

# Recycling systems for flats: a communication campaign

## Introduction

Despite considerable activity to boost recycling by residents living in flats in the London Borough of Barnet, anecdotal evidence suggested that participation was low compared with other sectors and that the recycling tonnage captured from flats could be increased. This issue was recognised as a high priority in Barnet's Best Value Review of Waste Management in 2006. Over 15,000 flats were visited in a six-month campaign by Barnet London Borough Council to encourage residents in this target group to recycle more.

## Key Facts

- The average monthly tonnage collected increased by 4% during the campaign.
- Committed recyclers increased by 6% from 37% to 43%.
- The campaign ran from October 2006 to February 2007.
- The campaign cost £61,300.
- Cost per household was £4.09

## About Barnet

- London Borough of Barnet is an outer London unitary council.
- Its projected population for 2008 is 334,600.
- Barnet has 134,000 households of which 20,503 are flats.

## Background to campaign

Barnet LBC provides a weekly kerbside collection in boxes for aerosols, car and household batteries, cans, foil, engine oil, glass bottles and jars, mobile phones, newspapers and magazines, shoes, textiles and Yellow Pages. Over 3,000 flats receive this service and over 15,000 flats have access to communal wheeled recycling bins. The sites consist of five 240-litre wheeled bins for cans, foil, aerosols, glass bottles and jars, newspapers and magazines.

The installation and promotion of recycling in flats was achieved by:

- working closely with the housing ALMO (arms length management organisation) responsible for the management of the properties;
- a range of publicity including newsletters, leaflets, press articles, schools recycling challenges etc.; and
- working with residents' organisations and their management companies to set up recycling facilities.

## Communication objectives

The campaign set out to:

- maximise participation and tonnage collected from flats using communal recycling facilities through a comprehensive door-to-door canvassing campaign; and
- reinforce participation in the flats recycling service using a variety of marketing techniques.

The specific objectives set were to increase the following by the end of the campaign:

- claimed usage rate by at least 10%;
- quantity of recyclables by at least 10%;
- number of committed recyclers by at least 10%;
- level of awareness by at least 10%; and
- level of usage of specific material containers by at least 10%.

## Approach

### Door-to-door canvassing

WRAP funding allowed Barnet LBC to commission teams of recycling promoters to visit all flats with communal recycling bins. The council commissioned Waste Watch to run the door-to-door canvassing campaign. The aim was to engage with residents in the 15,250 flats with communal recycling facilities. Return visits were carried out to achieve a 50% face-to-face contact rate. The promoters offered residents free, reusable bags to store recyclable items and handed out an information leaflet on recycling.



Door-to-door canvassing was selected as the most appropriate and effective form of communication because:

- the council could tailor its message to suit local circumstances;
- face-to-face contact was more likely to overcome barriers such as literacy and language; and
- information about recycling could be adapted to meet the resident's level of knowledge.

### Other communication methods

In addition to face-to-face contact, the following materials and activities were used:

- **Media releases** to achieve instant and sustained awareness and to launch the Flats Recycling publicity campaign. This included articles on letsrecycle.com, London CRN Recycling E-news and the local press.
- **Newsletters** – including features in local newsletters and community magazines.
- **Website** – the pages dealing with recycling on the council's website ([www.barnet.gov.uk](http://www.barnet.gov.uk)) were updated with a separate section for flats.
- **Service leaflets** were produced for distribution as part of the door-stepping campaign.
- **Direct mail** – a letter to provide information about the service was posted to residents who were not in when the door-steppers called.
- **Posters** featuring details of the campaign were produced for communal areas of flats.
- **Reusable bags** printed with service information were distributed to all residents visited.
- **Signage on recycling containers** – new clear, easy-to-follow information stickers conforming to national 'Recycle Now' branded signage were introduced.
- **Show cards** were produced illustrating the materials collected for recycling for use by residents who do not speak English as a first language.

### Monitoring and evaluation

A key element of the campaign was to monitor the effect of the activities by collecting:

- **Tonnage data.** These were collected from the site of each set of flat and were based on estimates of the volume of material in the recycling bins at the time of collection.
- **Usage data.** Residents representative of the flat's population were selected and asked a series of questions about their recycling behaviour during door-to-door canvassing.
- **'Committed Recycler' data.** A series of linked questions were asked through the face-to-face survey.

	Pre-campaign	Post-campaign	Increase
Sheltered accommodation	89%	100%	11%
Large social housing blocks	65%	90%	26%
Small private and social housing blocks	78%	96%	18%

Table 1: Claimed usage of recycling facilities by flat type

**Results/Conclusion**

The campaign achieved the following positive results.

- The average tonnage collected increased by 4% from 19.88 tonnes per month to 20.56 tonnes per month.
- Average monthly tonnages of paper and cans collected were higher than before the campaign.
- Claimed recycling of paper, cans and glass exceeded the 10% target.
- The number of bins emptied each week rose from 563 to 574 as a result of putting out more bins.
- Committed recyclers increased by 6% from 37% to 43%.
- Level of awareness increased by 11% from 81% to 93%.
- Claimed usage increased by 10% from 73% to 83%.
- A reusable recycling bag was requested by 53% of residents.
- Residents’ recall of promotional materials rose during the canvassing period from 18% to 90%.

Claimed usage increase as a result of the campaign by flat type is shown in Table 1.

**Key Learning Points**

- The delivery of bags via the canvassers slowed the team down. In the second week the canvassers took orders for bags and a van and driver delivered the bags a few weeks later. If the council ran the project again, canvassers would use vans so as to deliver the bags within a quicker time frame.
- There were more sheltered and managed sites than expected, some of which were difficult to access. Where canvassers were unable talk to residents, caretakers and wardens were provided with the materials to distribute.
- Council staff need to work closely with the caretakers and managers of the larger social sites.
- The campaign improved the accuracy and currency of information about flats.
- The monitoring enabled the council to identify sites where bins are regularly full. The council is adding extra bins to increase collected tonnages further.

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