

Social Firm set to take over public service delivery of recycling in Gainsborough.

A recent feasibility study by the **Institute for Sustainable Development in Business (ISDB)** for **Gainsborough Recycling Enterprises (GRE)** has shown that it is possible for a social firm to provide public services in a cost effective way. GRE already provides a dry recyclable collection and processing service for West Lindsey District Council, using volunteers from Lincolnshire Social Services and the local Job Centre. The enterprise based in Gainsborough is managed by staff employed by the County Council and the research evaluated the potential for the creation of an independent social enterprise.

Because GRE provides opportunities for people with learning disabilities, it can become a social firm. The research highlighted the challenges and opportunities of operating a business with people with disabilities in a competitive market like recycling. It showed the wide range of skills that are needed to run a successful private sector business and maintain a social and productive work force.

The study evaluated the kerbside collection system presently operating in terms of materials collected, vehicle capacities, costs and potential income. The processing system was similarly assessed, having included material from Bring Banks and local businesses, to establish tonnages, operating costs and material values. The potential to increase services was considered, having regard to maintaining the important social objectives. Income and expenditure were modelled at different levels of operation to determine minimum viability and potential future surpluses for reinvestment in the business.

Funding streams were identified for both capital and revenue, in relation to commercial activity and social services. Legal and governance issues were addressed. The study concluded with a set of detailed recommendations and a two phase action plan. The conclusions showed that the social enterprise/firm was viable, subject to securing the necessary service level agreements with both the County and District Councils. The many variables reflected the complexities of running Council services, a change to any one having a major impact on others.

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The government in its 'Social Enterprise:... a strategy for success' believes that 'social enterprise offers radical new ways of operating for public benefit....combining strong public service ethos with business acumen.... The vision is of 'dynamic and sustainable social enterprise strengthening an inclusive and growing economy. This study has shown that such a vision is attainable, at least in providing recycling services in Gainsborough.

If you have a social enterprise in the making, there is support and funding available. Contact Bob Pick on ext. 4261 or Rosamund Aubrey on ext.4266.