

Leading From The Front Line



The Clean Britain Awards will be handed out at an event at the end of November, but prior to that taking place, we decided to invite some of the entrants and sponsors to take part in a round table discussion on street cleansing and local environmental quality, as CIWM editor, **Ben Wood** reports

The idea of the round table was to put representatives from a range of local authorities that have already entered this year's Clean Britain Awards into discussion with some of the event's sponsors to give them the opportunity to share best practice and talk about what really made them a contender for the title of "Britain's Cleanest".

Jim Graham represented the Corporation of London (CoL), ie the Square Mile, which has 9 000 residents but welcomes 360 000 visitors and workers on a daily basis. It has a growing night time economy and he highlighted chewing gum and smoking related litter as the biggest challenge. The Square Mile has less than 50 waste bins, but more than 700 cigarette bins, most of which the local authority is responsible for emptying and it works 24/7 on street cleansing, achieving a

recycling rate of circa 40 percent. Jim explained that the CoL is working with the likes of Milan, Berlin and Antwerp to create a benchmark for costs and best practice.

Like CoL, Nottingham also has a high number of commuters, and a city centre of comparable size, and uses an in-house operation (whereas CoL is served by Amey), which it keeps detritus free and is now turning its attentions to scrubbing, as Nottingham City Council's John Marsh explained. It operates shifts in the city from 4am until midnight and John was immediately keen to share information with Jim as to shift and cleansing patterns in a city centre environment. Less than five minutes into the round-table and already an avenue for discussion and sharing best practice had been discovered.

Nottingham's Dave Halstead added that Nottingham City Council's strategy

has had a neighbourhood theme and was based on their improvement, with the Council pledging that its neighbourhood areas would be as clean as the city centre. And he added that as runners-up to Truro in 2011, Nottingham could lay claim to the title of Britain's cleanest "big" city!

From the issues of the city centres, to the smaller and more rural, as event chair Chris Murphy invited Peter Linkson to share Broxbourne Borough Council's experiences of street cleansing. "We're 'toy town-ish' in comparison," he laughed, "we have three small town centres and use just three small sweepers and one large one." But, with budget cuts in the offing, like every local authority, regardless of size, Peter explained that Broxbourne was also keen to look at shift systems, immediately seeing a comparison between the residential part of Nottingham City and his own local authority where operations could be compared.

The talk quickly turned to shift patterns and the role that night-time cleansing has to play. "If we didn't run the night shift, we couldn't be clean for 7am in the City," Jim explained. "Nights are key – if you get the nights right the rest goes like clockwork for us," he added, whereas for Peter in Broxbourne, night-time cleansing is simply not an option.

And the last of the local authority representatives to introduce himself was David Coventry, representing the London Borough of Enfield. He explained that Enfield's challenge is that it has two distinct areas: one of unemployment, deprivation and



Nottingham City Council's John Marsh leads the debate as David Coventry (LB Enfield), Peter Linkson and Lisa Carroll (both Broxbourne Borough Council) listen intently

The Round Table Attendees

Those taking part in the round table were, pictured left to right:

- Dave Halstead, head of city services at Nottingham City Council
- Lisa Carroll, environment contract support manager at Broxbourne Borough Council
- Carly Di Crescenzio, area sales manager at the Helping Hand Company
- Rebekah Douglas, marketing communications specialist, Johnston Sweepers
- Steve Douglas, product manager, Johnston Sweepers
- Peter Linkson, group manager (environmental services) of Broxbourne Borough Council
- John Marsh, locality manager – central, Nottingham City Council
- Tina Benfield, senior technical advisor, CIWM
- David Coventry, section manager – street scene and park services, London Borough of Enfield
- Les Bullock, area sales manager, Aebi Schmidt UK Ltd
- Chris Murphy, deputy chief executive of CIWM and chair of the round table event
- Jim Graham, assistant director of operations and cleansing, City of London Corporation



typically suffering from anti-social behaviour; and the other is a leafy suburb with multi-million pound houses... two areas with very different needs and problems!

David explained how Enfield had changed shift patterns to allow it to use the resources where they were most needed – in the mornings in areas most in need of cleaning. He added that the street orderlies had been turned into "tidy teams" and that this system of team working had contributed to improvements in the amount of litter dropped and fly-tipping in the borough, as well as helping address any safety issues the operatives had. "We are working to improve standards on the front line services," David added, "and that approach has helped clean up the borough, including park areas and all neighbourhoods. The changes have funded a better service where it was most needed."

It's clear then, that we have four local authorities with four very different sets of challenges, but even in the opening discussions it was clear they had a lot in common, not least of which being standards. That much is clear from the fact they've entered the Clean Britain Awards, all believing they are good enough to win, but they all discussed the standards and expectations they have to achieve "grade a" – or even higher – street cleansing standards, be they rural or urban, large or small and whatever the challenges thrown at them.

Raising The Profile

DAVID'S TALK of introducing teams prompted Aebi-Schmidt's Les Bullock to ask whether it raised the profile of street cleansing, and all authorities were in agreement.

For David it raises not only the profile, but the new barrows it is using have brought an opportunity to advertise and promote its work. "People can see the teams and what they're doing," he explained, while Les himself recounted an example of an authority switching from utilising four sweepers in different areas, to operating them together, and seeing complaints about street cleanliness drop by 20 percent!

Adding flashing lights to barrows,

incorporating fluorescent uniforms and utilising an old school crossing "lollipop" were all given as examples of how "visibility" had increased, with Dave Halstead adding: "Our citizen survey showed that visibility and perception are vitally important. Achieving that often requires being clever about how you manage resources," as the example of simply operating the same equipment, for the same amount of time, but in different places, showed.

But as his colleague, John, added, when Nottingham promoted its dog fouling clean-up exercise, it made the problem more visible and the public became more aware of that particular problem! "Education is they key" he surmised, while Jim Graham added ➔

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that barrow signage in the City of London had put greater responsibility on the operatives, and that when they weren't working the signage was designed to allow them to show the public that... again, information, perception and visibility are key in getting the right messages across – showing a worker is on an official break and not simply 'not doing their job' is a simple, but effective tool in building bridges with the public.

Jim even added that a move away from a "zonal working" system, whereby different areas were blocked for cleaning on different days, and back to a system whereby the workers were given specific areas in which to work, led to not only less complaints, but to residents highlighting the good work they had seen the crews doing in both their and other areas of the City. "It's about getting the balance right – customer satisfaction and a neighbourhood approach combined optimal efficiency," Dave Halstead summarised.

Setting Standards

THE DEBATE turned to the question of standards and benchmarking, with Chris Murphy asking what systems the authorities used to measure their cleanliness... and there were no two systems the same.

As Johnston Sweepers' Steve Douglas then asked, with no specific national indicator or standard system, how do you notice the difference, and does a drop in cleanliness only become



Carly Di Crescenzio puts her thoughts to Nottingham City Council's Dave Halstead

apparent because of complaints? But that wasn't something that could be relied on, as all authority representatives agreed, complaints can vary area from area and by demographic depending on the standards expected. But it's hard to compare local authorities without a standard benchmarking system... which is one way that entering the Clean Britain Awards can help, giving that direct comparison from an independent source.

When it comes to achieving cleansing standards, David Coventry believes that it starts with setting the standards within a team, and engaging with them and giving them respect, remembering that they want to take pride in their work, and giving them what they need to do the job... if that's air conditioning in a sweeper cab or extra safety features, so be it. "If the

Council goes the extra mile, the staff will too," he added.

A significant recent development for Nottingham City Council has been the recruitment of 50 apprentices. Prior to that, when it was given single status, it took the opportunity to move away from agency staff and to employ all of its street cleansing workers. But the apprentice scheme has effectively become the Council's recruitment strategy for the next few years. As Dave Halstead says, "It's not just about clean streets... it's about jobs and skills" and creating opportunities in the areas that the people that could be employed to keep them clean, care about. As one person added, "these are your future managers". And Dave himself added: "Your front line staff need to be engaged on this journey [to cleaner streets and better local environmental quality]". Knowing that if they meet the standards required over a two-year apprenticeship there will be a job, with prospects, at the end is certainly achieving that. It was an idea that gained the approval of all those in the room.

Carly Di Crescenzio of the Helping Hand Company highlighted the benefits of having an in-house workforce and questioned whether that gave greater flexibility and a more multi-skilled workforce, to which Dave explained that it had helped, but had taken time. He added that agency workers were used to being asked to work in any department, whereas permanent employees had more defined roles that they were sometimes reluctant to change from, but with specified contracts it had helped the Council's performance overall.



Dave Halstead, Rebekah Douglas and Steve Douglas (both of Johnston Sweepers)

More For Less?

CHRIS MURPHY took the opportunity to move the discussion on, and into the area of finance, asking the participants if they felt that they were being asked to "do more for less" and, being high achievers, if it was even harder because they were being asked to do even more and become even better, for less? Before he asked the equipment manufacturers whether they felt they were being pinned down on price because of the austerity measures felt by their local authority customers...

"Doing more for less is certainly what's expected of us," replied Les Bullock, with Steve Douglas adding: "Yes, that's the way of the world, isn't it... do it better and more efficiently, we can't stand still." And on that topic, he asked the participants his own question of what they wanted to see from new technology in the street cleansing sector... doing the job better, saving more money, better measurement of operations...

For John Marsh of Nottingham City Council it's a combination of all of that. He explained that the Council has started a trial with sensors in bins which will help it track bin collections better, and he added that it had invested heavily in the Big Belly solar-powered bins, which allowed it to remove a whole team from emptying litter bins and move onto other duties. "There's no bin in the city centre that we need to empty more than every two days," John added, and with the technology that tells you when it needs emptying, solutions like that can save time, resources and, therefore, valuable money! "It's all about how we do things smarter" he concluded.

John's colleague at Nottingham, Dave Halstead, concurred. "Technology is something we have to turn our minds

to and I've started to think about operational logistics and planning, and we've started to explore GPS enabled radio communication systems, but I see there could be something in that for responsiveness, flexibility and being able to respond to where the demand is, meaning potentially a better use of the fleet, double shifting vehicles and so on."

"When it comes to achieving cleansing standards... it starts with setting the standards within a team, engaging with them and giving them what they need to do the job"

Asked if the strategy was to move away from schedule cleansing to a more reactive approach, Dave said it was both. "It has to be scheduled to remain litter free, but when things do happen they happen very quickly and you need a fast response team."

John added that a few years ago there was more of a "public realm" response to reports of litter on private land, for example, whereas now there are tighter budgets, less resources and they cannot respond in the same way, while, tellingly, he added that there is also now a greater pressure to bring an income in through cleansing operations.

Nottingham City Council provides a free graffiti cleansing service, which has improved standards but not improved income... it's a similar dilemma for authorities across the UK – how to balance the standards they want to achieve in local environmental quality against the need to generate an income from the services they offer, and was certainly a point for further debate in this particular discussion.

And here is where I apologise for giving you an even more whistle-stop round-up of the remaining debate – more

than two hours of debate just does not divide into four pages!

The panel talked about the responsibility of retailers (mainly fast food outlets) for their branded litter, for which there was some praise for the work being done, while bin numbers, air quality from sweepers and how to operate efficient

cleansing without the need for road closures were all addressed.

In summary, what we gleaned from the day, was that there is no "magic system" that equals brilliantly clean streets, cities and parks, but that there are elements of good practice that can be implemented almost anywhere. You'd have thought it unlikely that Broxbourne, Enfield, Nottingham and the City of London would have had too much in common when it comes to cleansing issues and systems, but it seems that the problems and the pressures are much the same wherever you are, and these particular authorities have a lot of good practice to share. [CIWM](http://www.ciwm.org.uk)

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City of London's Jim Graham, CIWM's Tina Benfield and Carly Di Crescienzo seem deep in thought, as Aebi-Schmidt's Les Bullock gets animated