

Bulky Waste Re-use Partners in Belfast

An initiative by Belfast City Council to increase re-use at its HWRCs has seen a new partnership with East Belfast Mission successfully divert furniture away from landfill, bringing environmental and social benefits.

Introduction

Belfast City Council is a unitary authority in Northern Ireland. The council delivers an in-house bulky waste collection service, which is free, to approximately 125,000 households.

It operates four Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and all have re-use areas where householders can deposit re-usable household items. The re-use areas were set up using funding from the Department of the Environment's (DoE) Rethink Waste Fund.

In April 2011 the council tendered for a third sector contractor to collect separated re-usable items at all four of its HWRCs, with the aim of increasing the amount of material re-used. The contract was won by the social enterprise East Belfast Mission (EBM) and started in May 2011.

Key facts

- EBM provides the collection service on a no-cost basis to the council.
- Each HWRC has a re-use 're:store' collection area established using Rethink Waste funding.
- In the first six months of operation (June – November 2011) over 40 tonnes was collected for potential re-use, saving approximately £2,850 on disposal costs.
- The procurement exercise was open exclusively to the third sector.
- EBM's current estimated project costs are £30,000 with plans to break even in year two of operation from the sale of re-used items.
- Training was provided to council HWRC staff to help them understand which goods may or may not be suitable for re-use.
- EBM also collects furniture from households; this makes up 90% of its activity, with the remaining 10% from the four HWRCs.
- The contract created two jobs with two further roles safeguarded. It also supported work for two volunteers and seventeen placements.
- EBM provides placement and volunteering opportunities in the community. It teaches new skills to the long-term unemployed, helps individuals regain lost confidence and helps others socialise and meet new friends.

The approach

Background – Belfast City Council

The council's in-house bulky waste collection service has always been provided to households free of charge. It collects bulky items from outside a householder's property, and most items are currently disposed of via landfill.

WEEE items are collected separately by the council's in-house service and taken to a waste transfer station for recycling. WEEE is also collected in separate containers at HWRCs for recycling and refurbishment under a contract with Bryson Electrical Recycling, a social enterprise and part of the Bryson Charitable Group.

In 2010 the council applied to Northern Ireland's DoE's Rethink Waste Fund to increase re-use and recycling of bulky items at its HWRCs. It was awarded capital funding of £50,000 for additional facilities at the Alexandra Park, Blackstaff Way, Ormeau and Palmerston Road HWRCs. The funding, together with support from the council, was used to provide:

- enclosed 're:store' branded containers to collect re-usable bulky items;
- electronic trolleys to help transport items to the containers; and
- support to operational staff for training, such as manual handling training.

In conjunction with providing the new facilities, the council tendered for a contractor to collect re-usable items brought to the sites. Councillors decided to tender exclusively to third sector providers, the qualifying factor being the organisation must be registered as a charity, social enterprise or community interest company. Tender documents were sent to five organisations. The documents included evaluation criteria and detailed requirements, which covered: collection method and frequency; re-use proposals; proposed partners/sub-contractors; existing and proposed outlets; copies of relevant certificates and licences; details of staffing; confirmation of compliance with environmental legislation; the ability to work in partnership; and confirmation of compliance with health and safety legislation. Tenderers were also required to demonstrate value for money and the promotion of waste reduction and re-use.

A single submission was received, from EBM, and this was on a no cost basis. However, it was still evaluated against the evaluation criteria and requirements. Belfast City Council accepted EBM's proposal for handling re-usable items at HWRCs, and the contract was awarded to EBM in April 2011. Collections started in May 2011.

Background - East Belfast Mission

EBM became a registered charity in 1985 and has a long track record of social engagement in inner East Belfast. It has grown considerably since running a church soup kitchen in the 1800s, but its mission is still the same – to transform and renew East Belfast. The social economy projects at EBM include eight charity shops (re:store), a vintage clothing shop with bridal department, a furniture restoration project (re:urb), and a repair and restoration bicycle workshop (re:cycle). The café (re:fresh) is open to the public and also provides a meals on wheels service five days per week to the ill or housebound in the local community.

The charity works in an area of social and economic deprivation with high levels of unemployment, ill health and illiteracy, and its interventions are having a positive impact. EBM has developed a number of social programmes to respond to the changing needs of the local area including:

- The Stepping Stone Project, which provides information, advice and guidance on employment opportunities, training and education;
- Hosford House, a homeless hostel providing temporary accommodation for single men and women and offering support to tackle homelessness;
- family, youth and community projects, counselling and pastoral work;
- placement and volunteering opportunities providing new skills to the long-term unemployed, helping individuals regain lost confidence and others to simply socialise and meet new friends; and
- providing good quality, affordable second-hand furniture to individuals, who could otherwise not afford it.

The approach

The charity relies on furniture donations from the local community. It also has a number of recycling banks for clothes, bedding, curtains and shoes across Greater Belfast in the grounds of Methodist churches.

Approximately 90% of its furniture re-use activity is from direct furniture collections, with 10% coming from the four Belfast HWRCs. Direct furniture collections are made using a fleet of four 3.5 tonne vans and drivers covering a wide area, including the council areas of Belfast, Larne, North Down and Antrim. Collections are booked in advance and householders are allocated a morning or afternoon collection slot.

The re:store charity shops have a partnership agreement with Bryson Electrical, selling reconditioned white goods such as cookers, fridges and tumble dryers, with EBM retaining a commission on sales. EBM has been working in partnership with Bryson Electrical for several years and seven of the eight re:store shops sell white goods. Wherever possible, EBM will collect householder white goods, even if faulty, and pass them onto Bryson Electrical for recycling.

Belfast City Council and EBM working together

All materials taken from the HWRC re:store containers by EBM become its property to restore, refurbish and sell on at its retail outlets. There is one dedicated van and driver covering the four HWRCs, with a guarantee that the containers will be emptied at least once a week. EBM are also required to have a 24-hour response time for a specific request to collect, and collections are normally made on the day of the request.

Items collected include cabinets, pictures, tables, chairs, bookcases, sofas, wardrobes and bicycles. About 60% of items collected from the HWRCs require refurbishment, and the remainder can be sold immediately through one of the re:store shops.

Site users are directed to the re-use containers by site staff according to the quality and type of items. Leaflets are available on site promoting the scheme and are also available in EBM's retail outlets. EBM is now seeing a month on month increase in tonnage collected. Items from the sites are delivered to the nearest EBM retail outlet or to the re:fusc project. EBM has a shop located close to each HWRC.

The re:fusc project has grown since it began in November 2010 and operates from a 70,000 square foot workshop. Furniture items are stripped, sanded, re-stained or repainted by hand and then quality checked before being sent to the shops. Three-piece suites of poor quality or which do not meet fire retardant regulations are stripped, re-foamed and recovered for resale.

EBM has a three-year contract with the council and is predicting to break even after year two, with potential for profit in year three as item numbers increase with raised awareness of the scheme. The cost of collection and delivery is estimated at £30,000 per annum, which covers the van driver and upkeep of vehicle, fuel and training. EBM is currently financing the scheme during the first year of operation. Any profits from EBM's social economy activities are re-invested into the social programmes of the charity, which in the long term will enable EBM to achieve financial sustainability.



The approach

Home

Introduction

Critical success factors
and key learning points

Achievements and contact information

Case Study
page 3

Critical success factors and key learning points

From Belfast City Council's perspective

- The involvement of operational staff. Fundamental to making the change at the HWRCs was the knowledge and commitment of site staff. Site staff were involved in planning from the outset. Both site and call centre staff were taken to the EBM workshop and retail premises to meet EBM staff and see the whole process. This helped council staff see the potential for the re-use and refurbishment of items and helped them identify any suitable materials brought to the HWRCs.
- Being flexible. Council staff were originally keen to establish re:store retail shops at the HWRCs. However to make operations less complicated and to avoid the need for money to be taken and kept on site, it was decided that working with organisations that collect and sell off-site was key to their success.
- Targeted awareness raising. To minimise displacement of items from existing re-use routes, the scheme was only advertised on-site at the re:store areas, in the EBM shops and on recycling banks. Because of this approach, the items diverted from the HWRCs complement existing re-use streams.

From East Belfast Mission's perspective

- Opportunities for the third sector. In the past EBM felt that there was not a level playing field with regard to opportunities for the third sector to tender for contracts involving waste management. In this instance they thought it was fair for the HWRC contract to be offered only to a social enterprise or equivalent registered charitable organisation.
- Achieving critical mass. EBM was awarded the contract due to its size and capacity, the fact that it could cope with a wide range of materials and because they had the facilities to refurbish and re-use a wide range of items. Its advice to other social enterprises is to build capacity so that they have the infrastructure and capability to deal with resource issues, the ability to develop robust monitoring and recording systems, and have the capacity and skills to re-use and refurbish a wide variety of items. Key for EBM is its professional and flexible approach to cope with unexpected incidents, the training of staff from the outset and having procedures in place to deal with the required elements of the contract.
- Comprehensive staff training. EBM emphasises the importance of staff training, no matter what their role is. EBM ensures all staff have manual handling and health and safety training and are issued with personal protective equipment as required. The operational manager has also had training in van driving in case he is ever required to act as last resort cover for absences.
- Accurate record keeping. This is essential; excellent administrative support is key to delivery. Staff are required to gather data on site so that every item collected is described, and logged on spreadsheets to show which site it was collected from. Data controls are in place and logs are emailed to the council every month for scrutiny and recording of tonnage re-used.

Achievements

- This low cost scheme is capturing additional materials for re-use and making a contribution to the council's re-use tonnages. The contract is managed by the council's contract management team.
- The contract with the council created two jobs in EBM: the refurbishment manager and the upholsterer at re:furb. Two jobs were safeguarded at retail outlets and the contract supports work for two volunteers and seventeen placements. EBM is currently involved in both the 'Steps to Work' programme involving 8-week placements, and the 'Step Ahead' programme for those unemployed longer than 30 months, providing opportunities to learn skills in carpentry and upholstery, as well as general woodworking.

Contacts

Belfast City Council

Marcus Campbell, project officer waste management service

T 028 9032 0202
E campbellm@belfastcity.gov.uk

East Belfast Mission

Peter Tomlinson, social economy manager

T 028 9073 8304
E peter.tomlinson@ebm.org.uk

While we have tried to make sure this guide is accurate, we cannot accept responsibility or be held legally responsible for any loss or damage arising out of or in connection with this information being inaccurate, incomplete or misleading. This material is copyrighted. You can copy it free of charge as long as the material is accurate and not used in a misleading context. You must identify the source of the material and acknowledge our copyright. You must not use material to endorse or suggest we have endorsed a commercial product or service.

For more details please see our terms and conditions on our website at www.wrap.org.uk

**Waste & Resources
Action Programme**

Helpline freephone:
0808 100 2040

www.wrap.org.uk
E-mail: info@wrap.org.uk



Working together for a world without waste