

Working Together in Oldham

Municipal Journal local government
achievement awards 2010



Oldham
Council

Oldham's recycling revolution

Summary

We have made huge improvements in the last year in terms of our approach to waste management. People now have more choice in their waste collection service, and we have made sure we tailor our messages and approaches to meet local needs.

As a result our recycling performance has more than doubled since 2007. We are now in the top three performing councils in Greater Manchester – a fantastic improvement from our place in the bottom 5% of all local authorities in the UK just three years ago. In two years we have reduced the amount of refuse sent to landfill by 13,790 tonnes.

We have only been able to make such dramatic improvements by working closely with our communities in ways that recognise we all have a role to play in making the service a success for the borough.

Introduction

We want Oldham to be recognised as a place of choice – a place where people choose to live and bring up their families; a place to do business; a place to study and a place to visit.

Our diverse environment is at the heart of this vision. Almost a quarter of our borough lies within the Peak District National Park, while other parts of the borough link directly to city centre Manchester. Seven of our parks have been awarded green flags and we were winner of the Best Town Centre in the North West in the 2009 Britain in Bloom competition. Our Chief Executive is lead for the sub-region's Environment Commission and championed the drive which led to the City Region to be recognised as the first Low Carbon Economic Area. He is also the chair of Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority.

Fundamental to our ambitions for our environment is our approach to waste management.

Our drivers for change

Our performance has not previously been in line with our ambitions. Performance for the year ending March 2007, whilst an improvement on the previous year, at just 15.5% recycled placed Oldham in the bottom 5% of all local authorities in the United Kingdom.

If Oldham was to improve, there are a number of economic and social factors within the borough we needed to recognise. Overall, Oldham is ranked 42nd most deprived borough in England, with the 23rd highest local concentrations of deprivation. Our population is increasingly diverse, with BME communities comprising 16.6% of our citizens. Within our borough are significant, geographically concentrated Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. In addition, a significant proportion of the borough's housing stock (44%) is 'inner-city' terrace property with limited space for a variety of refuse receptacles.

Reduce, reuse, recycle

Our approach means we are now on target to hit a 35% recycling rate by March 2010. To achieve this we work at a Greater Manchester, borough and local level.

Oldham Council is part of the Greater Manchester Waste Partnership. A recent Private Finance Initiative (PFI) has been signed to deliver new waste technologies in the Greater Manchester area over the next 25 years. It is indicative of the scale of the project that this is considered to be Europe's largest PFI. Oldham Council has played an active role in supporting the initiative, and has devised new waste collections systems to synchronise with the PFI timetable.

At a borough level, in 2007 we launched our new Managed Weekly Collection Service (MWC). To make it as simple as possible for residents we have alternate blue and green weeks. This service has provided households in Oldham with:

- A new weekly food waste collection.
- New 140 litre brown bins for co-mingled refuse (glass, cans and plastic bottles).
- A specially designed no-blo bag for collecting paper and card.



Food waste collection

Central to our MWC service is the weekly food waste collection. Our implementation has been the third largest in the UK so far and we are particularly proud of how well we have progressed it. In July 2009 alone we collected 550 tonnes of food waste for agricultural use.

In other areas of the country, fortnightly collections have been a contentious issue. However in Oldham, by emphasising the goal of boosting recycling rates, and communicating honestly and openly, we've managed to engage the public and harness their support.

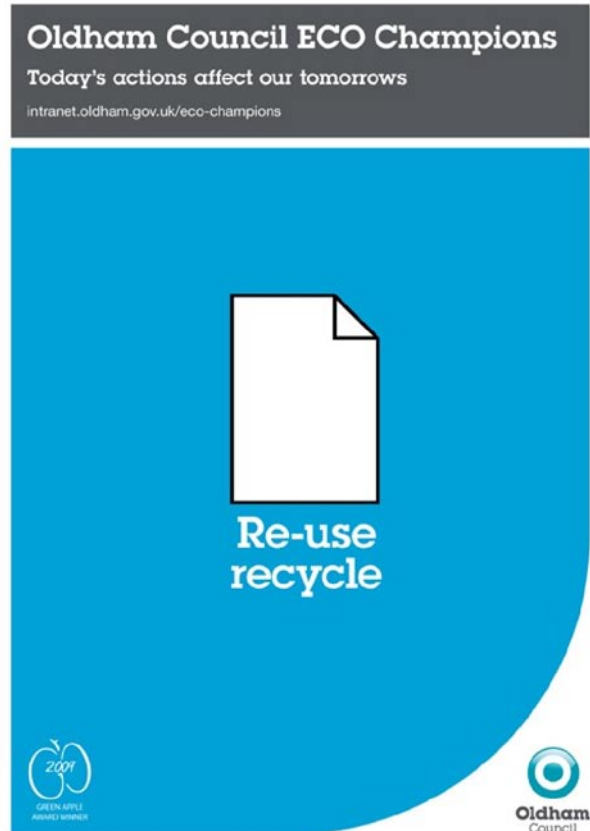
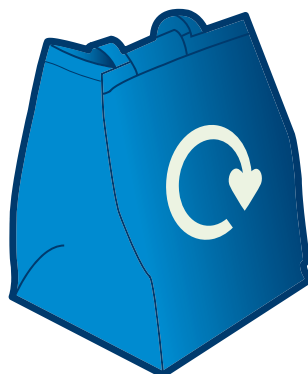
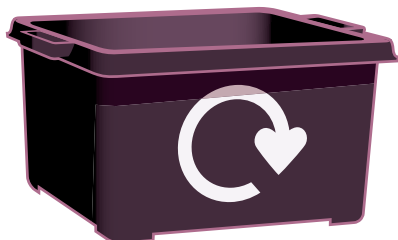
It's good to talk

We know we can't reduce the amount of waste we generate without the cooperation of our citizens. Part of our approach is to capture the imagination of our children. Almost 85% of Oldham schools are now registered as eco-schools and over 80% are recycling. As a result of initiatives such as the promotion of recycling in schools, Oldham is now ranked the 6th highest LEA in England for the number of eco schools that have achieved the prestigious green flag status (the highest status achievable as part of the eco-schools programme). We are also ranked 6th for the overall percentage of our schools who have registered with the eco schools programme in England (Data November 2009).

We now have the funding in place to offer schools a food waste collection service and will be rolling this out in 2010.

Our leadership as a Council within the community is also key. With almost 8,000 employees, the majority of whom live in the borough, it's vital our own staff champion recycling and other initiatives to reduce our carbon footprint. A new Council Office Recycling Action (CORA) scheme has been launched at all Oldham Council offices. The communication material links in with the communications to households, and reinforces our messages to residents.

This scheme builds on the excellent work of our 150 strong staff eco-champions network which received a prestigious Green Apple Award from the independent Green Organisation in November 2009 in recognition of their work on recycling and energy saving measures. A series of eco champion staff based posters were also produced that received an Association of Print and Communications Managers Award runner up in 2008.



These posters and our improvement in recycling are also helping contribute to our emerging organisation-wide Environmental Management system (aiming for ISO14001 accreditation during 2010/11).

We have put significant effort into working with our residents and communicating the changes in their services. This supports a smooth transition, but also greater take up. To support the implementation of the new MWC we:

- Designed, printed and delivered pre-leaflets giving residents 6-week's notice of the new services.
- Hosted over 25 community drop-in sessions in each phase of the roll-out for residents who wanted to speak to a member of the Waste section.
- Conducted a sustained campaign of pre/post door knocking across the Borough to explain the changes around the new collection system and then to ensure residents were happy and using the new system correctly.
- Designed, printed and delivered a full information pack alongside the bins detailing collection dates and explanation of materials.

Bin of choice

We believe a key success factor has been the fact we have offered our residents a choice of collection bins. Some of the properties in our borough simply do not have the space to store up to four wheeled bins – and we recognise that lots of bins around properties can make streets look ugly and messy.

We have listened to the concerns of our residents and offered them a range of receptacles such as smaller boxes instead of wheeled bins, or even smaller wheeled bins. This has encouraged increased participation across the borough.

But some people have told us they would like more bins! For instance some would prefer to have a wheeled bin for paper/cardboard instead of the current no-blo sack. In response we introduced the choice of small blue bins in late 2009. We have already received requests for and delivered 7,000.

We are also responding to the recycling needs of people living in flats and hard to access properties across the borough. We are introducing more communal recycling sites to reinforce the more than 100 sites already in place borough-wide.

We know from our research that different places and different sections of our communities respond in different ways to the new services. As a result we reviewed the ways in which we were engaging with our residents and developed more tailored approaches to better connect with local circumstances.

As part of this work we met with faith and community leaders to explain the scheme and share our proposed approaches. We listened to feedback and further tailored our plans. We put in place tri-lingual written materials (English, Bangladeshi and Urdu). We recruited five people fluent in community languages to help us talk to local people. This team went from door-to-door pre- and post-bin delivery to all households to support the roll-out process.

We also attended over 20 community meetings, held drop-in sessions and included messages on Asian and borough radio stations, and Asian community newspapers. We worked in conjunction with Oldham's

Interfaith Forum to have messages and announcements read out at all local mosques. This was supported by leaflets in all three languages, and translated bin stickers for brown bins and food caddies.

Levels of recycling before the campaign were 31.2%. Following the campaign they leapt to 73.8% - a fantastic increase. WRAP have complemented Oldham on the quality of the support materials produced and are using Oldham as a case study to present to other local authorities.

Review

During 2009 we carried out a review to explore the level of satisfaction with the service. Of the 560 responses (25% response rate) key results were:

77% either happy or very happy with the food waste collection service

77% either happy or very happy with the paper/ cardboard collection

83% either happy or very happy with the glass, cans and plastic bottles collection

84% either happy or very happy with the garden waste collection service

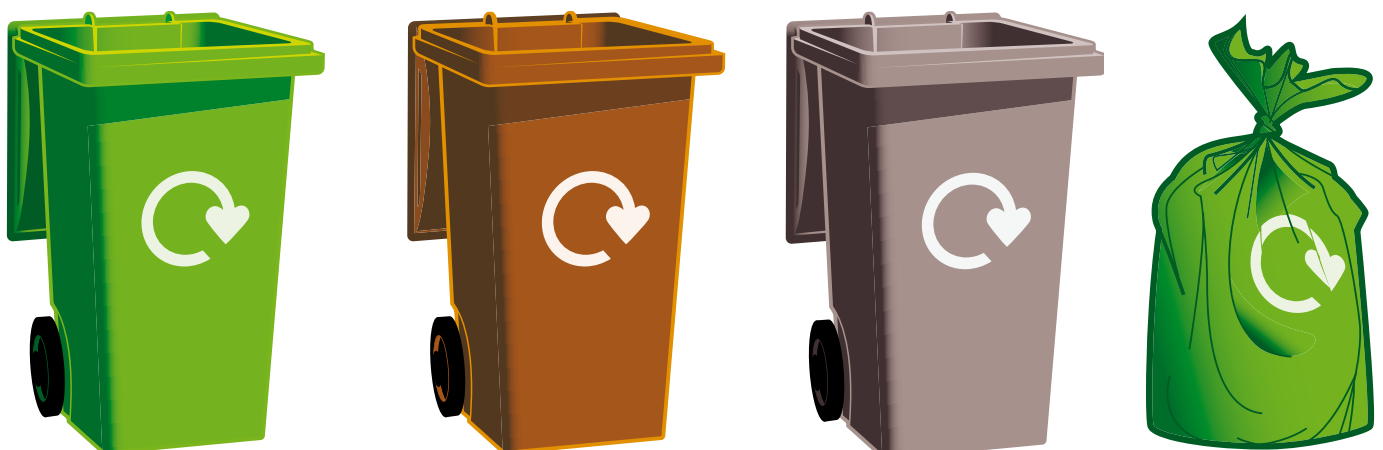
78% either happy or very happy with the grey bin waste collection service.

78% rated the overall waste collection service very good or excellent.

81% rated communications very good to excellent

Summary

Through strong and committed leadership, as well as working directly with local people so they can both understand and shape the service they receive, we have made dramatic improvements in our waste management arrangements. Our waste management team is hugely enthusiastic about the challenge ahead to make even greater increases in the amounts recycled and reduce the overall amount of waste produced. This commitment was recognised in December 2009 when they were overall winner of the Council's STAR awards.



Oldham is the largest recycler of food waste in the North of England.

Thanks to our unique partnership with the Co-operative, residents can now use the group's compostable carrier bags in food waste caddies.

