

# Tamworth Borough Council: Recycling collections for flats

Collection arrangements for dry recyclables from flats in response to guidance on fire safety

## Background

Tamworth Borough Council traditionally provided communal facilities for the collection of recycling from its multi occupancy properties. The authority in its Waste Strategy had given a commitment to providing a recycling service to all of its residents irrespective of the type of property they lived in or location. However it was considered that communal recycling facilities were not the right solution for the residents of six town centre high rise blocks of flats managed by the Council. There was no suitable space at ground level and with many of the residents being elderly and frail it was felt that the facilities would be impractical to use. The solution was to introduce a weekly door to door collection service in each block of flats.

This service ran successfully for four years until July 2011 when the Local Government Association released new guidance regarding 'Fire Safety in Purpose Built Blocks of Flats'. The guidance recommends that:

*'Landlords should put in place arrangements for recycling that do not rely on collection from within the common parts'.*

Following the release of the guidance the Staffordshire Fire Authority approached the Council to highlight the new guidance and discuss the fire risk associated with recycling containers being placed in corridors. The Council felt it had no alternative but to comply with the advice and withdraw the service.

## Demographics

Tamworth's resident population of around 74,500 makes it one of the main urban centres in Staffordshire. It has the highest population density (24.2 people per hectare) of all the southern Staffordshire districts and is second to Stoke on Trent (25.8 people per hectare) in the County as a whole. Population projections for 2010 to 2020 suggest there will be a small growth in the population of 3%.

The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups within Tamworth is lower than the national average (4% compared with 12%) and is slightly lower than Staffordshire (5%).

According to 2001 Census data, around 10% of properties (households) in Tamworth are within purpose built blocks of flats.

### The door to door collection scheme for flats

A door to door collection scheme was provided to 348 properties in six high rise blocks of flats on a weekly basis. Each block is around 13 storeys high and has around 60 flats. Residents were setting out their paper, cardboard, glass, cans and plastic bottles in a reusable bag once a week for collection.

The collections were undertaken by Tamworth’s collection crews with the materials being tipped into a slave bin which was taken floor by floor before being loaded into the collection vehicle.

Following the initial advice from Staffordshire Fire Authority Tamworth Council discussed a number of options for continuing to provide internal collections of recyclables with the Fire Authority, including the use of fire proof collection containers. However, as the guidance and the specific advice from the Fire Authority was that recyclable materials should not be placed in corridors for any amount of time the Council felt that it was obliged to comply with the guidance and withdraw the door to door collections.

The collections were withdrawn in August 2011, just a month after the release of the guidance document. Residents were informed of the end of the door-to-door collections via a letter that was sent to them in the final week of collection. As well as informing them of the end of this service, the letter thanked them for recycling and explained that the Council was investigating alternative options for providing them with a recycling service.



[back](#) : [forward](#)

## Assessing options for recycling

Officers from the waste and recycling department worked closely with housing officers to investigate alternative options for recycling.

Through site visits officers identified that there were two chutes in each of the high rise buildings that had had the door-to-door collection service. These chutes were accessible from alternate floors meaning that on each floor of the building only one chute could be used.

The recycling and housing officers identified that two types of recycling scheme could be feasible for these flats:

1. A dedicated chute recycling scheme: Residents would be asked to use one of the chutes in the building for waste and one for recycling. This would require them to walk up or down a floor when disposing of materials that were not accepted in the chute that was accessible on their floor of the building.
2. A timed chutes recycling scheme: Residents would be asked to use the refuse chute for recycling between certain times. For the remainder of the week the chute would be used for refuse.

These options were discussed with the Staffordshire Fire Authority who agreed that both were acceptable from a fire safety perspective.

An internal report was drafted on the options and it was agreed that both options would be assessed through a consultation exercise with residents of the flats with the door to door collections.

### Chutes accessible from alternate floors



[back](#) : [forward](#)

## Case Study

page 3

Background

The door to door collection scheme

Assessing options for recycling

The consultation process

The chute recycling scheme and future changes

## The consultation process

The Council undertook an extensive exercise to engage residents in deciding which chute recycling scheme would work best for them:

- Letters were sent to all residents inviting them to attend a meeting to discuss the recycling options available. Over 100 residents attended this meeting, more than three times the number that the Council had expected.
- At the meeting the proposals were debated at length. Feedback from residents suggested some support for the dedicated chute for recycling but many felt that they would struggle to get up and down a flight of steps to dispose of either waste or recyclables.
- At the end of the meeting the preferred option identified was to have a 24 hour period each week where both chutes could be used for recycling only, but it was agreed that all residents should be provided with an opportunity to vote on the two methods discussed. The preferred recycling method would then be trialled for three months at two of the blocks of flats before being rolled out further.
- Following the meeting the Council wrote to all residents outlining the outcomes of the meeting and asking them to use a form and pre-paid envelope to vote on one of the two options for recycling using the chutes. 217 of the 348 households responded by the mid-November deadline. 90% of those that responded were in favour of using the chutes for recycling for a 24 hour period each week.
- The Council then wrote to residents letting them know the outcome of the vote and the timescales for the trial.
- Caretakers were engaged via meetings. They were initially sceptical about the scheme and concerned about the work load associated with exchanging bins at the base of the chute, however, once it was agreed this task would be undertaken by the collection crews they supported the scheme.

## The form residents used to vote on the chute recycling scheme

**Voting Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please vote for one option only by ticking the box next to your preferred choice.**

**Option One**

Use the chute that serves the even numbered floors for waste that can be recycled only (Paper, cans, plastic bottles/cartons, glass and cans) and use the chute that serves the odd numbered floors for waste that cannot be recycled.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Option Two**

Use both chutes for waste that can be recycled only between the hours of 07:00 on Monday to 07:00 hours on Tuesday. The chutes can then be used for waste that cannot be recycled at all other times.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Please return the form in the enclosed self addressed envelope no later than Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November**





Operational Services  
 Corporate Director: Ruth Platt

back : forward

## Case Study

page 4

Background	The door to door collection scheme	Assessing options for recycling	The consultation process	The chute recycling scheme and future changes
------------	------------------------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------	---

## The chute recycling scheme

The Council launched chute recycling in two of the six blocks of flats, Weymouth House and Strode House, in early December 2011.

Between 7am on Monday and 7am on Tuesday residents can use both chutes in the building to recycle their paper, cans, plastic bottles, card and glass bottles and jars.

Collection crews move the waste bin from under the chute on Monday morning a replace it with an 1100 litre recycling bin. They then exchange the bins again on Tuesday. The timings are organised to fit with the collection schedule so on Monday the bins are moved when the refuse collection takes place and on Tuesday the rotation is made when the recycling collection takes place.

Residents use the reusable bags that they were using for the door to door collection to transport their materials to chutes.

The trial was a success and a decision was made to roll out the service to the remaining four blocks in February 2012.

The Council plans to undertake formal monitoring of the scheme in early summer 2012 to identify how well the scheme is performing. Anecdotal feedback from the Council indicates that:

- There has been very little contamination of the recyclables
- Residents, collection crews and caretakers are happy with the scheme
- There have been very few chute blockages
- The scheme has minimal capital and revenue costs associated with it and was launched mainly using existing resources
- There have been no problems with residents continuing to set out materials in the corridor. The Council believe that this is in part due to the close knit communities within the blocks of flats and extensive consultation exercise



## PLEASE NOTE:

**BETWEEN 0700 HOURS MONDAY AND 0700 HOURS TUESDAY THIS CHUTE IS FOR RECYCLING ONLY. PLEASE DO NOT PUT GENERAL WASTE DOWN THE CHUTE BETWEEN THESE TIMES**

## THANK YOU

A copy of the poster displayed by the chutes

## Key learnings and future plans

- The Council advises that residents' buy in to the scheme is crucial. The consultation exercise was an important part of ensuring that residents had a say in the design of the scheme, and ultimately of reducing the risk of contamination by non recyclables.
- Consideration is to be given to introducing the service in several high rise blocks in Lichfield District Council. Tamworth and Lichfield formed a partnership to deliver a Joint Waste and Recycling Service in July 2010.

back : forward

## Case Study

page 5

Background	The door to door collection scheme	Assessing options for recycling	The consultation process	The chute recycling scheme and future changes
------------	------------------------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------	---

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[back : home](#)

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