

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

Appendix XIX: St Edmundsbury Borough Council

St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Introduction

St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC) received funding from the DEFRA National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund to introduce a co-mingled dry recyclables collection to around 43,000 households and also to extend and improve the existing green waste collection service. The funding was part of a partnership bid with Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) to implement an identical scheme. In 2002/03, prior to the introduction of the collections, SEBC's BVPI 82a was 7.2% and BVPI 82b was 22.7%. These were achieved through providing a green waste collection service to 34,000 households, bring recycling and a kerbside paper collection to half the householders. In 2004/05, following the implementation of the blue bin and the alternate week collection, SEBC achieved a combined BVPI 82a and 82b of 50.6%.

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

Description of the collections

Recycling and refuse collections before the Round 2 funding

SEBC has used wheeled bins for refuse collection since the mid 1980s. As early as 1993 the Authority trialled alternate week collection for garden waste with 'green' kitchen waste (excluding cooked food, meat, fish and bones) and refuse in 1,000 households. The trials indicated that this type of collection was viable on a larger scale and so from 1995 to 2002 SEBC introduced 240L wheeled bins to 80% of the district for the fortnightly collection of garden waste together with 'green' kitchen waste. The trials also showed that 60% of residents could not cope with the alternate weekly collection of the residual waste bin as this was overfull. It was evident at that time that to introduce an alternate weekly collection would require a dry recyclable collection including plastics.

No facilities were available to process the dry recyclable material stream. Weekly collections in the trial areas were reinstated for residual waste and garden with 'green' kitchen waste was collected fortnightly. Additional trials using home composters were also carried out.

Approximately 34,000 (out of a total of 43,000) households were provided with bins during this period. Prior to the Animal By Products Regulations, the garden with 'green' kitchen waste was composted windrow style on top of completed cells at the landfill at Lackford.

Newspapers and magazines were also collected separately from about half of the households, although no containers were provided by the authority. The residual waste was collected weekly in 240L wheeled bins and the garden waste with 'green' kitchen waste and paper were collected fortnightly on alternate weeks. Participation in the paper collection is estimated to have been around 40%. Fifty two bring recycling sites were located across the district.

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Round 1 of the DEFRA Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund provided £1.113 million to SEBC and neighbouring FHDC to expand the garden with a 'green' kitchen waste scheme and establish a Waste Transfer Station at Lackford. The transfer station enabled garden and 'green' kitchen waste to be bulked prior to in-vessel composting in accordance with the Animal By Products Regulations brought in during 2003 which required all 'green' kitchen waste to undergo a specialist treatment, rather than the open windrow composting previously used. The funding enabled SEBC to purchase bins and a vehicle, which completed the roll-out of the garden and kitchen waste collection to the remaining residents.

SEBC, in collaboration with the other six WCAs in Suffolk, has committed to deliver the Suffolk Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. This includes a vision to recycle and compost 60% of waste arisings by 2010 through a 3 waste stream collection method.

Trials were carried out in 2002 to test whether alternate week collection had any impact on recycling rates and total waste arisings. The trials comprised weekly or alternate week collections of refuse and recyclables in either sacks provided by the authorities or wheeled bins. The trials found that wheeled bins for recyclables collected on alternate weeks enabled the best diversion rates of both compostable and recyclable materials and the highest levels of customer satisfaction.

The Authority decided that alternate week collection of refuse would enable higher recycling rates in line with the target and therefore bid for Round 2 funding with FHDC to implement a kerbside collection of dry recyclables on alternate weeks to residual waste collection across the Borough.

Collections funded from Round 2 NWMRF

SEBC received funding of £1.375million from the DEFRA Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund to establish an alternate week collection of co-mingled dry recyclables to all residents using 240L wheeled bins and to extend the bulking facility to accept the dry recyclable material. The funding covered the costs of the bins, staff costs and publicity material.

The materials targeted in the co-mingled dry recyclables collection are plastic bottles, cans and paper (newspapers and magazines, junk mail and cardboard). The dry recyclables are collected in the same vehicles as the refuse, but on different weeks. At the same time as implementing the alternate week collections a "no side waste" policy was introduced. Householders can request a 330L bin if they have more than 6 family members. Alternatively, blue sacks for recyclables can be purchased for 10p. The elderly and disabled can request a 140L bin.



Part of the Enforcement Officer's work is to ensure residents comply with the scheme and to assist those having difficulties. The distribution of larger or smaller bins must receive authorisation.

All householders in SEBC now have three waste stream collection with 98% of householders on a 3-bin scheme.

Roll-out of the collection

FHDC, like SEBC, staggered the project roll out so that in each authority bin delivery took place every other month. Roll out of the collection to 68,000 households in both authorities took six months and started in the rural areas first, moving to urban areas last.

A project manager was recruited to ensure the smooth delivery of the bin roll-out. Temporary staff were taken on to deliver letters and during the last phase of the project SEBC employed a person to door knock difficult to reach areas. No additional staff were recruited to the recycling and waste hotline.

The Local Authority in-house team operates all the collections.

Following the Round 2 funding dry recyclables are bulked at Lackford then processed through Viridor's MRF at Great Blakenham. Garden waste and 'green' kitchen waste is processed at the new composting facility at Lackford whilst some goes directly into Stanton, north of Bury St Edmunds at a former mushroom growing plant operated by County Mulch Ltd.

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Communications and promotion of the collection

Householders were informed of the imminent changes to their waste collection through a letter and leaflet sent out one month in advance of the delivery of the recyclable bin. Information gained from the trials was used to shape the publicity and emphasis was to promote the positive aspects of recycling. As the switch to alternate week collections coincided with the provision of an additional wheeled bin for the dry recyclables, residents were assured that they were not being provided with a reduced service.

The first areas to receive the collection were selected so few complaints were received and it was the public who declared that the new arrangements were a success. SEBC organised roadshows at schools, community centres, fetes, shopping centres – anywhere officers could find suitable venues!

All council staff were given training on how to use the new waste system and asked to be champions of the scheme with friends and neighbours.

A few months after bins were delivered, householders were sent letters thanking them for their participation and informing them of the tonnages diverted. The letters also reminded householders of the materials targeted and how they be separated and presented (washed, squashed etc).

Contaminated blue bins are not collected or emptied by the crews. Householders are left a bin hanger to inform them why their bin has not been emptied and then, after the householder has removed the contaminating articles, they have the choice of either paying £10 to have the bin emptied that week, or to leave it for another fortnight, or dispose of it properly themselves e.g. at a bring recycling site. Items are not to be wrapped in the bins. Householders who persistently wrap recyclables or who dispose of the wrong items in the bins are visited by the Enforcement Officer. SEBC has now decided that after three warnings it will not collect waste from these households until they conform to the service requirements.

Once the types of problems householders might have been experiencing were identified, then the Suffolk-wide door knocking campaign, sponsored by the Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP), began. This lasted 28 weeks with the first 4 weeks devoted to studying participation.

Performance of the collection

The total quantity of dry recyclables collected in the 43,000 kerbside bins in 2004/05 was 9,837 tonnes, equivalent to approximately 229kg/household/year. In the same year 13,417 tonnes of garden and kitchen waste was collected from 43,000 households, equivalent to approximately 312kg/household/year.

Glass is not included in the kerbside collections but Officers reported an increase of approximately 40% in the quantities collected when the alternate week collection was introduced. SEBC plans to introduce a further 10 bring sites, increasing the total number to 65. Together with the material from the bring sites, the total quantity of dry recyclables and green/kitchen waste collected in 2004/05 was 24,654 tonnes, equivalent to 573 kg/household/year.

Participation rates have been estimated from a four week study that found that over 90% of households set out recyclables and compostable material across the borough and that there are no pockets of better or poorer set out rates. Thus, latest figures suggest that approximately 600 kg/participating household/year is collected in the kerbside collections.

The proportion of households found to be participating as SEBC would ideally require (i.e. unwrapped recyclables, washed containers with no lids) is 73%. Ninety two percent of households set out recyclables in the blue bins with lids up and/or side waste and 8% set out recyclables in black sacks. The side waste and the black sacks are not collected. An education programme is being carried out in 2006 to address the issue of wrapped waste and for the few properties putting out side waste.

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 SEBC 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.

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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	–	43,000	Fortnightly	21,702	59	43
Dry	For 43,000	43,000	Fortnightly	9,837		
Green	–	43,000	Fortnightly	13,417	48	15
Total		43,000		44,956	58	55

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.

Lessons learnt

Officers consider that the trials run in summer 2002 and the surveys conducted during the trials, were vital to the successful roll out of 43,000 blue bins and high recycling rates recorded by the Borough. Lessons learnt during the trials shaped publicity and promotional materials, informed decisions on the types of containers to be used, and determined the policies to ensure people separate waste and do not set out side waste. SEBC have shared this information with the other Local Authorities by holding open days.

Timing has been critical during the project and Officers believe it was useful not to provide too much specific warning to residents of the imminent changes to limit the time they had to worry about the implications and to store recyclables. The whole project has been to time and fast moving because of spending deadlines for the funding.

Close working in partnership with FHDC has also helped the project improve the economies of scale so that each authority achieved good value for money with purchasing. Although seeking approval for projects takes longer if there is more than one party, with only two authorities working on this scheme, there were limited delays.

Officers have supported Members when tricky issues regarding bin emptying have occurred. Similarly, Members have been supportive of the whole waste management vision and the authority has good cross party working on waste issues which have not become political issues.

Finally, residents in SEBC have a history of sorting their waste and so the implementation of the collection did not require a significant change in mind set. This, combined with the publicity campaign and rigorous rejection policies, helped the implementation go smoothly.

Officers identified a few areas that they considered could have been improved on during the project. Only two additional staff were employed to tackle the large project of implementing the scheme within the 6 month deadline. Additional resources would have eased the workload of Officers. The tight deadlines meant the project actually made actions take place with little time wasting. The dedicated Project Manager dealt with all of the various aspects associated with changes to waste collection. Ideally, the project would have been implemented across a 12 month period and not within 6 months.

Officers would recommend using the emboss message into the lids of the dry recyclables bins "Loose material only", encouraging the correct way to present waste while still allowing scope for change in the materials collected in the future.

Developments following the Round 2 funding

SEBC is keen to maximise the potential of its current recycling and garden/kitchen waste collection schemes through continuing education campaigns and enforcement methods. Officers mentioned that resources are still required to run the schemes, in particular, to keep up the high level of public interest and awareness about recycling. Officers were also keen to understand the real scope for requiring householders to separate their waste correctly using fixed penalties and other methods under the Clean Neighbourhoods Act 2005.

Officers feel that, at present, there is no strong case to put to Members to grow the system further. They consider that as much of the biodegradable element of the waste stream is being treated separately and not landfilled, Suffolk County Council, the WDA, will be unlikely to require any changes from SEBC in the near future.