

Local Authority communications case study: Lewisham

Communications campaign to support a bin swap trial in the London Borough of Lewisham

Introduction

To build on the success of its 'Love Lewisham Recycle Now' campaign, Lewisham London Borough Council undertook a trial to encourage residents to think about waste differently. Householders on a trial round of 1,500 properties were given green 240-litre recycling bins instead of 55-litre boxes, and the size of the black residual waste bin was reduced to 180 litres.

Key Facts

- Recycling tonnages increased by 69% and refuse tonnages fell 9% during the trial.
- No residents chose to revert to the old system after the trial.
- The campaign lasted from June 2007 to October 2007.
- Communications campaign budget was £13,250.
- Cost per household was £8.83.

About Lewisham

- The London Borough of Lewisham occupies 14 square miles in the south-east of the capital.
- Lewisham's population in 2007 was around 255,000. There were 114,176 households made up of 76,038 kerbside properties and 38,138 in low- and high-rise flats on estates.
- Lewisham is the 57th most deprived of England's 354 districts.
- In the 2001 Census, 34.1% of residents were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME).

Background to campaign

Lewisham provides a weekly refuse service in 240-litre wheeled bins, 180-litre wheeled bins, or communal bins for high rise flats. For houses, it offers a commingled dry recycling kerbside collection of paper, card, cans, plastic bottles and glass in 55-litre boxes collected on the same day as refuse; households can also request a 240-litre recycling bin. For households in flats and communal blocks, the council provides 1,280-litre bins at 'near entry' bring sites and 42 bring sites located on-street for the same five dry recyclable materials.

The localised nature of the trial meant that the communications campaign had to be highly targeted to inform affected residents of the service change and to encourage their participation.

Communication objectives

The overall aim of the campaign was to maximise performance by ensuring all households on the trial round were aware of the bin swap. The specific objectives of the campaign were to:

- increase participation in the trial area to at least 70% by October 2007;
- increase capture of all recyclable materials in the trial area by October 2007; and
- increase tonnage of recyclable materials collected by 50% in the trial area by October 2007.

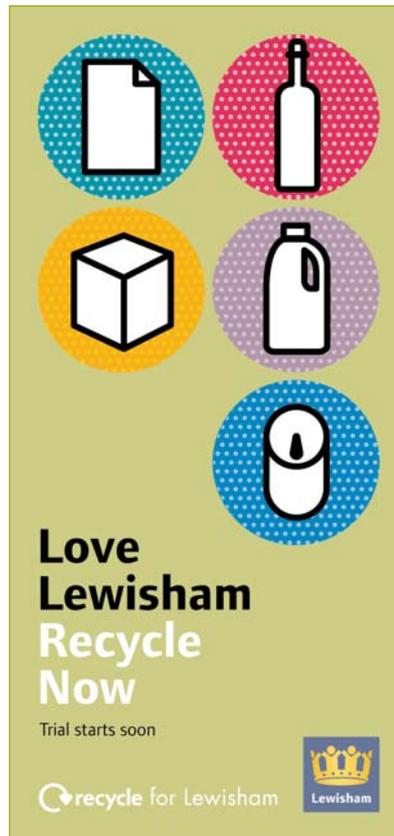
Approach

The round chosen for the trial covered an area where:

- the extra bin could be accommodated easily in the larger gardens and driveways; and
- the recycling crew and vehicle had the capacity to pick up from every household (at the time, recycling rounds were twice the size of the refuse rounds as not everyone recycled) and to collect greater amounts of recyclable materials.

It was decided that a mixture of phased direct leaflet distribution, door-to-door canvassing and reactive engagement with non-participants would allow the greatest exchange of information and have the greatest chance of success. The communications campaign therefore had the following elements.

- **Introductory leaflet for trial rollout.** This first leaflet gave residents full details of the forthcoming trial including the bin changes and what they needed to do with the new bins. These and other leaflets were distributed by the Waste Awareness Assistants (see below) and Lewisham Council staff.
- **Reminder leaflet for trial rollout.** This pre-launch leaflet served as a reminder to residents of the information given in the first leaflet. It was assumed that some residents might have missed the first leaflet or thrown it away by mistake. The design of the leaflet remained essentially the same but the text was changed to let people know that the trial was getting nearer.
- **Rollout postcard.** The postcard retained the same creative features and was used to let residents know the date their trial collections would be starting. The Waste Awareness Assistants inserted this date in a space left blank on the front of the postcard. It was decided not to print the start date on the postcard in case the trial was delayed and to provide more flexibility.
- **Side waste postcards.** These were posted by the recycling crew through the letterboxes of those residents who left large amounts of waste by the side of their refuse bins on collection days. The cards were designed to educate the residents about not overloading their refuse bins and to urge them to use their green bins for recyclable items.
- **Design for crew clothing.** Members of the dedicated crew emptying the recycling bins on the trial round were given new uniforms with branding matching the literature sent to residents. The crew wore polo shirts, sweatshirts and high visibility coats bearing the symbols of the five recyclable materials.



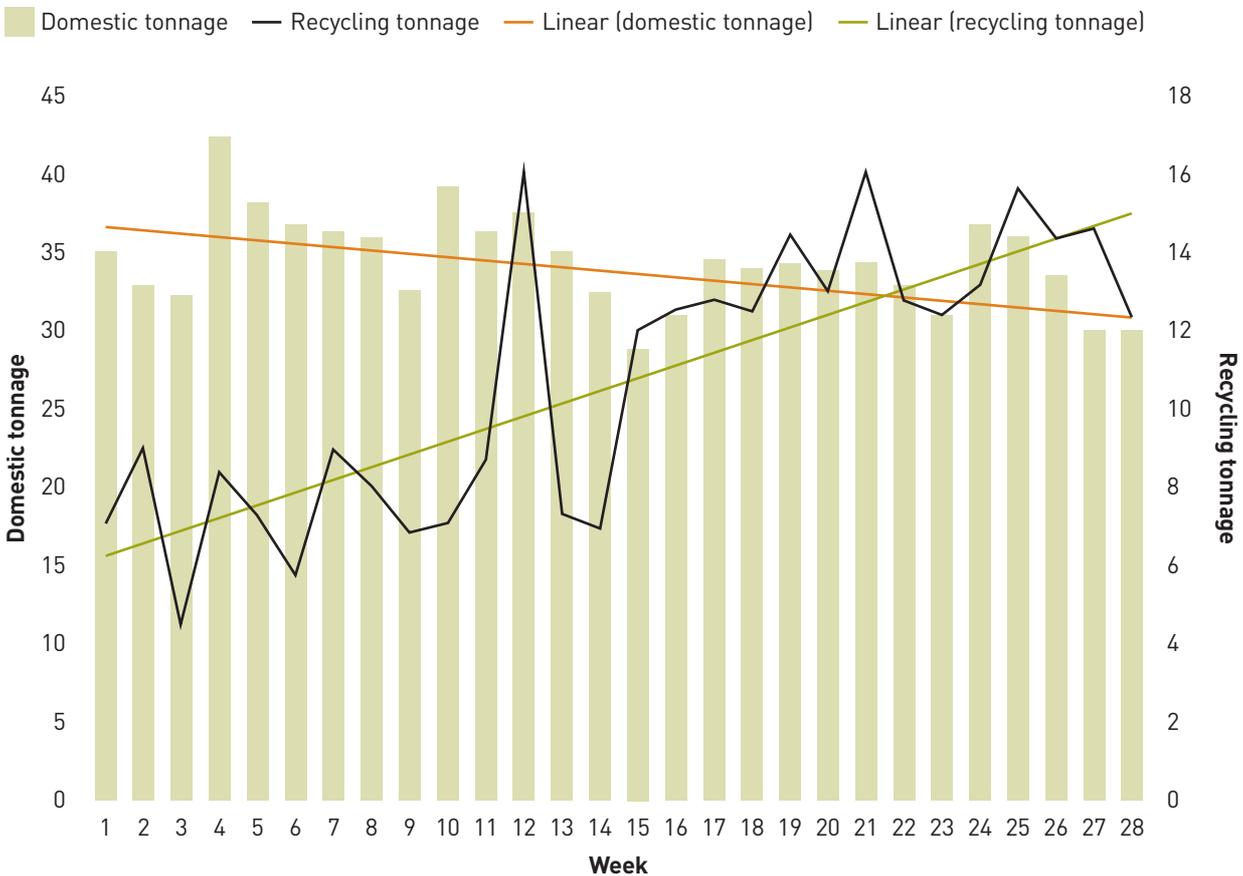
- **Waste Awareness Assistants.** To emphasise the messages outlined in print media, residents in the trial area were visited regularly by Waste Awareness Assistants (Lewisham's door-to-door canvassing team) who explained the scheme's aims and objectives, and instructed the householders on how to use the service. By varying visiting times, the canvassers were able to speak to over 1,400 households during the six phases of canvassing. This equated to a 97% contact rate. Residents who were noted by the crews as not participating in the scheme were visited more frequently and reminder cards were left when contact was not made.
- **Feedback leaflet for trial area.** Following the trial, a feedback leaflet was produced and distributed to the trial households. The leaflet informed residents of the success of the trial, thanked them for their participation and asked people to contact the council should they wish to switch back to a 240-litre residual waste bin.



Results/Conclusion

Monitoring before and during the trial showed that the weight of recyclable materials collected increased 69% during the trial and the weight of refuse collected fell by 9% (Figure 1). Before the trial, the participation rate in the trial area was 61%. This had risen to 88% by the end of the trial and the communications campaign.

During the trial period, there was very little negative feedback about the service (only five people at the beginning of the trial complained the bin would not be big enough for their needs). This indicated that residents within the trial area were well informed of the service and generally in favour of it. Concerns by some residents about the lack of capacity in the smaller refuse bins were dealt with early on through the communications campaign and there were no further complaints as the scheme progressed. Interestingly, not one resident chose to revert to the old system when offered the chance at the end of the trial. Following on from the trial's success, the Mayor of Lewisham asked for the rollout of the scheme borough-wide to be investigated.



* Trial started in week 15 when 12.17 tonnes were recycled.

Figure 1: Monitoring data for 14 weeks before and 14 weeks after the start of the trial in mid-June 2007*

Catford couple welcome the bigger recycling bin

Carl and Jean Curtis live in one of the streets in Catford that took part in the recycling trial. "We're environmentally conscious and have always recycled as much as we can," says Carl, who cycles everywhere and doesn't own a car. "Before the trial, though, we only had a green box and couldn't fit much in it." Carl and Jean also were not completely clear about what could be recycled. "When we got the green wheelie bin, we also received a leaflet explaining what we could and couldn't recycle, which we've stuck up in the kitchen," says Carl. "We didn't realise we could recycle plastic bottles, for example." Jean likes the fact they can put all their recycling into one bin. "It makes it easier to be green," she says. "Some councils have a different bin for each material, which takes more effort." "Our green bin fills up every week and usually has more in it than our black bin," says Carl. "Before I throw anything away now, I always think 'can I recycle it?' We're also composting more."

Key Learning Points

- There was consistent branding across all communications materials and the crew uniform.
- Door-to-door canvassing started around the same time as the bins were being delivered.
- There was a good relationship and clear lines of communication with the operations team.
- Advanced planning gave the operations team time to buy the bins, deliver them to households in the trial area and measure up the recycling crew for their new uniforms.

'This pilot scheme aims to encourage residents to think about their waste before they throw it away. We hope the difference in size between the bins will act as a constant reminder that we need to think about recycling first and throwing away second.'

**Councillor Susan Wise,
Cabinet Member for Customer Services**

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