
Low Participation Areas: Case Study 6 – Breckland District Council

Improving participation with incentives in deprived areas



Breckland District Council targeted a deprived estate in Thetford to incentivise residents to participate in the recycling collection service.

Improving participation with incentive schemes in deprived estates

Background

Breckland District Council is one of seven districts within the county of Norfolk. It has population of 127,000 and 55,000 households covering a large rural area of 1,305km². Around 50% of the population lives in the five market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffam, Thetford and Watton and the rest is spread across 107 rural parishes varying in size from 20 to 300 residents.

Breckland District Council provides an alternate weekly refuse and recycling service to all households and a chargeable (opt in) garden waste service. Householders separate their recyclable materials (paper, card, cans and plastic bottles) into black 240 litre wheeled bins for a fortnightly kerbside collection service.

Breckland has a large migrant population of around 15,000 - attracted by employment opportunities within the agricultural, food processing and manufacturing sectors. The issues of engaging with migrant communities are the subject of a separate case study.

This case study is focussed on the experiences of improving participation within the Abbey estate in Thetford - categorised as one of the top five most deprived wards in the UK. The Abbey estate has a population of approximately 5000 (lowest mean average age in the district at 35 years) with 1,148 households and a range of issues associated with high unemployment.

Aim

In 2005, Breckland District Council received £19,000 funding from DEFRA to operate a Household Incentive Pilot Scheme (HIPS) working with the Abbey estate in Thetford. The aim of the HIPS

project was to incentivise residents to recycle and make a link between positive recycling behaviour and specific benefits for their community.

Identifying low participation areas

In 2005, the Abbey estate had the lowest recycling participation rate in the district. Low participation was compounded by high contamination with 15.6% of households issued with red cards, indicating that their bins were contaminated. Contamination at this level resulted in the disposal of every load that was collected for recycling being landfilled.

Understanding the issues

The issues of low participation and high contamination were in part symptomatic of the prevailing social and demographic problems experienced by the residents of the Abbey estate:

- high unemployment (nearly 6%) - contributing to lower aspirations and levels of achievement amongst the community;
- located in one of the top 5 most deprived wards in the UK;
- some racial tension directed at the incoming migrant population;
- introduction of the alternate weekly recycling scheme was not well received by the Abbey estate residents;
- council's red card scheme (to signify contamination) did not always deter repeat offenders;
- some aggression experienced towards crews from a minority of residents following the issue of 'red cards'. This prompted the police to be called in on a few occasions to escort the crews in particular 'hot spots'; and
- refuse crews de-motivated by the standard of recycling and abuse received from local residents.

Defining the target audience

The Abbey estate is located within Thetford, one of the top 5 most deprived wards in the UK with unemployment standing at nearly twice the national average (based on 2001 census data). In addition, 51% of households live in rented accommodation, 40% of people have no qualifications and the population profile is skewed towards higher than average numbers aged under 44 years.

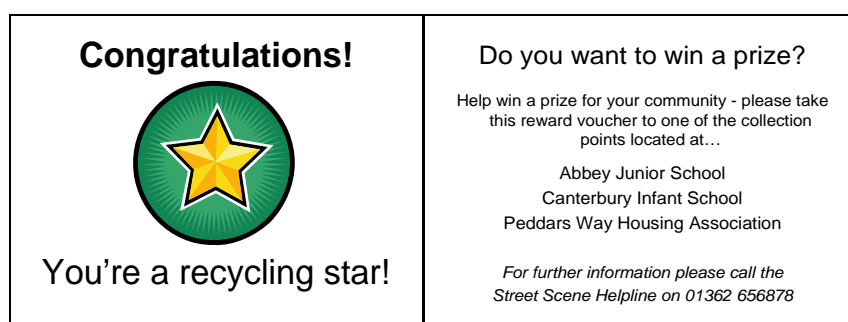
Developing communication solutions

A desk and field research project was carried out to determine the most effective way to motivate and incentivise residents on the estate to recycle and not contaminate. The research also established that the red and yellow card enforcement scheme, successful in other parts of the district, was not suitable for the Abbey estate and another approach would be required. The research highlighted that a large proportion of households on the estate had children at the local Canterbury Infant and Abbey Junior Schools. Both schools were seen as important hubs for the community and so an incentive scheme that would benefit the schools was more likely to work.

Developing a local incentive scheme

Council officers devised the 'Recycling Stars' scheme, which rewarded positive recycling behaviour amongst residents with vouchers exchanged for money for schools. The scheme was promoted prior to the launch with letters and leaflets. For every clean (uncontaminated) bin that was presented for collection the household would receive a 'Recycling Star' voucher posted through the letterbox by one of the council's project staff. The vouchers could then be handed in at one of three collection points, located at each of the two schools and the estate's

Housing Association office. It was observed that children gained a certain pride in presenting their vouchers to their teachers at school.



For contaminated bins householders were issued a card with 'unfortunately you missed a great opportunity to help your local school' which highlighted the materials that should not have been in the box.

The incentive scheme was implemented between October 2005 and March 2006. Activities included:

Sept 05	The design and print of letters to residents, leaflets and reward vouchers
Oct 05	Letters sent to residents to explain the project
	Organisation of collection points and meetings with collection contractor
Nov 05	Start of scheme – star vouchers issued
	Commencement of Star voucher collection – to be completed one week after distribution
Dec 05	Start of recycling surgeries
	Assemblies held at participating schools
Feb 06	Cheques presented to both schools
Mar 06	Final distribution of recycling star vouchers

Project budget

The project was delivered with a £10,000 cost saving on the original planned project budget for which Breckland had received £19,100 from DEFRA. Savings meant the actual project spend was £9,080. This covered all project outputs including: the design and print of leaflets, letters, posters, displays, stickers, magnets, funding of a recycling assistant, setting up the collection points and funding the schools' prizes.

Ensuring engagement with key stakeholders

To ensure the success of the project Breckland Council officers engaged with all stakeholders that had involvement in its delivery including:

- waste and recycling contractor (Serco) and crews;
- police;
- residents association;
- housing association;
- schools – assemblies attended;
- recycling surgeries held in the community centre weekly; and
- local press and media.

Achievements and results

The 'Recycling Stars' campaign achieved its targets. Firstly, participation rates (measured by the numbers of vouchers collected) more than doubled. Secondly, contamination rates fell from 15.6 % to 8.2% between November 2005 and April 2006. This was measured by the fall in numbers of red cards issued to householders. In addition, it was observed that the general quality of loads observed by crews had improved and they also saw a reduction in bagged waste appearing at the waste transfer station.

This contributed to an overall rise in the recycling and composting rate of 32% in 2005-06 to 39% in 2006-07.

The campaign had two other beneficial outcomes:

- both schools receiving £3,500 between them to benefit environmental and social projects; and
- there was a marked change in the perspective of the local press from a negative view point to that of positive support for the campaign and its aims - so much so that the local press was credited with contributing to its overall success.

Press Coverage (Eastern Daily Press)

WASTE: Recycling turnaround prompts £2000 gift to schools

Star turn: You've bin marvellous

The success of the Recycling Stars project has ensured that incentive schemes have been incorporated into the district council's service plan for 2006/07 and beyond. The intention is to ensure that the incentive scheme can be managed by the contractors, Serco, as part of their daily activities without the need for ground support from Breckland Council staff.

Lessons learnt

The three main lessons from this project are as follows:

- choose the incentive scheme carefully – the local primary schools in this case proved to be very popular amongst the Abbey estate residents - most of whom had children at one of the 2 schools involved;
- include all local stakeholders in the aims of the incentive scheme to ensure complete buy-in to the scheme; and
- the 'stick' in this case was the 'guilt factor' whereby residents who did not participate and continued to get red cards were effectively seen by others as not helping their local school.

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