

# Fortnightly refuse & wheelie bins

## West London research summary



# What was the research for?

- Small-scale focus groups in Hounslow and Ealing to test terms and messages that might be used in communications about fortnightly refuse collections and the introduction of wheeled bins
- Research participants drawn from both boroughs were a mix of mid, high and low recyclers and covered a broad socio-demographic mix of residents

# What was changing?

Borough	Current service	Proposed service
Ealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry multi-stream recycling, separated, weekly</li> <li>• Mix of green box and sacks</li> <li>• Weekly food</li> <li>• Residual - black sacks, weekly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recycling – blue 240L bin, co-mingled, fortnightly (increase in capacity)</li> <li>• Food remains weekly</li> <li>• Residual - black 240L bin, AWC (smaller bin on request)</li> </ul>
Hounslow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry multi-stream, separated</li> <li>• Mix of green box and sacks</li> <li>• Weekly dry (except plastics)</li> <li>• AWC plastics/garden waste</li> <li>• Weekly food</li> <li>• Residual – black sacks, weekly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recycling - 140L grey bin, initially weekly, moving to fortnightly (bigger bin on request)</li> <li>• Weekly plastics</li> <li>• Charged, opt-in garden waste in 240L brown bin (£50 pa)</li> <li>• Food remains weekly</li> <li>• Bring collections in-house</li> </ul>

# Key findings

- Existing attitudes to waste, local council, tax & government **frame** people's responses to changes in services
- First (instinctive) reactions to moving fortnightly are always negative – a **sense of loss**, something taken away
- 'Selling' messages are disliked – e.g. “We are providing an enhanced service” – councils need to **be honest** about why they're doing it (i.e. to encourage more recycling)
- Almost everyone is likely to have a worry about **food waste**

# Residents' preferred messaging

- This makes it **easier** to recycle and to recycle more
- (Wheeled bins) mean a **cleaner** service – ending the problem with ripped bags, foxes and cats
- **Environmental** protection benefits of increased recycling, now and future (as a supporting message only)
- Resource 'stories' to show how items collected for recycling are put to **further use** (for more engaged recyclers)
- We're doing well but need to recycle more – **targets** and/or keeping costs down
- **Saving money** to put back into local services, with 'proof' provided by specific examples (NB: tread carefully here)

# Messages that don't work...

- Appeals to social norming (“everyone is doing it”)
- Unsupported statements that services will be improved which do not sit well with the instinctive sense of loss
- Leading with a service improvement message when it is obvious to many participants that the council’s motivation is to encourage higher levels of recycling
- Messages that assume too much prior knowledge about the way the service is run to be meaningful
- Anything that speaks more to the council’s interests than the residents’

# Opportunities – more recycling?

*“I didn’t start recycling until I got the [grey] bin, because until I had to manage how much waste I could use [I didn’t think about] recycling then it became part of a daily thing...”*

*“...so they might be trying to make us have a check on ourselves.”*

*“So I am a little bit lazy when it comes to recycling ...Typically, especially if you’ve got to wash it out as well it’s straight in the main bin but now obviously I’m going to have to think a bit more and recycle.”*

# Opportunities – food waste?

- Some of the low recyclers said they would re-think their routines and start recycling more. A few said they would re-consider food waste collections because they are weekly
- This might be an opportunity to re-engage residents with specific food waste information and motivational messages

# Be straightforward

- Do not over-emphasise changes and be straightforward about losses and gains
- Where services are extensive, position the change to the refuse element proportionately
- Spell out and give equal weight to any gains from providing service additions (e.g. bigger bins/boxes) that will balance the 'taking away' of weekly residual collections
- Do not rely on vague or bland appeals to 'improved' or 'extended' services because they are unlikely to be accepted at face value and could feel disingenuous

# Keep it simple

- Explain exactly what will change and what will be the same
- Explain precise details of what to do and how
- If it's going to be easier to recycle, say so and how
- Reassure existing recyclers that they can still recycle as much as/more than before
- Remind residents about weekly food collections where those are provided
- If there are other benefits that will appeal directly to residents (e.g. cleaner streets, better response times to enquiries, easier recycling) spell them out

# Use tried and tested motivational messages

- **Don't assume** knowledge or interest, make sure messages stand on their own terms
- Don't use messages that imply **benefit to councils but not to residents**; don't assume that everyone will make the connection that residents benefit from council cost savings
- Environmental messages are widely accepted as supporting messages, as long as they aren't 'preachy'
- Referring to targets can convey that more needs to be done but can be tricky to pitch
- Focusing on local benefits can be engaging but cost saving messages need to be handled with care

# Words to use, words not to use

- Rubbish
- Waste
- General waste
- Black bag/bin

These are everyday terms that make immediate sense

- Non-recyclable
- Refuse
- Residual
- Landfill



*“You’re not going to say ‘I’m putting out the non-recyclables darling’ ”*

These are ‘council’ words or ‘posh’ words (Chiswick or Chelsea)

# Things to remember...

- Not everyone can visualise the size of the bin!
- Residents don't necessarily understand austerity and council financing – they're still paying the same council tax (or more)
- If you're charging for garden and going fortnightly residual, residents will struggle to accept cost-saving messages
- Complicated scheduling of services needs to be made simple – use colour coding or similar, consistently, across infrastructure and comms



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