



Working in partnership for partnerships

## Partners in Grime

*Dr Jane Beasley was interviewed by Rachel England for Resource Magazine for an article focusing on the importance of partnerships. Rachel writes:*

*Waste partnerships can provide much-needed relief in a financially-constrained environment, but as Rachel England finds, this can only happen if everyone's on board. Back in the heady days of '90s recycling and waste management, around one-third of the 51 local authority waste partnerships active in England today were formed. These partnerships came together to share resources, improve performance and proudly proffer joint strategies and communication campaigns. The noughties saw the formation of the majority of today's waste partnerships, and then... the economy took a nosedive. No longer were waste partnerships borne of a simple exploration of joint service improvement and knowledge-pooling; slashing budgets and money-saving were the frantically underlined activities at the top of the to-do list. Waste partnerships took on a new meaning.*

*"Essentially, they can make savings. That's the bottom line", says Dr Jane Beasley, Chartered Wastes Manager at Beasley Associates Ltd. "Even the smallest savings from sharing procurement can be significant. We're seeing a lot more pairings happening as smaller waste collection authorities can't make the same scale of efficiency savings without doing so - at least not without making drastic cuts."*

*Indeed, the focus of waste partnerships has moved firmly onto the financial. When Beasley Associates undertook research into efficiencies in waste partnerships for a presentation at the LARAC conference in 2010, it was found that of all active partnerships in England, only one (Somerset) was able to actually quantify its savings (£1.5 million). Now, however, increasing numbers of authorities are able to demonstrate savings, such is the agenda of waste partnerships in light of budget cuts. Lichfield District Council and Tamworth Borough Council, for example, joined forces in 2010 and in addition to ticking improved rates and service boxes, were able to report a saving of £750,000 - a not insignificant sum. Indeed, Beasley reveals that some partnerships are estimating savings of up to £12 million.*

*"If two authorities come together and do a joint collection, for example, you'll have one head of waste, one set of back-room staff and your crews are reduced", says Beasley. "You're talking lower salary costs, lower vehicle and vehicle maintenance costs and long-term savings in future procurement." However, this can be a sensitive issue for the local authority officers employed to find these savings. "There's the risk that they might find themselves in a position where they're actually talking themselves, or their colleagues, out of a job. But it's those types of savings that make a difference."*

*Getting decisions made at a local authority level is no quick job, and so partnerships benefitting from dedicated staff are often more likely to do well and see tangible progress. "They often rely on an individual driving things forward. If it's half of someone's job, or activities in this area are carried out for time-in-lieu, it can be a slow old process", says Beasley. "Having someone to lead it - maybe a partnership manager employed specifically for the purpose - is crucial." However, partnerships without dedicated staff can still show high levels of achievement, provided, as Beasley says, "there's at least one person who's really behind the partnership, pushing things forward and stimulating dialogue".*

*Surprisingly, a lot of successful waste partnerships are forged on little more than 'an understanding' between parties. "There are some partnerships that operate very loosely, and are happy to do so, because they trust one another implicitly", says Beasley. For others though, especially partnerships formed on the back of PFIs, there is a level of rigidity in their governance. "There has to be a safety net for members if financial dealings are involved, so someone can't just pull out at the last minute. And of*

*course, there are other factors to consider: what happens to the partnership at the end of the PFI, or how often does the focus of the partnership need to be revisited?" However, Beasley is keen to note that these concerns do not form the crux of partnership success. "Certainly what we've found in our research into governance is that it's not the be-all and end-all. It's the level of commitment from members and depth of collective vision that make the difference."*

*This extract can be found at [http://www.resource.uk.com/article/Latest/Partners\\_grime](http://www.resource.uk.com/article/Latest/Partners_grime)*

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