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Cleaner Counties project

Summary document

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The original Cleaner Counties Vision

A pilot litter project was designed to test the assumption that improved co-ordination between statutory bodies could lead to cost savings and reduce litter. Many of those bodies responsible for dealing with litter were working well in terms of their own local system. The aim was not for statutory bodies to fundamentally redesign their strategies and work plans; rather to undertake their work as part of an integrated county-wide effort. A co-ordinated plan would ensure that each organisation could understand where its activities would have the most impact and where they could make savings, while identifying opportunities for collaboration with others.

Essex was identified as the pilot county as it has urban and rural areas, areas of deprivation, a large coastline, a rail network, a number of major roads, several ports and two airports. This meant that there were a good variety of statutory bodies which are legally obliged to take action against litter and could be involved in the project.

Outcomes

The main three proposed outcomes of this project were:

1. A change in the understanding of all relevant statutory bodies within Essex of the current national legal framework on litter and how it is interpreted and used, in turn informing a county-wide action plan and targeted campaigns to improve the framework
2. A change to the levels of efficiency and accountability of statutory bodies within Essex following the implementation of a publicly accessible county-wide action plan which co-ordinates activities and identifies cost savings
3. A change in people's attitudes towards statutory bodies within Essex as they have a better understanding of the work being undertaken, the costs involved and the complexities of litter clearance

Delivery plan

In order to measure the outcomes of the project, initial benchmarking surveys would be undertaken to assess the status and perception of litter within Essex. It was proposed that this would be repeated in the final year of the project to assess progress.

A major piece of the mapping work was the research into the legislative framework surrounding litter which was commissioned from the University of Essex. Following this we expected to have a clear understanding of both the legal framework in which litter sits, and also an understanding of those organisations which are responsible for managing litter within the county. This would identify what strengths, weaknesses and opportunities there were, and what work would be required to improve and coordinate the current situation.

In the next phase, CPRE, in partnership with all the organisations identified as part of the mapping process would develop a county-wide action plan. The plan would be divided into sections and would determine what each organisation had to do to improve their performance and set timescales.

Year 1

Mapping and Analysis

At the start of the project in autumn 2018, an indication of litter levels was established using a Local Environmental Quality survey undertaken by Keep Britain Tidy. It was established that the standard of cleanliness in the county was better than the national baseline, with only 9.5% of sites falling below the established standard.

The second baseline measured the public's perceptions of councils and other statutory bodies across Essex in terms of their efforts to deal with litter. These findings were also good with just over half of residents surveyed stating that litter is not a significant issue (53%).



During the first year we made contact with all the relevant statutory bodies within Essex such as Network Rail, Ports Authorities, Stansted Airport, Highways England, Country Parks and local authorities. The intention was to work with them to map existing activity across the county, identifying where the opportunities and frustrations existed. This would then lead to the development of a county-wide action plan, with associated recommendations for adjustments and improvements.

Stakeholder engagement from the statutory bodies was variable, local authorities, however, were very keen to engage. Extensive survey work resulted in the creation of a database showing the full resourcing, task management and scheduling of cleansing activities undertaken by each authority. From this data map it was clear that integration between authorities would be a challenge, but this was not insurmountable and local authorities were keen to work together to deliver tangible benefits. However, there was limited appetite for an action plan with prescribed activities and timescales as litter was not a key priority for them. Financial mapping was also undertaken during this phase; the baseline data provided a very useful insight into the costs faced by local authorities and the true scale of the issue could be visualised.

Post-mapping review

The completion of the mapping phase, in autumn 2019, was an appropriate time to review results against anticipated outcomes and confirm the way forward.

Changes to project evaluation

The findings from the original baseline studies indicated that any shift in either littering on the ground or public perception of littering would only be slight as the results were more positive than anticipated. Consequently, with a project duration of three years it was felt that there would be very limited value in repeating the studies as significant change would not be seen in such a short period of time. As a result, monitoring was refocussed towards specific trials.

In light of the first years' investigations and information gathering, bearing in mind the challenges with stakeholder engagement, the original outcomes for the project were amended.

Changes to project objectives

During the mapping phase it was noted that one of the increasing problems for rural communities and the countryside in Essex was fly-tipping. As littering and fly-tipping are largely covered by the same pieces of legislation, it was felt that the addition of fly-tipping to the remit of the project, with particular emphasis on the legal and enforcement side, would serve to enhance the project.

In order to deliver the revised project outcomes, taking into account feedback and areas of interest highlighted by partners, several sub-projects were created which would enable us to take the project forward.

Additionally, the government published their Litter Strategy in 2017, after the initial Cleaner Counties project plan had secured funding. The refocussing of the project enabled us to take account of these workstreams and align some of our new trial projects accordingly.



Cleaner Counties Project Outcome	Sub-projects
<p>Outcome 1:</p> <p>The existing legal framework is clarified and subsequently made available and more accessible to all statutory bodies across Essex that have to deal with litter. This would also be available to members of the general public.</p>	<p>Action 1.1: Conduct a trial of Litter Cam software for enforcement purposes in a selected area of Essex</p> <p>Action 1.2: Trial an enforcement partnership arrangement</p> <p>Action 1.3: Presentation of findings of law review to Essex Waste Partnership Board to secure member support for an ‘Essex Approach’ to enforcement</p> <p>Action 1.4: Production of an Enforcement Legal Pack - a ready-made enforcement toolkit for councils to use to support enforcement against littering</p> <p>Action 1.5: Deliver enforcement training for Parish Council staff to support action at a local level</p>
<p>Outcome 2:</p> <p>An improvement in the efficiency and accountability of statutory bodies that take action against litter within Essex, by co-ordinating activities and developing trial projects to measure the success of joint working.</p>	<p>Action 2.1: Produce an ‘Essex Inventory’ of resources available across all authorities and encourage sharing of resources to reduce private hire charges across the county</p> <p>Action 2.2: Conduct a trial of joined-up cleansing on a major trunk route</p> <p>Action 2.3: Conduct a trial of combined gulley emptying and mechanical sweeping on both single carriageway and dual carriageway routes</p> <p>Action 2.4: Develop a memorandum of understanding between highways partners concerning responsibilities for clearance and disposal to remove current delays in clearance of litter and fly-tips</p>
<p>Outcome 3:</p> <p>Enabling a greater understanding by the public of the work being undertaken to tackle litter in Essex and the complexities of litter clearance through increased availability of information.</p>	<p>Action 3.1: Law review webpage delivery - providing information to both the public and practitioners to increase awareness and understanding of the relevant legislation and legal powers</p> <p>Action 3.2: Publication of the outcome of trials carried out during the project via the Cleaner Counties website and social media platforms</p> <p>Action 3.3: Publication of the outcome of the project as a whole to raise awareness and increase understanding</p> <p>Action 3.4: Produce an online guide to set out landowner responsibility for litter clearance for different land uses to help members of the public to report issues to the correct body</p>

Year 2 Action

One of the key priorities in the second year of the project was to finalise and bring to publication the Litter Law report. In addition, to make this information accessible to a wider audience, web content was developed to deliver this in a user-friendly format.

Litter Law Report & Webpages

Background

Littering is not only a social and environmental blight, it is also a criminal offence. There is an extensive legal framework in the United Kingdom to deal with littering, however it is not clear that it is fully understood either in its scope or how it operates. A more comprehensive understanding of the law as it relates to litter and litter clearance was required, consequently a report was commissioned by the Cleaner Counties Project. The aim of the report was to undertake a comprehensive review of existing and past litter related legislation, this information would then be made available to the public via the Cleaner Counties web pages.

The report

The Litter Law Report was produced by Karen Hulme and Samantha Davey at The Law School at University of Essex and was completed late 2019. The research for the report was both qualitative and quantitative; they used many sources closely related to litter enforcement in Essex, developed two focus groups, reviewed government strategy and Litter legislation over the past 25 years. It identified that:

“The ad hoc nature in which littering has been addressed over the years has resulted in complexity. There is also a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.”

The report examined what constitutes litter and where litter can be found on public land, private land, roads and water courses; what powers there are to enforce against littering; what types of penalties may be applied; and whose responsibility it is to remove it. The report also addressed what actions the public might take if litter clearance is not undertaken as it should be. Given the apparent lack of clarity around litter law the report also identified a number of recommendations. The report is available [here](#)

The Litter Law webpages

The Litter Law Report is a lengthy document and maybe more suitable for those studying legislation and litter. In order to promote and facilitate public awareness of litter law and how it might be applied to specific areas of land or water an interactive website, based upon the information in the report, was created. Following discussions with CPRE's website team it was determined that it would be more appropriate for this information to be contained within the CPRE website rather than as a standalone site, so pages were developed in order that this could become an integral part of the CPRE website. The Litter Law web pages can be found [here](#).

The baseline surveys for the Cleaner Counties project identified that members of the public were confused when it came to who litter issues should be reported to, so the production of a guide was suggested as an appropriate action for the project to achieve. As the responsibility for litter is enshrined within the law it was felt that this would most appropriately be included as part of the webpages to provide maximum clarity.

In order to develop the new sub-projects, many meetings were held with partners to produce project action plans, processes, and timelines. This also included full assessments of all the potential risks to each action, however, one risk which was not foreseen was a global pandemic!

Coronavirus

The coronavirus outbreak in early 2020, and the increasingly restrictive measures being taken by the UK government, had a severe impact upon the progress of the Cleaner Counties project.

All meetings, litter monitoring activity and site visits were postponed indefinitely. Partners needed to refocus their full attention on delivering the essential services that were so needed by members of the public struggling in uncertain times, therefore their engagement with Cleaner Counties was curtailed.

It also became apparent during lockdown that where littering was occurring and what was being littered was changing as people were driven to working remotely, schools closed, and travel limited to essential journeys. Our whole way of life changed overnight, so it was understandable that litter and littering behaviour would change too.

A review of the situation was undertaken in April 2020. We considered the viability of each action,

assuming that there would be a return to 'normal' in summer 2020. However, this was not to be!

Thankfully virtual meetings soon became the norm and so we were able to resume work on some of the projects. In August 2020, when it became apparent that coronavirus and its impacts would be with us for the long term, a further review of the project objectives and actions was carried out. In several cases it was necessary to adjust actions or the timeframe in which they would be delivered. Monitoring of the actions was also reviewed with a shift from quantitative analysis, which had been initially planned, to the use of more qualitative methods.

Coronavirus presented us with a unique opportunity with regards to litter which we capitalised on. A new fourth outcome was proposed to research and report on the unprecedented changes in littering behaviour and challenges faced in litter clearance.



Litter in Lockdown

Background

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic rendered a substantial amount of the Cleaner Counties work untenable as many of the partners were required for other more pressing duties. This coupled with the new way of living and unprecedented levels of littering as lockdown lifted inspired us to turn Cleaner Counties attention towards a study of what has happened and why, with a view to preventing this in the future.

The report

It was evident that the changes in people's behaviours resulted in a change in littering patterns; open spaces such as local parks, beaches and national parks became heavily used and consequently became littering hotspots. The report commenced with research to evaluate the situation.

We carried out:

- A detailed survey of local authorities to gain insight into their experience
- An assessment of litter level and type in 140 sites across Essex
- Commissioning a YouGov poll of 2,000 people to assess public views on littering in the pandemic from a national perspective
- Canvassing of the CPRE network for their experiences of litter during coronavirus
- Review of the extensive media coverage

The results demonstrated a marked decrease of litter in towns and an increase to unprecedented levels of litter in open areas, beauty spots and places that people were using to meet up instead of pubs and cafes. Additionally, a new type of litter, Personal Protective Equipment such as mask, gloves and wipes, was prevalent everywhere.

Several theories were put forward to explain this unparalleled littering behaviour. Through analysis and understanding littering actions this may enable more targeted campaigns to prevent it happening again in the future. Litter has to be tackled both systemically by those that create the packaging and educationally providing information to those that carry out the littering.

Presenting the Report

Litter had become a huge contemporary issue and, as the Litter in Lockdown report was unique in approaching the matter it was decided to launch the report with an event held on the 18th December 2020. Speakers at the event included Environment Minister Rebecca Pow MP, member of the Environmental Audit Committee Feryal Clark MP, 9-year-old anti-litter advocate and CPRE 'Green Clean' participant Isla Lester and Cleaner Counties' Cat Chapman. [The link to the recording can be found here.](#)

Media coverage

The event and the report received lots of good media coverage [The Mail Online](#), a detailed article which focused on the rise in PPE litter, while calling on the government to do more to tackle single-use waste, [The Yorkshire Post](#), whose message was one of festive responsibility, and [Countryman Magazine](#) with a full report of the main study findings. The report was also picked up by trade magazine [Packaging News](#).

Radio coverage included Isla being interviewed for Sky News Radio, who sell-in to 280+ commercial stations including Classic FM, Capital, and LBC. Cat got some airtime as well with a slot on BBC Radio West Midlands.

We also had a positive social media comment from the Minister, [found here](#).

The coverage of the report has been ongoing throughout lockdown easing with recent mentions following the littering seen over the 2021 Easter bank holiday weekend in both [The Grocer](#) and the [Eastern Daily Press](#)



Photo courtesy of
Jenny Dadd, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Year 3

Rising from the ashes

In early 2021, as the impact of coronavirus on public services receded, work resumed with local authorities and highways partners. Work continued apace on the actions, resulting in some of the key achievements of the project being realised during this period of renewed focus.

One of the discussions which took place with local authority officers, following the launch of the Litter Law report, was about proficiency in enforcement against littering. This led to the development of the sub-project on provision of information and support to raise standards of enforcement.

Enforcement Against Littering

Action 1.4

Production of an enforcement Legal Pack, a ready-made toolkit for councils to use to support against enforcement against littering.



Background

During the course of the Cleaner Counties project work with statutory bodies it became apparent that there was differing levels of competence, confidence and resources for the execution of enforcement against littering. This was especially evident in the local authorities with some never awarding a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for littering and others frequently applying them and taking many cases to court.

Investigation revealed that several levels of involvement could influence this variability across Essex.

- The enforcement officers - observing the crime and deciding to apply FPN or educate
- The local authority legal officers – confidence or time to take cases to court
- The councillors – personal view on litter and desire for action or concern for reputation
- The magistrates – view on severity of littering as a crime and awarding penalties

After engaging with the groups involved to identify a remedy it was felt that the provision of training at all levels and the production of an enforcement best practice guidance pack would be the best solution to enabling everyone to operate at a consistent and high standard.

Training

Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) carry out many excellent litter enforcement related courses so discussions with them commenced. They agreed to supply courses from their existing repertoire for the enforcement officers and magistrates and to supply tailor made courses for legal officers and councillors. These would be delivered by their litter specialist, an in-house barrister.

All Essex local authority enforcement officers and other statutory enforcement bodies such as Essex police and Environment Agency were invited to participate in either a one-day Cradle to Grave enforcement course, funded by Cleaner Counties or a more intensive four-day course which led to a qualification, this was part funded by Cleaner Counties. 40 Officers signed up and undertook these courses. The feedback demonstrated that participants had gained greater confidence in applying the law at ground level and better understood the process of taking cases to court.

Legal officers benefited from a pioneering KBT course with some positive feedback from the officers including a better understanding of the requirements to ensure successful outcomes at court.

Despite several attempts to engage with councillors there was limited response, possibly due to imminent local government elections. Similarly, the manager of the magistrates for Essex did not feel litter enforcement training was a priority, which could be explained by the huge backlog of work they have as a consequence several months of not working due to coronavirus.

Enforcement Toolkit

To assist the training and to provide ongoing support, especially for those new to litter enforcement it was agreed that an all-encompassing reference guide should be produced. Through Cleaner Counties collaboration with KBT they have developed a best practice guidance, manual or Standard Operating Procedures. Cleaner Counties have secured an e-copy which has been distributed to all local authority enforcement sections and is widely acknowledged to be a helpful tool in

ensuring quality and consistency in enforcement against littering. It will be held by the Cleaner Essex Group and Essex Fly tipping Group for distribution to new members.

Summary

Through the training and the guidance toolkit/SOP Essex litter enforcement officers are now better equipped to ensure a consistent and good standard of enforcement across the county. This will back up the Litter Strategy and campaigns that littering is not acceptable in the county and prevent black holes or patches where enforcement is weaker.

Local authorities had a new sense of urgency about litter due to the changing landscape in which they found themselves as a consequence of lockdown, and a strong desire to work together in partnership to achieve maximum impact for their efforts. From this dynamism came another new action, to develop an overarching litter strategy for Essex.

A litter strategy for Essex was proposed and, using the background data that had been accumulated during the Cleaner Counties project, this became the final project action under outcome 2, action 2.5: Support the development of an Essex wide Litter Strategy.

Essex Litter Strategy

Background

Following the coronavirus pandemic and the explosion of litter that it brought to our public spaces, combined with local authority elections planned for May 2021, local authority and political interest was once more focused on littering and fly-tipping, with a call for more decisive action.

A countywide litter strategy for Essex

In order to produce an appropriate litter strategy for Essex, consideration needed to be given to the wide variety of different services offered by the county council, the 12 district, city and borough councils and the two unitary authorities that make up Essex. The strategy also needed to be flexible in order to allow other statutory bodies and organisations to engage with it. Any strategy needed to have a holistic view of the system and interrelationships at play whilst also being mindful of budgetary and operational constraints upon each of the partners involved.

It was established that the strategy needed to be high level and have a joint overarching vision and objectives for the county which could be developed into key workstreams and transposed into local policy and action by each partner organisation.

The government's Litter Strategy for England, published in 2017, provided a good base and it was important to align the Essex litter strategy with the key tenets of the national strategy. Using this, and in consultation with partner organisations to gain an understanding of their aspirations of a litter strategy, a vision for Essex was developed:

To make littering unacceptable in Essex by seeking new and innovative ways to prevent littering and clear it promptly when it occurs.

From this principle, three objectives were established, to improve:

- Co-ordination
- Value for money
- Personal responsibility

The strategy was presented to officers of the Cleaner Essex Group and, at the time of writing, the group is now in the process of seeking adoption through the relevant channels.

Work also continued on improving collaboration between local authorities and Highways England concerning litter clearance on major routes. Despite the lack of a physical trial, the significant learnings from the research carried out was used to inform a paper presented to senior civil servants.

Partnership Working on Highways

The report sought a major systemic change to the way that litter is managed on the All-Purpose Trunk Road network. In this sense the project completed a full 360 rotation through various challenges and opportunities and returned to the original vision of seeking systemic change on a national level to issues faced by all statutory bodies with responsibility for the clearance of litter.

Action 2.2

Trial joined up cleansing on a major trunk route

Background

Cleansing and litter picking on the major roads known as All Purpose Trunk Roads (APTR) which run through Essex (A12 & A120) posed a particular challenge for 6 of the 12 local authorities in Essex who have parts of this network within their boundaries. Responsibility for all maintenance, other than cleansing, lies with Highways England as part of the Strategic Road Network (SRN).

In 2018 DEFRA commissioned a survey to assess the cleanliness of the road network. Following this survey, in late 2019, local authorities with responsibility for APTR routes were sent questionnaires by DEFRA to understand the barriers to cleansing on these routes. This survey raised concerns amongst local authorities so it was relevant to explore these issues further within the Cleaner Counties project and attempt to 'iron out' some of the challenges both parties faced.

Identifying the challenges & finding solutions

In order to assess the situation fully, a working group was established with all of the authorities with responsibility for stretches of the APTR network, Highways England's litter champion for the Eastern Region, chaired by the Cleaner Counties project team. An initial meeting of the working group was held in January 2020 to discuss the challenges faced by all partners as a result of the current arrangements for cleansing on the network.

Safety of staff is a paramount concern when operating on the highways, and the APTR network, with its largely dual carriageway, high speed, high volume routes is a particularly dangerous environment for operatives carrying out works. Highways England understandably have very strict regulations surrounding permitting to allow access onto the network. In order to be granted a permit, significant levels of training, traffic management schemes and often overnight works are required in order to minimise the risk. This is in stark contrast to the majority of work that local authority cleansing teams undertake, which can be safely managed with signage and lighting to warn road users of operatives in the highway and avoiding peak travel times. Understandably this heightened safety requirement for working on the APTR brings significant cost implications to local authorities.

In order to attempt to minimise the cost implications for local authorities, Cleaner Counties project manager proposed Highways England a trial of joint working on the network. The trial would consider local authorities being granted access to the road when it was closed for maintenance work by Highways England in order that local authorities could safely provide effective cleansing and litter clearance in a more financially viable way.

Sadly, due largely to the coronavirus outbreak in March 2020 and the additional pressures that this placed on public services, this trial could not take place, despite enthusiasm from both Highways England and the local authorities concerned. Following a review of the situation in late 2020 it was determined that a meaningful trial could no longer take place and so work shifted to focus on a more systemic approach to the challenges faced.

A more far-reaching solution . . .

In early 2021 work commenced on research and a report outlining the challenges faced by all partners involved in cleansing on the APTR network. This research focused largely around the proportionality of the issue within the context of constrained local authority budgets.

The resulting report and recommendation were shared with senior civil servants in DEFRA & DfT and a meeting convened between all parties in early May to discuss the issue in a round table. Representatives from all 6 local authorities, Highways England, DEFRA and DfT attended the meeting, which was chaired by the Cleaner Counties project team.

The report and the meeting were welcomed by all parties and all committed to continue to work together. The group stated their intent to meet regularly to push forward the actions, and the Cleaner Essex Group agreed to support and facilitate this work.

Actions taken forward from the meeting included:

- **The pursuit of collaboration with Highways England on landscape maintenance operations**
- **For the group to ask that the Secretary of State exercises their powers under Section 86 (11) of the Environmental Protection Act to transfer the responsibility for cleaning and litter picking on the Highways England controlled APTR routes from local authorities to Highways England**

The excellent attendance at the meeting and engagement from all partners highlighted the importance of the issue and demonstrated a real commitment to seeking a long-term solution.

A further highways workstream came from a discussion with representatives from Essex Highways concerning where authorities could work jointly with maintenance teams to make the most of existing traffic management in the early 'mapping' phase of the project.

Action 2.3

Trial combined gulley emptying and mechanical sweeping on both single carriageways and dual carriageway routes.

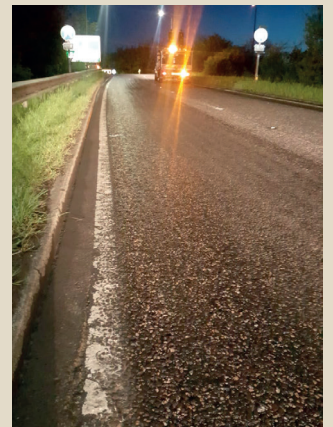
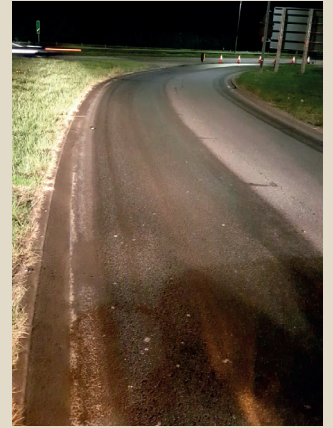
Testing the theory

In spring 2021 an opportunity arose to test collaborative working between Basildon District Council's cleansing team and Essex Highways' gulley emptying teams, who are responsible for cleaning the drainage system on the road.

The gulley emptying team were deployed on the A127, which is a major dual-carriageway arterial route which requires lane closures in order to allow safe access for works. Basildon District Council engaged with the gulley emptying team and arranged to join up to carry out cleansing work on the junctions of the A127 at the same time as the Essex Highways team had traffic management in place. A process was prepared to outline the responsibilities for both parties.

As the routes had not been mechanically swept in several years, largely due to the cost implications of the need for traffic management, the district council deployed their HGV mechanical sweeper vehicle and also a pedestrian controlled weed ripper to ensure that they not only removed debris and detritus but also any weed growth which had accumulated in the area.

The works were a great success and both teams reported that they were happy with how the work had gone and were keen to work together in future to do more work like this.



Before and after photographs of the works carried out on the A127

Summary

The Cleaner Counties project was originally established with laudable aims and objectives, of combining the litter related activities of the statutory organisations in one county to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Unfortunately, several challenges arose between the inception of the project and its completion which necessitated changes; however, we have managed to retain the original vision. The research of the first year demonstrated that despite concerted efforts the statutory bodies were hard to engage with many focusing on the impact of Brexit on their business activities. The Cleaner Counties project was 'reinvented' with similar objectives but different activities to achieve them. Sub-projects began in earnest but were soon became derailed by a pandemic. Every situation is an opportunity – The Cleaner Counties project produced a unique and well-researched report assessing this littering occurrence which received much media attention.

The past six months have enabled a return to completing the previous projects and starting some new ones, all of which will have an impact on littering in the county of Essex while some will have an enduring legacy.

Cleaner Counties has enjoyed a good working relationship with staff at DEFRA which has been mutually beneficial. This has also smoothed a path for easier communication between the local authorities of Essex and DEFRA.

Legacy

Throughout the duration of the project we have worked closely with the Cleaner Essex Group (CEG), which is a working group of local authorities and business partners who aim to reduce littering and share best practice in Essex. The CEG has been a key partner from the inception and has embraced the project and its sub-projects. In recognition of this support, data gathered during the project will be handed over to the CEG for them to use to build on the work we have started. The historic challenges of the relationships between Highways England and local authorities concerning the removal of litter and cleansing of major roads have been recognised and addressed by the Cleaner Counties highways sub-project. These challenges are now being considered at the highest level. Local authorities, Highways England, DEFRA and the Department for Transport are now committed to working together to find a solution.

The CEG have furthered their relationship with representatives from Highways England and Essex Highways and have formally invited them to be members of the group to ensure that work started by the Cleaner Counties project can continue.

Local authority enforcement and legal officers have directly benefitted from the enforcement training courses facilitated by the Cleaner Counties project, which is also backed up by the Standard Operating Procedures document. This will ensure ongoing quality of enforcement against litter and fly-tipping offences in Essex.

Learning points

Statutory bodies are necessarily cautious when it comes to significant changes, partly due to their accountability to the public and the spending of tax payers' money and also due to political influence and processes. Future projects of this nature should be considered for a five-to-seven-year timeframe to allow for these processes to be completed and full monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes.

Flexibility is essential in projects of this nature; the ability to react to changing circumstances and adjust the project was vital in achieving the successes. Without this flexibility, the outcomes of the project would have been significantly impaired.

It is important to get commitment at a corporate level from all partners for projects of this nature. Staff need to be empowered to give time and make appropriate decisions for the project. Corporate support is also essential to ensure continuity in the event of staffing changes, as reliance on one person within an organisation who demonstrates enthusiasm for a project is unsustainable.

Project Partners

The Cleaner Counties project would not have been possible without the input and support from its many partners.

First and foremost is the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation who has kindly funded the whole project and supported the directional changes. We have worked extensively with Defra, Highways England, the Cleaner Essex Group, Essex local authorities, Keep Britain Tidy and the University of Essex, all of whom we thank for their input.

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