

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

Appendix III: Bromsgrove District Council

Bromsgrove District Council

Introduction

Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) received two separate allocations from Round 2 funding. One was for the kerbside collection of dry recyclables to 37,600 households in the district. The second funding allocation was for collection of garden waste, again to 37,600 properties. At the same time it moved residents from a weekly sack collection to an alternate week collection from wheeled bins and adopted a no side waste policy. In 2002/03, prior to the introduction of kerbside collection of dry recyclables, BDC achieved a recycling rate of 9%, mainly through a network of bring sites. It carried out no composting. BDC's combined recycling and composting rate has increased to 24% in 2004/05, although this does not represent a full year of operation to all households. In the first quarter of 2005/06, with the whole district served by the new collections, a combined BVPI of 46% was achieved.

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

BDC is a predominantly rural authority with 90% of the district designated as Green Belt and has a population of 84,856 in approximately 37,600 properties. Prior to receiving Round 2 funding BDC did not carry out any kerbside collections for recyclables and operated weekly black sack, back door collection service for refuse with residents providing their own sacks.

Collections funded from Round 2 NWMRF

Round 2 funding provided £1.7 million funding for the introduction of a dry recyclables collection and a green waste collection district wide with the exception of 3,000 properties that are unsuitable for the service.

For dry recyclables it covered the purchase of two boxes for each household and 4 stillage vehicles. BDC provided funding for a further 4 collection vehicles, but opted for Kerbsiders in place of stillage vehicles. Paper, glass, cans plastic bottles and textiles are collected fortnightly. Crews sort the recyclables at the kerbside and then deliver them to the WDA's transfer station for bulking by BDC. The recyclables are then collected by reprocessors as follows:

- Newspapers and magazines to UPM Shotton and light card to Kappa;
- Mixed glass to Berrymans
- Cans and plastic bottles for further sorting at the WDA's MRF in Pershore then to Recoup
- Alu to Novelis via alutrade
- Steel to Corus via EMR
- Textile to John Padley

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For green waste, the funding purchased 4 Faun side press vehicles and 37,600 240L wheeled bins for garden waste collection. The Faun vehicles have demountable dedicated pods (either for refuse or garden waste). Each vehicle chassis has been purchased with three pods, similar to standard shipping containers, so that when a pod is full, the crew return to the WDA's waste transfer station, remove the full pod and pick up an empty one. Full pods are taken in batches of two by the WDA's standard haulage vehicles, either to a composting facility 18 miles from the transfer station or to landfill, as appropriate. No waste is actually "handled" at the transfer station as it remains sealed in the pods. It is not possible to reach 3,000 households with the larger vehicles so 2 caged vehicles are used to collect black sacks from these properties. Garden waste is not collected from these properties and a dry recyclables collection is just now being rolled out to some of the more accessible households.

At the same time as introducing the recyclables collections BDC introduced an alternate week collection of refuse and moved residents from a backdoor sack collection to a kerbside wheeled bin collection and adopted a no side waste policy. The garden waste and the dry recyclables are collected one week, and refuse is collected the following week. BDC purchased an additional 4 Faun vehicles and 40,000 240L wheeled bins for refuse collection.

Waste and recyclables collection takes place only 4 days a week (Tuesday to Friday) all year round except Christmas. Waste collection is carried out by BDC's Direct Service Organisation.

Roll-out of the collection

Due to a delay in procurement, officers started the roll out of the delivery of bins and boxes to one round in the district in March 2004. Householders were issued with one 44L box with lid for paper and card and one 55L box for other recyclables. They were also provided with one 240L bin for refuse and one 240L bin for garden waste. The roll out across the district was completed at the end of December 2004, approximately one round a month (a 2 month break in the roll-out schedule occurred mid way due to senior staff changes in the waste management department).

A steering group was formed to manage the roll out of the bins and boxes and also to oversee the whole project. The steering group comprised the depot manager, transport manager, the environmental manager, the public relations manager, health and safety manager, technical manager and occasionally the union representative from the crews. Tasks were assigned to individuals at each meeting and running of the project was incorporated into staff's existing roles. Consultants were employed to assist with the procurement process and also with a review of the rounds. The consultants used PRINCE as part of their project management tools but BDC did not find this tool to be particularly user friendly. Four dispensation officers were employed on a temporary basis to check dispensation claims and to establish a database of households with special requirements. One Dispensation Officer has been retained.

Communications and promotion of the collection

In September 2003, 6 months before the launch of the collections, BDC sent each household a letter informing them of changes to waste collection and a dispensation form. Householders could apply for dispensation from using the wheeled bins providing they supplied satisfactory evidence of disability, or access issues. Households able to prove that they are made up of more than 5 people could apply for an additional 120L bin and small households could opt for a smaller bin. A separate call centre was established to handle enquiries and to deal with the dispensation requests. There followed a deluge of calls to the

call centre and in total 10,000 requests for dispensation from the scheme were received within a month of sending out the initial contact letter and dispensation form. Council employees from all departments were tasked with fielding calls. Most issues were resolved after sorting true from false claims by talking to householders and the dispensation officers visited all residents who had applied for dispensation.

Starting six weeks before the new collections were introduced to a round, residents received leaflets at two weekly intervals to introduce the new waste collection services, as follows:

- Leaflet 1 – announcement of change to waste collection in six weeks;
- Leaflet 2 – information on the materials that would be collected
- Leaflet 3 – informing residents they would receive their new collection containers during the week

This was followed by delivery of the bins and boxes together with “do’s and don’ts” leaflet, details of the refuse collection changes (move from back door to kerbside collection, sacks to wheeled bins and no side waste) and a collection calendar.

The leafleting approach changed after the initial roll-out following feedback from householders that the drip-feed approach made them worry about the change because they had a long time to consider the impact of the changes and did not understand exactly what the changes would entail. The revised communications policy was to hand deliver leaflets to all the relevant households. The leaflets outlined everything residents needed to know about separate waste collections, one month prior to delivery of bins. Council employees usually working on electoral form delivery were tasked to deliver these leaflets to ensure they reached householders as BDC had previously subcontracted this role with poor results.

The containers were delivered with an information pack containing a bottle opener with the helpline phone number on, a leaflet on sustainability published by a local group, stickers for identifying bins and a collection calendar running from March to March, in line with the start of roll out.

Officers believe householders were upset with the change to a kerbside (not back door) collection and the council’s decision not to take side waste. This is not just a waste minimisation issue as there is no accessible aperture for collection crews to deposit sacks etc. into the Faun vehicles as they have a side lift. Crews post tickets through doors where bins have not been left out or where there is side waste, contaminated bins, open lids etc.

There was at first a strong campaign against the waste collection changes including an anti-recycling website, culminating in bags of side waste that had not been collected by the authority being left on the council office steps. BDC has been featured by the local press and TV several times and its response has always been to reply to any media queries or stories as quickly and as positively as possible. Media training was not provided to staff or councillors

Other communications tools used by the authority were:

- educating crews through their supervisors to handle householders queries where possible and to direct queries as appropriate to BDC’s waste management department;
- running an on-line questionnaire (October 04);
- customer satisfaction panel;

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- attending parish council meetings to advise householders of the changes to waste collection;
- attending fetes, fairs and public events to answer the public's queries.
- Taking talks regarding the new service to community groups, sheltered housing groups, schools and parish councils
- Radio advertising
- Street Banners
- Parking ticket advertising
- Posters in libraries, leisure centres and other public buildings

Performance of the collection

The new collections commenced March 2004 but the roll-out was not completed until December 2005 so data is unavailable on the performance of the district wide collection for a full 12 month period. In 2002/03 BDC had a combined BVPI recycling and composting rate of 9%. In the first three quarters of 2003/04 this had risen to approximately 10%. In 2004/05 the average combined BVPI recycling and composting rate was 24%, but it showed quarterly increases as the collections were rolled out, and achieved an average rate of 33% in the final quarter. In the first quarter of 2004/05 the combined rate had reached 46%, however, this is partly due to large quantities of garden waste collected in this period and it is possible that this will not be sustained for the full year.

Due to the roll-out it is difficult to calculate an average quantity collected per household for each collection. However, in the first quarter of 2005/06 1,708 tonnes of dry recyclables were collected, equivalent to 136kg/household/year, and 3,310 tonnes of garden waste, equivalent to 352 kg/household/year. It is unknown if these levels, and in particular that for garden waste, will be sustained for a 12 month period.

An average participation rate of 76.8 % has been calculated by BDC following monitoring of three rounds during February and March 2005.

Since the changes to the refuse and recycling collections, overall household waste has increased by approximately 5.5%. The collections have not been in place long enough to establish if the increase is due to the change in collections methods e.g. use of a wheeled bin for refuse and collection of garden waste, or if it is simply due to the natural growth in waste that is experienced by most authorities.

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 2005/06, with projections made for the fully rolled-out collection based on tonnes collected in 2004/05 and the first quarter of 2005/06.

The standard collection costs for the refuse and kerbside collections in BDC 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	–	40,600	Fortnightly	23,382	24	14
Garden	for 37,600 households	37,600	Fortnightly	9,414	65	16
Dry sorted	for 37,600 households	37,600	Fortnightly	6,833	124	23
Total	–	40,600	–	39,629	51	50

Note: The above costs include the more expensive ‘pod’ vehicle @£160K for refuse and garden waste. The cost benefits of these vehicles are not realised during collection but subsequently for transfer to disposal or composting.

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.

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Lessons learnt

BDC set out on an ambitious project to completely change the household refuse collection service and despite the initial bad press received for wheeled bins, officers are proud of the high recycling rates achieved and general public acceptance of the scheme. The following elements of the project went well:

- choosing the FAUN side press vehicles which the crews are happy to operate and the WDA is keen to expand into other WCAs;
- focusing on project delivery to meet DEFRA deadlines despite staff changes and breaks in roll out, such that roll out was complete in ten months but allowing a longer period for the first phase;
- keeping a database of households, e.g. dispensation applications and outcomes, number and type of bins;
- employing dispensation officers specifically to deal with the tricky issues BDC faced moving to wheeled bins;
- responding to bad press as soon as possible and being honest about the project;
- using trustworthy leaflet delivery organisations;
- holding regular project meetings with representatives from different departments of BDC so that any issues could be identified and dealt with quickly;
- attending public events to answer queries; and
- having access to a group of influential councillors, who while small in numbers were supportive and influential and able to deal with specific householders' queries.

Aspects of the project that officers felt went less well were as follows:

- sending an open ended question to householders regarding dispensation from using bins which resulted in a deluge of enquiries.
- using a sub-contractor for the delivery of leaflets which did not get delivered;
- having a long lead in time highlighting the change in waste collection (from September 2003 when dispensation applications were issued to March 2004 when the first phase of the project was rolled out) which meant some householders worried or had additional time to complain;
- not providing a training session for councillors which meant some did not know why the changes to waste collection were taking place, nor did they understand why increased recycling rates were required;
- not having media training before the project started leaving officers to act on instinct when dealing with the press who were sometimes hostile;
- delaying the branding of the vehicles because the authority wishes to sell the vehicle sides as advertising space although there has been no interest shown yet by the private sector.

Developments following the Round 2 funding

The comprehensive changes in the collections, and only recent completion of the full implementation, has meant that BDC is now planning a period to enable the collections to settle down. Despite this, it has some ideas on possible developments in the future.

Recently BDC has been able to use Worcestershire County Council's publicity bus, which has been designed using recycled materials, to promote the separate collections.

BDC is reviewing the feasibility of kerbside collections in rural areas. It is likely that for some properties, wheeled bins will never be practical and so the authority is drawing up criteria to assess where this is the case.

In order to reduce the maximum journey times to under 30 minutes for vehicles collecting in the east and west of the district, BDC has identified two drop off points on farm land. Waste management licences would be required to operate these mini transfer stations, although the refuse or garden waste would remain in the Faun demountable pods.

BDC may provide householders with wheeled bins, not boxes for recyclables in the future. Officers believe that bins would provide householders with additional capacity and be quicker and easier for crews to empty. All the dry recyclables would be collected together, including glass. The WDA may secure a contract for S-tech waste treatment, a form of waste to energy with MRF technology at the back end.