

# Promoting recycling to residents of high and low rise flats

## Introduction

**During the upgrading of recycling facilities in the London Borough of Bexley it became clear that purpose-built flats had fewer committed recyclers and a lower rate of recycling waste than low-rise accommodation. From July 2006 to March 2008 Bexley London Borough Council ran a communications campaign to overcome problems associated with recycling in blocks of flats by communicating the resources available to residents of flats in the borough.**

### Key Facts

- Increase in dry recycling rate of 3.5%.
- Committed recycler rate in the target area increased from 27% to 63%.
- The campaign lasted from July 2006 to March 2008.
- The campaign cost £48,200.
- Cost per household was £3.00

### About Bexley

- London Borough of Bexley is an outer London unitary council covering an area of 6,056 hectares.
- Bexley has 219,080 residents living in 93,000 households.
- There are 13,000 flats in Bexley.
- 9% of the population of Bexley are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups (data from 2001 Census).

## Background to campaign

Bexley LBC offers a recycling service for residual, dry recycling, kitchen and garden waste to residents in low-rise properties. For flats, the council provides 1,100-litre Eurobins or sets of 240-litre wheeled bins in communal bin areas colour-coded according to the material collected. Three colour-coded reusable bags are provided to residents of flats to store their recyclable waste.

Bexley faced a number of problems when it came to persuading the residents of flats to use recycling facilities. These included:

- residents had to carry recyclable waste materials to the bins in communal areas rather than using refuse chutes;
- the recycling campaign required the council to co-ordinate work with a number of housing associations; and
- the response to recycling varied between socio-demographic groups. Success depended on a campaign that could appeal to all and engage hard-to-reach groups.

## Communication objectives

The main objectives of the campaign were to:

- increase the use of recycling services for flats through clear communications and greater resident participation; and
- decrease contamination in recycled material collected from flats through explanation of the correct participation methods.



### Approach

The council identified four key issues that would need to be addressed.

- **Communication.** New methods of communication were needed to reach residents. Previous communications had been limited to an information leaflet delivered with the resident's reusable bags.
- **Transient populations.** Residents of flats tend to move more often than those in low-rise properties. They need to be informed about the scheme and equipped with reusable bags on moving into their property.
- **Ethnicity.** Barriers that might prevent participation by the BME communities must be understood and overcome.
- **Convenience.** It is essential to make recycling easy and convenient to use in areas where there are refuse chutes.

### Data gathering

To provide information to tackle the communications issues, data were gathered about residents' attitudes, behaviour, ideas and barriers (perceived or real) that might affect their full participation in the council's recycling services. Based on good practice and experience of previous campaigns it was decided to carry out two types of data gathering before the communications campaign began. Committed recycler surveys (CRS) were undertaken to find out how many residents were using the recycling service and communal bin usage was assessed. The latter involved a visual evaluation of the fullness of the bins to discover how much material was being collected.

### Focus groups

Residents reflecting the socio-demographic profile of the target areas were invited to focus groups to discuss the barriers to recycling and waste management issues highlighted by the surveys. At this stage a key finding emerged indicating a lack of communication between the council and residents who live in flats. Most of the council's communications through its quarterly magazines, website and the annual recycling calendar and recycling guide – along with adverts in the local free newspapers – were perceived to be insufficient. The focus groups highlighted the fact that:

- local free newspapers were not distributed to flats;
- the recycling calendars and guides were not relevant to flats;
- most residents in the targeted area did not have access to the internet in their homes; and
- council magazines did not always have messages or articles about recycling.

This was a major communications flaw for a socio-demographic group already identified as being low performing.

## Communications

Bexley addressed the communications problems by:

- translating campaign material for BME communities;
- incorporating a strong graphic element into all communications;
- focussing the design and messages on the target residents;
- producing a recycling document specifically for residents of flats;
- developing map signage for recycling facilities on estates of high-rise flats; and
- introducing door-to-door canvassing for flats.

The first barrier to successfully communicating with its target audiences was language. The Council translated materials into the two predominant BME languages in the borough – Punjabi and Polish. Previous experience had shown that translations with a heavy pictorial layout were more effective than just text translations and so all communication work, translated or not, followed this guidance.

The results of the surveys and focus groups fed into the design and message of the communications adopted in the next stage of the campaign. A recycling guide aimed specifically at the residents of flats was produced detailing why residents should recycle, what materials to recycle and how to use the Reuse and Recycling Centres and bulky waste services.

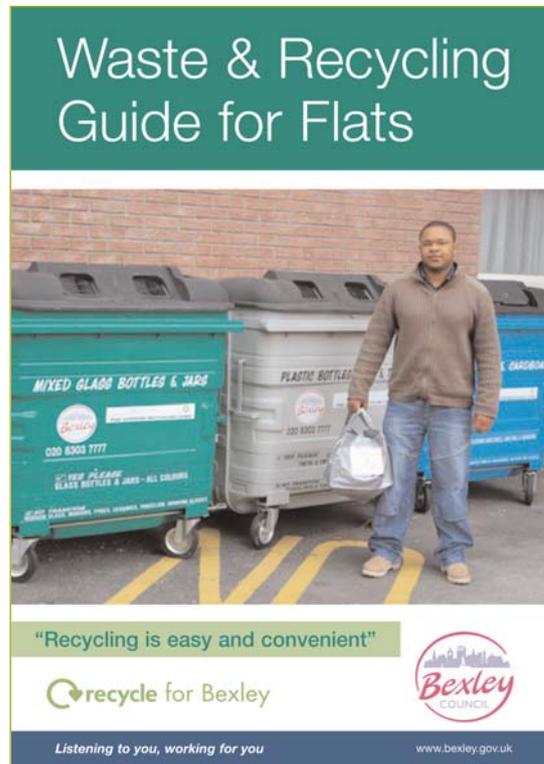
Door-to-door canvassing had been used to good effect by Bexley LBC during previous campaigns and it was decided that this form of direct communications would be highly effective for the target audience. During the course of the campaign the recycling promoters made over 23,200 visits, knocking on 16,640 doors and speaking to 5,380 residents.

Every effort was made to ensure that the messages from the CRS and focus groups were addressed. A conversation guide was adopted to address key issues as experience had shown this to be more effective than a survey for eliciting information. Headline points from the conversations were noted down away from the doorstep as the recycling promoter moved to the next flat.

## Post-campaign monitoring

Focus groups, surveys and bin usage assessments were carried out again following the door-to-door campaign. This second round of focus groups aimed to gauge the effectiveness of the door-stepping in addressing issues raised in the original meetings.

Although the bin usage assessment is not a standard survey method, it helped to verify the tonnage data obtained from the weighbridge tickets of the collection rounds in high-rise areas. An increase in bin fullness figures matched by an increase in tonnage collected indicated an increase in participation and capture rates for the targeted areas.



### Results/Conclusion

The key findings from Bexley's monitoring activities were as follows.

- The dry recycling rate in the target area increased by 3.5% due to the campaign. There was an increase in recyclate collection of 10kg per household per year and a large residual waste decrease of 108kg per household per year. The reduction in overall waste arisings was attributed to an increase in the overall environmental awareness of residents in the target area, reflected in purchasing habits and the handling of resources.
- Levels of contamination of communal recycling bins in targeted areas fell.
- The average fill level of the paper and cardboard bins on estates of high-rise flats was 75% – a significant increase compared with the baseline figure of 62%.
- The committed recycler rate of 63% in the target area post-campaign closely matched the national average for the whole country and was a significant increase from the pre-campaign rate of 27%.

### Key Learning Points

- Using a series of well co-ordinated activities it was possible to change residents' behaviour and improve participation in recycling services.
- The key to full engagement in recycling services is to first understand the barriers (perceived or real).
- The initial door-stepping campaign and use of appropriate literature was then used to address the issues raised in order to overcome the barriers.
- Evaluation of the campaign was crucial to determine the impact of this tailored campaign.

While steps have been taken to ensure its accuracy, WRAP cannot accept responsibility or be held liable to any person for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading.

This material is copyrighted. It may be reproduced free of charge subject to the material being accurate and not used in a misleading context. The source of the material must be identified and the copyright status acknowledged. This material must not be used to endorse or used to suggest WRAP's endorsement of a commercial product or service. For more details, please refer to our Terms & Conditions on our website – [www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)

---

#### Waste & Resources Action Programme

The Old Academy  
21 Horse Fair  
Banbury, Oxon  
OX16 0AH

Tel: 01295 819 900  
Fax: 01295 819 911  
E-mail: [info@wrap.org.uk](mailto:info@wrap.org.uk)

Helpline freephone  
0808 100 2040

[www.wrap.org.uk](http://www.wrap.org.uk)