
Bulky Waste Guidance: Case study 1 - Banbridge

On-site shop: Banbridge, Northern Ireland



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Introduction

The Council noted that there were large numbers of quality items disposed of at the household waste recycling centres (HWRC). The Council decided that the HWRC's were the ideal place to set up a reuse and refurbishment scheme with environmental and social benefits for the local community.

Key facts

- Restore is an on-site reuse facility which opened in June 2009 and was the first of its kind in Northern Ireland.
- It is owned and operated by Banbridge District Council but has its own branding to set it apart from the Council.
- The 3,000 square foot building was constructed when the HWRC was refurbished.
- In the first year, approximately 10 tonnes of waste was diverted but this is increasing as customers learn about the service.
- Start up funding of £260,000 was obtained from the Northern Ireland European Social Funds Programme through the Department for Education and Learning.
- The funding was for three years to March 2011. This covered capital costs to refurbish the building, tools and a collection vehicle, and covers revenue costs for staff costs and marketing.
- At the time of writing the project was in the pilot phase and the economic costs and benefits over three years are being assessed.
- Current annual running costs are estimated to be £70,000; this includes staff wages, utilities and maintenance.

About Banbridge

- Banbridge is 25 miles south of the Belfast metropolitan area.
- The District covers 180 square miles and includes the towns of Banbridge, Dromore, Rathfriland and Gilford.
- There are 44,500 inhabitants, in 18,500 households.
- According to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure, Banbridge District is ranked 23rd out of the 26 council areas (1 is the most deprived and 26 the least deprived).

Background

There are three HWRCs in the district accepting a range of recyclable materials and household waste. In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Council ran a six-month pilot scheme at Dromore HWRC to collect white goods. The aim was to identify the level of donations for collection through a reuse service. Approximately 30 tonnes of goods ranging from toasters to tumble dryers were collected, and therefore the Council decided to expand the service.

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The Council identified the new Banbridge HWRC as a suitable site for reuse and investigated how reuse could be incorporated into the operation of the HWRC. With support from WRAP, the Council was able to conduct an options appraisal for a reuse facility. The preferred option was diversion of suitable bulky items in reusable or repairable condition from the main HWRC area to a reuse shed, where items could be stored and refurbished as appropriate. This included repair and refurbishment facilities for WEEE.

The approach

A large building was constructed on site when the HWRC was redeveloped. The building is 3,000 square feet and includes space for a shop, office and repair and refurbishment area. The building was fitted with a shop front to help customers feel like they were entering a shop. Roller shutter doors elsewhere in the building allow access to the refurbishing area.

Partner organisations were initially identified and an information day was held prior to issue of an invitation to tender to run the whole site. Bids were evaluated; however, none of the proposals included both refurbishment and resale of goods. The Council therefore decided to manage the reuse facility in-house. This delayed the facility operation by approximately 12 months.

Banbridge secured £260,000 (until March 2011) from the Department for Education and Learning under the Northern Ireland European Social Funds Programme. The funding has been used to fit out and refurbish the building, pay staff costs, purchase tools and a small amount of communication activity. It has also enabled Restore to offer collections direct from householders. This collection service is unrelated to the Council's bulky waste service. It is hoped that when the funded project ends in 2011, Restore will be a financially self-sustaining service that forms an integral part of the Council's ongoing sustainable waste management programme.

The facility is managed in-house by the Council, by two staff members were recruited specifically for the roles. The Training Supervisor helped to set up the facility, and is now responsible for supervising the trainees and the refurbishment of white goods, as well as overall responsibility for the whole facility. In 2010, the Council employed a new member of staff to help manage the shop and to promote the facility to a wider audience, with the objective of increasing the number of customers and quality donations. Between July 2010 and March 2011, funding from the Probation Service will allow Restore to recruit a full time furniture restorer to work with the trainees.

The Council liaises with various agencies to source trainees. At any one time Restore has three to five trainees (Community Service), supervised to restore furniture and repair and test electrical items, on placements through the Steps to Work scheme¹. The retraining is supported by government-funded training programmes such as People First², and as a result some of the trainees have been successful in finding new employment or education. Income from training plays an important role in the overall financial self sufficiency of the scheme. Restore intends to offer NVQ level 2 courses approved by the

¹ <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/finding-employment-finding-staff/fe-fs-help-to-find-employment/stepstowork.htm>

² <http://www.people-1st.co.uk/>

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Engineering Training Council³. Restore has also benefitted from volunteer input (retired individuals and young volunteers completing their Duke of Edinburgh award). Members of the public often approach Restore to offer their time, and the volunteer bank has grown. The first Duke of Edinburgh award volunteer was the son of a Council employee who had heard about the scheme.

Stock is sourced via the bulky waste collection service (dropped off at the donation point by the Council bulky waste collection crew) or donated directly by the public. Restore will also collect direct from householders wishing to donate. Householders contact Restore via email or phone and a collection appointment is made.

Restore stocks a wide range of household furniture and white goods, including beds and bed frames (mattresses are not usually sold), bikes, cookers, dishwashers, garden furniture, mirrors, pictures, three-piece suites and toys. Due to the size of the shop and the primary functions of Restore (social and diversion of waste from landfill), the focus is on larger items and therefore bric-a-brac is kept to a minimum. Small amounts of bric-a-brac are displayed in the shop to encourage people to browse and hopefully purchase large items.

The shop is open between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1pm on Saturdays. Weekend opening started due to requests suggesting there was demand, however, there are actually relatively few sales on Saturdays.

To date, Restore has been widely promoted through word of mouth; donations are increasing, as is footfall within the shop. It is estimated that for every three customers, one will purchase an item, and therefore increasing footfall is viewed as very important.

The average sales turnover per week is approximately £600 and this looks set to increase to £1,000. To be sustainable longer term (once start up funding ends in 2011), it is anticipated that turnover will need to be approximately £1,350 per week. The HWRC is very important for the supply of goods, as they are intercepted before residents enter the HWRC. But as more residents are aware of the service, it is expected more stock will be donated.

Table 1 below provides an indication of the sale price of items, although it will vary depending on the quality and style of the item. Goods can be delivered to homes for free but electrical items, such as white goods, will not be installed.

Table 1 Indicative prices for some common items sold at Restore

Item(s)	Indicative sale price
Three piece suite	£150
Sofa	£50
Dining table and chairs	£70-80
Electric cooker	£80-£100
Washing Machine/ Tumble dryer	£80-£100

³ <http://www.etcni.org.uk/>

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Items are also sold directly to other local charities for onward sale/ distribution to individuals. Shops that have benefitted from low cost goods from Restore include St Vincent de Paul and Mission. Housing associations can also refer individuals to Restore for very low cost items, although Restore is aware that this is potentially open to abuse and are monitoring this system. The price to charities and housing associations may be less than the indicative sale price listed above. However, this fits with Restore aims to generate interest and regular turnover of stock, and to further their wider social and environmental aims.

Restore staff undertook an informal survey of customers over a period of about one month. From this survey they have estimated that approximately 60% of customers are those on low incomes, 20% are landlords and 20% are individuals looking for niche items. Restore aims to sell the concept of the shop; encouraging people to visit and purchase items because of the 'green factor'.

An additional offering provided by Restore is a sourcing service. If residents are looking for a particular item they can contact Restore, leaving a description of the item wanted and their contact details. The resident is then notified when the item is in stock.

Results and conclusions

Restore is a council-owned facility managed by the Waste and Environment Manager, with two paid employees managing the day-to-day activities. Any decisions on Restore are made by the Waste and Environment Manager in consultation with Restore staff and other council staff as necessary, for example a PR representative.

Achievements to date include:

- Approximately 30% of all items that are delivered to site are suitable for reuse and are reused. In addition, some items are stripped for their component parts.
- Reduced landfill costs.
- All profits from the sale of the reused items go back to Restore.
- Socially, it provides retail, warehousing, furniture restoration and electrical training opportunities for local long term unemployed. In its first year 16 placements were fulfilled.

As a result of securing £260,000 from the Northern Ireland European Social Funds Programme, the Council has not needed to use council resources to set up Restore. It is hoped that when the funding ends in 2011, Restore will have developed to be a financially self-sustaining facility that forms an integral part of the Council's ongoing sustainable waste management programme.

It is estimated Restore needs a minimum of £70,000 per annum (approximately 80:20 split between staff costs and facility running costs), which equates to sales of approximately £1,350 per week if no income is generated elsewhere. Increased public awareness through word of mouth and a small increase in communications are expected to help generate this turnover. Whilst the tonnage collected in year one was quite low, staffing levels have since increased, as has awareness of the facility with the public. Therefore it is expected to reuse significantly more in the current and future years.

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Key learning points

- This is a pilot project and the learning is a continuous process, which will help establish a financially self-sufficient project post-grant funding.
- Ensure sufficient space to segregate the different activities: storage, refurbishment and resale.
- Liaise with local community groups to assess interest and capacity to deliver or participate in scheme.
- Consider using box vehicles to protect items from rain and handling damage.
- Develop a marketing strategy to support infrastructure and generate demand as well as supply of goods.
- Footfall needs to increase to generate throughput.
- Honesty of staff is very important as there is not usually an audit of items that are donated (records are kept of items when refurbished and sold) and money may be kept on the premises.
- Employ staff with electrical training skills, people management skills, retail and warehousing skills and enthusiasm for the concept.
- Ensure sensible pricing structure in line with the market (eBay, second hand shops and charities) to encourage turnover of stock whilst generating income.

Contact

Tom McRoberts
Restore Manager
E-mail: restore@banbridge.gov.uk
Tel: 028 40660656
Web: www.banbridge.gov.uk

Contact

Barry Patience
Waste and Environmental Manager
Banbridge District Council
E-mail: barry.patience@banbridge.gov.uk
Tel: 028 4066 0604
Web: www.banbridge.gov.uk

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**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

Helpline freephone
0808 100 2040

www.wrap.org.uk/la