INTRODUCTION

Southend-on-Sea is the closest seaside resort to London and is located on the north side of the Thames estuary, approximately 40 miles east of central London. There are 78,450 households with a total population of 160,200.

Since 2004/05, Southend-on-Sea Council has provided a kerbside collection service for co-mingled dry recycling. This included textiles. In 2008/09, the Council decided to add glass to the recycling service, following research showing that some 60% of glass was being disposed of in householders’ residual waste sacks.

However, this meant that the risks of contamination to other recyclables increased, so the Council took the decision to introduce a separate sack for textiles.

The separate collection of textiles was in keeping with Southend-on-Sea Council’s ethos of keeping recycling simple for residents, and as well as minimising contamination. This enables the material to be easily sorted and segregated at the delivery point.

Kerbside textile collection carried out by Cory Environmental Municipal Services Ltd for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

Key facts

- Since 2004/05, Southend-on-Sea Council has provided a kerbside collection service for dry recyclables. The council provides sacks.
- In 2008/9, following the addition of glass, householders were asked not to place textiles in the main pink sack, but instead in a separate white sack.
- The amount of textiles collected at the kerbside reached a peak at over 500 tonnes, a significant peak when the scheme was first introduced.
- The tonnages collected have reduced considerably to a low of 33 tonnes per year in 2009/10. The Council believes the sharp reduction in textiles collected is due to increasing reports of theft.
- The Council has provided a non-emergency number to residents in case of theft or suspicious behaviour. The council is also working closely with the police in order to tackle the issue locally.

The Approach

Background

Cory Environmental Municipal Services Ltd is the recycling and waste collection contractor for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. The contract started in 2008 and runs until 2015.

Under the terms of the contract, Cory collects textiles from the kerbside as part of the weekly dry recyclables collection service. Textiles are collected in a white sack, while mixed dry recyclables are presented for collection in a pink
sack. Transparent colours (for both pink and white sacks) were chosen to ensure that contamination could be easily identified. Textile sacks are co-collected with the pink sacks in the same compartment on refuse collection vehicle, for segregation at a transfer station in Rochford.

The clear, pink and black sacks (for residual waste) are delivered to households as part of Cory’s contract. One roll of 6 sacks is delivered to households every six months, on the assumption that residents would put one full sack of textiles out for collection per month. In delivering the 6 x 20 litre sacks, the Council aimed to encourage residents to maximise the amount they put in the sack. If residents run out they can obtain further sacks from the outlets across the Borough (all libraries, the Civic Centre and at Cory’s depot).

Cory has a dedicated delivery crew that works full time delivering sacks to the whole Borough. It takes them 6 months to deliver to every household and then they start again.

The textile sacks are a thicker gauge (30 microns) than the pink sacks to prevent them splitting in the collection vehicle.

When the sacks are delivered to the transfer station in Rochford, the bagged textiles are manually separated from the pink sacks, bulked and collected (still bagged) by a reprocessor, Excel Textiles in Chadwell St Mary’s. Once the textiles are collected and have been processed to determine whether they are suitable for reuse they are sorted, packaged and sold or donated to a variety of outlets in different locations within the U.K or abroad (e.g. Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe). The sale or donation, and the final destination, depends on market rates and demand in different countries at the time.

Cory also collects textiles from the Council’s Household Waste and Recycling Centres. Bring sites have textiles banks from a number of organisations, but the Council gets no income from any of the textiles collected in the Borough.

Contamination is not reported as being a big issue and the reprocessor has never rejected a load. However, garden waste does sometimes appear in textiles sacks as the garden waste sacks are also clear. Minor contamination may be removed by the collection crew. Where severe contamination does occur, it is stopped at source – contaminated bags are left with a sticker attached to the sack asking residents to be more vigilant.

Communications

The Council has not produced a dedicated leaflet to promote the textile recycling service, but it is included within its general recycling service leaflet which is sent to householders and given out at all events and roadshows. A section from Southend-on-Sea’s ‘Guide to Recycling in Southend’ is shown below.
The Council is also involved in organising a one-off ‘make do and mend’ event at the Borough ecohub with local entrepreneurs. The event focuses on working with textiles, carrying out minor alterations to old clothes and includes a swishing event (clothes swapping). Promotional events run by the Council are on-going and they want to progress them further.

Recycling and reuse is promoted in a range of other ways, including newspaper wraps, website, articles in the council magazine. Service leaflets are sent out in new residents’ packs, are available on the website and distributed during events and roadshows.

Participation
Cory carried out participation monitoring in 2011 to establish baseline participation. Monitoring took place in 2 areas of the Borough which are referred to as the ‘High Performance Area’ and the ‘Low Performance Area’. In the Low Performance Area there was a 2% participation rate for clear textile recycling sacks. In the High Performance Area there was a 6.1% participation rate at the end of the monitoring, compared to 3% before it started.

Tonnages
The tonnage data provided for textiles collected at the kerbside shows tonnage reaching a high in 2007/08, but by 2010-11 had reduced to less than 100 tonnes.

Table 1  Textiles Collected at Kerbside (tonnes per year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>04/05</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>06/07</th>
<th>07/08</th>
<th>08/09</th>
<th>09/10</th>
<th>10/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>117.70</td>
<td>121.06</td>
<td>452.34</td>
<td>502.27</td>
<td>221.46</td>
<td>33.24</td>
<td>92.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1  Low Participation Area Participation Monitoring Report March-April 2011, Sauce Consultancy

The Council puts the reduction in textiles collected down to theft of, and from, bags left out for collection. It receives reports of theft at least once a week. Residents contact the council when they see theft and records are kept and the information passed on to the police. One police operation led to a successful prosecution for theft.

The Council now recommends that residents contact the police directly (an approach which has been agreed with the local police.) The Council has updated the wording in the council tax booklet (in which there is a page covering all recycling collection services) which is delivered to all residents in the borough, providing details of the Police non-emergency number to report thefts. The website also has this information in its recycling pages.

Finance
■ The highest cost in this scheme is supplying the sacks: a thicker grade of sack is used to ensure the bag doesn’t split open in the vehicle. It also reduces potential contamination with the glass in the pink sacks.
■ Delivering the collection sacks also has a high cost.
■ As the collection crew visits each property to collect the pink recyclables sack, there is no additional cost for collecting the textile sack.
■ There is a cost involved in sorting the sacks at the transfer station – one operative is employed full time to separate out the sacks.

Economic benefits
■ The direct benefit to the Council is the reduction in waste to landfill, which in turn reduces landfill costs. In 2010/11, landfill tax was £48 per tonne: 92.68 tonnes were collected at the kerbside, generating a saving on landfill tax of £4,448. It is hard to put an estimate on what impact the kerbside collections may have had on the usage of the mini-recycling centres and the HWRCs, as it is possible that the provision of the service encouraged secondary usage elsewhere.
■ An indirect benefit is that the contractor, Cory, receives revenue from sales. This may have helped to reduce contract costs. As the incumbent contractor, Cory Environmental would have had an approximate idea of the tonnages of textiles being collected at the mini-recycling centres. Its team would therefore have been the able to estimate the potential income from the sale of textiles to offset against the costs of delivering the service.

Case Study – For the full Textiles Collection Guide visit www.wrap.org.uk/content/textile-collection-guide
Lessons learnt

Theft of the sacks before collection is a big issue and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council regularly receives calls from residents about unknown vans taking the textiles sacks. The Council advises other local authorities to make sure residents are well informed about the scheme and what to do if theft is suspected. The Council provides a non-emergency number to call if a theft is suspected, and is working closely with the police to tackle the issue.

“The kerbside clear textile recycling sack scheme is part of the comprehensive kerbside recycling collection services offered to residents. Whilst the Council encourages residents to either re-use clothing, donate wearable items to charity shops or place clothing in textile mini recycling centres wherever possible, the kerbside collection complements this, providing residents in the borough with a wide range of options for recycling their unwanted items. This in turn helps the Council to meet its recycling targets, and contributes towards the diversion of biodegradable waste from landfill.”

Miranda Valenzuela, Waste & Recycling Officer, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Achievements

- At its peak in 2007/08, the councils collected over 500 tonnes of textiles from the kerbside. This reduced to approximately 92 tonnes in 2010/11.
- Residents benefit from a weekly kerbside collection for textiles.
- The service has helped reinforce the value of reuse/recycling: the Council has found the textiles ‘reuse’ message is one that is readily understood by the majority of residents.

Acknowledgments

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Case Study – For the full Textiles Collection Guide visit www.wrap.org.uk/content/textile-collection-guide