

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Recommendations Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Food Waste in Flats and HMO's review	Environment and Communities	3 August 2021

“Protecting and enhancing our environment is one of six strategic themes listed in the Council Plan (2020-2023) with the key objectives detailed in our climate change strategy. One of these themes is to divert waste from landfill which was realised by introducing a household food waste collection. The implementation of which, has been successful with residents being really engaged and recycling considerably more food waste than expected.

This review aims to assess whether the council's desire to have food waste collection from every property was feasible and particular consideration was paid to what impact these additional collections would have on Bracknell Forest's recycling rate and the financial viability of an extended scheme.”



**Councillor John Porter, Chair:
Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Recommendations

1 – That the Executive implements a progressive roll out of food waste collection for up to 20% of properties (up to 1800) with officers developing the criteria for suitable flats. This should also take into account good practice which has been identified within the report and the panel to be consulted on the draft criteria. The implementation of the scheme to begin in Spring 2022.

2 – Subject to recommendation 1 being agreed, that in order to make the roll out effective that the Executive commits to undertaking the following proposed actions:

- individual kerbside food waste caddies be distributed to residents in appropriate flats with blocks that have demonstrated a willingness to recycle and fit within the strict criteria to begin in Spring 2022
- ongoing communication and engagement with residents in flats is undertaken and where possible, give presentations to interested parties.
- bins are provided with apertures to minimise contamination where no individual kerbside caddies are issued.
- all new HMO licences and renewals will have inserted into them the mandatory condition regarding waste storage and disposal. Any breach could result in enforcement action by Environmental Health.

3 – That the Executive produces a report reviewing the roll out after 1 year along with a report on the effectiveness and cost by Spring 2023.

AVERAGE FOOD WASTE

Each household / per week*



1.5 kg

NATIONAL AVERAGE



2.8 kg

**BRACKNELL FOREST
AVERAGE**



0.3-0.5 kg

**NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR
FLATS**

*Data provided by WRAP



18% OF HOUSEHOLDS ARE FLATS IN BRACKNELL FOREST

There are currently 9300 households who live in flats including those in sheltered housing. This number is rising, particularly in the town centre



Residents in flats often have small kitchens and space to keep a food caddy is limited



Councillors completed site visits to assess the waste and recycling facilities

Key findings

- The panel's findings were that food waste should only be implemented in flats and HMO's which meet the agreed criteria.
- Any properties that did not meet the criteria, were likely to have low participation and low yields which would impact the environmental benefits,
- A partial scheme targeting properties with adequate facilities was considered most effective.

“I was surprised to learn the national average of food waste collection in flats was so low and that in many places, bin stores were not adequate”

Cllr John Porter

Introduction

Following the successful implementation of food waste collections in households in March 2021, the panel has been investigating how food waste collection could be implemented in flats and houses of multiple occupation (HMO's).

The panel spoke to key stakeholders and experts including Julia Bragg, Local Authority Technical Consultant from Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), Gemma Scott, Senior Advisor from RE London and Cllr Dorothy Hayes MBE, Executive Member for the Environment. Damian James, Assistant Director for Contract Services and Claire Pike, Head of Environmental Services also contributed to the review. Kim Shaw, Regional Manager for Suez, a waste contractor, also spoke to Councillors and written evidence was provided by Reading Borough Council and a local managing agent.

What approach have other councils taken in implementing food waste in flats? What were the challenges and lessons learnt?

The panel spoke to a technical consultant from WRAP who explained about the issues faced by residents who lived in flats. The problems identified included inadequate bin storage which was poorly lit, overflowing or unhygienic, and bins being located a long way from the resident's home. The food waste collected from these locations was often contaminated and therefore all the waste would be unsuitable for recycling. It was recommended that apertures were used on bins to help prevent this issue. Participation rates for food waste recycling was also poor amongst residents living in flats and the accumulation of these challenges contributed to lower food waste yields. Where food waste collection had been implemented in all flats, the national average yield per property per week was approximately 0.3-0.5kg. A holistic approach which included assessing whether residents were already successfully dry recycling was recommended before introducing a more complex scheme.

These challenges were also highlighted by the senior advisor from RE London. RE London had completed extensive behavioural insight research which looked at residents in flatted properties. This included installing cameras in resident's homes to observe their lives and conducting interviews. The research found that residents needed to be particularly motivated to recycle food waste through positive experiences. The ease of disposing of waste was critical and any dirtiness or overflow was demotivating. Again, low participation rates of around only a third of residents, affected overall food waste yields.

What type of flats would be suitable for a food waste scheme?

After hearing about the experiences of local authorities in London and across the country, councillors were keen to understand the situation for flats in Bracknell Forest and conducted site visits to three typical blocks of flats. Whilst on the site visit, councillors saw a waste disposal area where space was limited. This was considered one of the main barriers identified when speaking to a local managing agent. Whilst at the site, the head of environmental services, advised that dry recycling at that location was often contaminated. On occasion, the rubbish was so contaminated that the waste crews had been unable to make a collection and the managing agents had paid an additional fee to have it collected separately once they had sorted the waste. It was acknowledged that introducing food waste in that location, and those similar, would be challenging and councillors questioned whether there was any way of enforcing better recycling at these sites. It was explained that this was challenging as they were communal bins, so it was difficult to apportion accountability.

Particular concerns about health and safety were raised and officers advised that if the waste and recycling became a health hazard, then Environmental Health would investigate and had powers of enforcement.

Councillors visited two other sites including sheltered accommodation where dry recycling was already at a high standard. The waste recycling facility at this location was well lit and had sufficient space and clear recycling signage. Residents and managing agents at the location were also engaged and had an interest in ensuring their waste was correctly disposed of. This was considered an ideal location to have a food waste collection.

Councillors also visited a small flat block where residents had individual general waste and recycling bins identical to houses in the borough. It was observed that at these locations there was sufficient room to add food caddies to kerbside collections. The head of environmental services advised that residents in these flats had requested their own caddies and the panel agreed that this would be an ideal starting point for implementing food waste in Bracknell Forest.

The regional manager from Suez also shared this view and added that there could be an option to add some of these types of properties to existing collection rounds if capacity allowed.

“The visit to sheltered accommodation showed a genuine commitment to correct recycling where the bin area was clean with good lighting and a drainage area for bin washing by the managing agent”

Cllr Michael Brossard

What scheme would be recommended, after considerations have been made for the cost and the environmental implications?

Throughout the review the panel considered what options would be most successful in Bracknell Forest.

Initially councillors questioned whether a door to door collection would be feasible. However, as the senior advisor from RE London explained, this would be prohibitively expensive and was only seen in London in flats with a private concierge service.

The panel spoke to the Assistant Director for Contract Services regarding the effect on recycling rates for the borough should food waste be implemented for all properties and he confirmed that it would only result in a 0.5% increase on the overall recycling rates. This was because it would include flats where it was expected that participation would be low or non-existent due to inadequate facilities, lack of engagement or a high turnover of residents. By contrast, rolling out to 20% who met the criteria needed for success would result in a 0.2% increase.

Practical considerations were also made by the panel regarding the additional resources required to collect food waste. Implementing a full roll out would require significant additional resources including a new food waste truck, equipment and additional staff.

The purchase of an additional food waste truck in Spring 2022, to support high tonnages on the household scheme would increase capacity and allow collections from 20% of the most suitable flats. This would make the additional costs significantly lower.

Although at the start of the review, there was an appetite for a full roll out to all flats, every expert spoken to, talked about the challenges in implementing food waste in flats and the correlation between poor facilities and either contaminated food waste or poor participation.

Where facilities were not adequate, the council did not have the responsibility to make the necessary changes and in some locations, it would be challenging even if the managing agent or property owner were willing. Without meeting the minimum criteria, there would be little to no benefit to the environment.

Without a positive environmental impact, implementing a full roll out would not contribute to the Council’s strategic theme of ‘protecting and enhancing the environment’ and therefore the substantial cost could not be justified.

For those flats who did meet the suitability criteria, councillors discussed various bulk bin options with RE London, WRAP and Suez and the conclusive evidence was that a 140l bin with an aperture would be the most practical option. Food waste is particularly dense and larger bins would be too heavy to be picked up by the waste trucks. Apertures were also considered important to avoid contamination and fly tipping.

For blocks of flats, the review concluded that officers would need to undertake individual assessments to determine whether a food waste scheme would be viable. The senior advisor for RE London, advised this was something which was already happening in London Boroughs and shared with the panel the criteria that they were using. The panel identified some specific examples of good practice which officers should use to inform the flat selection criteria.

The regional manager for Suez emphasised the importance of good communication with residents prior to launch including social media engagement starting several months before implementation. Generally, the more engagement with residents the better the participation rates, although this wouldn’t overcome major waste facilities problems.

Following consideration of what could be done for the current flats in the area, the panel considered if there were any actions which could be taken to ‘future-proof’ new developments and ensure the residents would have adequate facilities. Although there were currently no houses of multiple occupation with bulk bins in the borough, the panel were concerned about the consequences of not providing adequate recycling facilities. They recommended that all new HMO licences require landlords to provide adequate recycling facilities, supported by relevant information for tenants. The Council’s Local Plan also made provision for adequate waste and recycling provision in new developments

Good Practice

The panel found that recycling food waste in flats was most successful when the following conditions were met. These should be considered when identifying suitable flats:

- Good lighting
- Adequate space,
- Sufficient signage
- Residents already had a good dry recycling record
- Clean recycling space and bins including regular bin cleaning
- No problems with vermin
- Convenient location
- Managing agents had good working relationships with the council.

In addition, the panel noted the good practice of officers continuing to consult with Environmental Services where planning permission is required for new properties to ensure there is enough space for waste and recycling.



I would like to thank the members of the panel, and the organisations that have spoken to us for their frank, open and honest opinions as well their expertise. They have been invaluable in creating our recommendations. I also extend my thanks to Emma Young who supported the review.

Councillor John Porter, Chair: Environment and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Contributors to this review

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“So far, residents’ response to food waste collection has been superb. Flats have not yet been included and many flat dwellers are also wanting to join the scheme and help reduce land fill and methane release. Experience has shown that where there is a will, then there is a way. When residents want this to succeed it does.”

Cllr Mrs Mary Temperton