



# Can pledging increase civic activity?

## **A literature review on developing community Pledgebanks**





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September 2009  
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Department for Communities and Local Government

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Online via the Communities and Local Government website: [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

September 2009

Product Code: 09L9RU05951

ISBN 978-1-4098-1502-0

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The *Communities in Control* white paper included a commitment to pilot community Pledgebanks during 2009. It is envisaged that community Pledgebanks will encourage people to register a pledge to undertake some activity or contribute some resource towards a common goal. Pledgebanks are seen by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) as developing alongside Community Contracts and other statements of local priorities, such as the policing pledge, as a way of encouraging citizens to pledge to undertake the responsibilities outlined in the community side of these statements.

The Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG) were commissioned by CLG to undertake a brief review of the academic literature, including an Internet search, in order to gather evidence in response to a series of research questions provided by CLG. This report sets out the findings from the review, beginning with an overview of current pledge activity in the UK. It then examines evidence from pledge scheme reports and academic study to discuss whether pledging works: do people get involved in pledge schemes, are people who pledge more likely to act on their good intentions and is there any impact on wider behaviour change? Drawing on the recent evaluation of Community Contracts, completed by IPEG for CLG, we discuss how Pledgebanks can link to Contracts and other statements of local priorities. We then outline the key elements to consider when designing a community Pledgebank, and finish with the issues and risks that should be considered in the design.

## A. Current UK pledge activity

There are a number of pledge schemes in the UK. “A pledge scheme is an invitation from an organisation to an individual to make a public commitment to a behaviour change [in relation to climate change]”<sup>1</sup>. By far the greatest volume of pledge schemes concern environmental issues, with many local authorities and others now running some form of pledge scheme where individuals can commit to one or more sustainable behaviours. Other individual pledge schemes include protest campaigns, promises to be vegetarian or vegan, schemes aimed at young people and a few local pledges. Some pledge schemes target organisations, asking firms to pledge to invest in the skills of employees, or adopt environmentally sustainable behaviour.

There are two national generic pledge sites, covering a wide range of pledges. PledgeBank allows users to set up pledges and then encourages other people to sign up to them (see [www.pledgebank.com](http://www.pledgebank.com)). We Are What We Do puts forward 130 actions on the website that individuals can sign up to do ([www.wearewhatwedo.org/](http://www.wearewhatwedo.org/)).

<sup>1</sup> Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) (2008) *Best Practice Guide to Designing and Operating Climate Change Pledge Schemes*, p.3.

There is very limited information on the demographic characteristics of who joins pledge schemes. Many pledge schemes are targeted at specific groups (e.g. school pupils) or people interested in a specific issue (e.g. the environment) and, as a consequence, there may be demographic skew. Only pledges targeting the whole population with wide topic coverage could provide unbiased evidence on the demographic characteristics of those who pledge.

## B. Does pledging work?

### Measuring success

The success of a pledge scheme can be measured in a number of ways. The measurement of success will vary depending on the scheme's objectives. If the objective is to build a case for change, then the number of pledgers may be an adequate measure; if the objective is to change attitudes, a survey might be a better measure; but if the scheme is aiming to change behaviour, observation of the relevant behaviour may be more appropriate.

### Success in attracting pledges

A Pledgebank is most likely to be successful in getting people to pledge if the pledging activity is part of a wider promotional campaign. All pledges should be made voluntarily, without coercion, and only sought for behaviours in which people are already interested. A personal approach will be the most effective in getting people to pledge: options could include using front-line staff who already have established contacts or other local residents. This might be a more cost-effective way of seeking pledges. Any activity to encourage pledging should help people to view themselves as civic. All materials used need to be attractive and if a website is used it should be well designed and 'sticky', meaning that people enjoy using it and return to it time and time again.

### Success in publicising issues to wider population

One objective of a pledge scheme might be to send out a positive message to those who have not yet pledged. High profile campaigns can promote awareness of a pledge scheme. However, the forthcoming evaluation of Community Contracts<sup>2</sup> found a low level of awareness of both the Contracts and the obligations of residents contained within them.

### Do pledges encourage people to act on their good intention?

There is a limited amount of research on pledging and from the available research it is difficult to know whether pledging works or not. Pledgebanks can best encourage people to stick to their pledges by ensuring that at least some of the pledges are not too challenging: be realistic about what the target group can actually do. Pledges that are written down will be more effective than verbal commitments, and pledges that are publicised are likely to be more effective than private commitments. Flexibility

<sup>2</sup> IPEG (forthcoming) *An Evaluation of the Community Contracts Pilots Programme*, report to the Department of Communities and Local Government, London: CLG.

is important: allow people to choose the pledge themselves or personalise it by adding their own views; for example “I pledge to help out in my local community centre once a week ... so that young people have something fun to do after school”. Keeping the Pledgebank simple will make the purpose clear and avoid confusion, but it will limit the choice of pledges available and reduce the opportunities for personalisation: there may need to be some compromise between simplicity and flexibility. Another way to establish clarity of purpose is to keep a core list of pledges for a substantial period, even if additional ones are created over time. If the Pledgebank includes any well-established and cohesive groups, where individuals care how they are viewed by others, then group commitments could be effective. Where there is not an established community of people, group pledges are likely to be quite risky.

## C. How can Pledgebanks link to Community Contracts?

The review did not find any existing examples of Pledgebanks which have links to Community Contracts or other statements of local priorities. There are some examples where people have been encouraged to sign up to keep to the community side of contract-type documents, but these do not constitute Pledgebanks. On paper, Community Contracts have a strong emphasis on requests of citizens. However, while service providers had to actively agree to sign up for the service commitments made in Community Contracts, the resident ‘pledges’ were agreed and signed by community organisations ‘on behalf’ of the rest of the community. There was a lack of sign up by residents, and few additional mechanisms to reinforce the resident commitments over and above existing mainstream enforcement measures.

Residents in Community Contract areas emphasised that most people followed the rules, and therefore did not need to be told, asked to commit or reminded of the rules, although they did not object to being asked. Residents felt that problematic behaviour was due to a minority of people who were persistent and deliberate rule breakers and were pessimistic about the likelihood of Contracts affecting these behaviours. Stakeholders in the Community Contracts pilots expressed a general desire to develop the ‘two-way ask’ – a co-produced process – but their immediate attention was focused on: convincing partners to continue after a pilot phase, producing monitoring data on the impacts of Contracts, and increasing awareness among the public.

Therefore, in theory, Pledgebanks are the logical next step to support the successful implementation of Contracts, by firming up residents’ commitment to doing specific behaviours in a second phase of development of Contracts, based on the requests already made of residents in the first phase. However, the practitioners delivering Contracts will need to be convinced of the need to do this work before their other priorities, and convinced of the potential of the approach. Residents will need to be convinced that pledges are relevant for the majority of rule abiding citizens. Additional mechanisms are needed to enforce rules where there are persistent offenders, and possibly rewards (not necessarily financial) for more civic behaviour.

## D. What are the elements to consider when developing community Pledgebanks?

Pledgebanks can potentially learn from community-based social marketing (CBSM), an approach which brings together psychological theory with theories of marketing to develop practical tools to foster sustainable behaviour<sup>3</sup>. This approach suggests that making a commitment to do something increases the likelihood that a person will later act in a way that is consistent with that commitment. The checklist for using commitment could offer a useful tool in designing a Pledgebank:

A checklist for using commitments:

- Emphasize written over verbal commitments
- Ask for public commitments
- Seek groups' commitments
- Actively involve the person
- Consider cost-effective ways to obtain commitments
- Use existing points of contact to obtain commitments
- Help people to view themselves as environmentally concerned
- Don't use coercion (commitments must be freely volunteered)
- Combine commitment with other behaviour change techniques.

McKenzie-Mohr, D and Smith, W (1999) *Fostering Sustainable Behaviour, an Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*, p. 58.

The Community-Based Social Marketing approach suggests four steps which should be taken before introducing a new Pledgebank:

- 1) Identify the target population and understand their background attitudes and behaviour. Identify the behaviours to be targeted by the scheme and address any potential barriers to behaviour change.
- 2) Careful design is important. A Pledgebank is most likely to be successful if it is combined with: prompts (stickers, lapel badges, window posters, fridge magnets); building social norms (discussion forums; street parties), communication (local radio, leaflets, and website) and incentives. Remove any external barriers where possible. Check that the right behaviours are being targeted and the messages are appropriate to the population. Link the message to personal experience as far as possible.
- 3) Pilot the Pledgebank and compare it with a control group.
- 4) Implement and evaluate.

<sup>3</sup> McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) *Fostering Sustainable Behaviour, an Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*; [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com)

As with any new scheme, getting the support of the council leadership and getting staff fully behind it is very important.

Elements to consider when setting up a Pledgebank include:

- establish clear objectives
- the pledge itself can be a single pledge, a long list, or people can be offered a choice of pledge
- target audience
- whether to offer support to those who pledge
- measurement of the number and type of people pledging and whether the pledge is delivered
- consider whether to offer incentives to those who pledge or those who deliver on their pledge
- time frame: is the pledge to last indefinitely or is there a finish date?
- whether the pledge will be made on-line, on a postcard, or in some other way.

## E. Pilot scheme – issues and risks

### Design/operational issues

A successful pledge campaign will work best if it is part of a wider campaign with high profile commitment and a great deal of publicity. There is a risk that this type of large scale campaign will be quite expensive and demand organisational resources. There is also a danger that the pilot might not be a genuine trial as agencies might feel under pressure to put a positive slant on their initiative, irrespective of outcome. If pledging is adopted as part of a bigger package of tools, it will need to be well-planned from the outset and there is a risk that it will be harder to adapt the design in response to the lessons learned as the pilot unfolds. However, the approach could always be adapted afterwards, for future implementation. A pledge scheme needs to offer people choice about the issues on which they pledge, leading to a risk that the Pledgebank will lack a clear focus and people may make pledges that do not fit with broader targets.

Community Pledgebanks could be collective (“I pledge to do x if y other people will join me in doing it”) or individual (“I pledge to do x”). Collective pledges are harder to make work, and may appear less attractive to citizens, because they have to link in with someone else’s idea, which might not exactly match their own. There are some civic behaviours which need to be done as a group – such as setting up a parent and tots group – but much civic behaviour is not done as part of a group. Setting up a collective Pledgebank would be higher risk. However, it is likely that people will be encouraged to pledge if they can see that many others in their neighbourhood are pledging too. One option might be to consider adopting a *Blue Peter* style accumulator which adds up all the individual pledges and displays them in a prominent place for all to see.

## Links to Community Contracts

In theory, there are clear links between pledges and Contracts, but in reality, pledging should be treated as a wholly new activity. A Pledgebank is not a natural extension of existing work: there will need to be a discussion with those involved in the Community Contract pilots to see what capacity and appetite they have for Pledgebanks, as this is not clear at the moment. There are some other statements of local priorities that might be equally relevant for piloting pledges: community plans, Local Area Agreement targets or the policing pledge. There may be some synergy in setting up a Pledgebank alongside a TimeBank. A TimeBank encourages participants to 'deposit' their time in the bank by giving practical help and support to others and they are then able to 'withdraw' their time when they need something done themselves. However, TimeBanks require a level of long term commitment to volunteering that will not appeal to everyone, so their draw is likely to be narrower than Pledgebanks. A TimeBank would be likely to require more effort to set up than a Pledgebank and there would be a need for more support (for example, to ensure that people did qualify for the time credits they claimed). It might be interesting to see if any current TimeBanks are interested in piloting a Pledgebank alongside their existing activities.

## Measurement issues

It is very unclear from the desk review whether pledging is any more successful than other similar methods in achieving behaviour change. It will therefore be very important to ensure that any pilot scheme includes robust tools to measure whether and how a community Pledgebank impacts on citizen behaviour. Without this robust evaluation, there is a risk that the pilots will not establish whether or not pledging is a successful approach that should be rolled out further. During the design phase, careful thought will be needed about two aspects of measurement: firstly, what data to collect about participation and implementation, and how to collect it; secondly, how to design the pilots so that the behaviour outcomes of pledges can be adequately measured. The use of experimental or quasi-experimental methods is most likely to provide effective measurement. Although measurement is challenging, it is not impossible and, with careful thought, solutions can be found.

## Summary and conclusion

There is a limited amount of research on pledging, and from the available research it is difficult to know whether pledging works or not. Overall, studies of the effect of pledging on recycling, vehicle safety, voting, smoking and environmental behaviour indicate that:

- Asking people to pledge can lead to behaviour change, but there is no clear evidence that it is any more or less effective than other campaigning approaches
- Asking people to pledge seems to work best if it takes a personal approach, but it is unclear whether it is the personal approach or the pledging that has an effect

- Pledging campaigns are most likely to be successful if they are part of a wider promotional campaign, including publicity, incentives, creation of social norms, reminders and cues, but then it is hard to separate out the effect of the pledge
- People are more likely to carry out a pledge if: it relates to something they were already thinking about; they have been allowed to personalise the pledge; and the activity is not too challenging

This evidence from the research suggests that there should be a note of caution before embarking on a Pledgebanks pilot scheme: Pledgebanks are likely to work best as part of a wider promotional campaign and it may then be unclear which element is doing the work: is it pledging that leads to behaviour change or the associated campaigning? Given the limited nature of the research in this field and the inconclusive nature of the findings, there is certainly scope for further testing in this field, which could potentially be delivered by a robust evaluation of the pilot Pledgebanks, using experimental methods. If pledging is most successful when people are already thinking about it, a Pledgebank might be most likely to recruit those who are already interested in the issue and therefore have a limited impact on the wider population.

# Introduction

The *Communities in Control* white paper included a commitment to pilot community Pledgebanks during 2009. It is envisaged that community Pledgebanks will encourage people to register a pledge to undertake some activity or contribute some resource towards a common goal. Pledgebanks are seen by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) as developing alongside Community Contracts and other statements of local priorities, such as the policing pledge, as a way of encouraging citizens to pledge to undertake the responsibilities outlined in the community side of these statements.

The Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG) were commissioned by CLG to undertake a brief review of the academic literature, including an Internet search, in order to gather evidence in response to a series of research questions provided by CLG. This report sets out the findings from the review, beginning with an overview of current pledge activity in the UK. It then examines evidence from pledge scheme reports and academic study to discuss whether pledging works: do people get involved in pledge schemes, are people who pledge more likely to act on their good intentions and is there any impact on wider behaviour change? Drawing on the recent evaluation of Community Contracts<sup>4</sup>, completed by IPEG for CLG, we discuss how Pledgebanks can link to Contracts and other statements of local priorities. We then outline the key elements to consider when designing a community Pledgebank, and finish with the issues and risks that should be considered in the design. Throughout the report, the CLG research questions are listed at the start of the section which addresses them.

<sup>4</sup> IPEG (forthcoming) *An Evaluation of the Community Contracts Pilots Programme*, report to the Department of Communities and Local Government, London: CLG.

# A. Current UK pledge activity

## A1. Existing pledge schemes

RQ 1. What Pledgebanks already exist (at both a national and community level)?

RQ 6. What are the most popular topics for pledges?

There are a number of pledge schemes in the UK. A pledge scheme is defined by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in its *Best Practice Guide to Designing and Operating Climate Change Pledge Schemes* as “**an invitation from an organisation to an individual to make a public commitment to a behaviour change** [in relation to climate change]” (p.3). A list of pledge schemes is included at the end of this report. The schemes can be categorised by topic as follows:

### Environmental

By far the greatest volume of pledge schemes concern environmental issues, with many local authorities and others now running some form of pledge scheme where individuals can commit to one or more sustainable behaviours. Many of these are funded by Defra, which has also produced a good practice guide to pledge schemes. Prominent examples among these include the Energy Savings Trust’s “Save your 20%” pledge campaign, which closed in June 2008, and the Community Carbon Reduction Programme (CRed). One of the largest local pledge campaigns in Manchester is My Planet, covering Greater Manchester.

### Protest campaigns

There are a number of pledge sites run by campaigning organisations where people can pledge to protest. For example, people can pledge to take action if airport extensions are planned; pledge to take action in the event of war being called; or pledge to avoid registering for an ID card.

### Vegetarian and vegan

People can pledge to be vegan or vegetarian for a specified period and are offered support and advice on how to adopt this lifestyle.

### Young people

- A number of schools, local authorities and youth groups adopted an anti-knife pledge campaign put forward by the Damilola Taylor Trust. A blank sheet of paper is posted and young people can sign up to not carry knives. Despite being a national campaign, this is implemented at negligible cost at a local level, without the need for any national resources

- The London student pledge set out to raise the aspirations and life experiences of the capital's children
- There are also environmental pledge campaigns aimed at school pupils.

## Organisations

There are a number of schemes that encourage organisations to pledge to change their behaviour. Most of these are pledges made by employers in relation to their workforce or behaviour, such as the Skills Pledge, London Child Poverty Pledge, Manchester Environmental Business Pledge, and the Jobcentre Plus/Recruitment and Employment Confederation Diversity Pledge. The Community Development Foundation (CDF) runs a pledge scheme encouraging community organisations and community workers to act sustainably.

## Local pledges

There are a few additional examples of local pledge schemes:

- Dudley Anti-Bullying Pledge. Every year, at the end of November, Dudley council does something to mark anti-bullying week. In 2008 they produced a pledge card declaring "My pledge is to ...", which were distributed to all schools. The schools used the pledge cards in a number of ways: some pledges were submitted on behalf of a whole class after a discussion and others were made by individuals. Once completed, the cards were returned to the council. Some additional activities were organised where pledges were invited: school pupils conducted a debate in the council chamber; the council invited local pupils to a session on cyber bullying; an event was organised for traveller children, addressing concerns specific to them. A selection of the pledges was chosen to form a pledge wall: a pull up banner that can be used by schools and others throughout the year to keep the issue alive. Some of the ideas will be acted upon (e.g. the suggestion of a play on bullying by one young person is now being realised)
- Chorley Smile civic pride campaign, launched in 2007. A pledge card sets out the behaviour expected of local people and asks them to sign it. The council has its own pledges to carry out too
- Pledges to buy local food (Chorlton in Manchester and Brighton) or buy fair trade products (Torbay)
- Action for Sustainable Living, Manchester. Staff and volunteers visit people at home and advise them on sustainable living. People are encouraged to think about what they can do in their household and then personally pledge to a variety of environmentally-friendly actions
- There are a number of local authority environment campaigns – see above
- Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth group allocates points to all of its environmental pledges, and has an accumulator on its website so people can see how near to a collective target they are
- People in Bristol have pledged money and time towards saving a local swimming pool.

There are two national generic pledge sites, covering a wide range of pledges.

**PledgeBank** allows users to set up pledges and then encourages other people to sign up to them (see [www.pledgebank.com](http://www.pledgebank.com)). A pledge is a statement of the form 'I will do something, if a certain number of people will help me do it'. The creator of the pledge decides how many pledgers to aim for, publicises their pledge and encourages people to sign up. Two outcomes are possible – either the pledge fails to attract enough subscribers before it expires (in which case, PledgeBank contacts everyone and tells them 'better luck next time'), or, the better possibility, the pledge attracts enough people that they are all sent a message saying 'Well done—now get going!' This site was built by **mySociety**, a charitable organisation which has grown out of a community of volunteers who built sites like [TheyWorkForYou.com](http://TheyWorkForYou.com). "mySociety's primary mission is to build Internet projects which give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives"<sup>5</sup>. When someone signs a pledge they are given examples of other similar pledges they might be interested in, and people can sign up to be sent details of local pledges near to them.

PledgeBank offers, on its site, to make a special version of PledgeBank for organisations by grouping pledges together on one page, altering the logo, colours and style to match an organisation's branding. PledgeBank also offers to link to other sites and gives the option of making these web-based pledges public or private. They normally charge for choosing these services. There are no examples of these tailored sites currently visible on PledgeBank.

**We Are What We Do** says it is a movement which aims to inspire people to use their everyday actions to change the world"<sup>6</sup>. We live by the maxim small actions X lots of people = big change". It started in 2004 by putting forward "100 simple, everyday actions that can improve our environment, our health, and our communities and make our planet and the people on it much happier". The idea to utilise these everyday actions has its origins in the books *Change the World for a Fiver* and *Change the World 9 to 5*, which, so far, have sold nearly one million copies worldwide. Today there are books, bags, campaigns, education programmes, community development initiatives, public speaking events, newsletters, and a website ([www.wearewhatwedo.org/](http://www.wearewhatwedo.org/)). We Are What We Do began life in the United Kingdom as a project of the charity Community Links – an inner city charity running community-based projects in east London.

There are now 130 actions on the website that people can sign up to do. For each action, there is some additional information, advice and resources to help people find out more or to actually undertake it. There is an action tracker for individuals to keep a list of what they have pledged to do and to allow them to indicate completed actions. It ranks all the *actions* in order of how many times each action has been completed and ranks *individuals* according to how many actions they have undertaken and how often. We Are What We Do is funded by various education organisations and a lot of the emphasis is on children and young people, although the site is open to all.

<sup>5</sup> [www.pledgebank.com/faq](http://www.pledgebank.com/faq)

<sup>6</sup> [www.wearewhatwedo.org/about\\_us/](http://www.wearewhatwedo.org/about_us/)

## A2. Other schemes

Pledgebanks can potentially learn from TimeBanks, which started in the UK in 1998.

*“A TimeBank is a new and exciting way for people to come together to help others and help themselves at the same time. Participants ‘deposit’ their time in the bank by giving practical help and support to others and are able to ‘withdraw’ their time when they need something done themselves. TimeBanks measure and value all the different kinds of help and skills we can offer each other. In a TimeBank, everyone becomes both a giver and a receiver. Everyone’s time is valued equally: One hour = 1 time credit. Participants can spend their time credits on the skills and support of other participants when they need a helping hand. People help each other out with everything from making phone calls to sharing meals and giving lifts to the shops – anything that brings them together: DIY, help with the kids, trips out, exercise, making friends, shopping, new grandparents, talking on the phone, having a break, gaining new skills, crafts, going to the park, cooking, getting to know your neighbours.”*

(TimeBanking UK website)

TimeBanks usually have an office base and a paid member of staff who acts as a broker between people. The government has granted a benefits disregard, so people on state benefits are not adversely affected by volunteering. The TimeBanking UK site states the numbers of TimeBanks that are either active or developing:

- England      146 TimeBanks (of which 61 are in London)
- Scotland    23 TimeBanks
- Wales        33 TimeBanks.

An innovative version is the TimeCentre at Blaengarw Workmen’s Hall – the first of its type in the UK. Members gain ‘time credits’ by giving their time to activities in the community, such as organising events, clubs and classes and acting as street ambassadors. Time credits are a currency that TimeCentre members can use to attend events at the Hall, Creation café and other venues in the community. All events are priced so that users can pay in time credits or cash, or a combination of both, thereby enabling equality of opportunity for all and encouraging active citizenship. This unique way of engagement has attracted visits from the UK, Europe, and now Japan, to see how this model has engaged and sustained people in the community from seven to eighty years of age. Since its launch in May 2004, over 550 community members and 30 community groups have benefited socially and economically from participation. The judges in the BURA 2008 Community Inspired awards described the TimeCentre as:

*“an outstanding example of good and innovative practice ... add to this a series of professionally run and sustainable projects that are also part of their portfolio then I would say this is one of the best examples of community led regeneration I have seen – there are no public sector development people involved here. They train and employ people locally”<sup>7</sup>.*

<sup>7</sup> BURA 2008, *Community Inspired regeneration awards assessment panel report* – confidential document.

TimeBanks are essentially a way of recording, and rewarding volunteering: there is no pledge involved in a TimeBank. Some people might be encouraged by a TimeBank to become a volunteer, but it is unlikely to be an attractive option to everyone and it cannot be expected to attract large numbers of new people to volunteering. An exchange of time with other local residents requires a level of commitment that will not appeal to everyone.

For Pledgebanks it would be more appropriate to offer individuals rewards that do not depend on the actions of others, which could include the type of rewards offered by the Blaengarw TimeCentre, such as free access to community facilities.

### A3. Who pledges?

RQ 7. Which demographic is most likely to pledge (age, gender, etc)?

RQ 8. What is the impact of local characteristics on the success of a pledge (e.g. levels of deprivation)?

There is very limited information on the demographic characteristics of who joins pledge schemes. The review found few studies that had considered the demographics of those who pledge. Many pledge schemes are targeted at specific groups (e.g. school pupils) or people interested in a specific issue (e.g. the environment) and, as a consequence, there may be demographic skew. Only pledges targeting the whole population with wide topic coverage could provide unbiased evidence on the demographic characteristics of those who pledge.

An exception was a recent campaign case study and survey by Manchester is My Planet. Manchester is My Planet is one of the largest campaigns of its type – the largest city-regional campaign – and has attracted a total of 20,300 pledges. Its case study explains that it differs from many similar initiatives in that it has one simple pledge rather than multiple pledges; also, the pledging is only one of its many campaigning activities. It justifies this approach by saying that,

*“The Manchester is My Planet Pledge Campaign is targeted at a far wider demographic than those interested in pledging and tracking progress on small individual actions. In this regard the pledge campaign has been very effective in engaging with the mainstream of public opinion, and not just involving the usual already ‘converted’ environmental activists”.*

(Manchester is my Planet Pledge campaign case study 2008, p20).

Manchester is My Planet has undertaken a recent survey of those who have signed its pledge. 3,000 existing pledgers were surveyed, of whom 12.4 per cent responded. The survey has not yet been analysed in detail, but the raw results are summarised in Table 1.

<b>Table 1: People who signed up to the Manchester is My Planet pledge</b>			
Gender	57.3% female		
Ethnicity	95.6% white (British, Irish or other)		
Of all ages making pledges:	under 16 years	2	0.6%
	16–25	49	14.0%
	26–35	86	24.6%
	36–45	95	27.2%
	46–55	52	14.9%
	over 55	65	18.6%
Total		349	

The review found no evidence of the impact of local characteristics on the success of a pledge campaign.

## B. Does pledging work?

### B1. Measuring success

When thinking about whether pledging works, it is important to note that the success of a pledge scheme can be measured in a number of ways. Defra's *Best Practice Guide to Designing and Operating Climate Change Pledge Schemes* recommends that measurement of success will vary depending on the objectives of the scheme. Defra identify four possible objectives for pledge schemes and various different types of measurement (see Table 2).

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Measure</b>
1. Reinforcing the need to change by increasing awareness and changing attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey of people visiting website and/or pledgers</li> </ul>
2. Changing behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of pledges and types of pledges made</li> <li>• Number of people pledging</li> <li>• Corresponding reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> consumption in either absolute or percentage terms</li> </ul>
3. Building a case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people pledging</li> <li>• Number of pledges made and completed</li> <li>• Number of hits to your website</li> <li>• Time spent on your website</li> <li>• Number of webpages visited</li> <li>• Cost per pledger/pledge</li> <li>• Set-up and ongoing costs</li> </ul>
4. Collecting data on individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of pledgers or registered users</li> <li>• Amount of data collected</li> <li>• Number of opt-ins to further communication with you</li> </ul>

Source: Defra (2008) *Best Practice Guide to Designing and Operating Climate Change Pledge Schemes*.

The measures can include both quantifiable web measures of the volume and level of interest in the pledge scheme as well as some on-going measures of whether pledges have been kept. Defra identifies important limitations to all these measures: the response to an on-line survey is likely to be low and might not be representative; it is difficult to measure whether a pledge has been completed and there may be double counting; people may pledge to do things they are already doing; also, collecting demographic data requires personal questions to be asked (age, sex, postcode).

## B2. Success in attracting pledges

RQ 4. How successful are existing Pledgebanks at involving the community and what factors influence success?

The review found few evaluation reports of pledge schemes, so it is hard to judge the success of the schemes in attracting people to make pledges. The following points are largely based on looking at the limited information available on pledging websites.

High profile campaigning and publicity can successfully promote the opportunities to pledge. When Manchester's My Planet was launched in 2005, £160,000 was spent on a high profile and intensive campaign over three months, including website, branding, pledge cards, posters, campaign resource packs and media coverage, designed to get 10,000 citizens to pledge on climate change. The campaign culminated in a major event at Manchester Town Hall to celebrate the achievement of the first 10,000 pledgers. The pledge campaign continued with a lower budget and numbers continued to increase, but at a slower rate, gaining a further 10,300 pledgers over the next two and a half years, to reach a total of 20,300.

The Energy Saving Trust attracted a total of 216,997 commitments to its *Save your 20%* campaign and CRED's *Community Carbon Reduction Programme* has attracted 53,611 pledges. Both have a clear focus on environmental sustainability and appear to be well-resourced and well-thought out campaigns with attractive websites.

The earliest pledge deadlines on Pledgebank are dated March 2005. In the four years since then, 1,039 pledges have been created. 445 were successful in attracting the number of pledgers required by the originator (including eight that are still open to pledgers) and 575 failed. There are currently 19 "live" pledges that are actively seeking signatures.

**Table 3: Statistics on use of Pledgebank (25 March 2009)**

	Number of pledges	Deadline for signing
Current pledges that need pledgers	19	28/03/09 – 01/11/11
Successful open pledges	8	30/04/09 – 09/02/11
Successful closed pledges	437	18/03/05 – 09/03/09
Failed pledges	575	14/08/05 – 22/03/09

If the pledges have been created at a steady rate throughout the life of the site – and we do not know if this is true – there have been on average 21 pledges posted a month. The number of signatures requested for the pledges that are live varies from 10 to 1,000 and the mode is 20.

The *We Are What We Do* site has an action tracker so individuals can keep a list of what they have pledged to do and go to the site to indicate each time they do the action. It also lists where the individual is in a scale of activity on the site. For the review, we randomly picked some of the most popular actions.

- “Smile and Smile Back”: 6,468 individuals have signed up to do this and it has been completed 101,243 times, the most prolific person has done it 25,624 times, and some people who signed up have not done it at all.
- “Take public transport whenever you can” 4,008 individuals have signed up to do this and it has been completed 32,557 times, the most prolific person has done it 2,000 times, and some people who signed up have not done it at all. The person who came in top at 2,000 times had also claimed to do a list of other actions at a similarly high rate.
- These inflated figures suggest a need to be sceptical about self-reported claims relating to completed pledges.

A study of incentive schemes found that getting people to sign up to written rules of behaviour in a locality is much less popular with local respondents than more traditional measures such as directly punishing anti-social behaviour and making it easier to report it or more expensive measures like improving the physical fabric of the area<sup>8</sup>. But, this was a scheme focusing on anti-social behaviour and attitudes may be different on other issues.

### B3. Success in publicising issues to wider population

In addition to attracting pledgers, another objective of pledge schemes might be to raise awareness in a wider population, not just among those who pledge. This could be particularly important in sending out a positive message to those who have not yet pledged; for example, “30 per cent of residents in your area have already pledged to do x”. In 2005, a poll of 350 residents of Greater Manchester found that 12 per cent had heard of Manchester is my Planet, which, if extrapolated to the population, would be 360,000 people. But this was a high profile media campaign, not just a pledging activity.

The study of incentives, referred to above, found that there was very low awareness among local residents of a Good Neighbour Scheme, where residents were asked to sign up to a local charter, although those who had heard of it thought it was helpful in a minor way. Almost 60 per cent of residents had never heard of it, and only 15 per cent had heard a lot about it, with the remaining 25 per cent being unsure of what it was. People thought the scheme was designed to make services do more (‘get more backing from the authorities’), rather than to help people sort themselves out; so, it had the opposite effect of what was anticipated, by creating even more demands on authorities<sup>9</sup>. The recent evaluation of Community Contracts found a similar low level of awareness among local residents. This lack of awareness among the wider public has implications for Pledgebanks: people in Community Contract areas often were not even aware of the obligations of residents under the Contract, let alone changing their behaviour.

<sup>8</sup> Bastow, S., Beck, H., Dunleavy, P. and Richardson, L (2007) ‘Incentives Schemes and Civil Renewal’, in Brannan, T, John, P and Stoker, G. (eds) *Re-Energising Citizenship, Strategies for Civil Renewal*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>9</sup> Bastow, S., Beck, H., Dunleavy, P. and Richardson, L (2007) (ibid).

## B4. Do pledges encourage people to act on their good intention?

RQ 9. Are people more likely to act on their good intentions if they have made a pledge?

RQ 10. Does carrying out the activity that was pledged lead to wider behaviour change?

Several theories from psychology suggest that in certain circumstances people who pledge are likely to act on their good intention. Individuals who commit themselves to a particular behaviour often come to see themselves in a way that is consistent with that behaviour, leading to long term change in their attitudes and behaviour. The commitment can act as a catalyst, providing the internal conviction for a new identity and leading to behaviour that corresponds with that conviction, which can last well beyond the duration of the commitment. So, if an individual gives a commitment that they will volunteer, vote, recycle or not drop litter, it increases the likelihood that they will later act in a way that is consistent with those attitudes. “When individuals feel committed to a certain type of behaviour, they will often adopt an identity that is consistent with that behaviour, the result of which frequently is long-lasting behaviour change”<sup>10</sup>. Their compliance with the original commitment can be enduring, even if they are called upon to act by a different person and some substantial time later<sup>11</sup>. The likelihood of a commitment leading to long-lasting change will vary according to the nature of the pledge: change is more likely if the commitment is voluntary, made in public and relates to an issue the pledger is already concerned about. These issues are examined further in section D below.

The review found little evidence either way on whether pledging can be successful in achieving behaviour change beyond the individual who pledges. It might be expected, though, that an individual’s pledge could have an impact on family and friends. For instance, people who took a vegan pledge reported that their family members were also eating more vegan food. It may be that the action of one person in making a pledge can have a wider impact on the behaviour of those around them, although we have no strong evidence of this.

The review found no evidence either way on the question of whether a pledge to undertake one form of behaviour might encourage people to then engage in other related behaviours, for example, whether pledging to vote may increase the likelihood of someone signing a petition.

A number of research studies have examined whether making a pledge or commitment makes it more likely that the pledged action will be carried out. The results of these studies are somewhat conflicting.

The largest number of studies on commitments have focussed on doorstep recycling. Securing pledges through direct personal contact worked better than securing

<sup>10</sup> Bator, R. J. and Cialdini, R.B. (2000) ‘The Application of Persuasion Theory to the Development of Effective Proenvironmental Public Service Announcements’, *Journal of Social Issues* 56, 3 527 – 541, p536.

<sup>11</sup> McKenzie-Mohr, D. & Smith, W. (1999) *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.

pledges through indirect contact or educational information alone, but the studies did not compare personal contact with pledges with personal contact alone<sup>12</sup>. A study where households were visited and given either a persuasive leaflet or asked to make a commitment found that both methods worked equally well in encouraging recycling<sup>13</sup>. A study comparing commitments and rewards also found that both worked equally well in raising newspaper recycling compared with no contact<sup>14</sup>. A more recent report compared canvassing campaigns with and without pledges and found that the pledge made no significant difference<sup>15</sup>. **Overall, the message from recycling research is that asking people to pledge to recycle can raise recycling rates if it is done through a personal approach on the doorstep, and it will raise recycling at a similar rate to other alternative approaches, but it is not clear whether it is the personal contact or the pledging that persuades households to recycle.**

**There are some studies which have found that pledging is successful, but the pledge was part of a wider promotional campaign, making it difficult to assess the particular contribution made by the pledge.** A pledge campaign to encourage cyclists to wear helmets was successful in raising the use of helmets, but participants were provided with information and a voucher while being asked to pledge, so it is difficult to separate out the different effects<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, use of car safety belts rose among those who signed a pledge, but they were also provided with a card to hang in their car as a reminder and entered into a prize draw, so, again, it is hard to separate out the pledge effect<sup>17</sup>.

A US research paper examined the impact of pledging on voter registration and voter turnout. In one experiment, students were contacted by telephone with information about how to register to vote. Half were then randomly allocated to a treatment group and were asked whether they were planning to register to vote. The other half were allocated to a control group and not asked the additional question. The proportion who did register was higher among the treatment group, who were asked for a commitment, than in the control group, who received information about registration but were not asked for a commitment. A further experiment where students were asked to state whether they would turn out and vote had similar results: a higher proportion of the group who were asked for a commitment voted, compared with a control group who received information about voting<sup>18</sup>.

**This suggests that being asked for a commitment can have a positive effect on voter registration and voter turnout, but it does not compare the commitment approach with any other method of mobilisation.**

<sup>12</sup> Reams, M. A. & Ray, B. H. (1993) 'The Effects of 3 Prompting Methods on Recycling Participation Rates – a Field Study', *Journal of Environmental Systems*, 22, 4 371–379 and Bryce, W. J. et al. (1997) 'Commitment Approach to Motivating Recycling: New Zealand Curbside Trial', *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 31, 1 27–52.

<sup>13</sup> Burn, S. M. and Oskamp, S (1986) 'Increasing Community Recycling with Persuasive Communication and Public Commitment', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 16, 1, 29–41.

<sup>14</sup> Katzev, R.D. and Pardini, A.U. (1987) 'The comparative effectiveness of reward and commitment approaches in motivating community recycling', *Journal of Environmental Systems*, 17, 2, 93–114.

<sup>15</sup> C. Thomas, Open University (2006) *Recycle for Hampshire – Campaign Evaluation Report*.

<sup>16</sup> Ludwig, T. D. et al. (2005) 'Using Social Marketing to Increase the Use of Helmets Among Bicyclists', *Journal of American College Health*, 54, 1 51–58.

<sup>17</sup> Geller, E.S. et al. (1989) 'Promoting Safety Belt Use on a University Campus: An Integration of Commitment and Incentive Strategies', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 1 3–19.

<sup>18</sup> Greenwald et al. (1987) 'Increasing Voting Behavior by Asking People if They Expect to Vote', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 72, 2 315–318.

A US campaign to encourage voter turnout asked young people at rock festivals to complete one of two postcards, “I will rock the system by exercising my right to vote” or “I will vote because...”. The two differently designed postcards were used at different times, so there was no random allocation of the two groups. The cards were posted back to the young person a week before the presidential election. People who had entered their own pledge were more likely to see it through and turn out to vote than those who had completed the generic pledge<sup>19</sup>. **This does not say whether pledging works, but does indicate that people are more likely to carry out the action if they have been allowed to personalise the pledge.**

Research with 142 smokers who all completed a written pledge to abstain from smoking for one hour a day over a month found that whether people were heavy, moderate or light smokers made no difference to them keeping to the pledge. There was no control group. People were more likely to successfully keep their pledge if they had already expressed a desire to quit smoking or reduce their level of consumption. There was no difference between males and females, but younger smokers (under 21) found it harder to stick to the pledge<sup>20</sup>. **This suggests that people are more likely to keep to a pledge if it is something they were already thinking about before they were asked to pledge.**

Action for Sustainable Living (AfSL) conducted phone and email interviews with 104 of the 2,400 people who had previously pledged to sustainable behaviour as part of a face-to-face meeting with an AfSL staff member or volunteer. 95 per cent of people said that as a result of their contact with AfSL they were now doing more than before to reduce their environmental impact, and 30 per cent were doing much more<sup>21</sup>. **The pledging was undertaken as part of a one to one meeting providing information and advice about sustainability, so it is hard to separate out the particular effect of the pledge.** People found it easier to stick to their pledge if it was easier to implement – e.g. 79 per cent of pledgers managed to take all their unwanted clothes to charity shops – but on the most challenging pledges like “generate my own energy” none of the pledgers had achieved it. **People are more likely to choose pledges that are less challenging. Less challenging pledges are more likely to be implemented than pledges that are more challenging.**

The London Student Pledge aimed to encourage more young people to take up a wide range of extra-curricular activities that might otherwise only be available to a few: theatre, music, sports, trips etc. Interviews with teachers, pupils and activity providers indicate that the initiative encouraged many young people to take up new opportunities, but very few pupils or teachers were aware of the pledge. The success lay in the provision of funding to a range of organisations who would otherwise have charged for their services. Funding was provided for students to have access to new opportunities and it was this funding rather than any pledging that led to the increased take up<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Burgess, D. Haney, B. Snyder, M., Sullivan, J. L. & Transue, J. E. (2000) ‘Rocking the Vote: Using Personalised Messages to Motivate Voting Among Young Adults’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64 29–52.

<sup>20</sup> Hallaq, J. H. (1976) ‘The pledge as an instrument of behavioural change’, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 98, 147–148.

<sup>21</sup> Alan Boyd (2008) *Action for Sustainable Living (Manchester) evaluation report* to Defra.

<sup>22</sup> Policy Studies Institute (2008) *London Student Pledge Evaluation*.

## C. How can Pledgebanks link to Community Contracts?

RQ 2. Are there any existing examples of Pledgebanks which have links to Community Contracts or other statements of local priorities?

RQ 12. How can Pledgebanks support the successful implementation of Community Contracts?

The review did not find any existing examples of Pledgebanks which have links to Community Contracts or other statements of local priorities. There are some examples where people have been encouraged to sign up to keep to the community side of contract-type documents, but these do not constitute Pledgebanks:

- Wycombe District council have a community pledge, linked to the community plan, where people can individually pledge on-line in relation to voting, healthy eating, volunteering, crime prevention, but we were unable to get any details of its operation or how effective it has been
- To put local people at the heart of their own neighbourhood and services and develop active citizenship, Chorley Council developed the Chorley Smile civic pride campaign. Launched in 2007, the campaign creates a contract between residents and the authority by setting out mutual responsibilities on both sides, similar to a Community Contract. A Chorley Smile pledge card was produced, which sets out behaviour expected of local people and asks them to sign it. In the first year of the campaign, 600 residents have pledged their commitment to helping 'make Chorley smile' by signing one of the pledge cards. This number is set to increase as the Council looks to launch the second phase of the campaign. Chorley Smile awards were held in June 2007, funded by local business, giving recognition and cash prizes to local community heroes who personify the ethos of the campaign
- There are some examples of residents being asked to sign good neighbour agreements alongside their tenancy agreements, usually linked to attempts to reduce anti-social behaviour. Liverpool's Riverside Housing has asked residents on the Cross Farm Road estate in Peasley Cross to sign up to a community agreement as a first step to unify residents who want to drive out all unacceptable behaviour in the area. During earlier research we came across the Meres Estate Agreement, Barnes. Obligations were jointly drawn up by the RA and Richmond Housing Partnership: Residents received a 16 page booklet to sign and return; people who signed up were given a window sticker to display. Over 75 per cent of households had signed up in 2005, when the research was carried out.

On paper, Community Contracts have a strong emphasis on requests of citizens. Some are phrased in a way that sounds like a request e.g. 'what you can do – please be considerate to your neighbours'; others are phrased more like a pledge, e.g. 'we

will be considerate to our neighbours regarding noise and will talk to our neighbours about any possible noise problems’.

Requests or pledges for residents in the Contracts included:

- keep gardens free from rubbish
- do not leave dog mess
- ensure that children do not abuse play areas
- ensure that children follow safe road crossing rules
- be considerate to neighbours
- attend councillor surgeries
- attend local community safety meetings
- use recycling bins correctly
- report service or neighbourhood problems like graffiti
- do not abuse the 999 service or use ambulances as taxis.

However, there was little evidence of behaviour change through Contracts in the evaluation. The evaluation showed that the emphasis in the first phases, for pilot and non-pilot case studies, had been on setting up structures, negotiating on the content and launching the document, working with services and groups of active residents, as well as councillors. There were plans in the case studies for future phases to have an increased emphasis on encouraging residents to fulfil the obligations listed in the Contracts, making it a more co-produced process, a ‘two-way ask’. In the Community Contracts evaluation it was noted that:

*“Stakeholders were asked about the potential for links between Community Contracts and Pledgebanks. In this report it has already been noted that there were different levels of emphasis given to asking citizens to make a reciprocal commitment with services, and that residents wanted to see a stronger emphasis on this in the Contracts than was there. Stakeholders wanted to incorporate more requests of citizens in a next phase. Pledgebanks are one avenue for encouraging citizens to make personal and collective commitments. However, levels of awareness of pledging by stakeholders were extremely low in the case study areas. At the time of the research levels of interest in Pledgebanks as a specific policy initiative were also quite low, although there was an appetite for further discussion about how to develop the ‘two-way ask’ in Contracts, which Pledgebanks could be part of”<sup>23</sup>.*

Although service providers have had to actively agree to sign up for the service commitments made in Community Contracts, the resident requests or commitments have not required all residents or individual households to agree to do these things. The resident ‘pledges’ were agreed and signed by community organisations ‘on behalf’ of the rest of the community. One of the evaluation case studies had

<sup>23</sup> IPEG (forthcoming) *An Evaluation of the Community Contracts Pilots Programme*, report to the Department of Communities and Local Government, London: CLG.

attracted around 100 individual residents to 'sign' the Contract at a launch event, but this was more of a symbolic gesture, and it is difficult to know what residents thought they were signing up to and if they had understood the requests being made of residents. Only one area had attempted to follow through on resident pledges with rewards (i.e. a garden competition for residents and Dream scheme rewards for young people – trips and treats for voluntary work done). This area had also introduced specific enforcement measures as a result of an estate walkabout, where untidy gardens were spotted and enforcement notices sent out.

All areas continued with their normal mainstream enforcement measures (i.e. not new or additional for Contracts), e.g. in one regeneration area between March – August 2008, 30 warning letters have been issued to residents, 16 abatement notices have been issued in respect of removing harmful waste from private land; there has been one conviction for breach of duty of care to clear household waste; 12 fixed penalty notices have been issued to residents and four people have been convicted of littering offences; and two local businesses have signed Responsible Business Agreements to improve the external areas in exchange for some help from the Council and the regeneration scheme.

So, there was a lack of sign up by residents, and few additional mechanisms to reinforce the resident commitments (over and above what already happens). This means that it could be argued that the pledges in the Contract are equivalent to requests made in a local newsletter for people not to park in certain places, or a poster asking people to keep a green space tidy: requests which are supported by the majority, but unenforceable.

Residents in the focus groups in the Contracts evaluation had lots to say about the problematic behaviour of other residents. They identified that some residents did not keep to the commitments e.g. some people left dog mess on the pavement, others kept messy gardens, and the majority did not attend community meetings. They emphasised that most people followed the rules, and therefore did not **need** to be told, asked to commit or reminded of the rules, although they did not object to being asked. Indeed, in one area, 79 per cent of residents agreed with the proposal that residents should be asked to sign up to a common set of values and principles.

Residents in the focus groups felt that problematic behaviour was due to a minority of people who were persistent and deliberate rule breakers, and for whom a politely worded request in a written document would not be effective. They were very pessimistic about the likelihood of Contracts affecting these behaviours. Research by IPEG members has found the same reactions to a Good Neighbour Declaration in Hackney which made similar requests of residents. When asked what they thought of the Good Neighbour Declaration, one local respondent was very clear about its purpose:

*"It's an agreement we all got sent. You sign it and stick to particular kinds of behaviour and rules. You voluntarily agree to it and acknowledge by signing it that if you don't stick to it you're violating your tenancy."*

(Person 1)

But people felt it was a minority who did not stick to the rules, and therefore the Declaration would only work if it was enforced, as another respondent said:

*"It's a good idea if everyone sticks to it but it's not something that's enforceable by law. It's so difficult to evict somebody ... It's difficult to evict someone if their kid is causing nuisance ... such a long drawn out process."*<sup>24</sup>

(Person 4)

For stakeholders in the Community Contracts pilots, although they expressed a general desire to develop the two-way ask, their immediate attention was focused on: convincing partners to continue after a pilot phase, producing monitoring data on the impacts of Contracts, and increasing awareness among the public. Their medium term interests were in vertical alignment of neighbourhood level Contracts with Local Area Agreements and Multi-Area Agreements, and in linking Contracts with participatory budgeting, i.e. devolved decision making. There was not a clear audience ready to trial a development of the 'ask' of residents. In addition, as stated in the Community Contracts evaluation report:

*"Stakeholders in the case studies argued that this aspiration was a long term one, that behaviour change was complex and that Contracts could not be reasonably expected to produce these changes either alone or in a short period."*<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, in theory, Pledgebanks are the logical next step to support the successful implementation of Contracts, by firming up residents' commitment to specific behaviours in a second phase of development of Contracts, based on the requests already made of residents in the first phase. However, the practitioners delivering Contracts will need to be convinced of the need to do this work before their other priorities, and convinced of the potential of the approach. Residents will need to be convinced that pledges are relevant for the majority of rule abiding citizens. Additional mechanisms are needed to enforce rules where there are persistent offenders, and possibly rewards (not necessarily financial) for more civic behaviour e.g. attending meetings etc.

<sup>24</sup> Bastow, S., Beck, H., Dunleavy, P. and Richardson, L (2007) 'Incentives Schemes and Civil Renewal', in Brannan, T, John, P and Stoker, G. (eds.) *Re-Energising Citizenship, Strategies for Civil Renewal*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>25</sup> IPEG (forthcoming) *An Evaluation of the Community Contracts Pilots Programme*, report to the Department of Communities and Local Government, London: CLG.

## D. What are the elements to consider when developing community Pledgebanks?

RQ 3. How do existing Pledgebanks work (e.g. are they wholly web based)?

RQ 5. What makes people pledge?

RQ 11. Can we learn lessons from other similar initiatives? What might be the key characteristics of a successful Pledgebank?

Community-based social marketing (CBSM) is an approach which brings together psychological theory with theories of marketing to develop practical tools to foster sustainable behaviour<sup>26</sup>. Community-based social marketing has been adopted in a number of projects relating to sustainable behaviours including water use, recycling, composting and energy use. There is a website at [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com) with advice, case studies and articles on the implementation of this approach. CBSM has found that people are more likely to stick to their commitments if they are written down and made in public. Group commitments can be effective in well-established and cohesive groups where individuals care how they are viewed by others. Actively involving the person in the issue helps to increase commitment. Using community “block leaders” – local people who already engage in the behaviour – is an effective and cheap way of seeking commitment; asking people who have already committed to approach their neighbours can be effective in changing the behaviour of both. Commitments should be voluntary, and only sought for behaviours in which people express an interest (see checklist).

### A checklist for using commitment

- Emphasize written over verbal commitments
- Ask for public commitments
- Seek groups’ commitments
- Actively involve the person
- Consider cost-effective ways to obtain commitments
- Use existing points of contact to obtain commitments
- Help people to view themselves as environmentally concerned
- Don’t use coercion (commitments must be freely volunteered)
- Combine commitment with other behaviour change techniques.

McKenzie-Mohr, D and Smith, W (1999) *Fostering Sustainable Behaviour, an Introduction to Community Based Marketing*, p. 58

<sup>26</sup> McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999 (ibid) and see review of CBSM in Jackson, T. (2005) *Motivating Sustainable Consumption*. Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey.

**It is very important to note that, within the Community-Based Social Marketing perspective, commitment approaches work best when combined with other tools to change behaviour, and commitment on its own is unlikely to work. The other tools that encompass the community-based social marketing approach are prompts, social norms, good quality communication, incentives and removing external barriers.**

During this desk review, a number of different models for pledge schemes were found, and an examination of the various websites suggests that the following elements should be considered in the design of any pledge bank:

Elements to consider in setting up a Community Pledge Bank	Options
Be clear about the objectives.	Scheme objectives can vary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcing the need for behaviour change (raising awareness of the issue; educating people on actions they can take; persuading people they can make a difference; making people feel part of a movement)</li> <li>• Changing Behaviour</li> <li>• Building a case: demonstrating interest in an issue to gain commitment from decision makers</li> <li>• Collecting data on individuals<sup>27</sup>.</li> </ul>
The Pledge  Pledges that are easy are likely to be made more frequently; for example in one scheme, more people pledged to re-use plastic bags and recycle and fewer people pledged to switch their bank account to an ethical bank or generate their own power <sup>28</sup> .	The pledge can be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A single pledge like <i>"I pledge to play my part in reducing Greater Manchester's greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent before 2010, to help the UK meet its international commitment on climate change."</i> (Manchester is My Planet)</li> <li>• A long list of pledges that are signed up to as a complete list (e.g. Chorley Smile campaign)</li> <li>• A long list that people pick and choose from. When there is a long list, participants are sometimes given a choice to say: "I already do", "I pledge to" or "Not yet". The list is sometimes graded for degree of difficulty (1* 2* 3*)</li> <li>• A single pledge for a defined period like "I will be vegan for a month" followed by asking for a repeat pledge at the end of the trial period</li> <li>• A pledge that people create themselves. A campaign from the U.S to encourage voter turnout among young people asked them to complete a postcard, "I will vote because ..."</li> <li>• A pledge to do something but only if others do too (Pledge Bank).</li> </ul>
Target audience	Is the pledge scheme aimed at school students, young people, citizens of a borough, residents of an estate or all individuals?

<sup>27</sup> Defra (June 2008) *Best Practice Guide to Designing and Operating Climate Change Pledge Schemes*

<sup>28</sup> Action for Sustainable Living evaluation report.

Support for Pledgers	<p>Some pledge schemes offer support for those who pledge. This varies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some simple information about the topic and signposting to other places of interest (like the 365 days to change the world website)</li> <li>• Tailored support. Action for Sustainable Living visit and advise people on sustainability before asking for the pledges. The skills pledge and the Manchester City Council environmental business pledge offer on-going advice to employers on implementation of the pledge. The JobCentre Plus and Recruitment and Employment Diversity Pledge includes an on-line MOT for employers and then creates a bespoke action plan</li> <li>• Funding. The London student pledge provided funding for organisations to provide out of school experiences</li> <li>• The vegan pledge offered the 25 people who took the pledge before and after support meetings where they received a free health check and advice on vegan cooking. At the end of the pledge period they were asked if they wanted to pledge again. Their evaluation suggested that a discussion forum would have been useful</li> <li>• Communication with pledgers to prevent interest from waning. Emails can be sent to remind people about their pledge, encourage greater commitment, keep people informed or provide help to keep pledges.</li> </ul>
Measurement	<p>Measuring participation for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people pledging</li> <li>• Type of people pledging</li> <li>• Cost per pledger.</li> </ul> <p>Checking whether the pledge is delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sites (e.g. Pledge Bank; West Midlands Climate Change; We Are What We Do) ask participants to click on the site when they have completed a pledge</li> <li>• The vegan pledge invited everyone to a follow up meeting (but there were only 25 people)</li> <li>• Surveys of participants asking if they have completed their pledges (Manchester is my Planet; Action for Sustainable Living).</li> </ul>
Consider whether to offer incentives	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A goody bag of vegan food for <u>sticking to</u> a vegan pledge</li> <li>• Bronze, silver and gold awards for <u>sticking to</u> the Manchester City Council Environmental Business Pledge</li> <li>• A bag of environmental goodies for <u>signing</u> the Oxford Citizens pledge on climate change</li> <li>• Free prize draw for all who <u>sign</u> the Coventry Planet pledge</li> <li>• The Blaengarw 'Time Centre', which recently won a BURA award, encourages people to help out in events or in the community. It works on the simple principle that, for every hour of time given to the Centre, citizens can take an hour back from the Centre; for example, attending special Blaengarw Time Events such as bingo sessions, concerts, quizzes, themed nights, community TV nights and other social events.</li> </ul>

<p>Time Frame</p> <p>Is the scheme to last indefinitely or is there a finish date?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some pledge schemes are very short term (e.g. knife pledges posted for a finite time or anti-bullying pledge during anti-bullying week)</li> <li>• Others are set up to last over a prolonged period or to have a finale on a specific date on which the results will be announced</li> <li>• Important to be aware that the pledge might go out of date (e.g. Manchester is my Planet mentions 2010 so will be revised soon).</li> </ul>
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Defra's best practice guidance offers some useful tips on designing pledge schemes:

- be realistic about what your pledgers can actually do
- keep it simple (no more than five pledges)
- be flexible – people are more likely to stick to commitments they have chosen
- make it last – keep a core list of pledges for at least a year, don't keep changing; and
- make sure you can measure it.

Most pledge schemes are web-based. According to Defra's report, the advantages of being web-based are:

- pledgers can enter their contact details themselves
- pledgers can update on-line when they have completed the pledge, allowing for an easier tracking mechanism
- on-going communication with pledgers is easier by email, costs less and is more environmentally friendly than letters; and
- on-line operations are more scaleable, without the need for additional resources for a high number of pledgers.

Some schemes make use of meetings, events, press publicity, ambassadors and street marketing to promote the scheme, but ask people to pledge on-line or ask for email addresses on any paper pledge cards they use. If a website is to be used, the site needs to be "sticky"<sup>29</sup>, meaning that people enjoy using it and return to it time and time again: easy, fun, useful, personal, celebrating success and creating a team spirit. Defra's 2008 Best Practice Guide gives pointers on web design and operability issues.

However, there are also clear disadvantages to being web-based, which might be particularly important in Pledgebanks linked to Community Contracts:

- web-based schemes reduce the personal contact between pledgers, and this might contradict a key objective of community Pledgebanks – to create better community spirit
- inequalities of access to the internet.

<sup>29</sup> Defra (2008) *Best Practice Guide to Designing and Operating Climate Change Pledge Schemes*, p12.

### Design and Evaluation of Pledge Schemes

The design and evaluation of any behaviour change scheme are crucial: the lessons from community-based social marketing are that the following four steps should be taken before introducing a new Pledgebank:

- a) Selecting behaviours and identifying barriers. It is important to: identify the target population and understand their background attitudes and behaviour; identify the behaviours to be targeted by the scheme and prioritise which behaviours to focus on; and identify the potential barriers to behaviour change.
- b) Designing the programme. Select which other behaviour change tools might be most useful to use alongside the pledge:
  - prompts or retrieval cues such as stickers, lapel badges, window posters, fridge magnets
  - building social norms (e.g. discussion forums and street parties)
  - communication (e.g. through local radio, leaflets and websites) to satisfy the need for well-placed positive messages from a credible source
  - incentives (e.g. prizes and rewards)
  - removing any external barriers where possible.

Check that the right behaviours are being targeted and the messages are appropriate to the population through focus groups or surveys and utilising existing data or local knowledge. Link the message to personal experience as far as possible to appeal to people in a way that evokes their emotion, triggers their imagination and is immediate to them.

- c) Pre-test/pilot the pledge campaign and compare with a control group.
- d) Implementation and evaluation.

(adapted from McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999 and Bator and Cialdini 2000)

As with any new scheme, getting the support of the council leadership and getting staff fully behind it is very important, as the organiser of one local pledge scheme said:

*“The entire Council has to be behind any pledge scheme and reinforce the messages wherever they go. If you are developing a pledge scheme, it is important to communicate the ethos of the scheme internally and get staff on board before launching it to residents”.*

## E. Pilot scheme – issues and risks

RQ 13. We will be designing a pilot project which aims to test whether community Pledgebanks are a suitable mechanism to be used to deliver Community Contracts or similar agreements that set out local priorities. What issues and risks should be considered in the design?

### E1. Design/operational issues

A successful pledge campaign will work best if it is part of a wider campaign with high profile commitment and a great deal of publicity. Pledging could be combined with other levers such as providing incentives, and giving plenty of support. There will also need to be some commitment from agencies, including a commitment to enforcement, directed at those who do not keep to behaviour promises. Potential risks include:

- the risk that this type of large scale, high profile campaign will be quite expensive and demand organisational resources
- the need for a wider campaign puts local organisations in a position where they are sticking their necks out and there might be some nervousness about failing. There is, therefore, a danger that the pilot might not be a genuine trial as agencies might feel under pressure to put a positive slant on their initiative, irrespective of outcome
- if pledging is adopted as part of a bigger package of tools, it will need to be well-planned from the outset and there is a risk that it will be harder to adapt the design in response to the lessons learned as the pilot unfolds. However, the approach could always be adapted afterwards, for future implementation.

A pledge scheme needs to offer people choice about the issues they pledge on, so it is something they want to do, they see as relevant for them and something they did not already do. The pledge needs to be realistic, or have a graded scale for ease of completion, and preferably have some input from the pledger into writing it in their own words. Potential risks may materialise from:

- the need to keep a clear focus for the Pledgebank, so everyone is clear what it is, while allowing flexibility for individual pledgers; and
- the fact that people may want to make pledges that do not fit with broader targets.

Community Pledgebanks could be collective like PledgeBank (“I pledge to do x if y other people will join me in doing it”) or individual (“I pledge to do x”). Collective pledges are harder to make work, and may appear less attractive to citizens, because they have to join in with someone else’s idea, which might not exactly match their own. There are some civic behaviours which need to be done as a group – such as setting up a parent and tots group – but much civic behaviour is not done as part

of a group. None of the requests made of residents in the Community Contracts required a group. Setting up a collective Pledgebank would be higher risk. However, it is likely that people will be encouraged to pledge if they can see that many others in their neighbourhood are pledging too. A recent field experiment on e-petitioning found that people who were told how many others had signed an e-petition were more likely to sign it than those who were not. Furthermore, the willingness to sign a petition was greatest when there were a large number of other signers<sup>30</sup>. One option might be to consider adopting a *Blue Peter* style accumulator (as used by Tunbridge Wells Friends of the Earth group) which adds up all the individual pledges and displays them in a prominent place for all to see.

## E2. Links to Community Contracts

- In theory, there are clear links between pledges and Contracts, but in reality, pledging should be treated as a wholly new activity. A Pledgebank is not a natural extension of existing work: it is very likely that those who set up existing Community Contracts will see Pledgebanks as a new initiative on which they need to start from scratch
- There will need to be a discussion with those involved in the Community Contract pilots to see what capacity and appetite they have for Pledgebanks, as this is not clear at the moment. There was some potential in Contracts outside the pilot programme; for example, Ashfield was already a borough wide campaign, and seemed keen to develop the two way ask
- There are some other statements of local priorities that might be equally relevant for piloting pledges. Wycombe district council is already asking local people to pledge to stick to citizen's commitments to its Community Plan. Other examples might relate to Local Area Agreement targets or the policing pledge
- There may be some synergy in setting up a Pledgebank alongside a TimeBank. However, TimeBanks require a level of long term commitment to volunteering that will not appeal to everyone, so their draw is likely to be narrower than Pledgebanks. A TimeBank would be likely to require more effort to set up than a Pledgebank and there would be a need for more support (for example, to ensure that people did qualify for the time credits they claimed). It might be interesting to see if any current TimeBanks are interested in piloting a Pledgebank alongside their existing activities.

## E3. Measurement issues

It is very unclear from the desk review whether pledging is any more successful than other similar methods in achieving behaviour change. It will therefore be very important to ensure that any pilot scheme includes robust tools to measure whether and how a community Pledgebank impacts on citizen behaviour. Without this robust

<sup>30</sup> Margetts, H. et al. (2009) 'Can the internet overcome the logic of collective action? An experimental approach to investigating the impact of social pressure on political participation', *Paper to the Political Studies Association Annual conference*, Manchester.

evaluation, there is a risk that the pilots will not establish whether or not pledging is a successful approach that should be rolled out further. The use of experimental methods or quasi-experimental methods to evaluate the pilots, with a control group and some randomisation of the intervention, would provide a suitable evaluation method.

Random selection of those involved in the pledging pilot would avoid a situation where the keenest “select in” – these would probably be the people who might be doing the activity already. One option would be to randomise who is invited to make a pledge within a bigger behaviour change campaign that includes everyone.

An experimental approach to measurement could be used to compare:

- individual and collective pledges
- Pledgebanks and simply asking people to do things
- Pledgebanks and some other behaviour change tool.

Measuring whether the pledging leads to any behavioural change will be an important part of any evaluation – testing whether pledging leads to people actually fulfilling the pledge. It will be important at the outset to identify some behaviours that might be open to measurement and think about collection of relevant data. A sample of behaviours could be selected, or tests created to get objective outcome measures.

There are substantial difficulties and risks associated with measuring behaviour change, largely arising from the difficulty of finding behaviours that are readily measurable. There are a very small number of civic behaviours – such as voting or registering to vote – that are relatively easy to measure because there are readily available sources of data. Other behaviours – such as kerbside recycling – are clearly observable. But many other behaviours are much more difficult to record or observe and therefore they are hard to measure. This places limits on what can be measured and may mean compromise or adaptation of the pledge scheme to allow measurement.

As well as measuring the behaviour change outcomes, Pledgebanks should be encouraged to plan in advance how best to collect data on:

- **Participation** issues, including the numbers of people who pledge, the demographic characteristics of those who pledge, the number of pledges, the type of pledges made, overall interest in the scheme; and
- **Implementation** issues, including partners involved, costs incurred, resources invested and challenges encountered.

This will provide a valuable dataset by which to evaluate the pilots.

Although measurement is challenging, it is not impossible and, with careful thought, solutions can be found. Measurement issues need to be thought through in advance at the design phase and appropriate resources made available.

# Summary and conclusion

There is a limited amount of research on pledging and from the available research it is difficult to know whether or not pledging works. Overall, studies of the effect of pledging on recycling, vehicle safety, voting, smoking and environmental behaviour indicate that:

- asking people to pledge can lead to behaviour change, but there is no clear evidence that it is any more or less effective than other campaigning approaches
- asking people to pledge seems to work best if it takes a personal approach, and it is unclear whether it is the personal approach or the pledging that has an effect
- pledging campaigns are most likely to be successful if they are part of a wider promotional campaign, including publicity, incentives, creation of social norms, reminders and cues, but then it is hard to separate out the effect of the pledge
- people are more likely to carry out a pledge if: it relates to something they were already thinking about; they have been allowed to personalise the pledge; and the activity is not too challenging.

This evidence from the research suggests that there should be a note of caution before embarking on a Pledgebanks pilot scheme: Pledgebanks are likely to work best as part of a wider promotional campaign and it may then be unclear which element is doing the work: is it pledging that leads to behaviour change or the associated campaigning? Given the limited nature of the research in this field and the inconclusive nature of the findings, there is certainly scope for further testing in this field, which could potentially be delivered by a robust evaluation of the pilot Pledgebanks, using experimental methods. If pledging is most successful when people are already thinking about it, a Pledgebank might be most likely to recruit those who are already interested in the issue and therefore have a limited impact on the wider population.

Preparation and planning of a Pledgebank are crucial to its success, which can be undertaken by drawing on the evidence. Before setting up a new scheme it is important to:

- identify the target population
- understand the existing attitudes and behaviour
- decide the behaviours which will be targeted by the scheme
- identify and address any barriers to change.

As with any new scheme, gaining the support of the council leadership and ensuring staff are fully committed to the idea is important.

A Pledgebank is most likely to be successful in getting people to pledge if the pledging activity is part of a wider promotional campaign. Community-based social marketing has found that commitment on its own is not as effective as combining

pledging with a range of other behaviour change techniques. All pledges should be made voluntarily, without coercion, and only sought for behaviours in which people are already interested. A personal approach will be the most effective in getting people to pledge: options could include using front-line staff who already have established contacts or other local residents. This might be a more cost-effective way of seeking pledges. Any activity to encourage pledging should help people to view themselves as civic. All material used need to be attractive and if a website is used it should be well designed and 'sticky' so people come back to it.

Pledgebanks can best encourage people to stick to their pledges by ensuring that at least some of the pledges are not too challenging: be realistic about what the target group can actually do. Pledges that are written down will be more effective than verbal commitments, and pledges that are publicised are likely to be more effective than private commitments. Flexibility is important: allow people to choose the pledge themselves or personalise it by adding their own views, for example "I pledge to help out in my local community centre once a week ... so that young people have something fun to do after school". Keeping the Pledgebank simple – Defra suggest no more than five pledges – will make the purpose clear and avoid confusion, but it will limit the choice of pledges available and reduce the opportunities for personalisation: there may need to be some compromise between simplicity and flexibility. Another way to establish clarity of purpose is to keep a core list of pledges for a substantial period, even if additional ones are created over time. If the Pledgebank includes any well-established and cohesive groups, where individuals care how they are viewed by others, then group commitments could be effective. Where there is not an established community of people, group pledges are likely to be quite risky.

Measurement issues need to be planned from the outset. During the design phase, careful thought will be needed about two aspects of measurement: firstly, what data to collect about participation and implementation and how to collect it; secondly, how to design the pilots so that the behaviour outcomes of pledges can be adequately measured. The use of experimental or quasi-experimental methods is most likely to provide effective measurement.

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