

# Increasing bulky waste re-use in social housing

How a collaborative whole-council approach has helped reduce bulky waste sent to landfill in Leeds and deliver valuable savings across Leeds City Council

**The Waste Services team at Leeds City Council had identified that the main local social housing organisations were disposing of large quantities of re-usable furniture and white goods left when residents moved out. Rather than send this to landfill, they wanted to pass this on to local furniture re-use organisations (FROs). They used WRAP’s assistance to quantify the opportunities, build a business case and bring together relevant stakeholders to introduce a new collaborative, whole-Council approach.**

**This has already reduced the amount of bulky waste sent to landfill, and generated savings for various Council departments and additional revenue for local FROs. In the longer term there are plans in place for a single city-wide contact number and a common stock control system for the FROs, which should dramatically increase the benefits.**

*"We're now intercepting many more re-usable items for FROs. It's very satisfying, as we knew there was a great opportunity to increase re-use – but we just had to bring everything together to realise it."*

Janice Frost, Waste Strategy Officer,  
Leeds City Council

## At a glance

- Aims to maximise re-use from social housing
- In first year, has reduced volume of bulky waste sent to landfill and generated extra revenue for FROs
- Introduced a whole-Council approach – securing the commitment of multiple departments within Leeds City Council
- Delivering valuable efficiency savings for several departments within the Council
- Set to increase re-use volumes further through use of a common stock control system and a single point of contact



A big opportunity lay in increasing re-use from social housing

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## Background

With seven established furniture re-use organisations (FROs), Leeds has a strong track record of supporting re-use. The FROs, who meet regularly as the Leeds Furniture Re-use Group, had collected some 24,000 unwanted items of household furniture and domestic appliances each year from 2009 to 2011. That equates to more than 600 tonnes of material being diverted from the waste stream.

However, both the FROs and Leeds City Council were keen to do more, and a particular opportunity had been identified to increase re-use from the city's large social housing stock.

Existing processes meant that when tenants moved out, any bulky waste left behind – furniture, white goods, etc. - was typically collected by the caretaker staff or voids team of the Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) or their contractor and taken to a waste facility for disposal.

In the meantime, the Council was providing new tenants with new furniture and white goods through support from the Social Fund.

This process satisfied no-one, as it:

- meant an unnecessary amount of re-usable furniture was going to landfill rather than through the FROs – most of whom themselves seek to provide a social benefit;
- incurred costs for the Council and ALMOs at each stage – collection, disposal via landfill, and in helping new tenants furnish their homes.

Leeds City Council discussed the issue with WRAP, who appointed independent consultants CO2Sense to look into the opportunity in more depth.

<b>Partners involved</b>		
<b>Leeds City Council departments</b>	<b>Local re-use organisations</b>	<b>ALMOs &amp; Housing Associations</b>
Waste Team Adult Social Care Asset Management Contact Centre Housing Services Strategy & Commissioning	Emmaus Leeds Leeds and Moortown Revive Leeds Safe Haven S.L.A.T.E St. Jude's Sydney Bridge	Aire Valley Homes Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation East North East Homes Morrison Plc (contractor) West North West Homes

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## Project aims and objectives

The objectives of the project were to review how the Council and partner organisations managed bulky waste and identify ways to reduce the amount sent to landfill and increase re-use. To achieve that, Leeds needed to:

- increase awareness across the whole Council of the opportunities for passing on re-usable furniture and other household goods, that would otherwise be discarded, to the voluntary/charity sector;
- build stronger links between the ALMOs and FROs so that more re-usable goods could be passed on; and
- encourage social housing residents to donate unwanted items to the FROs – and to encourage social fund recipients to acquire second-hand furniture from FROs.

This led to the specific project objectives for the consultants which were:

- to fully scope out the opportunity for re-use within social housing;
- to assess the capacity of the FROs to deal with more items;
- to identify all relevant stakeholders and understand their priorities;
- to develop a business case for collaborative working;
- to produce a selection of actions for Leeds Council and partners to take forward in an implementation plan from April 2012.

## Project approach

The project began with the consultants conducting an extensive review of the existing waste and re-use landscape. This included:

- meeting with a wide range of stakeholders including the bulky collection service, civic amenity sites, Housing Services, Social Services, ALMOs and housing associations, Strategy and Commissioning Services and the Council contact centre;

- analysing data about existing collections – including frequency, cost and amount recovered – as well as data provided by FROs and ALMOs;
- analysing the composition of the waste collected from social housing clearances;
- scoping the potential opportunity for improvement, and presenting an initial report to stakeholders to gather feedback and secure their support; and
- developing a full business case and realistic implementation plan, which was then presented to senior managers at Leeds City Council to agree priorities.

Feedback from the Council was positive, and a set of actions agreed – some immediate, some longer-term. The stakeholders signed up to the implementation plan and a new cross-departmental Bulky Waste Project board was set up to deliver it. The Council also agreed to provide financial support and procurement expertise for the purchase of a stock control system and on-line booking calendar to be used by the FROs.

The process was initially led by the WRAP-appointed consultants, and as Liz Behrens, Waste Strategy & Development Manager at Leeds City Council confirms, “having independent consultants leading the project was invaluable. They were able to dedicate the time needed to gather data, interview stakeholders and really build up that strong evidence base that could be used to get everyone’s buy-in.”

The Waste Strategy team at the Council now manage the project and co-ordinate regular meetings.

## Key challenges

### Securing buy-in to the concept of collaborative working

While all parties – the Council, the ALMOs and the voluntary sector – were theoretically keen to work together, in practice this was hard to achieve. Organisations with different cultures can be uncertain about others' motivations.

- The key to getting everyone on the same side was through gathering data that showed the scale of the opportunity – and the fact that current processes were inhibiting re-use. The consultants' report highlighted issues such as calls to FROs being unanswered, and how the short window for clearing vacant social housing properties was making it difficult for small FROs to respond. By showing clearly how these 'gaps' in the existing service restricted re-use, the report gave a strong business case for improved collaboration.

### Establishing an effective process across organisations

While the gaps in the existing process were clear, establishing an effective process across the different partners was no small task. It had to be customer-focused, but also reflect what the partners could actually work to. Instead of trying to create an entirely new process, a number of small changes were proposed to existing processes.

- An area was set aside at a waste management contractor's site where furniture removed by the ALMOs from empty houses could be stored in the short term. The FROs could then collect items from there on a rota basis – providing flexibility in the overall process rather than requiring FROs to get to each vacant house in the short clearance window.

- Changes were also made to processes such as social fund allocation, so that some recipients are now supplied with used furniture from FROs instead of being encouraged to buy brand-new items.

### Recognising what's re-usable

FROs are able to re-use a vast amount of materials including not only furniture, but also textiles, bedding and crockery – much of which was simply thrown away during clearance of void properties.

- One of the FROs, Emmaus, provided training to ALMO staff to help them better understand what could be re-used rather than treated as waste.

### Increasing/ensuring capacity of FROs

There was considerable concern on the part of both the Council and the ALMOs that the FROs lacked capacity to handle a greater volume of furniture.

- Several key elements of the implementation plan sought to reduce the pressure on FROs. For example, it was proposed to create a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) – i.e. one number that the public can call to arrange a collection of re-usable bulky waste. Procurement is now underway for a stock control system, which will include an on-line booking calendar. This will be used by the SPOC to book collections by the FROs. Implementing this is one of the next steps for the project.

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## Project outcomes and outputs

Within the first year of the project operating, the volume of furniture being re-used had increased, and the amount of bulky waste sent to landfill decreased. Between June 2012 and June 2013, three of the ALMOs found over 450 re-usable items when clearing empty houses, diverting over 11 tonnes of material from landfill. This comes in addition to the volumes already passing through FROs. FROs are now working more closely with ALMOs and the Council to ensure that re-usable items are identified and passed on – either for resale or for distribution to families in need.

For the FROs, this means a greater amount of stock, generating extra revenue and helping them fulfil their social goals. For Leeds City Council, it means tangible savings – reduced use of bulky waste collection services, reduced need to buy or fund purchases of new furniture and reduced volumes of bulky waste sent to landfill.

At every level, awareness of the possibility of re-use has increased. Individual social landlords are looking to develop their own re-use systems, and departments within the Council are actively promoting re-use, both to social housing residents and the wider community.

The information about bulky item collections on the Leeds City Council website has been rewritten, highlighting the FROs and providing contact details for them up-front, with the Council’s own bulky waste collection service being pushed to the bottom of the page. On a targeted level, leaflets were distributed door-to-door in north-east Leeds, advertising the local Revive Leeds re-use shop which is sited on the nearby HWRC.

At all the HWRCs operated by Leeds City Council, site staff are encouraged to set aside potentially re-usable items in dedicated

containers. Each HWRC is partnered with an FRO who regularly collects segregated re-usable items. These different activities together have further increased the amounts collected by FROs.

The next key steps are the implementation of a stock control system, which will help track items from collection through to resale and ensure better distribution between the different FROs, and setting up the single point of contact. Both will help increase the capacity of the service considerably, allowing a swifter and more co-ordinated response to requests for collection, and so drive up re-use still further.



Re-usable items are identified and collected for resale or distribution



A re-use shop located on a Leeds HWRC

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## Key Learning Points

- **Identify and engage all your potential stakeholders at the start.**  
 Across a local authority, there are all manner of departments and teams that might have an interest in bulky waste re-use – as well as the many FROs, ALMOs and housing associations that work in the area. The more organisations you can bring on-board, the greater the potential returns – and the stronger the business case.
- **Actively demonstrate the benefits of working together.**  
 By highlighting the complementary roles each partner can play in the overall process, you can encourage collaboration even across seemingly opposed organisations. A simple example was to underline to Council teams the importance of the FROs as a redistribution outlet: without these, there would simply be more bulky waste to deal with.
- **Offer people something tangible to sign up to.** The implementation plan set out clear actions with clear processes for monitoring them. They weren't all huge steps, but by being transparent – and showing success and progress – it helped build trust in the partnership.
- **Appoint a dedicated project manager.** From everyday communication and relationship management to driving forward actions with each different partner, a dedicated project manager is essential to maintaining progress.

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This is one of a series of case studies highlighting the benefits of local partnership organisations working alongside each other to increase re-use. Other case studies in this series can be found on WRAP's website: [www.wrap.org.uk/reusecasestudies](http://www.wrap.org.uk/reusecasestudies) and feature the following areas projects:

- Bucks;
- Leicestershire; and
- Surrey

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