



## **A response to Towards Zero Waste: WAG Consultation on a New Waste Strategy for Wales**

**22 July 2009**

### **About us**

Consumer Focus Wales is the new statutory organisation campaigning for a fair deal for consumers.

Consumer Focus Wales is the voice of the consumer and works to secure a fair deal on their behalf. It was created through the merger of three consumer organisations – energywatch, Postwatch and the Welsh Consumer Council. This new approach allows for more joined-up consumer advocacy, with a single organisation speaking with a powerful voice and able to more readily bring cross-sector expertise to issues of concern.

In campaigning on behalf of consumers we aim to influence change and shape policy to better reflect the needs of consumers. We do this in an informed way owing to the evidence we gather through research and our unique knowledge of consumer issues. We have a particular focus on vulnerable consumers, particularly those on low incomes, people with disabilities, people living in rural areas and older people. In addition, we also seek to identify where other consumers may be disproportionately disadvantaged by a particular consumer issue or policy.

Consumer Focus Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on a new waste strategy for Wales. In this instance, we believe that the strategy has implications for all consumers, but specific attention should be given to those who are on low incomes who may be particularly impacted by some of the proposals within this strategy such as charging for waste collection.

### **Summary of response**

We are pleased that the Waste Strategy recognises the important role that other agencies and factors apart from the consumer play in contributing to a high recycling society. We believe however that it is important that agencies take full account of consumers in terms of the barriers they face to engaging with this agenda in order to effectively encourage and enable them to play their part.

### **Effective communication**

Consumer Focus Wales believes that recycling services should be effectively communicated to consumers and that consumers should also have a role to play in the design, monitoring and evaluation of such services. It is also important that consumers know how to provide

feedback or complain about the service they receive and know that the issues they raise will be dealt with<sup>1</sup>.

In communicating with consumers it is important that campaigns are targeted appropriately, use clear language and commonly understood terms. WRAP research suggests using targeted recycling messages that link to the different barriers faced by different segments of the population. The nature of these messages will of course depend on the barriers consumers face, but could include a range of information from basic how-to 'user guides' to messages around what actually happens to the recyclates collected<sup>2</sup>. Branding for high profile authority wide campaigns around the waste agenda should also be fully bilingual.

### **Consumers' attitudes**

Welsh Consumer Council research conducted in 2007 noted that 68% of consumers thought recycling was very important with a further 26% citing it as fairly important<sup>3</sup>.

Only 28% believed that they were doing as much as they could to recycle, whilst only 8% felt that nothing else could encourage them to recycle more. This suggests a large proportion of consumers believe that there is potential for them to recycle more.

There are several barriers which consumers face when seeking to engage more fully with the recycling agenda. WRAP research highlights the following:

- situational barriers including not having adequate containers, a lack of space for storage, unreliable collections, unable to get to bring sites;
- behaviour for example household disorganisation, being too busy with other preoccupations, difficulties in establishing routines for sorting waste and remembering to put it out;
- lack of knowledge such as knowing what materials to put in which container, and understanding the basics of how the scheme works; and
- attitudes and perceptions such as not accepting there is an environmental or other benefit, resistant to householder sorting and not getting a personal motivational reward from recycling<sup>4</sup>.

Efforts to encourage consumers to recycle should start from an understanding of consumers' current situation and what are the practical barriers they face in terms of recycling. Local authorities should seek to develop an understanding of these barriers and tailor their efforts to enable them to support consumers to overcome these barriers as best they can.

### **Charging for waste collection**

We note the strategy highlights that other alternatives for waste management may also be developed in future such as charging. Consumer Focus Wales research also shows that 74% of people disagree or disagree strongly with the notion of councils charging for

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<sup>1</sup> [WRAP press release – 16 June 2008, cited in unpublished research commissioned by the Welsh Consumer Council](#)

<sup>2</sup> Barriers to Recycling at Home, WRAP, August 2008

<sup>3</sup> Research commissioned by the Welsh Consumer Council (unpublished) undertaken by Beaufort Research in their Welsh Omnibus Survey, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Barriers to Recycling at Home, WRAP, August 2008

collecting the rubbish that they do not recycle<sup>5</sup>. The supporting document within the strategy relating to charging refers to the need to consider the impact on various vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of charging. It also introduces the idea of exclusions for certain groups. We would urge that the Welsh Assembly Government and Local Authorities pay due attention to this if proposals are developed further. Consultation and engagement with all consumers will also be important.

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<sup>5</sup> Research commissioned by the Welsh Consumer Council (unpublished) undertaken by Beaufort Research in their Welsh Omnibus Survey, 2007

