



Food waste

APSE issued a survey in 2009 to authorities throughout the UK on food waste. This briefing outlines the responses received to date. It is provided to local authority chief executives, council leaders and all APSE waste contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Key issues

This briefing sets out key findings including:

- How many authorities are operating a food waste scheme?

- The nature of these schemes

- Why some authorities aren't offering a food waste collection service

1. Introduction

APSE issued a state of the market survey for refuse collection and recycling in 2008 (briefing number 08-55) and in the findings, more than 90% of councils said they recycle paper, cans, green waste, glass and card, with almost 90% recycling plastics. However, only 23% recycled food waste and when councils were asked about the difficulty of implementing schemes, food waste was thought to be the most difficult. As a result, APSE issued another survey in 2009 to authorities throughout the UK specifically relating to food waste. We received 112 responses and this briefing paper shows key findings arising from the analysis.

Also included in this briefing are case studies from APSE member authorities Preston City Council and Carmarthenshire Council on how they have successfully approached food waste schemes. These examples show that, while dealing with food waste presents challenges, these can be overcome with the right approach.

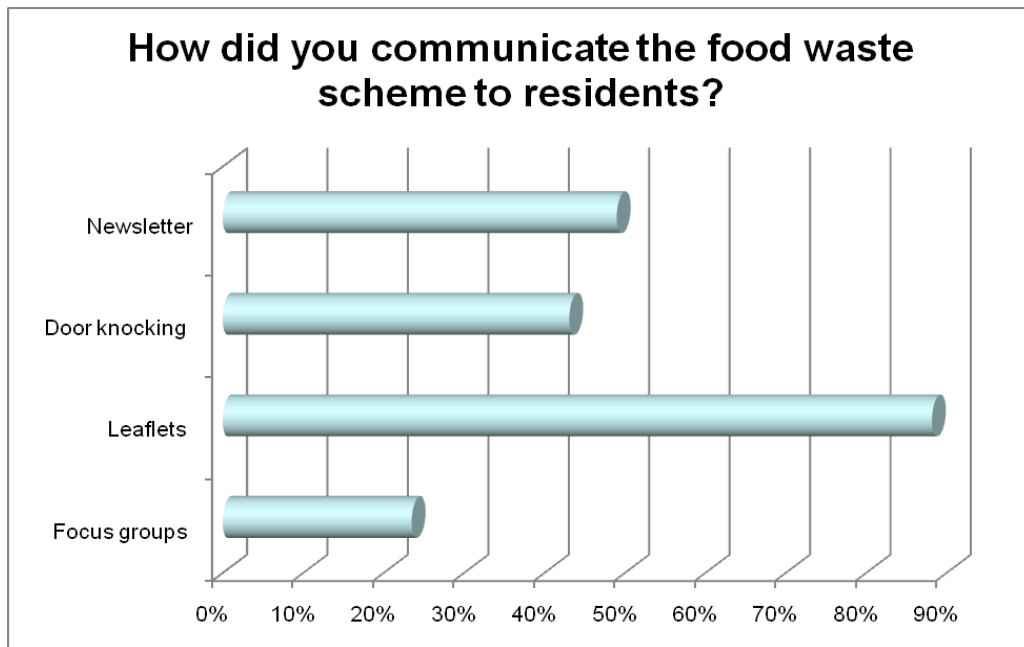
2. Key findings

The survey found that 38% of respondents currently offer a food waste collection service. Of those who don't, half of them expect to offer it in the next 2-3 years. The reasons for not collecting food waste include costs, there being no local facilities to treat the waste, that the waste is being treated as part of residual waste or political reasons.

For those respondents who do currently offer a food waste collection, key survey results include:

- On average they cover 36,000 properties, although this will obviously be affected by the size of the local authority
- Average participation stands at 66%, although this ranges from 23% to 100%
- The average kg of food waste collected per property that participates per week = 1.9kg
- 54% have weekly collections of food waste
- 61% offer alternate weekly collections
- 97.8% offer this for cooked food, 87% for uncooked food
- 48% mix food with green waste
- Even though all respondents stated that they use external bins, 87% use internal bins in the scheme
- 47% provide bin liners and of these, 17% residents pay full price and 4% pay a discounted price rate

The chart below shows how authorities who have implemented food waste schemes have communicated this to residents.



There is no correlation from the data between participation rates and the frequency of collections nor a correlation between participation rates and whether bin liners are supplied to the residents or not. Out of those authorities with a participation rate of over 50%, 59% offer a weekly collection and 41% provide bin liners (and of these are supplied free of charge).

In terms of costs of the schemes, many respondents commented that it is difficult to separate out the costs of the food waste scheme from other schemes such as green waste or from the overall service. Estimated costs ranged from £42,000 to £2.4 million although this depends on the type of scheme, the number of properties participating and what has been included in these costs (transport, staff, overheads, etc).

3. Case studies

Between 2007 and 2009, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) provided funding and technical support to 21 authorities in England and Northern Ireland to carry out trials of separate food waste collections. The trials found that refuse collection frequency was a significant factor. The average food waste yields achieved by trial areas with fortnightly refuse collections were generally higher in comparison to trial areas with weekly refuse collections. Levels of deprivation were also found to be significant in affecting the food waste yields, with higher yields in more affluent areas. Trials involving door-to-door collections of food waste from flats reflected the challenges of collecting food waste from multi-occupancy properties.

The most common reasons given by respondents for not participating in the food waste collections were related to concerns about potential hygiene, odour or vermin issues. However these issues were considered less important by residents who actually participated in the collections – indicating that these are often perceived issues rather than problems experienced in reality. The single main reason stated for non-participation was not producing enough food waste. Again, for most households this is also likely to be an issue of perception rather than reality; with studies showing that even households that claim to generate no food waste at all produce on average 2.9kg per week.

Below are two case studies from APSE member authorities, which show how they have implemented food waste schemes.

Preston City Council

Preston City Council's food waste scheme has been highly successful and the council has carried out a full end of trial report on the scheme. The collection and processing element of the project ran from May 2005 to May 2007. It was introduced alongside the extension of alternate weekly collections to a densely population area of over 7,500 households in the Deepdale area of the city. Residents in the target area felt that the food waste project gave them an opportunity to dispose of their food waste weekly within a fortnightly collection service.

The project required householders to separate food waste into a 7 litre kitchen caddy lined with special compostable bags. A larger 25 litre outside container was used to store full bags and was set out on the kerbside every week. Bags and containers were provided free to householders. A project officer was employed and a driver and one assistant carried out collections with a specially designed vehicle.

Participation began at around 56% and in some areas has been measured to be as high as 77%. Contamination was reduced to a very low level in a short space of time through doorstepping and rejection slips. Over 850 tonnes of food waste was collected over the years of the project. On average 3kg every week could be expected from a participating household and this can be as much as 5kg where cooking involves fresh un-prepared ingredients.

The council adopted an innovative approach to communication in response to the diversity of ethnic backgrounds and languages in the area. The project focused on producing extremely visual and almost word-free literature with key text repeated in several different appropriate languages. In terms of customer satisfaction, a questionnaire was sent out in Spring 2006 and 97% of the respondents thought that the

service should continue. The trial has now been mainstreamed and collections rolled out to a further 7,500 households.

Carmarthenshire Council

Carmarthenshire Council, a primarily rural authority in Wales with some urban wards rolled out a scheme in February last year and by October this year, 75,000 households will be covered. Their new kerbside recycling scheme involves alternate blue bags and black bag collections with food waste collected every week by new vehicles. Food waste is put in a brown caddie in the kitchen and transferred to a bin outside.

The council appointed a Communications Officer to help deliver the communication plan alongside their waste awareness team of officer. It ran a major advertising campaign called 'Green or Mean' and have events and roadshows to schools and communities. An average of 1.72kg of food waste is being collected per household and the authority conducted a participation exercise in August 2008 which revealed that a 78% participation rate in food waste. It carried out 2 doorstepping exercises in February and September 2008 which demonstrated that over 95% of respondents were aware of the scheme and in the main the project was highly successful.

For more information on the above case studies or to obtain contact details for these councils, please email djohns@apse.org.uk

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