

6 February 2020		ITEM: 8
Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Recycling for Communal Buildings		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Report of: Lynn Aben – Recycling Project Officer		
Accountable Assistant Director: Daren Spring – Assistant Director for Street Scene and Leisure		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers - Director Environment and Highways		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

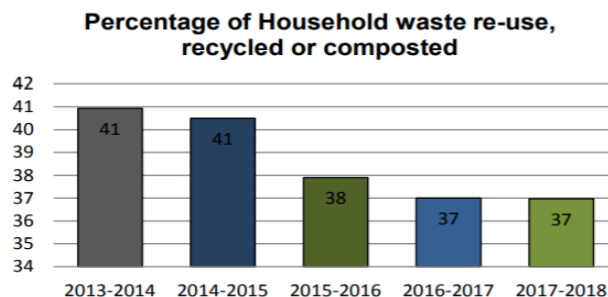
Thurrock Borough Council has a legal and moral obligation to increase recycling rates in order to mitigate waste related environmental problems, and has committed itself to reaching this goal.

At present, a considerable number of Thurrock's communal buildings lack the facilities to recycle. Encouraging residents of communal buildings to recycle has proven to be a challenge for many local authorities, both nationally and internationally, as recycling contributions from these properties are generally lower than other households. Thurrock's residents recycle approximately 37% of their waste and the introduction of increased recycling opportunities in communal buildings could have a considerable effect on the overall recycling rate.

This report provides an update on activities in relation to recycling in communal buildings, including an overview of a recycling pilot which was undertaken at two locations in the borough and an outline of future activities scheduled to take place.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 It is recommended that the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the report for information and comment.**
 - 1.2 It is recommended that the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee support and propose to Cabinet the roll out of recycling in all communal buildings in Thurrock.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 This is an update report following the ‘Recycling Service Report’ presented to the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2019. The current report highlights key activities that have been undertaken with regard to introducing recycling in communal buildings, including background information covering why this was undertaken and future plans.
- 2.2 In order to reduce waste related environmental problems and to mitigate climate change, the UK government has published its 25 Year Environment Plan, in which it pledges to “leave the environment in a better condition for the next generation” (Resource and Waste Strategy, 2018). Improving recycling rates is an important part of this pledge: through recycling, we can ensure that we preserve the earth’s natural and finite resources by reusing resources which have already been extracted from our environment. The European Union (EU) has therefore set a recycling target of 50% for 2020, which means that by 2020, every EU member state needs to recycle at least 50% of its waste. This target is set to be increased to 65% in 2030. In line with the EU’s ambitious plan, Thurrock Borough Council has a legal obligation to act in accordance with these plans and has therefore committed to increasing recycling rates, in the interest of our planet and generations to come.
- 2.3 Thurrock’s current recycling rate is approximately 37%, and has seen a decline over the last five years (see graph below). This is lower than the 2020 target and the average recycling rate in England, which is currently approximately 45%. Cost of recyclable waste disposal is considerably lower than the disposal costs of residual waste. An increase in recycling would therefore not only benefit the environment, but would also realise financial benefits for Thurrock Council and its residents.



- 2.4 As part of the Council’s commitment to increasing its recycling rates, it is recommended that a new recycling scheme is introduced to all communal buildings in the borough. Recycling rates in communal buildings are often low, and at present most communal buildings in Thurrock do not have recycling facilities in place, due to recycling bins in the past being continually contaminated. For this reason, introducing recycling in communal buildings would potentially have a substantial effect on Thurrock’s recycling rate.

2.5 Other UK boroughs who have committed themselves to increasing recycling in communal buildings have relied heavily on education and communication in their efforts to engage residents. Hackney Council, for instance, has trialled several schemes which all included education of residents through the provision of recycling guides, information on recycling euro bins, and signs. This approach has proven to be very effective and has served as guidance in the design phase of the pilot scheme for Thurrock.

3. Pilot

3.1 After extensive literature research, two versions of a newly designed recycling scheme were trialled at two sites: The Echoes (Grays) and Worthing Close (Grays). Residents of these sites had in the past expressed an interest in recycling. Both sites are of similar size, and have similar characteristics. The pilot went live on 28 August 2019.

3.2 Bin stores at both sites were carefully assessed prior to the pilot in order to determine which arrangements should be made to ensure the scheme would be as effective as possible. At each of the two sites, 1100L reverse lid recycling bins with restrictions were installed. Information on the front of the recycling bin ensured that residents were reminded of what can and cannot be recycled. Signs behind recycling and residual waste bins reinforced this information and showed residents how to handle bulky waste. External signs on the outside of the bin stores showed residents whether the bin store was a 'recycling and rubbish store' or one of each (**see Appendix 1**).

3.3 Residents were involved early in the process and received an introductory letter approximately one month before the scheduled launch of the pilot, with a follow up 'recycling welcome pack' several days before the launch (**see Appendix 2**). The welcome pack included a second introduction letter, a recycling guide, a fridge magnet, and two rolls of single use recycling sacks (Worthing Close) or a reusable recycling bag (The Echoes). Guides were designed keeping in mind the fact that some residents may not read or speak English. Graphics were used as much as possible in order to minimise this potential barrier.

4. Project evaluation and next steps

4.1 For two months, both sites were closely monitored in order to determine whether the proposed arrangements were functioning as intended and whether residents were recycling as a result of these arrangements. Results show that recycling bins are used effectively, with very low levels of contamination. Contamination levels were slightly higher at Worthing Close, with plastic carrier bags being the most common type of contamination. This might have been caused by the fact that plastic carrier bags are in close resemblance with the single use recycling sacks (as opposed to the reusable bags), making residents more likely to resort to plastic carrier bags as an alternative for the single use recycling sacks.

- 4.2 Initial resident feedback from one-to-one interviews and online surveys shows that residents of both pilot sites rate the user friendliness of their pilot scheme as high, and communications as effective. Overall, residents are pleased with the new arrangements. Although response rates for the online survey were relatively low, results show that residents of The Echoes are generally more positive about their reusable bag than residents of Worthing Close about their single use bags.
- 4.3 Moving forward, it is recommended that a reusable bag (as opposed to single use bags) is provided to residents as part of the scheme. The councils own Housing properties will be the first to be targeted during roll out. The approach for roll out is location based, starting in West Thurrock and Grays area, and moving to the East of the Borough. During this first phase, any communal buildings that have previously requested recycling will be included. Phase 1 of the project will also be utilised to establish engagement and buy in from landlords and managing agents of private properties. The second phase of the roll out will target private properties, again with the same location based approach.
- 4.4 A similar pilot project undertaken in 12 London flats in 2018 showed that recycling rates at targeted buildings increased by 26%, whereas contamination levels dropped by 24%. In Thurrock, there are approximately 360 communal buildings across the borough, of which very few have recycling bins. Based on the take-up and reduced contamination during the pilot, we anticipate an estimated 3% increase in overall recycling rate as well as a reduction in contamination. By educating residents through targeted messaging and through the use of signs and guides, awareness of the environmental impact of our waste can be created, causing residents to become more motivated to recycle and increase recycling behaviours and leading to a further overall increase in recycling rates.
- 4.5 To ensure success and to obtain managing agents buy-in, cost of infrastructure (i.e. signage, recycling Eurobins and welcome packs) were covered for both pilot sites. Moving forward, managing agents could be asked to support by covering the cost of recycling bins, which would significantly reduce the cost of roll out, but may influence decisions for participation and potentially lead to an inconsistent service provision across the borough. If we were to provide new bin provision for recycling, we would require a commitment from managing agents to maintain the same standard and type of reverse lid bins. This would be included in the new Waste Strategy and form part of our policy going forward, with recycling collections only taking place from reverse lid recycling bins as used in the pilot.
- 4.6 A capital bid has been submitted to support future roll out across the borough over a period of twelve to eighteen months. It is anticipated that, with cooperation from managing agents and negotiations on bin price, the project can be completed at a lower cost. **The estimated cost of materials for**

implementation of the new recycling signage and bins for a 40 household site is £1,600.

- 4.7 The Cross Party Waste Management Group, who have committed to providing a vision statement for Thurrocks new waste strategy, with a clear focus on increasing recycling rates, are supportive of the pilot and its findings and recommend the graphic materials used for the pilot are also used for other domestic households.

5. Summary

- 5.1 Following a two-month pilot, the recycling programme has demonstrated success; the success rate was based on the degree of contamination, participation levels and feedback from both residents and collection crews. It is recommended that this be rolled out to other communal buildings in the borough, coupled with continuous efforts to educate residents through social media messaging, recycling talks and other educational activities. These efforts will contribute to reaching the goals for local authorities as outlined in the 'National Resources and Waste Strategy' written by the UK Government. Within this strategy, the Government sets out the importance of increasing recycling rates, particularly in communal buildings, where often recycling rates are lower than average. At the same time, all residents should be able to recycle and have the same opportunities to do so wherever possible.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 An online feedback survey has been shared with all residents of both pilot sites. This survey aimed to find out what the strengths of the programme were, and what could or should be done differently when the programme is rolled out to other communal buildings in the borough. Additionally, one-to-one interviews with residents and managing agents were held in order to find out more about their experiences. The main goal of the survey was to determine whether single use or re-usable bags are most likely to encourage and support recycling.
- 6.2 Ward members were consulted during the design phase and prior to the launch of the pilot.
- 6.3 Residents were generally positive about the scheme: bins were easy to use, signs and recycling guides helped the residents to know what could be recycled, and bags were seen as a helpful tool that encouraged residents to recycle. One resident requested the reusable bags be slightly bigger as she is a keen recycler and it would allow her to store more recyclables in her kitchen. The reusable bag furthermore seemed to encourage residents to rinse their recyclables.
- 6.4 Based on resident feedback and the average level of contamination during the two month pilot period, it is recommended that the scheme be rolled out with the provision of reusable recycling bags (as used at The Echoes), along with

communication strategies (i.e. signage, bins and recycling guides) as used at both pilot locations.

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

7.1 The implications of the recommendations in this report may require a review of local policies and procedures. This will be covered by the refreshed waste strategy, which will be recommended by the Waste Management Working Group in 2020.

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

The introduction of recycling in communal buildings has an initial capital cost which is subject to approval. This investment if approved will be mitigated by a reduction in waste disposal costs in future years.

8.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Acting Monitoring Officer

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

Following a two-month pilot, the recycling programme has been shown to be successful with no specific equality and diversity implications noted through this initial project. If this project is rolled out as a borough-wide programme, it is acknowledged that members of the community who do not speak English may be limited in their understanding of what they can or cannot recycle owing to the nature of the supporting campaign that will be primarily literature based. This implication has been considered and recycling communications will be picture based wherever possible.

8.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

We have considered implications for any crime or anti-social behaviour.

9. Background papers used in preparing the report

- The Resources and Waste Strategy for England, December 2018.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-and-waste-strategy-for-england>
- Recycling in Real Life: Ethnographic Research with Residents of Purpose-built Flats in London. Resource London, April 2018.
<https://resourcelondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Recycling-in-reality-report.pdf>
- Increasing Recycling in Urban Areas. WRAP, June 2018.
<http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/RCY104%20Urban%20Project%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>
- Recycling in Urban Areas: Case Studies. WRAP, October 2016.
<http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/RCY104%20Urban%20Project%20Case%20Studies%20FINAL.pdf>

10. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 – Pictures of pilot sites after implementation

Appendix 2 – Pictures of 'recycling welcome pack'

Appendix 3 – Pictures of recycling bin content week 2 and week 8

Report Author:

Lynn Aben

Recycling Project Officer

Environment and Highways