

## **Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission**

### **Improving Recycling on Hackney Housing Estates and with Registered Social Landlords**

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#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1** The Mayor of London's Environment Strategy requires each London authority to write a Reduction & Recycling Plan (RRP). The RRP details how Hackney will contribute to the London-wide objectives, policies and proposals set out in the Environment Strategy and how these will be reflected and translated into action at the local level. Further, the RRP has to be in a manner consistent with the duty to act in 'general conformity' with the Mayor of London's Environment Strategy. The RRP was signed off by the Mayor of London in December 2019.
- 1.2** Key aspects of the RRP include service proposals for restricting residual waste through the introduction of fortnightly collections and improving recycling on estates. It further covers how Hackney will minimise its environmental impact of waste activities, move towards a more circular economy and what measures it will continue to take to work with key stakeholders in waste prevention and behaviour change.
- 1.3** The Waste & Recycling Budget Scrutiny Task Group of last year, played an active role in the RRP process. In particular they explored the rationale for the consideration of the significant change to elements of the waste collection arrangements for street level properties. The Group further looked at the range of work focused on improving recycling levels among flats and estates.
- 1.4** This report is focussed on improving recycling on estates and outlines what interventions have been done, and goes on to identify where there are opportunities for further improvements, in particular with registered social landlords (RSLs).

#### **2.0 Policy context**

- 2.1** In May 2018 the Mayor published his London Environment Strategy. The Strategy sets out objectives, targets and policies for the effective management of London's municipal waste and to accelerate the transition to a circular economy.
- 2.2** The Strategy's waste objectives are:
  - Objective 7.1 - Drive resource efficiency to significantly reduce waste focusing on food waste and single use packaging;
  - Objective 7.2 – Maximise recycling rates;
  - Objective 7.3 - Reduce the environmental impact of waste activities (greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants);
  - Objective 7.4 - Maximise local waste sites and ensure London has sufficient infrastructure to manage all the waste it produces.
- 2.3** The two most prominent requirements of the Strategy are around the household recycling targets and minimum service levels for London:
  - 45% London wide household recycling rate (and a 50% rate of local authority collected waste) by 2025, and 50% household recycling rate (and 65% municipal recycling targets) by 2030 to be collectively delivered by local authorities; and
  - A minimum recycling collection service provision to be provided by all Boroughs by 2020 incorporating the collection of the six key dry recycling materials (including pots, tubs and trays) for all properties and separate weekly food waste collections for all kerbside properties (and also flats where feasible).
- 2.4** Further, England is committed, through the 2018 Resources and Waste Strategy, to achieving a recycling rate for municipal waste of 65% by 2035. This is in line with the requirements of

the revised EU Waste Framework Directive. The Government considers that, to achieve this, new drivers (over and above the Landfill Tax and current legal obligations) will be required to encourage local authorities to expand recycling services – and for businesses and householders to choose to recycle more.

- 2.5 A Government consultation last year proposed that all waste collection authorities should be obliged to collect the same minimum or 'core' set of dry recyclable materials from kerbside properties and flats in their area to improve both the quantity and quality of recycling. The consultation further proposed that, by 2023, all households (including flats) should be offered a separate weekly food waste collection.
- 2.6 Hackney has been progressive in its offer of services to flats, and already meets the Governments and the Mayor of London's requirements in offering a core set of materials and food waste to those living in flats. Further, a Hackney manifesto commitment identifies that improving recycling on estates is a key area for development, and progress in this area is outlined in the following sections.
- 2.7 Importantly, improving recycling, both at street level properties and on estates, will play an important role in helping the Council achieve the highly ambitious decarbonisation targets set out in the climate emergency motion passed at Full Council, June 2019.

### **3.0 Current services and performance**

- 3.1 Hackney has delivered fundamental improvements in its household recycling rates, from 1% in 1998 to 28% in 2019/20. These have been supported by an expansion in recycling service provision over that period, including delivering comprehensive services of dry recycling and food waste to all households in the borough. However, recycling rates are remaining static and further improvements are required to meet our 2022/23 target of 31%, as agreed by the Mayor of London.
- 3.2 Estates and purpose built flats are all provided with a similar service to those in low rise properties, with a comingled dry recycling service using communal bins located in communal bin areas. Over recent years, service density has increased, with additional bins and additional sites across many estates, improving service accessibility. Food waste recycling services are also readily available to the majority of residents, with communal facilities provided at estates. Approximately 2,000 sites have 4,400 recycling bins and 1,600 food waste bins are available across all the boroughs high rise properties.
- 3.3 In order that the same services are provided, where feasible, low rise estates residents with gardens have been added to the street level garden waste service. These residents receive a locked 240 litre brown wheelie bin, a key to open and lock the bins, and reusable garden waste bags. The service continues to expand, and currently 87 estates receive the garden waste service with 172 lockable bins on those estates.
- 3.4 Hackney's current overall recycling rate is 28% (dry recycling, food and garden waste). Estates-based properties display lower recycling performance relative to street level properties; replicated nationwide, and not just in Hackney. The recycling rate (excluding garden waste to enable fair comparison) from street level properties is 32% whilst the rate from estates is lower, estimated at 14%, but some estates are as low as 8-10%.
- 3.5 To improve recycling rates (target is 31% by 2022/23), and to contribute to achieve the 45% reduction in emissions against 2010 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2040, Cabinet approved the move to fortnightly residual waste collections to street level properties. However, further improvements to recycling on estates are also needed to improve recycling performance, and help achieve the targets set out in the climate emergency motion.

### **4.0 Recycling on estates - current interventions**

- 4.1 A programme of work has been developed to deliver on the manifesto commitment to improve recycling performance on estates. The interventions that have been undertaken, and progress to date are outlined below.

## *Estate Interventions*

- 4.2** Additional Recycling Collections have been introduced to increase the frequency of recycling collections at busy sites. This ensures that recycling capture rates are maximised and barriers to residents recycling are minimised. The results of this intervention achieved an average monthly percentage increase of 6.3% throughout the monitoring period. This positive output resulted in one additional full time estates recycling vehicle being introduced on a permanent basis (from Nov 2019) to accommodate service growth. It should be noted that additional collections are only added at sites where there is limited space for bins; therefore the primary solution is to site extra bins, and increase the collections only as a last resort.
- 4.3** A new design recycling bin with a larger aperture in the lid has been introduced, making it easier for residents to recycle and reduce contamination. In November 2019, this intervention exchanged 126 recycling bins at 47 recycling sites across one collection round, with promotional leaflets delivered to 1,900 households. The results saw a 5% increase in tonnage collected, and a reduction in contamination. Over time recycling bins will now be replaced with the new design bin as standard (for example, damaged bins and new developments).
- 4.4** Additional recycling bins have been added to sites to improve recycling facilities for residents and increase available recycling capacity. The original aim was to add 153 additional recycling bins in predefined locations on Hackney Housing estates. The results of this intervention saw the introduction of 66 additional bins across Hackney Housing estates in November 2019, and 19 additional bins will be introduced through Phase 4 of the Estates Recycling Programme (see below). Following assessments, the remaining 68 recycling bins can only be added if infrastructure work is undertaken to accommodate these bins, which will require additional funding. In terms of impact, as these bins were embedded across all collection rounds qualitative tonnage monitoring is not feasible. However, visual assessments indicate that the additional bins are well utilised.
- 4.5** A reduction in the frequency of waste collections at some sites with three waste collections per week, would reduce the total amount of waste collected, and help nudge people into using the recycling services. However, from the 53 estates that have three waste collections, and following analysis and monitoring, the early indications suggest opportunities are minimal for this intervention to work currently (most sites are more than half full at every scheduled collection). An alternative approach is to work estate by estate to increase recycling capacity, improve placement of bins and deliver communications before stopping the third collection. Further, due to Covid waste tonnages have increased, making this particular intervention harder to implement at the current time.
- 4.6** To meet manifesto commitment 115 “To introduce a green champions scheme across our estates to promote recycling”, estate residents have been recruited as green champions to promote recycling on their estates and encourage positive behaviour change. Milton Gardens was chosen as the trial estate as it already has chutes closed & new bin stores built with the correct ratio of waste to recycling bins, and diverse demographics. An initial four champions have been recruited and trained to date, with planned activities including recycling demonstrations, social media promotion, sack inspections, recycling facility visit, monitoring of bins, and putting up posters. Once activities have been completed over an initial three month period, the Champions build up credits, which are later exchanged for cash vouchers. At the present time the scheme has been suspended due to Covid-19.
- 4.7** Hackney introduced the UK’s first reverse vending machine to reward residents for depositing single use drinks containers, as a trial on one estate. Over the course of the three month trial, residents deposited cans and plastic bottles into the machine in return for a 10p voucher which could be exchanged in two local shops (dry cleaner and general convenience store). In total 4,170 vouchers were redeemed by residents, and 5,268 plastic bottles and cans were deposited weighing in at 121kg of recycled material. However, whilst the Tenants and Residents Association liked the scheme, it wasn’t without issues, and there was no increase in total estate recycling tonnages, more that tonnage was diverted to using the machine rather than the communal recycling bins.
- 4.8** A review was undertaken of the ‘Waste Storage Planning Guidance’ to drive a long-term change in waste and recycling behaviour. A 4-week audit of a mixed tenure block was undertaken to assess if waste and recycling provision was appropriate and not causing side waste and/or contamination. Bin provision worked well when there was 50:50 provision for

waste and recycling. It was noted that if the bin store is only big enough for an odd number of bins, the emphasis needs to be on recycling bins not waste (although if the guidance/ planning process is followed this situation should not arise).

- 4.9** The above is in addition to notable estates focused projects that are already in development and therefore run concurrently with the above programme.

#### *Projects and schemes with RSLs*

- 4.10** The Recycling Team have built up good working relationships with the registered housing providers in Hackney over the years to provide recycling services, including adding new and additional recycling bins, and rolling out food waste bins. Detailed below are some of the projects.
- 4.11** Peabody Housing at Pembury Estate - Increasing recycling capacity and reducing waste collections by increasing the ratio of recycling to waste bins to 50/50. The project added 30 additional recycling bins, 10 communal food waste bins, delivered recycling communications as well as issuing reusable bags and compostable liners. The results saw an increase in recycling tonnages, and fill rate monitoring showed it was feasible for the third waste collection to be dropped.
- 4.12** Sanctuary Housing at Morningside Estate - Trialling recycling bins with larger apertures to increase recycling to tackle contamination. The current recycling bin lids were replaced with large aperture reverse bin lids, making it easier for residents to recycle. This showed an increase in recycling tonnages and less recycling dumped on top of the recycling bins.
- 4.13** Industrial Dwelling Society at Mountside walk and Laurel Court - Promoting food waste recycling, which included delivery of a communications project (leaflets and liners) to increase participation in the food waste service.
- 4.14** Peabody & Family Mosaic - Increasing recycling capacity, especially as Family Mosaic had a high imbalance of waste to recycling bins. Peabody are looking to rebalance this working towards a 50/50 ratio of waste and recycling bins.

#### *Estates Recycling Programme*

- 4.15** The Estates Recycling Programme (ERP) began as an invest to save programme in order to counter the increasing waste disposal costs as levied by the NLWA. It was originally set up under Hackney Homes in partnership with Hackney Council as one strand of the 'Delivering Integrated Waste and Environment' (DIWE) programme. This enabled the piloting of recycling improvement interventions with the support of Housing Management.
- 4.16** The earliest phase of works had included trials of bespoke communications, provision of single-use recycling sacks, unlocking of bin lids, and additional recycling bins amongst others across 8 different estates. What was clear from these trials was that the provision of additional recycling bins yielded the most significant improvements in average recycling rates. In order to facilitate this on a larger scale considerable infrastructure type works would need to be carried out in order to accommodate the potential additional recycling capacity across the 189 estates reviewed across the borough.
- 4.17** Phase 2 of works sought to implement this as a pilot of works across two estates (Milton Gardens Estate and Geffrye Estate). Waste chutes and hoppers were to be sealed in conjunction with the construction of external bin stores. By doing so residents would be better encouraged to sort their waste into the appropriate streams at a single point of disposal. This would divert much of the recyclable materials, both dry mixed recycling and food waste, away from the refuse waste bins. Across both pilot estates 30 new bin stores were built, 45 waste chutes closed and 30 additional 1100l recycling bins were added (as well as 10 additional 240l food waste bins). As a result, we found that the average recycling rate increased from 8.9% to 19.6% for Milton Gardens Estate and 6.9% to 18% for Geffrye Estate a year from completion. In both cases an increase of more than 100%.
- 4.18** With the primary driver for works being the improvement of recycling rates it became clear that a reduction in fire risks from decommissioning poorly maintained waste chutes and visible improvement to the estate environment were also addressed directly from these works.
- 4.19** We are currently undertaking Phase 4 of the programme as a direct expansion of this pilot, implementing the same infrastructure based interventions across 7 new estates. Upon

completion 57 new bin stores will be built, 75 waste chutes closed, 24 additional 1100l recycling bins and 24 food waste bins will be added. With a baseline average recycling rate of 10.45% across these 7 estates, we are expecting similar improvements to the recycling rates as to what was evidenced in Phase 2.

**4.20** Bin stores are currently being constructed, with 4 estates nearing completion and the remaining 3 estates are due for completion by August 2020. The waste chute closures have been temporarily delayed due to precautions currently being undertaken as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **5.0 Resource London Flats Recycling Project**

**5.1** The below information is primarily taken from the 'Making Recycling Work for People in Flats' Resource London research project<sup>1</sup>, which Hackney were a part of.

**5.2** Having primarily worked with local authorities previously, Resource London set up this two-year project in partnership with housing association Peabody and six inner London boroughs, including Hackney. The aim was to better understand the barriers to recycling for people who live in purpose-built flats and discover what practical measures could be taken by housing providers, building managers and service providers to help overcome them.

**5.3** This project was the first of its kind to include in-depth research with residents as well as those operating and managing services. It was also the first to include comprehensive measurement of the amount and composition of recycling and residual waste.

**5.4** Following from detailed inventories carried out at 132 estates of purpose-built flats across the project area identified a general lack of consistency in the quality of waste services provided. Resource London found that in the main services had evolved for the benefit of operators rather than for the residents who use them.

**5.5** Further, in-depth ethnographic research with residents highlighted the complexity of the issues faced by residents and clearly showed that good intentions to recycle are not enough: the key to effective recycling is only achieved when residents want to recycle, know how to recycle and find it easy to do so.

**5.6** A number of interventions were tested on 12 selected estates of purpose-built flats in London to see how they might influence recycling behaviour and increase the amount recycled. They included a common Flats Recycling Package applied to all 12 estates to standardise the look and feel of the bin areas, and five behavioural interventions introduced on 10 of the estates in various combinations.

**5.7** The Flats Recycling Package consists of:

- i.** Clean and well-maintained bins and bin areas
- ii.** Adequate collections to prevent overflows and appropriate recycling capacity (minimum 60l/hh/wk)
- iii.** Appropriate apertures on recycling bins big enough to accept plastic bags of recycling and with locked reverse lids
- iv.** Collection of the six main recyclable materials
- v.** Clear and visible signage on and above the bins
- vi.** Convenient location of recycling bins for residents
- vii.** Recycling leaflet sent to residents once a year
- viii.** Posters highlighting recycling messages displayed in a central location (where possible)
- ix.** Residents informed of what they should do with bulky waste items

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<sup>1</sup><https://resourcelondon.org/resources/research-and-innovation/making-recycling-work-for-people-in-flats/>

- 5.8** The results showed that overall capture and recycling rates were substantially increased over the course of the project, mainly thanks to the improvements made in bringing all 12 estates up to the standard of the Flats Recycling Package.
- 5.9** Over the course of the project the overall capture rate increased by 22%, the recycling rate increased by 26% and the contamination rate decreased by 24%. However, it is important to note that these increases were from a very low base. At the end of the project the capture and recycling rates were still low (46% and 13% respectively) and contamination remained high at 24%.
- 5.10** There was wide variation in the levels of improvements from one estate to another. Those estates that had a poorer quality service before the changes showed the greatest improvement.
- 5.11** Results of the five behavioural interventions were less conclusive, but the research did offer some insights. For instance, feedback from residents indicated that the provision of plastic bags for in-home storage of recycling were effective at influencing recycling behaviour and in some cases additional small recycling bins placed near estate entrances were also effective.
- 5.12** The key recommendations to come out of the project are:
- i. Housing providers, building managers and service providers can improve recycling capture rates in purpose-built flats by working together to put in place and maintain the standards defined in the Flats Recycling Package on every estate.
  - ii. The Resource London Flats Recycling Package toolkit offers practical advice and guidance to help housing providers, building managers and services providers to implement the Flats Recycling Package in purpose-built flats. The toolkit became available in March 2020.

## **6.0 Future recycling for those with communal facilities**

- 6.1** The Council will see significantly higher waste disposal costs for the longer term. The single way that these can be partly mitigated is by reducing the volumes of dry recycling and food waste that are disposed of in the waste stream; householders should be using the correct services for these material streams. Without this mitigation, greater levels of savings will be required from other areas of Council expenditure and from the services we deliver for our residents.
- 6.2** This paper has highlighted a number of programmes and interventions that have and are being implemented, and demonstrates opportunities for Registered Social Providers to assist in getting householders to change behaviour and improve recycling rates, who are key in assisting with improving recycling rates from their residents.
- 6.3** Key opportunities for improving recycling rates would include:
- 6.4** Implementing the Flats Recycling Package as outlined in section 5 above, which has demonstrated the importance of having a number of key elements addressed to encourage use of services, thereby improving recycling tonnages.
- 6.5** Specifically RSLs could:
- i. Ensure that the appropriate capacity for recycling is adhered to and if required, additional recycling capacity provided for householders to recycle (bin charges apply);
  - ii. Ensure that the bin area/stores are in clean, good order, with sufficient lighting and that they are cleaned regularly, in particular clearing bulky waste promptly;
  - iii. Ensure recycling communications, using existing and established communication channels, are proactively sent out to householders, as a minimum, on an annual basis and to all new households;
  - iv. Embed recycling knowledge and behaviour in staff day jobs to help in the reduction of contamination issues, to assist when residents have enquiries about the recycling services, and to proactively request service information, such as leaflets from the recycling team when stocks are low;

- v. Ensure that any incidents, issues and requests are promptly reported, and could include resident requests for bags or liners, or at least directing residents to the webpage or call centre, and reporting issues such as damaged bins;
  - vi. Ensure that on-site staff correct residents on any witnessed contamination and encourage the correct use of the recycling and waste facilities.
- 6.6** Officers in the Recycling Team are keen to assist RSLs, in particular in ensuring sufficient recycling capacity and ensuring that the recycling sites are in convenient and suitable locations. The team are also willing to provide high level training sessions for staff to gain knowledge of the services, which can then be cascaded across the organisation.
- 6.7** One way in which the above could be embedded from both the council perspective and the RSLs is through a service level agreement, which seeks buy in from and commits both partners to work towards ensuring that people have the knowledge of what to recycle, it is easy for them to recycle, and that they have the motivation to do so.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1** This report has highlighted the initiatives that have been or are continuing to be undertaken to improve recycling for those using communal bin facilities, both with Hackney Homes, and jointly with RSLs. There are however, a number of opportunities which RSLs could support and deliver to further improve the ability of people to engage in recycling. If RSLs who are already engaging with us continue to do so, and those that have yet to do so, undertook the actions as set out in section 6 they would be playing a key role in contributing to reaching Hackney's stretching recycling target and would be helping in our commitments to combat climate change.