

*Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
New waste collection and recycling service
Strategic communications overview*

Prepared on behalf of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council by
Maxim PR & Marketing Ltd
Grosvenor Lodge
Grosvenor Road
Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN1 1HL

Lead authors: Philip Jones & Andrew Metcalf
Tel: 01892 513033
Email: philip@maxim-pr.co.uk/andrew@maxim-pr.co.uk

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2. Introduction

Maxim PR & Marketing Ltd (Maxim), a long-established West Kent agency with a track record of working with local government, was commissioned by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC) to undertake an independent, high level review of the communications issues surrounding the introduction of the new waste collection and recycling service in 2019. The firm had previously been involved with developing a marketing analysis for the West Kent Waste Partnership Group in 2017.

As part of its work, Maxim was asked to look at issues such as:

- Key messages
- Possible risks and how to address them
- Audiences
- Communication channels
- Indicative costs

This report has been informed by meetings with and feedback from Council Officers, research into what has worked elsewhere in Kent and further afield and a realistic assessment of likely costs. The report is not intended to be a detailed marketing plan. That will be developed once a contractor has been appointed and further details are known about the new service arrangements.

3. Aims, objectives and key messages

Aim of the Communications Plan

The overall aim of the communications activity in the run-up to the new service should be:

To support the successful and smooth introduction of the new waste and recycling service in 2019, with residents understanding how to participate and how to correctly recycle as much material as possible.

Objectives

Underlying the overall aim of the work, there should be the following objectives:

- Informing all householders within the Borough which items can be recycled using the different domestic recycling/refuse bins/boxes and the waste food caddies
- Ensuring residents understand which other items can be recycled at municipal tips, bring sites and weekly bulk collection
- Achieving at least 30 percent of Borough households signing up to the new garden waste service

Key Messages

The proposed key messages are that:

- The new service is good for the environment
- It is better value for money
- It is easy to use
- It helps to protect the provision of other frontline Council services
- Charging for garden waste is more equitable (those who use the service pay for it) and is optional.

These messages largely mirror the agreed objectives for the retendering project:

- Increased recycling performance
- Financial savings
- Service improvement and efficiencies
- Greater consistency across partner organisations

Subsidiary Messages

Other messages that need to be included within future communications activity are:

- This is a massive logistical exercise involving 52,000 households. There will undoubtedly be teething problems but the Council will ensure residents can easily access support
- TMBC is one of only four councils in the County that doesn't currently charge for garden waste collection
- Residents have long-wanted kerbside recycling for plastics and glass – this is now being provided (TMBC is one of only two Councils in the country not to offer kerbside plastics)
- TMBC would have liked to introduce the new service sooner but was hindered by the contractual terms of the previous waste contract, which runs until the end of February 2019
- TMBC wants to improve performance in terms of its recycling. The new service aims to increase recycling rates from the current 42% to 50%, with a more convenient service for residents
- The new service is good for the local economy
- All new containers will be provided free of charge
- Popular services such as weekly bulk collections will remain
- Ten strategically placed recycling sites will be retained

4. The corporate context

Alignment

Communications regarding the new waste/recycling service will reflect the corporate vision set out in the Corporate Strategy 2017 - 19:

To be a financially sustainable Council that delivers good value services, provides strong and clear leadership and, with our partners, addresses the needs of our Borough.

With the following core values:

- *Taking a business-like approach* – focusing on ensuring good value for money, continuously reviewing how our services are provided and funded, focusing our available resources where they will have most beneficial impact, and maximising commercial opportunities.
- *Promoting Fairness* – acting transparently at all times and being accountable for what we do, and promoting equality of opportunities.
- *Embracing Effective Partnership Working* – achieving more by working and engaging effectively with a wide range of local partners from the private, public, voluntary and community sectors.
- *Valuing our environment and encouraging sustainable growth* – keeping our towns, villages and countryside clean and well maintained, planning for our future homes and jobs and seeking investment in economic regeneration and infrastructure.

Communications activity will be informed by what has worked well elsewhere, advice from organisations such as the Waste and Resources Action Programme, insight from the Corporate Communications team and assistance from external consultants. It builds on previous work undertaken by West Kent Waste Partnership Group and Kent Resource Partnership.

Current vs Future Situation

Below is a summary of the proposed changes in service:

Current service:

| Material | Frequency | Containers |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Garden Waste, Food Waste, Cardboard | Fortnightly | 240L Wheeled Bin (Black with Green Lid) |
| Dry Recycling: Paper & cans | Fortnightly | 55L Green Box |
| Residual Waste | Fortnightly | 240L Wheeled Bin (Black with Black Lid) |

Future service:

| Material | Frequency | Containers |
|--|------------------------------|------------------|
| Food waste | Weekly | 23L Food Bin |
| Residual waste | Fortnightly | 240L Wheeled Bin |
| Dry recycling: Paper & card | Fortnightly | 55L Green Box |
| Dry recycling: Glass, cans, plastics and cartons | Fortnightly | 240L Wheeled Bin |
| Garden waste | Fortnightly opt-in, paid-for | 240L Wheeled Bin |

The principal changes are:

- The introduction of kerbside collections for glass and plastics
- Changes in the way food waste and cardboard are collected
- The introduction of a charge for collecting garden waste

The demographics of the Borough (and related issues to consider)

Geodemographic data (Acorn) about the Borough shows a broadly well-off population in good housing stock.

In Acorn terms:

1. 31.9% are Affluent Achievers
2. 9.3% are Rising Prosperity
3. 29.9% are Comfortable Communities
4. 20.6% are Financially Stretched
5. 8.1% are Urban Adversity
6. 0.2% are Not Private Households (residents of hostels, refuges etc)

Groups 4 and 5 are likely to contain those households which may have greater difficulty adapting to the new service – and being able to accommodate the proposed bins.

For example, 351 households in group 4 are pensioners and singles in social rented flats; 263 are people in deprived areas and high-rise flats; 499 are families and single people in social rented flats.

This is not new territory for the Council and resources will be directed accordingly, with, for example, teams of doorknockers available to go from residence to residence.

How we will communicate – key principles

All communications material will be prepared in accordance with TMBC's Corporate Communications Guide and:

- Be clear and easy-to-understand, written in plain English
- Have consistent branding
- Contain consistent key messages
- Allow for a two-way dialogue
- Where appropriate, prepared in consultation with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Kent County Council and the contractor
- Take into account the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment

5. Audiences

A number of different audiences will need to be considered when introducing the new waste & recycling service. Key messages will be consistent although actual marketing activity will differ from audience to audience. Broadly speaking, the audiences break down into internal and external ones.

Internal

- Member Working Group
- Other TMBC Councillors
- TMBC staff
 - The Directorate's existing Customer Services team
 - The corporate Customer Services team
 - The Gateway team
 - All employees as ambassadors for the Council
- The successful contractor
- Kent County Council

External

- Residents
- Parish and Town Councils
- Community and environmental groups
- Children and young people
- Social housing landlords
- Managing agents for private sector rented properties
- Street monitors
- Liberty Property Trust and similar developers
- MPs

6. Routes to market and timings

Routes to market

Experience from TMBC and other local authorities shows that door-dropped printed material and publicity in the local media remain effective ways of communicating with residents. However, it is important the marketing support for the new service adopts a multi-channel approach to reach as many residents as possible, as often as possible.

The work could include:

- 1-2-1 briefings – particularly recommended for the Borough's two MPs. Given there has already been publicity about the proposals for garden waste, an introductory briefing is advisable in the near future, with a second as details of the new service become clearer

- Briefing sheet for Members and other influencers
- TMBC intranet and team meetings
- Local media – early briefing is essential
- Email/text
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Social media
 - @TMBC Kent has 4,100 followers (as of June); there are 1,000 followers on Facebook. TWBC figures are 9,000 and 960 respectively so there may be scope to make better use of Twitter and build engagement in the run-up to the new service
 - YouTube – previous videos have been viewed up to 1,200 times each
 - Instagram could also prove useful but resource may well be better deployed elsewhere rather than trying to start and run a new social media account from scratch
- Council tax bill insert
- Website – Waste & Recycling is the first item on the home page of tmbc.gov.uk but there may be merit in a bespoke website with a link to the existing TMBC site that can be built externally. This would reduce the demand on the in-house IT team but also make it easier for residents to access a comprehensive source of information.
- Roadshows – shopping centres/community events/schools. Maidstone Borough Council ran an effective school assembly roadshow to promote the recycling of kitchen waste
- Advertising (print media, social media, SkyAdsmart, local radio, bus backs)
- Community noticeboards
- Doorknockers
- Councillors
- Customer Services team
- Community groups
- 200 Street monitors
- My Account

The content, timings and deployment of the above will be the subject of a separate Tactical Promotional Plan once further details of the contractor and operational scope of the new service are known. The Promotional Plan will be developed in close liaison with the Member Group established by the Street Scene & Environment Advisory Board.

Timings

Until the contract is awarded in early to mid-September 2018, it is not possible to develop a detailed timetable for the communications activity. However, some points to bear in mind include:

- The Council should aim for a four-month lead-in promotional campaign for the introduction of the new garden waste service
- There is already a degree of awareness that changes are coming.
- While it is generally beneficial to communicate early with residents, the Council needs to avoid generating too much interest if there are still outstanding issues to be resolved and if resource is not yet in place to respond to queries

7. Resource and indicative costs

Resource

TMBC will ensure sufficient resource is available to make sure a successful marketing campaign can be delivered.

Current human resource includes:

- Cllr David Lettington, Cabinet Member for the Environment
- Alison Sollis, Waste Contract Officer appointed in June, experienced in the implementation of waste/recycling collection services
- David Campbell-Lenaghan, Street Scene Manager
- Darren Lanes, Head of Street Scene & Leisure Services providing managerial support
- TMBC Comms Team fully briefed and ready to support
- The Directorate's existing Customer Services Team
- New contractor will make staff available
- Tamsin Ritchie, Environmental Projects Co-ordinator
- External Consultant – Maxim PR & Marketing

Given the scale of the proposed changes, it is recommended additional temporary staff are recruited to enable the Customer Services Team to cope with the high volume of calls to be expected.

Indicative costs

Clearly, the detailed Tactical Promotional Plan will need to reflect the budget available. The Council's overall budget is currently under pressure but in order to ensure a smooth transition to the new collection method and the promotion of garden waste service, a one-off budget will be required. It is also worth viewing promotion of the new garden waste service as an investment, as exceeding the 30% target take-up will generate additional revenue.

WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) suggests a figure of at least £1.50 per household (guidance 2013 -15) for communicating details of a new service, therefore TMBC will require an estimated overall budget of £100,000.

By way of illustration, the following are some sample ballpark costs:

- Printing 3 x 50,000 x A4 polypropylene stickers to affix to repurposed wheeled bins = £7,200 x 3 = £21,600
- Film – introductory film (similar to the one produced by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) = £3,500
- 30 sec advert, using above introductory video content, for use on TV and social media = £1,000 to include music licensing
- Sky AdSmart campaign using 30 sec advert above = £4,000 (c.15,000 households in the Tonbridge & Malling area can receive AdSmart. The campaign would deliver on average six viewings of the advert to 90 per cent of the eligible households)

- A radio advertising campaign on kmfm targeting West Kent would cost in the region of £200 a week, or £2,000 for a 10-week awareness-raising campaign. The West Kent audience reach is 45,000 adults over four weeks. However, as the audience is spread across Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks, it would make sense to do a joint campaign with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and then signpost listeners to further information for their area
- Editing of food recycling animation produced for Maidstone Borough Council = £2,000 plus licensing fees (assumes MBC is willing to allow this)
- Media advertising – this is problematic as there is no single publication focused solely on the area covered by Tonbridge & Malling. Two options are set out below:
 - Adverts in the Courier will appear in Tunbridge Wells as well. However, a half page print advert (cost £380 for a single insert) comes with a package that includes 35,000 online geo-targeted impressions (which can be focused reasonably tightly on Tonbridge & Malling)
 - If booked far enough in advance, it would be possible to secure the back page of the Times of Tonbridge, which has a circulation of 10,000 and is not distributed in Tunbridge Wells. The full page costs £400, so a 12-week campaign with the advert appearing every other week would cost at most £2,400
- Printing 8-page A5 introductory brochure X 50,000 for the introductory pack = £3,500 (there would also be a design cost)
- Postage – by way of illustration, it cost £15,433.28 to post the 2018 council tax bills
- Simple flyers and leaflets – to be designed and printed in-house

8. Risks and mitigation

Introducing a key, new service on this scale is fraught with risk, both in terms of its practical implementation and the council's reputation.

Areas of potential concern include:

| Concern | Mitigation |
|---|--|
| Poor take-up of garden waste service. | Early marketing campaign & allowing plenty of time for sign up before service commences – however not delaying service start too long or will miss growing season. |
| Discontent with introduction of chargeable garden waste collection. | Effective media briefing; robust messages and marketing campaign. Setting of charge to reflect county average and consider promotional incentive. |
| Residents adding garden waste to their residual waste. | Clear labelling of residual waste bin showing unacceptable materials (garden & food waste). Initial light touch educational approach with subsequent sanctions for repeat offenders. |

| | |
|--|--|
| Residents' frustration at being unable to easily contact sources of advice/help. | Investment in Customer Services team; development of comprehensive website information; clearly produced explanatory literature. |
| Failing to meet the national recycling target of 50% by 2020. | Ongoing educational & promotional activities to reinforce messages. Participation monitoring to measure success and target any poor performing areas. Ongoing communications with residents thanking them for using the new service – publicise any increase in recycling rates. |
| Residents fail to sort recyclates correctly and put the wrong waste in the wrong bins/boxes. | Development of a comprehensive, multi-channel tactical marketing campaign with adequate financial and human resource. |
| Deteriorating service if current incumbent is not reappointed. | TMBC Contract Manager will strive to work with the existing contractor to deliver the standard of service expected and encourage the co-operation of existing contractor during the handover period. Additional monitoring staff appointed. |
| Insufficient in-house IT resource for timely website amends. | Build an external bespoke website linked to the corporate website. This will give the residents instant access to all the information they need. |
| Data issues (no matter how good the comms, if there is a repeat of the North Herts garden waste collection problems, the council will receive weeks of bad publicity). | Systems must be thoroughly tested and trialled. Engage in-house IT early in the mobilisation process to ensure systems in place for processing payments (all types) and data feed/compatibility to new contractor. |
| Concern among contractor staff about their jobs. | New contractor 'open days' and communications to allay fears. |
| Adverse press coverage. | Early briefing of the press on the new service. Media training can be made available if required. |
| Inconsistent messaging to the local media from TMBC, TWBC and the new contractor. | Agree common protocols between the three parties regarding content/issuing of press releases. |
| Ineffective partnership working with TWBC. | Clear project management structure between authorities. |