



Category: Best Use of Media Relations

Company: Newcastle City Council

Entry title: No Time to Waste

Brief and objectives:

Newcastle produces enough waste to fill St James' Park every three years. The costs are massive environmentally and financially. The council spends £18m a year to process the waste which it can no longer afford due to Government cuts.

Senior councillors decided they needed a fresh look at waste. Due to the complexity of the subject, they decided to approach leading experts to form an independent body, the Newcastle Waste Commission, to produce an honest and frank report into the scale of the challenge and what could be done about it. The report would inform a new waste strategy for the city and bring about a step change in how we deal with waste.

A media relations campaign was required to:

- Raise awareness of the scale and cost of waste
- Raise awareness of individual responsibility
- Encourage behaviour change by highlighting good practice

Rationale behind campaign, including research and planning:

At the heart of the campaign was the rising cost of dealing with waste and poor resident engagement. Also, Newcastle's growth as a city would present new challenges if action was not taken.

Costs:

- £18.5m per year to collect, treat and dispose of waste, rising by £600k every year due to inflation and housing growth
- £3m landfill tax in 2017 – up £0.5m from 2016 (35% of waste sent to landfill)
- £500k for contamination (people not putting the right thing in the right bin)

Poor engagement:

- Recycling rates in Newcastle have not increased for three years
- Half of the contents of household bins are recyclable
- Recycling in one ward amounted to 1kg per household per year - equal to a bag of sugar

By 2030 Newcastle is expected to see:

- A 30k rise in population
- 21,000 new homes
- 14,000 new jobs

Strategy and tactics, including creativity and innovation:

Strategy: present Newcastle as a world leader in waste reduction by promoting the work of the Newcastle Waste Commission.

We invited The Times' Environment Editor Ben Webster to be one of the seven Commissioners. His insight helped the campaign.

To attract media, we promoted the more newsworthy aspects:

- Newcastle had a big waste problem
- Leading experts had been assembled to tackle it
- Newcastle was the first UK city to set up a commission
- It would take a root and branch look at waste
- It would produce a ground-breaking report with lessons for all UK cities

Firstly, we would publicise the Commission from its launch, throughout the six months it met, right up to the publication of its report. Secondly, we would publicise how the council and the city responded to its findings to avoid the charge it was no more than an expensive talking shop.

We would issue the report to the media under embargo the day before publication to give them time to read it and prepare coverage. Journalists often complain about not being given enough time to digest lengthy and complex reports.

We would launch at a central location in Newcastle with free parking and offer the media interviews with key players such as the Chair of the Commission. We launched at 12.30pm to give broadcasters the option of live coverage in lunchtime bulletins.

Throughout the campaign, a mix of specialist and regional media were targeted including online, print, radio and TV. Specialists included: Resource; Materials Recycling World; letsrecycle.com; Recycling Waste World; Waste Planning and Circom.

We also approached regional media and targeted the BBC's documentary unit, Inside Out. We offered them exclusive access to the commissioners and promised no waste issue would be off limits.

When filming re-commenced, they approached us with a proposal to do a report on incineration. Through our partners Suez, we secured them supervised access to the Mechanical Biological Treatment plant at Byker where they filmed the waste process. We set up an interview with Cllr Nick Kemp, Cabinet Member for the Environment whose idea it had been to set up the Commission.

Throughout the campaign, we made every effort to give the media access to waste facilities as pictures are vital to secure TV coverage. They were given access to refuse collections, household waste recycling centres and a compost making centre.

Implementation of tactics:

- 1 March 2017 Press release issued: A radical new approach to waste
- 17 March 2017 Press release issued: Waste experts tour Newcastle
- 3 May 2017 Press release issued: Wise on Waste (website launched)
- Aug 2017 arrange filming opportunities for Inside Out
- Jan 2018 Prepare Cllr Kemp for interview with Inside Out
- Jan 29 2018 issue media ops note for launch of report/write speeches
- Jan 31 2018 arrange media access to film inside Byker waste plant
- Jan 31 Report No Time to Waste and press release issued under embargo till 12.30pm the following day
- 1 Feb 2018 12.30pm report launched at Mansion House
- 15 March 2018 Press release issued: Council acts on report
- 12 April 2018 Press release issued: A waste strategy for Newcastle
- 31 May 2018 Press release issued: Have your say on waste strategy

Measurement and evaluation:

- 19 articles online
- 5 articles in print

- 5 TV reports including a live into Look North's lunchtime bulletin
- Inside Out documentary 10 min broadcast on Jan 29 2018
- The TV coverage heralded the up-coming report three days before launch
- Media who attended the launch:
- Tyne Tees audience 240k
- Look North 310k
- Made in Tyne and Wear 46k
- Chronicle – 5 articles 3 of which viewed online over 9,000 times source: Chronicle
- 10 pubs came forward to announce a ban on plastic drinking straws
- Director of Wylam Brewery, Dave Stone, said: "We feel the leisure industry needs to throw their weight behind this initiative. The general school of thought to be 'how can you serve a cocktail without a straw' whereby our thinking is 'how can you have oceans without sea-life'."
- More than 100 businesses signed up to a campaign to allow the public to top up refillable water bottles at shops and other premises reducing the need for single use plastics
- The Newcastle Resource Partnership was set up to act on the Commission's recommendations
- The council received a strong response from the CBI, Chamber of Commerce, Community and Voluntary Sector and businesses
- Commission Chair Heidi Mottram said: "The media campaign was vital for communicating the Commission's work, and its report, which have already brought about many positive changes in Newcastle."

Budget and cost effectiveness:

- Officer worked on campaign as part of job
- Cost of designing and printing 100 reports £1,706 and £300 respectively
- Cost of two banners for launch £200
- Photograph of commissioners £70
- Total: £2,276