to encourage councils to do just that."

Phil Barton, Chief Executive, Keep Britain Tidy, said:

"Keep Britain Tidy welcomes this report from Localis and Westminster City Council. We need a change in attitude to how we deal with our rubbish, and this research outlines key ways in which councils can bring this about through positively reinforcing environmentally responsible behaviour. If councils are to achieve their green visions however, they should also look beyond working with residents and form beneficial relationships with private sector organisations that already do their bit for their local environments."

Cllr Ed Argar, Cabinet Member for City Management, Westminster City Council, said:

"While I believe this council [Westminster City Council] cannot back away from its core responsibilities, in financially straightened times it is right that we look for fresh thinking about how we can all help play our part by adopting a more environmentally responsible and financially sustainable approach."

Alongside continuing to make it easy for people to do the right thing councils need to continue thinking about how they and society can help change attitudes to waste and littering. We can all play a part in building a more collaborative and responsible approach between councils, businesses, communities and individuals – in short a Big Green Society."

'The Big Green Society' will be launched at **8.30am on Friday 25th November** at **45 Millbank, Westminster** by Cllr Ed Argar, Cabinet Member for City Management, Westminster City Council. Speakers at the launch will include, Dr Kevin-Golding Williams, Keep Britain Tidy and Tom Walker, Deputy Director for Decentralisation, Department of Communities and Local Government.

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For more information, or to arrange an interview please contact:

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Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to local government and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold a calendar of events and facilitate an ever growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK. Please visit www.localis.org.uk for more information

Notes to Editors:

Full recommendations from the report:

- Local authorities should look to broaden their role from that of service provider to 'enabler' – providing the opportunities for those residents that want to contribute to do so – whilst continuing to deliver on the councils' core responsibilities.
- Councils should look to empower local residents and businesses who are eager to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of their local environment, not just through making official the work that they do but also providing the opportunity for residents to become local representatives or 'go-betweens', enabling wider community involvement and engagement.
- The role of the local authority is central to meeting the Government's 'zero waste' economy commitment and as such they should lead by example starting with their own staff.
- Local government can bring about cultural and behavioural shifts in residents with regard to care of local environments through 'nudge' strategies. Positive reinforcement of community participation and making residents feel part of the solution are key.
- Local authorities should be innovative about enabling a two way communication process between resident and council. This will enable residents to engage through reporting problems and allow councils to better communicate their green message. Councils should also consider the importance of residents themselves as messengers.
- Communication of a green vision and nudging communities into behavioural changes is possible but requires a targeted, locally specific and socio-economically relevant focus. Rewarding the community as a whole for its combined efforts is an option that could create a virtuous cycle which benefits local authority and resident alike. Local authorities should attempt to gain an understanding of residents' motivations and which incentives they will best respond to.
- Local authorities should seek to develop mutually beneficial relationships with the private sector, including working with businesses already dedicated to improving the local environment.
- Local government should consider different ways of working with the private sector and working with the business community to provide appropriate financial incentives for residents in order to encourage behavioural changes including, where appropriate, payment by results contracts.
- Councils should, where appropriate, seek to collaborate with other public sector bodies to improve local environments for mutual benefit. For instance, councils' increased influence over local health funding offers an opportunity for early intervention schemes relevant to the local environment.