

# Kerbside Recycling – Experiences from authorities receiving funding from the National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund

Appendix XIV: Mid Suffolk District Council

# Mid Suffolk District Council

## Introduction

Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) is in a very rural area and consequently has a very low population density. The authority received Round 2 funding to implement a kerbside collection scheme of dry recyclables for about a third or 12,040 households across the district. Prior to the introduction of the collection its BVPI 82a in 2002/03 was 9.2%, achieved via bring recycling. With the introduction of the collections funded by Round 2 its BVPI 82a rose to 19.08% in 2003/04, the first year of operation. During 2004/05 it continued to expand the dry recyclables collection and in the last quarter of 2004/05 it has achieved BVPI 82a of 27.86%.

This report describes the detail of the collection and its performance together with a discussion of the lessons learnt in implementing the collection.

## Description of the collections

### Recycling and refuse collections before the Round 2 funding

MSDC comprises 39,236 households, 73% of which are located in small villages or isolated areas. The population density is one household per 2.73 hectares.

Prior to receiving funding, MSDC had been keen to keep waste collection costs as low as possible. Refuse was collected in sacks or bins provided by householders. Waste arisings have always been low in the district, equivalent to 680kg/household/year in 2003/04. This is possibly due to the lack of provision of a refuse receptacle, the generally older population in the area or because many households have larger gardens with space for composting. Officers at MSDC recognised that the recycling rate was low and needed to be improved.

Despite ambitious county-wide recycling targets, members were unwilling to change waste collection methods due to the costs involved and because they did not want to attract larger quantities of waste. It trialled a number of collections including boxes and wheeled bins and following this, got Member approval for the twin bin collection described below.

### Collections funded from Round 2 NWMRF

MSDC was awarded Round 2 funding of £565,000 in order to implement co-mingled kerbside collection from 12,040 households (30%) in the district, collected on alternate weeks to the refuse. The materials targeted in the dry recyclables collection are paper, card, cans and plastic containers. The funding covered the capital costs of two collection vehicles and 12,040 180L bins plus revenue costs for promotion, staff and container management.

Other costs for the project were met by Suffolk County Council, MSDC and through the Landfill Tax Credits Scheme.

As well as the 180L recyclables bins provided by DEFRA funding, MSDC also provided householders with 140L residual waste bins at the same time. This size bin is issued to households of 4 people or fewer. The bins are collected on alternate weeks but using dedicated vehicles for each stream.

Recyclables are sent for processing at Viridor's MRF at Great Blakenham. All of the six WCAs delivering recyclables to this facility pay the same gate fee. As the quantity of material delivered has increased the gate fee has decreased by 16%.

## Kerbside Recycling Experiences

### Roll-out of the collection

The first areas selected for the collections represented the most populated parts of MSDC and comprised 2 refuse rounds. During the implementation to the first households Officers did not want to have to reorganise the collection rounds as well, and by selecting these areas it was believed that this would be unnecessary.

All 12,000 properties were provided with the collection during March 2003 and collections started in April. Prior to the delivery of the bins, considerable effort was put into listing all the properties on the rounds, the rural nature of the authority sometimes making it difficult to be sure that no one had been missed. The bins were delivered by the bin manufacturer with the help of Officers. Problems were encountered with this and in subsequent roll-out phases, bin delivery was retained in-house.

Households with small children can request a larger refuse bin, and a record made of these properties and the bins replaced with smaller bins once the children are older. Residents are charged an administration charge for this service. Families of 5 or more were provided with a roll of recycling sacks free of charge every six months. These households will now receive a 240L wheeled bin for recyclables. Families of 8 or more are provided with an additional 180L wheeled bin for recyclables.

Bin monitoring is taken seriously by the authority as it is seen as essential to limiting waste growth and Officers estimate that half the full time equivalent is spent on bin management. For instance, Officers were quickly able to identify how many households currently receive the roll of recycling sacks (321) every six months and thus how many new 240L bins will be required.

When the scheme was introduced a side waste policy was also established. Householders wishing to set-out more refuse than can be held in the bin can purchase authorised sacks at 60p each, of which 22,600 were sold last year. Sacks for recyclables can be purchased for 10p each or householders can provide their own clear sacks for recyclables. Any other type of side waste is not collected and stickers are placed on items unsuitable for collection. Officers estimate that less than 5% of households use the additional sacks for recyclables, indicated by the fact that 35,300 were sold last year.

Many properties are remote from roads, located down long tracks, so as far as possible the wheeled bins are delivered to the edge of the property (i.e. near to the road) and emptied from there.

Staff costs for the Round 2 funded project were approximately £10,000 per month. Almost 90% of the senior officer's time, 100% of the recycling officer's time plus 5 recycling support officers at a junior level were required to ensure the project was delivered as required. The project was integrated into the senior officer and recycling officer's existing work and no special project management team was established.

Additional funding from DEFRA enabled the authority to roll out kerbside collection to 23,050 households by the end of financial year 2004/05.

Over 5,000 home composters have been sold at subsidised cost and householders can also purchase sacks for garden waste, although residents are discouraged from introducing garden waste into the collected waste stream. Officers have not experienced increased incidents of flytipping, nor any major increase in the quantity of green or residual waste disposed of at Civic Amenity Sites.

## **Communications and promotion of the collection**

The decision to introduce wheeled bins and move to alternate week collections was communicated to residents up to 18 months prior to the change in order to manage the press and publicity. Public meetings were held and Councillors received media training. A media company was used that liaised with the press. These actions paid dividends and there was no adverse press despite the change in refuse arrangements.

A phased approach was taken to inform the public about the proposed changes to waste collection.

Letters were sent to all residents receiving the new collections 8 to 10 weeks before the bins were delivered. The letters provided information on when waste collections would change and what action was required by householders. The letter included a form for residents to complete regarding access to their property, number of people at the property, assistance required to manoeuvre bins etc.

Three weeks later a second, interim letter, was sent to residents detailing when the bins would be delivered.

Finally, the bins were delivered together with a leaflet detailing the materials targeted and a collection calendar.

A hotline was set up to handle calls and peaked at up to 250 calls a day following the issue of initial leaflets and forms regarding access and bin delivery, after which call volumes tended to drop back down. This hotline has been retained and where residents express problems with the bin size or the collection frequency the support team pay home visits to carry out waste audits and to provide advice on how to use the service properly.

Three months after the bins had been delivered to the 12,040 households, all the properties were visited and residents asked to fill in a satisfaction survey and post it back using pre-paid envelopes. There was a high response rate of 47%. Of households responding 85% were satisfied or very satisfied, with only 11% being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. MSDC then updated householders with the results of the survey and congratulated them on the strong recycling rates achieved and explained why some people may not be so happy with the service. Two further satisfaction surveys have been conducted. It was found that bin size was a real problem to many households of four, so larger residual bins (180L) have been provided to homes of four or more people which have bin capacity problems. Since then, satisfaction rates of 91% and 93% have been recorded.

## **Performance of the collection**

In 2003/04, the first year of operation of the service, 2,620 tonnes of material were collected from 12,040 households, equivalent to 218kg/household/yr. During the following year, the collection was expanded progressively to 23,050, making it difficult to calculate an average quantity collected. In total 4,444 tonnes were collected in the kerbside dry recyclables collection during 2004/05.

MDSC's BVPI 82a in 2002/03 was 9.3%. It is calculated that this increased by 10.5 percentage points as a result of Round 2 funding. The authority's BVPI 82a rose from 19.8% in 2003/04 to 25.4% in 2004/05.

## Kerbside Recycling Experiences

Between 2003/04 and 2004/05, total waste arisings have increased by 1,172 tonnes to a total of 27,820 tonnes, equivalent to an increase of 30 kg/household/year. In 2004/05 the total household waste arisings was low compared to many other authorities at approximately 771 kg/household/year.

Participation rates have not been measured in the district but they are believed to be high due to the alternate nature of the collection and the limited refuse capacity provided to residents.

### Standard collection costs

It is difficult to compare collection costs between authorities for many reasons including contracting out versus in-house service, lease versus purchase of capital equipment, accounting practices, etc. Therefore, for the purpose of the case study analysis, Kerbside Analysis Tool (KAT) has been used to estimate a standardised cost for each collection. It should be stressed that the use of KAT is to overcome difficulties in comparing a service that is operated and paid for in a number of different ways across authorities and not as a reflection of perceived inaccuracies in the audited or declared costs for individual authorities.

KAT uses information on the infrastructure actually employed to carry out the collection, for example the number and type of vehicles, and applies a unit cost, uniform depreciation and financing. **The standard costs calculated by KAT are not the same as the price paid to a contractor for operating the service or the same as the costs that appear in the audited accounts of the authority.** However, they enable a fair comparison between authorities of the costs of running kerbside collections.

Standard costs have been estimated for all the kerbside collections operating in the authority including refuse collection, regardless of if they were funded by Round 2 or not. It is sometimes impossible to separate out the elements funded by Round 2, for example if it only covered part of a collection or if it replaced an existing collection. Therefore, the cost analysis can only be undertaken at an authority wide level. Refuse collection costs are included as well as those for recyclables collection because it provides a useful base reference against which to compare the costs of the recyclables collections, refuse collection costs not being uniform over the country.

The cost analysis is for the financial year 2004/05 and can therefore be directly related to the performance above.

The standard collection costs for the refuse and kerbside collections in MSDC are presented in Table 1. All the costs are **gross**, i.e. do not include any benefits from the sales of materials or from the receipt of recycling credits if payable.

**Table 1:** KAT standard gross collection costs for household waste collected at the kerbside

Collected stream	Round 2 funding	Total households served	Collection frequency	Tonnes collected 04/05 (T)	Collection cost per tonne (£)	Collection cost per household (£)
Refuse	–	23,050 16,186	Fortnightly Weekly	20,651	33	31
Co-mingled dry recyclables	For 12,040	23,050	Fortnightly	4,444		
<b>Total</b>	–	<b>39,236</b>	–	<b>25,095</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>

When considering the costs presented in Table 1 it is essential to remember that they cover the collection of household waste/recyclables only, i.e. trade waste is not included, and additional costs for spare vehicles, depots and other support costs relating to collection are not included. Post collection costs, such as gate fees for refuse, MRF processing and composting, and ancillary costs such as for promotion, education, call centres and communications are also not included. Depending on the extent of these facilities and activities, and also the level of recycling credits or sales revenues, the standard KAT cost may be lower or higher than the audited accounts and a direct comparison is impossible with BVPI 86.

### Lessons learnt

MSDC is proud of the increase in recycling rate achieved via the funding and has identified a number of successes. The project was implemented before WRAP had been established and so Officers had few sources of support on the issues of moving to alternate week collection. The Officers contacted the WCAs in Peterborough, Eastleigh and the London Borough of Sutton to understand how these authorities had tackled the implementation of kerbside collection of recyclables. Discussions with these authorities highlighted the need for clear instructions to householders and also the importance of ongoing publicity. Officers are proud of the promotion of the project, the customer support they provided and the overall planning and pacing of the project.

The tailoring of bin sizes to different property sizes has also been successful in limiting the growth in waste.

Council Member support has been vital to the success of the project. Regular briefings and clear guidance on the decisions Members need to make to make projects happen, have helped the smooth running of the project.

The main problem with the project was the bin delivery during the first phase where a substantial number of households failed to receive their bins due to the contractor not being diligent in the distribution in more rural areas.

Officers were surprised at the level of ongoing support required by householders which they had underestimated, despite increasing staffing levels. Even in between the implementation (or bin delivery) phases, there were often 50 calls a day. Some householders have been unreasonable about the changes to waste collection, which has been time consuming for staff.

### Developments following the Round 2 funding

Bins are still being delivered to households across the district, with 26,195 properties receiving the collection by the end of June 2005. The intention is to supply the whole of the district by the end of 2005/06. The roll-out of the initial phase provided a blue print for roll out with adequate planning and management tools in place so the demand on senior management time has receded during subsequent phases of the roll-out.

Landfill Tax Credits were awarded to subsidise the cost of home composters to householders wishing to use them. It is estimated that 7,000 homes have a composter and MSDC are happy with the low quantities of garden waste that they have to collect. However, with mounting pressure to remove biodegradable waste from the waste stream, MSDC are planning to collect kitchen waste, including meat waste and may run a joint scheme with neighbouring Babergh District Council by 2008 or 2009.