

Report to Sustainable development panel
23 January 2013
Report of Head of citywide services
Subject Recycling update

Item

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Purpose

To inform the panel on progress of recycling projects including the citywide engagement project, customer satisfaction surveys, housing waste project and communications activities; and other recycling issues.

Recommendation

To note the contents of this report.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority: A safe and clean city and the service plan priority to deliver an efficient and effective waste service whilst increasing landfill diversion rates

Financial implications

The projects are funded within existing budgets

Ward/s: All wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Driver – Environment and neighbourhoods

Contact officers

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Background documents

None

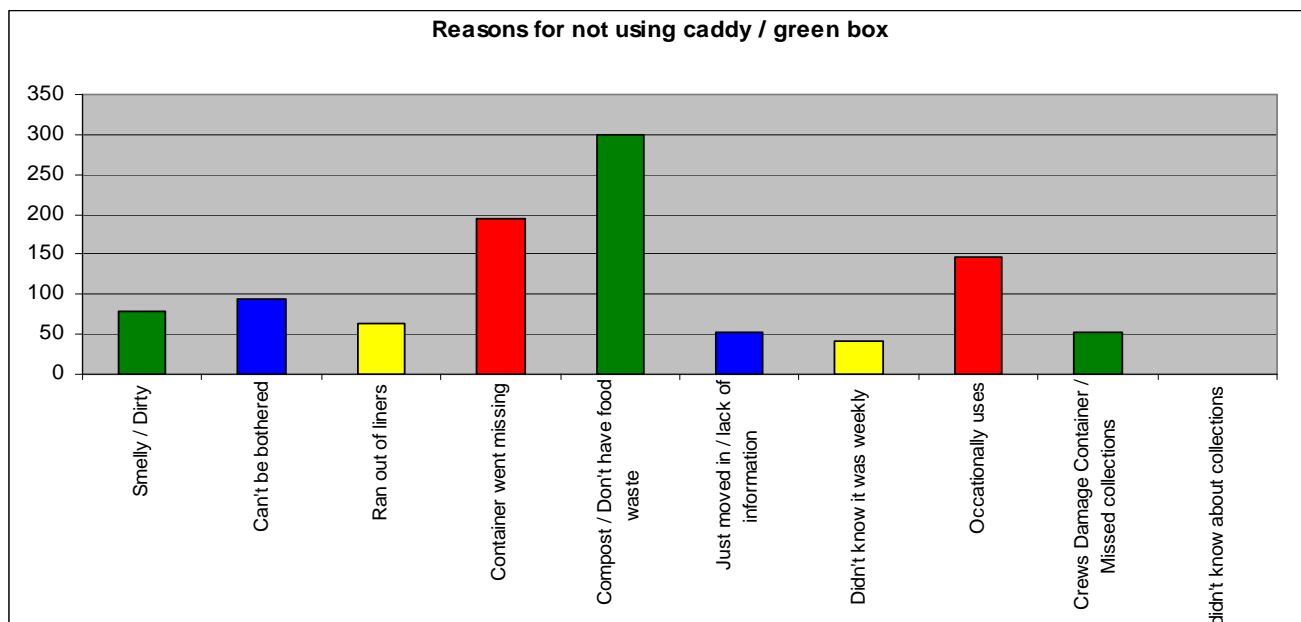
Report

City-wide engagement project

1. This is the second update on the progress of the city-wide recycling engagement project, following the first report in June 2012. Phases one and two of the project are now complete and phase 3, the student engagement project, is ongoing.
2. During phase one and two the recycling officers knocked on 8,000 doors and spoke with nearly 2,500 residents about their recycling collections, in particular food waste. Between March and October 2012, 273 food waste caddies, 255 green boxes and 245 rolls of food waste liners were issued to homes as a result of the visits to promote the recycling services. Hundreds of other residents have been issued with leaflets, calendars, advice and encouragement in order to improve participation rates and improve the quality of recycling collected.
3. Phase three of the project commenced in October 2012 and has concentrated on areas which are heavily populated by students in rented accommodation. This targeted approach has been very successful so far. Officers have knocked on over 2,650 doors, spoken with 637 residents and delivered 103 food waste caddies, 98 green boxes and 203 rolls of food waste liners. Feedback from students and their neighbours has been very positive and whilst the officers are at the door they are also able to address other issues, such as wheelie bins left on the street, how to dispose of bulky items and excess rubbish and recycling issues.
4. Officers have attended a number of events at the UEA during October, November and December 2012 where it is estimated that 150 students were spoken to and orders for food waste caddies, green boxes and food waste liners were taken. One event was a housing fair where first year students were given advice about finding rented accommodation in Norwich and the responsibilities that come with renting. Officers were in attendance and gave advice on the waste and recycling services offered in Norwich.
5. Prior to door knocking, participation surveys were undertaken to establish baseline participation rates for food and glass collections. From the 4,000 properties surveyed an average of 28% of households were using the food waste collections and 27.5% of households the glass collections. Set out rates for food and glass collections have continued to be monitored before and after the door knocking, to establish what effect the door knockers are having on recycling behaviours.
6. On the roads that have been door knocked participation rates have increased by an average of 14% for the food waste collections resulting in around 42% of households using the service. Participation rates in the glass collections have increased by 14.5%, also resulting in around 42% of households using this service. (As has been highlighted before, not all households put their food or glass out for every collection, therefore actual participation may be higher than the recorded figures).

7. An important aspect of the door knocking campaign is to gather feedback from residents on any reasons why they are not using the recycling services. With this information future communications can be tailored to address specific issues and operational matters can be resolved with the collection contractor (Biffa). Table 1 provides some details of the feedback received on the door step.

Table 1



Customer satisfaction survey

8. An online waste and recycling customer satisfaction survey was launched in July 2012 and following this Biffa began delivering paper copies of the survey to a number of different streets on a weekly basis. The survey asked residents how they would rate the recycling services, which door step services they use, reasons why they didn't use particular services and a section for suggestions, comments or issues to report. As stated in paragraph 7, this feedback is used to gain better understanding of the issues with the recycling services and to identify where improvements can be made – both general improvements and specific resolutions to individual problems.
9. From the start of the survey in July to the end of December some 382 responses were received. Of these 81.1% of people rated the services received as satisfactory, good or excellent.
94.4 % stated that they were using the recycling services, with 93.6% using the blue bins, 81.8% using the glass collections, 71% using the food waste and 29.6% subscribed to the brown bin service. (Obviously it is expected that those responding to the survey would be amongst the more active recyclers).
10. It has been particularly useful to understand the reasons why people are not using the recycling services. Some of the most popular reasons include:
 - previous problems with missed collections/poor service
 - food waste bags too expensive and no desire to use newspaper
 - not wanting to pay for garden waste collections

11. Residents' suggestions on how to improve the service include:

- (a) collecting more items for recycling in the blue bin (plastics, tetra, foil, batteries and electrical items);
- (b) providing free food waste bags;- ensuring the crews do not leave mess after collections;
- (c) returning bins to the point they were collected from;
- (d) increasing the frequency of garden waste collections in the summer months;
- (e) collecting glass in the blue bin.

12. It is encouraging to note that there have been many positive comments about the range of materials collected, praise for the collection crews and praise for the communications material provided and the content of the website.

13. Where residents include their address on the survey and raise any particular issues these are responded to on an individual basis. General collection issues, such as missed collections, mess left after collections and bins not being returned properly, are raised with Biffa during the monthly contract management meetings. There are rectification and default procedures in place that allow officers to use a carrot-and-stick approach in order to improve contractor performance. Officers also have full visibility of the collection rounds, including daily tracking of vehicles, which improves both the performance monitoring and the quality of information that can be relayed to residents.

14. We are also exploring other avenues to address reasons why residents may not be using the recycling services. For example lots of residents have told us that the food waste liners are too expensive, we are therefore looking at ways that Norwich City Council could sell these liners at cost price online and at other options. The most common service improvement residents suggested was to recycle more items in the blue bin, specifically other plastics and tetra. We hope that this will be addressed as a result of the contract re-let for the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) with a more comprehensive service available from 2014.

15. There will be an article in the Citizen magazine this year thanking all those who have taken part in the survey and explaining what will happen in response to their feedback.

Housing waste project progress

16. The roll-out of communal refuse and recycling bins to housing areas which cannot accommodate individual bins is progressing well. Within the last 8 months the sites listed in table 2 have received, or are about to receive their communal bins. This totals approximately 1,800 properties.

Table 2

Completed Sites	Completed Sites	Due to be completed by Jan 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Canterbury Place - Cardigan Place - Causeway Close - Crocodile Court - Derby Street - Devonshire Street - Ely Street - Holmes Close - Lothian Street - Midland Walk - Clifton Close & Street - Napier Place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Langley Walk - Orchard Street - Portway Place & Square - Russell Street - Leopard Court - Old Palace Road - Netherwood Green - Magdalen Close - Bull Close - Sleaford Green - Boundry Road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vale Green - Heathgate - Blackhorse Opening - Ives Road / Bussey Road - St Leonard Road area - Philadelphia Lane (96-103) - Lefroy Road (55-69,41-71&73-103) - Junction Road (55-69&71-81) - Berners Street (31-61) - Hooper Lane - Armes Street (multiple smaller blocks) - William Mear Gardens (15-22,23-41&41-62)

17. All sites had poor recycling facilities prior to the communal bins being introduced and now have communal bins for mixed recycling, glass, food and waste. Monitoring of the new communal recycling and waste bins occurs following delivery and additional door knocking and resident support is provided whenever it is required.

Schools food waste collections

18. Towards the end of the school summer term, two primary schools were approached to trial food waste collections in schools which would run alongside existing recycling services offered free of charge to schools by the city council.
19. Mile Cross and Lakenham Primary were the first schools to take up the offer of the food waste collections and following a meeting with the caretaker and kitchen staff, food waste bins and caddies were delivered to the school and collections began. The first month of collections ran smoothly with no problems highlighted by the schools or collection contractor and therefore the scheme was then offered to all schools within the Norwich City Council boundary.
20. Eleven schools are currently set up on the scheme (10 primary schools and 1 high school) with three more schools expected to take up the service in January. Officers have run assemblies at the request of the school to explain to students and staff about the food waste collections in school and at home. The school children have been fully engaged in using the food waste bins depositing leftover's from packed and cooked lunches in the food waste caddies. Hopefully using the food waste bins at school will have a great knock-on effect for the children, if they use the facilities and understand the process at school they are likely to want to do the same at home.
21. The scheme means food waste is diverted from landfill, which helps the environment and hopefully saves the school money as previously all food waste was going into the commercial landfill bins.

22. Schools will continue to be encouraged by officers to take up the offer of food waste collections and at the same time the schools existing recycling facilities will be review to ensure they are fully up to date.
23. A press campaign was run in December to promote the new initiative this included interviews by Anglia TV, Norwich 99.9FM, Future Radio and the Norwich Evening News.

Recycling Performance Issues

24. The recession has reduced the amount of disposable income in many households and this has had an effect on recycling performance. As household income has reduced so has expenditure on 'luxury' and leisure items. With fewer of these items being purchased there is less packaging to be disposed off and a corresponding fall in the amount of cardboard collected. There has also been a discernable decrease in the amount of glossy magazines and newspapers purchased. (A general reduction of 2% per year in the amount of newspaper that is produced – a heavy material which forms the largest part of the recycling tonnage). In tandem with this many manufacturers have responded to the economic pressures by reducing the amount of packaging they provide – a process known as 'light-weighting' – both reducing the amount and the weight of packaging. (An element of this reduction may also be a result of consumer pressure to reduce packaging).
25. During 2011-12 the county council withdrew the recycling credit payments for street sweepings and this material is currently sent to landfill. This has a significant effect on recycling tonnages and reduces the overall recycling rate by between 2 and 3%. The county are now working with a local (to Norfolk) business to develop a system for recycling street sweepings and indications are that this should be in place during 2013.
26. Whilst the current recycling service offered to residents is good, it does not match the service offered by many of the higher performing councils. This is because the service is restricted by the technology available in the re-processing plant (MRF). During 2012-13 all the Norfolk councils are involved in a tendering process to identify a new recycling contract to commence in 2014. This service will match that provided by the higher-performing councils by providing for a wider range of materials to be collected.
27. As a result of these and other pressures, recycling tonnages have fallen across the country over the last 3-5 years. However, Norwich has managed to 'buck' this trend through the doorstep recycling initiative and the co-ordinated communications campaign. As a result, participation rates are clearly increasing and collection tonnages are creeping upwards despite the downward pressure from unavoidable external factors.

Weekly collections support scheme (WCSS)

28. At the end of November 2012 the Council was informed that our bid for financial support from the government's WCSS fund had been unsuccessful. Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council, Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council were all involved with the bid and we were all very disappointed with the decision. The £1.8m in Government funding would have

been used by the councils working in partnership in a five year programme to provide weekly food waste collections for an additional 38,000 households.

29. Unfortunately, the government scheme was heavily biased in favour of Councils which retained or re-introduced significant numbers of weekly residual waste collections. All of the available evidence suggests that a return to weekly collections would increase residual waste tonnages, decrease recycling rates and significantly increase council costs (by an estimated £1million p.a. for Norwich). As a result, the Norfolk bid focussed on weekly food waste collections rather than a wholesale return to weekly residual waste collections.
30. Despite this setback, there were benefits from the work of officers from the four authorities and some potential future synergies and economies of scale were identified. All of the councils remain committed to the further development and delivery of improved and expanded recycling services, such as food waste collections, that will boost the amount of waste Norfolk recycles and reduce the amount we send to landfill.

Recycling Communications update

31. The communications activity over the last 8 months is attached below.