

Case Study - Recycling Scheme

Dartford Borough was one of the first Councils in Kent to introduce kerbside recycling to all its households in 1996.

Plastic sacks were issued to residents for newspapers, magazines and cardboard and were collected fortnightly. Consequently Dartford achieved a recycling rate of 14% in 1997. However, the slump in the world market for paper and card for recycling a year later hit the scheme hard. Retendering had to be carried out for cost reasons resulting in the dropping of cardboard collections and provision of collection sacks.

In 1998 Dartford's recycling rate dropped to 7%, and it is on this figure that the statutory Best Value targets of 14% (2003/04) and 21% (2005/06) are based. To meet these targets Councillors reinstated kerbside collection of dry recyclables in March 2002.

As well as being a statutory Government target, recycling and reduction of landfill, is a key priority for the Council under its Environment theme as well as featuring in the Service Improvement Plan from the Best Value review.

To meet those targets a co-mingled collection scheme was devised and a pilot project introduced in West Dartford from April to December 2002. Residents were issued with clear plastic sacks for dry recyclables (paper, card, cans, foil, plastic bottles & film). These were collected weekly with wheeled bin waste by the same vehicle.

A media campaign - Bag it Before you Bin It - was introduced and featured in local newspapers and on BBC TV local news. At the same time leaflets were delivered to households in the trial area.

Residents responded well but the system was axed because the sacks did not stand up to compaction in the refuse collection vehicle with other unbagged refuse. Stronger sacks were introduced but the problem remained and other issues arose around apportionment of recycled weights between different clients at the Cleanaway Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) which resulted in recycling achievements being overstated.

Alternative methods were costed and discussed with Dartford Councillors, KCC and the collection and disposal arms of Cleanaway. After limited trials, it was decided to retain the collection of dry recyclables in clear sacks, but to collect them separately. The extra cost was significant but KCC stepped in to help with the costs, so the scheme could keep to budget.

The trial and eventual roll out of the dry recycling scheme in March 2003 coincided with the Government's £140 million fund to help local authorities meet recycling targets. Dartford's phase 1 bid for recycling promotion and development was successful. A further £25,000 was awarded in 2002/3 and a consultant appointed to drive up recycling.

The separate collection scheme was eventually rolled out to the whole borough in March 2003 and recycling has stabilised at 12%. Combined with recycling achieved through the Borough's static recycling sites Dartford is on course to hit the 14% target.

The profile of recycling in Dartford has undoubtedly been raised by the promotion work funded by DEFRA. Now we are moving on to tackle green waste collections.