

Recycling in flats above shops

31/05/23

Revealing Reality report
for ReLondon

Research carried out November-April
2022/23



Contents

Introduction	5
Where were people getting their information about recycling	13
How were people recycling in their home	21
How were people disposing of their waste on the street	27
Relationships with businesses, landlords and the council	34
Conclusions and recommendations	40

A note on language:

As this is a qualitative research project, Revealing Reality has refrained from using any quantifiable figures. However, for the aid of the reader, here is a key to deduce roughly how 'many' respondents out of the total of 30 we are referring to throughout.

- 'Many/Most' - Over half of the respondents
- 'Some' - Between 7-15 respondents
- 'Few' - Between 2-6 respondents

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Building on previous research on recycling behaviours in houses of multiple occupancy, or HMOs, ("Sharing a house, sharing responsibility")¹ and purpose-built flats, or PBFs ("Recycling in real life"),² this work was commissioned to explore the unique challenge that flats above shops (FLASH) present for recycling provision. This research was carried out through a range of shorter remote interviews and more in-depth ethnographies in homes, to speak both with respondents themselves, and also observe their context and surroundings to see what other factors might shape their behaviour.

In contrast to purpose-built flats, where residents have dedicated bins with clear waste disposal regulations, the situation in FLASH is more complex. Visible kerb-side collection, restricted time-bands, and relationships with shops below often make recycling correctly more difficult than in other living situations. Given that the rules are not always that clear, residents tend to fall back on their preconceived knowledge and assumptions about recycling, which are often incorrect. The lack of clarity and on-street

guidance can also undermine residents' faith in recycling and their motivation to separate recycling properly.

Communicating rules in FLASH also appears to be more difficult. Given that residents living in FLASH often share entranceways, many residents were either unable or not interested in distinguishing between recycling related communications and other post or junk mail. Residents often experienced an accumulation of post and junk mail in communal areas, and suspected they might miss important mail that was not specifically addressed to them. Communicating recycling rules in this environment therefore is inevitably more difficult than in other types of housing.

Relationships between shops and residents also creates a different dynamic not faced in other housing scenarios. In this research, some business owners and residents were unaware of the differences in waste

collection rules between commercial and residential waste. Additionally, some businesses have their own private waste collection services, separate from the council's collection. The absence of on-street signs and clear communication exacerbates the confusion surrounding recycling collection, and there were sometimes tensions between businesses and residents, particularly if waste left out was perceived to be unsightly and in the 'wrong' place.

Most importantly, in line with other research, people's recycling behaviours are very often shaped by the actions of others around them, and this is especially the case in FLASH. With waste left out visibly on the street, and a lack of clear guidance around collection and recycling rules, residents tend to follow what they see around them, which can be detrimental to recycling behaviours if done incorrectly.

Introduction



Background to the research

Context and objectives

In recent years, ReLondon have provided significant support for local authorities and housing providers in London to pursue their recycling targets. Previously, Revealing Reality worked with ReLondon and on projects for WRAP to explore the recycling behaviours of residents in houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) ("Sharing a house, sharing responsibility")³ and purpose-built flats (PBFs) ("Recycling in real life")⁴. This work was used to develop the Flats Recycling Package (FRP) - an evidence-based set of operational and communication guidelines, proven to have improved recycling rates from PBFs.⁵

In terms of supporting improved recycling, residents living in a flat above a shop (FLASH) represent another challenging subsection of London's housing type. As hypothesised by ReLondon, there are some factors that are specific to FLASH and distinct from HMOs and PBFs, and for residents living in flats above shops (FLASH), dealing with rubbish and recycling can be confusing. Waste is left out visibly on the street, waste is collected during restricted time bands, and relationships with shops below residents sometimes

makes waste collection more complex. As a result, FLASH residents are often unclear about what can be recycled and how to do so.

In the previous pieces of work on HMOs and PBFs, the factors found in the COM-B framework (motivation, opportunity, and capability) were found to affect recycling behaviour. ReLondon commissioned Revealing Reality to build on this previous work in relation to FLASH, using this COM-B framework as the basis for the research. This work therefore explores genuine recycling behaviours of residents in FLASH, identifying factors affecting motivation, opportunity and capability, and assessing how these factors might play out differently compared with recycling in HMOs and PBFs. This work aims to inform recycling policy around flats above shops, and to determine how existing interventions and guidelines could be applied or adapted.

Previous research on recycling by residents in HMOs and PBFs also analysed the effects of personal, social and environmental factors, and these were found to shape recycling behaviour. Broadly speaking, these centre on knowledge, relationships and the condition of the environment - both inside and outside of the home. Each factor also had 'push' and 'pull' factors - push factors were those which made residents more likely to recycle, and pull made residents less likely. These factors were also used as a framework for this research.⁶

3) <https://relondon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Recycling-in-Londons-HMOs-report.pdf>

4) <https://relondon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Recycling-in-reality-report.pdf>

5) <https://relondon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ReLondon-Report-Making-recycling-work-for-people-in-flats-2.0.pdf>

6) <https://relondon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Recycling-in-reality-report.pdf>

Background to the research

Approach and methodology

The main focus of the research was to interview local residents to gather their perspectives on their recycling behaviours. The research was framed around general household behaviours, to avoid biased answers around waste and ensure a more honest response from residents. Recruiting residents in FLASH proved much more difficult than for PBFs, but through using a range of channels, such as social media posting, adverts in individual boroughs, and distributing flyers, a sample of 30 residents was achieved.

All 30 respondents submitted a short pre-task, which involved answering questions about their household routine and sending photo and video footage of their flat and the street below. Based on this information, respondents were taken forward for either a remote 30-45 minute interview or a 2.5-3 hour in-person ethnographic interview. Capturing a broad range of perspectives, researchers spoke to 20 people remotely, and conducted ten in-person ethnographic interviews to explore recycling behaviours in greater depth, focusing on factors specific to the project.

These interviews were used to gather an initial range of factors affecting recycling behaviours. Researchers profiled these factors in relation to previous work to deduce which overlapped with HMOs and PBFs and which were specific to FLASH.

Once the residents' perspectives were gathered, the researchers aimed to include the perspectives of businesses and landlords as well. They used ReLondon's work with Business Improvement Districts to inform in-person fieldwork with over 10 businesses. The researchers also spoke to businesses either below these flats or on the same street as those who took part in ethnographic interviews to compare the viewpoints of those living in the flats above and the businesses below and see when these relationships might affect on-street recycling.

However, getting landlords and letting agents involved in fieldwork proved to be challenging due to the sometimes complicated relationships between residents and landlords. Instead, researchers conducted a brief literature review on HMOs to understand the role of landlords in the

recycling process. These findings were then incorporated into analysis and reporting.

Prior to recruitment commencing, ReLondon conducted a workshop for London boroughs, including a survey to contribute their perspectives about the challenges of recycling. Revealing Reality attended this workshop, and findings were considered in the research design phase - helping to understand the problems at hand and shape the qualitative approach.

The report is structured around distinct stages of the recycling and waste disposal journey, focusing on communication, recycling in the home, and disposal on the street. The findings are consolidated based on the perspectives of residents, businesses, and landlords.

Background to the research

About ethnographic research

By employing an ethnographic approach, this research comprehensively explored the obstacles to recycling within FLASH.

Ethnography, as a qualitative research method, focuses on the significance of context in comprehending people's behaviour. Ethnography encompasses not only in-depth conversations with respondents but also observations of their environment (such as the waste disposal systems in their properties and street and how respondents interact with them) and social interactions (for example, how participants and their flatmates interact with each other). By observing individuals' domestic surroundings, relationships, and life priorities, their actions and words are able to be contextualised within their broader lifestyle. This was particularly useful in the context of recycling in FLASH, as outlined later in this report, as FLASH have factors affecting recycling behaviour both in the home and on the street, and other people's behaviour also was found to have a large influence on respondents' own recycling habits.

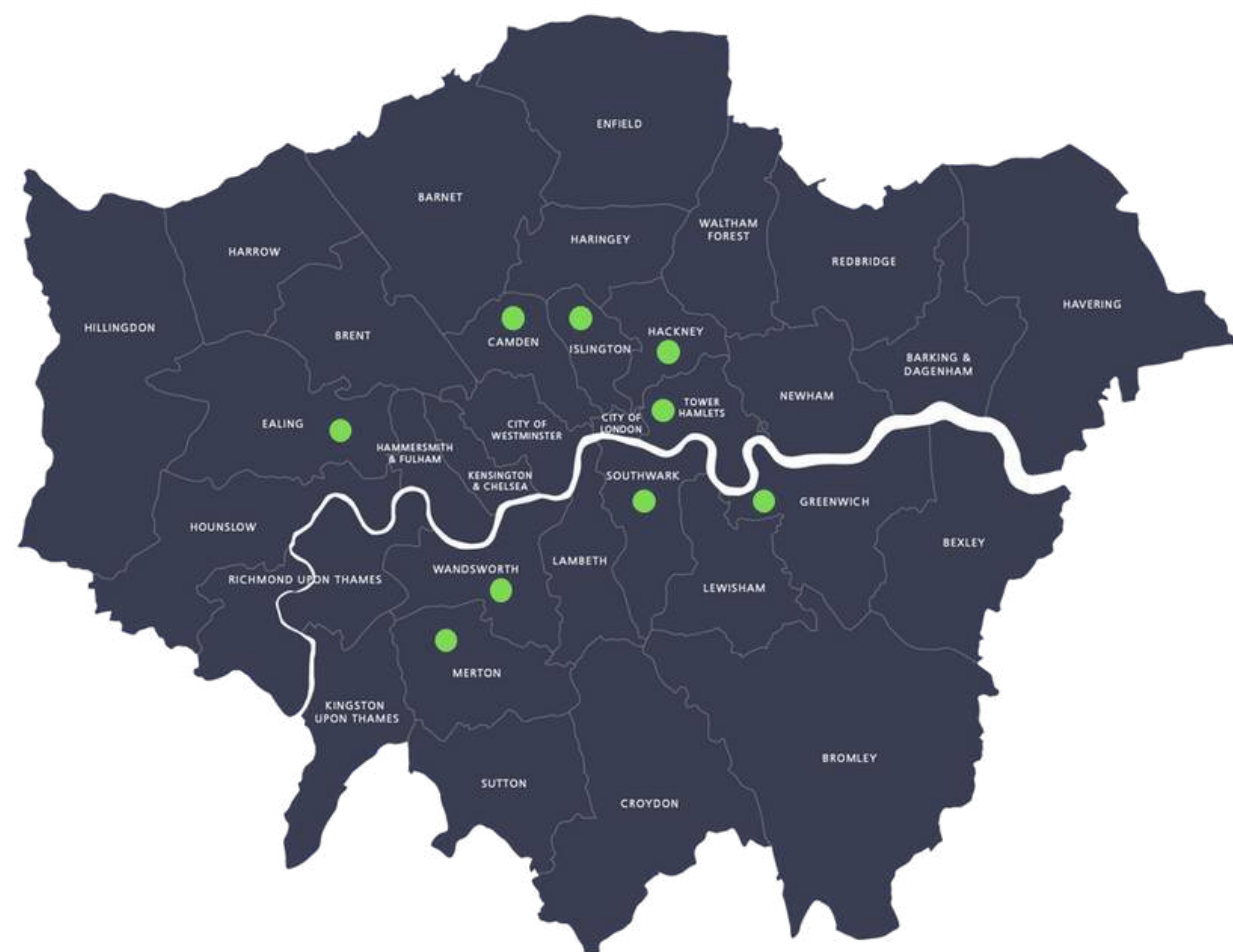


Sample - residents

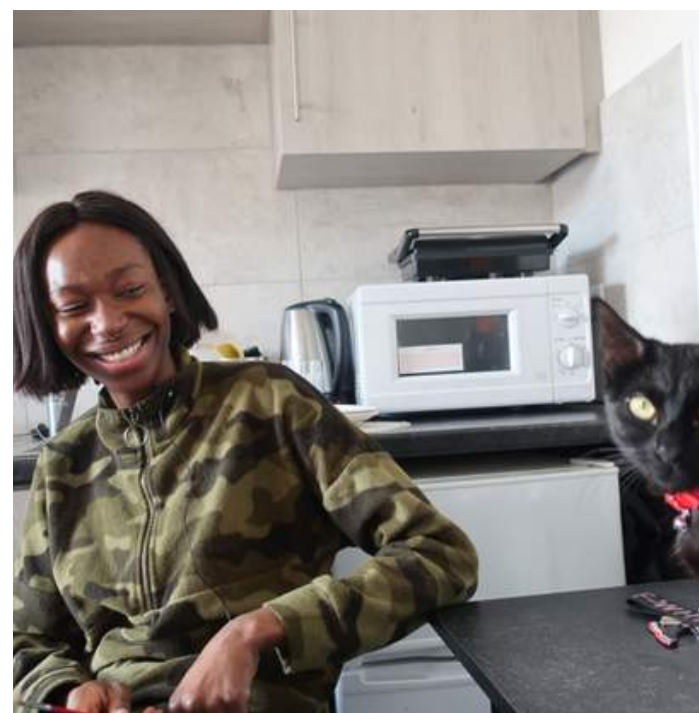
The sample consisted of 30 respondents from across 10 London boroughs

Residents were selected in boroughs where the council provided a dry mixed recycling service and asked them to present it in a sack on the street for collection. Each resident took part in either a remote or in-person interview.

The sample included a spread of demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity and living situation, to capture a range of different attitudes and behaviours around waste and recycling across the boroughs.



REVEALING REALITY



Sample - businesses

Alongside residents, 10 businesses were interviewed - both below residents flats, and on the rest of the street.

Throughout the project, various types of businesses, including cafes, restaurants, gift shops and spas were interviewed. This was to ensure there was a range in the amounts and types of waste being produced. Variety across the businesses, volume and types of waste produced were important to ensure that there was an array of impacts on the residents who lived above.

During interviews with businesses, researchers investigated waste disposal methods and any possible pain points involved with having on-street pick up. Business perspectives of residents' waste disposal habits were also investigated to understand how relationships between shops and residents might affect recycling and waste collection behaviours of each party.



Findings summary: How is recycling different for flats above shops compared with other types of accommodation in London?

1. Waste collection rules are more restrictive

Previous research highlights that people tend to make assumptions about what and how to recycle - and often this knowledge is inaccurate.⁷ For residents in FLASH, the complexity of on-street collection rules can cause more confusion, and more incorrect recycling.

Waste collection in FLASH can involve limited time-banding, specific collection points on the street, and separate waste collection services for businesses with differently coloured bags. As a result, there is often a lack of clarity about when and where waste is being collected, and a lack of on-street guidance to explain this.

Comparatively, residents in PBFs with a dedicated bin store are often following just one set of waste disposal rules, it is clear where residents should dispose of their waste.

Because there is typically more confusion around waste collection and the more messy environment on the street, some residents expressed a lack of faith in the recycling in FLASH, and this potentially could affect residents' motivation to separate their recycling properly.

2. Shared entryways and post-boxes result in lost or ignored post

Many residents shared front doors, hallways and post-boxes with several other flats in the building. This frequently resulted in a build-up of post and junk mail in communal hallways, and post that was not personally addressed to respondents was easily missed.

The actual degree of reported communication from local councils about recycling rules varied across the sample. While some residents could recall receiving leaflets or letters, others thought they had not received anything at all. Messy entranceways and the anonymous nature of post could be a factor in some residents missing communications from the council about recycling.



Findings summary: How is recycling different for flats above shops compared with other types of accommodation in London?

3. Businesses can create confusion around recycling collection

Along with ReLondon's research with BIDS, this research highlights that some business owners are not aware of distinctions between collection rules for commercial and residential waste, while others have their own private waste collections which are separate from council collection. Together with a lack of on-street signage, this lack of clear communication from the council, and between businesses and residents, can create an added layer of confusion around recycling collection.

Businesses and residents can take issue with how each party disposes of their waste, particularly if they perceive this to be anti-social, unsightly, or against the rules.

4. Residents are even more influenced by what others are doing around them

Previous research shows that people's waste disposal habits are shaped to a large degree by social pressures and how well-looked after their immediate environment is.⁸ Tidy environments and good recycling 'role models' tend to encourage better recycling habits in other residents. On-street collection means that how people dispose of waste and recycling is more visible to residents in FLASH. This greater level of visibility means that residents in FLASH are more influenced by the recycling behaviours of others.

The frequency of waste collection also plays a role in levels of visibility and tidiness - determining whether waste is left to pile up before the weekly collection day, or collected in tight time bands.



**Where were people
getting their
information about
recycling?**



People were not aware of receiving recycling information from their local council

Most respondents recalled receiving little to no communication about recycling or waste provision from their council - and they weren't reading information printed on recycling sacks either.

Many of the respondents had communal entryways and post-boxes, which often led to a build-up of junk mail and misplaced post. Some people had issues with receiving deliveries, and had formed agreements with shop owners or neighbours to keep their parcels safe.

With this in mind, some thought it was likely that they had missed communications from the council. Other residents reported missing important letters when only one had been sent to a building of multiple flats, or if the letter was addressed to 'The Occupier'.

For example, Georgia (23) lived with five other people she did not previously know in a rented property. They had trouble receiving post and deliveries, and their letting agents were not able to answer their recycling queries either.

"I don't know if we just get missed? Our number has got an A after it.. When I try to order things online, it doesn't ever have our number."

Georgia, 23

Similarly, Serena (64) said she did not recall receiving information about recycling from the council, or any recycling sacks either. She has lived in the same building all her life, and was aware that her street changed from daily to weekly waste collection. However, she claimed to be unaware of the on-street recycling sack collection, as she did not recall getting any information about it.



CASE STUDY



Johnny, 26

“At the very start we didn’t know what to do with the rubbish - we were just leaving it outside the front door. We didn’t get anything from [the shops], but we did get it from our neighbours, but not in a confrontational way. It was more just like, this is what you’re meant to do.”



Johnny lives with two flatmates above a nail bar. They had never knowingly received any information about recycling from the council. They often receive their neighbour's post by accident, accumulating a large pile of letters on their kitchen table. They don't sort through these letters very often, and he thought it was likely they could have missed letters from the council. As a result, they have learnt about recycling rules through trial and error, and were told what to do by their neighbours.

Only some people were proactively abiding by or sharing council communications

Of those who did remember receiving leaflets or letters from the council, only some acted on this information, by following or sharing it in their buildings with neighbours, or displaying leaflets or letters in communal areas.

For example, Marta (40) proactively pinned up recycling information in her communal hallway. She has lived in her flat for a few years and tended to take more responsibility for issues in the building than her neighbours, who are a bit newer and younger. She had never actually seen her neighbours recycle, and wasn't sure if they knew the rules.

"One year we received a leaflet from the council. So I put it in the electric cupboard [in the hallway], so you can't see it all the time – but if you open it you can see it."

Marta, 40

However, even with proactive tenants like Marta, the information displayed in public hallways was not always clear. Laura (26) noticed a letter from the council pinned up in her communal hallway. She wasn't sure if it had been put up by her landlord or a proactive neighbour, and it took a while before she actually noticed it was there. The letter itself was long, wordy and the actual collection rules were not very clear.

Some people in the sample also admitted that they would be unlikely to engage with any recycling communication from their council, even if they were committed recyclers themselves. Most respondents in the sample did not think to contact the local council, and were not motivated enough to do so about an issue such as recycling. Alan (36) admitted that he tended to recycle circulars to the flat without reading them in too much detail. He thought he probably wouldn't engage with information that the council sent.

This was also the case for Johnny (26), who had very little engagement with the council as well as a confusing post situation. He admitted it would be hard for the council to reach him about recycling rules - either by post or email.

"If something came through from the council about recycling, it probably wouldn't be read. If something came through the door, it would probably go straight in the bin."

Johnny, 26

People were not reading information on recycling sacks

Most people had not read the information printed on recycling sacks, and some hadn't even noticed it. This was the case for Zack (59), who didn't think his street had recycling provision and was using recycling sacks to dispose of his general waste.

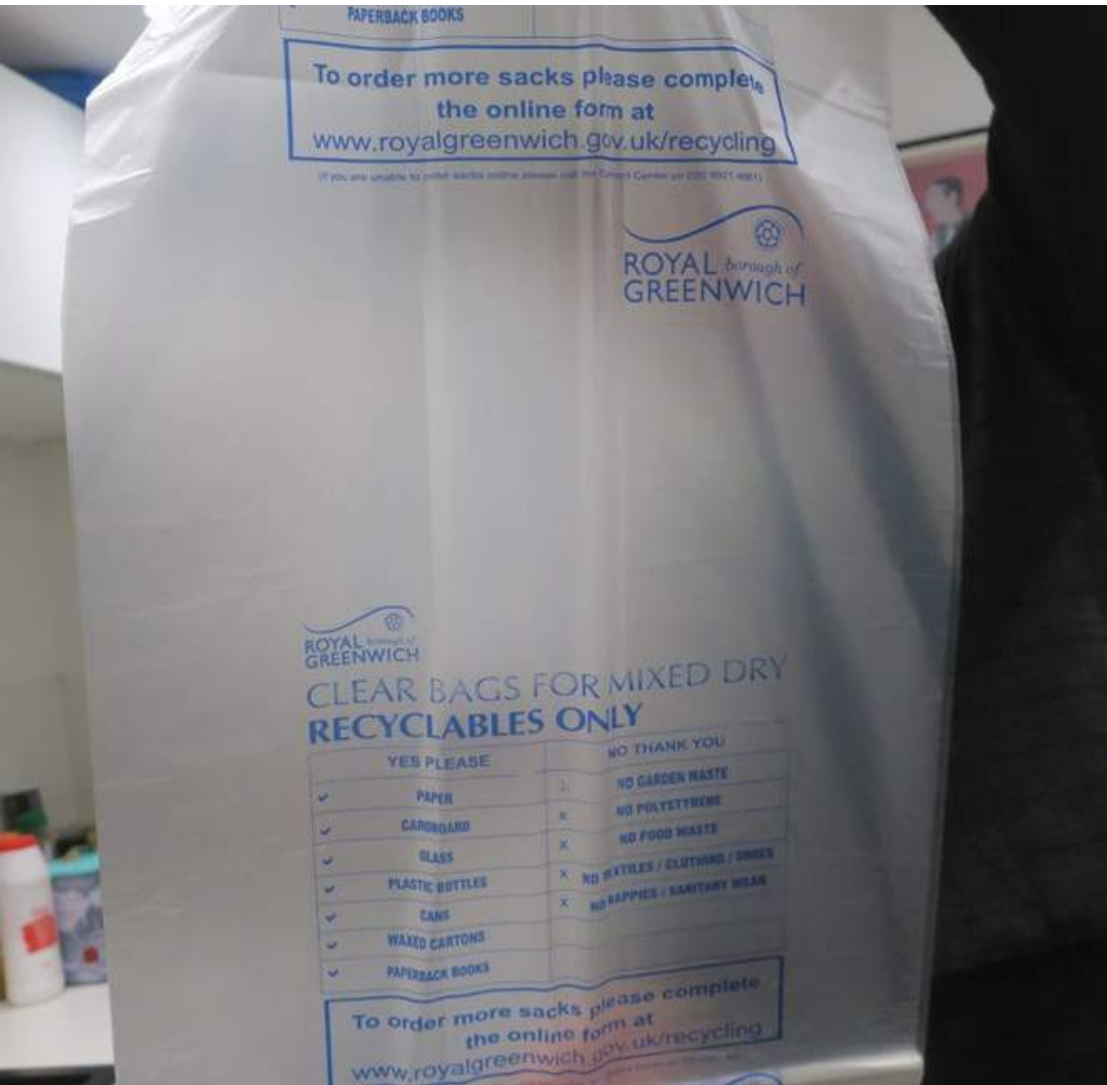
“We do get bin bags. They're thrown into communal areas. It just says [council]... it doesn't really say much and I don't know whether they're even for recycling or not.”
Zack, 59

Some people also found the information difficult to read on a plastic bag, and thought the information itself was confusing. For instance, some of the categories seemed too broad, while others were very specific.

“...It's not specific enough. So it says bottles, tins, glass... I know that, what I actually need is a list of which plastics!”
Karen, 54

It seemed that many people did not notice the information being provided on the sack itself, and were more receptive to receiving information earlier on in the process when they were actually looking for it, such as when they moved in, or during interactions with their landlord.

“It's not very easy to read on a plastic bag... I'd never read it before.”
Dina, 25



Most landlords and letting agents aren't providing information about recycling

In line the previous research on recycling in HMOs,⁹ landlords were not playing an active role in informing residents about recycling rules. Most of the private renters in the sample had little contact with their landlords and letting agents aside from alerting them to issues or repairs. When prompted, most people ascribed responsibility for recycling information to the council, but generally they could not recall receiving this information, and were not motivated to look for it.

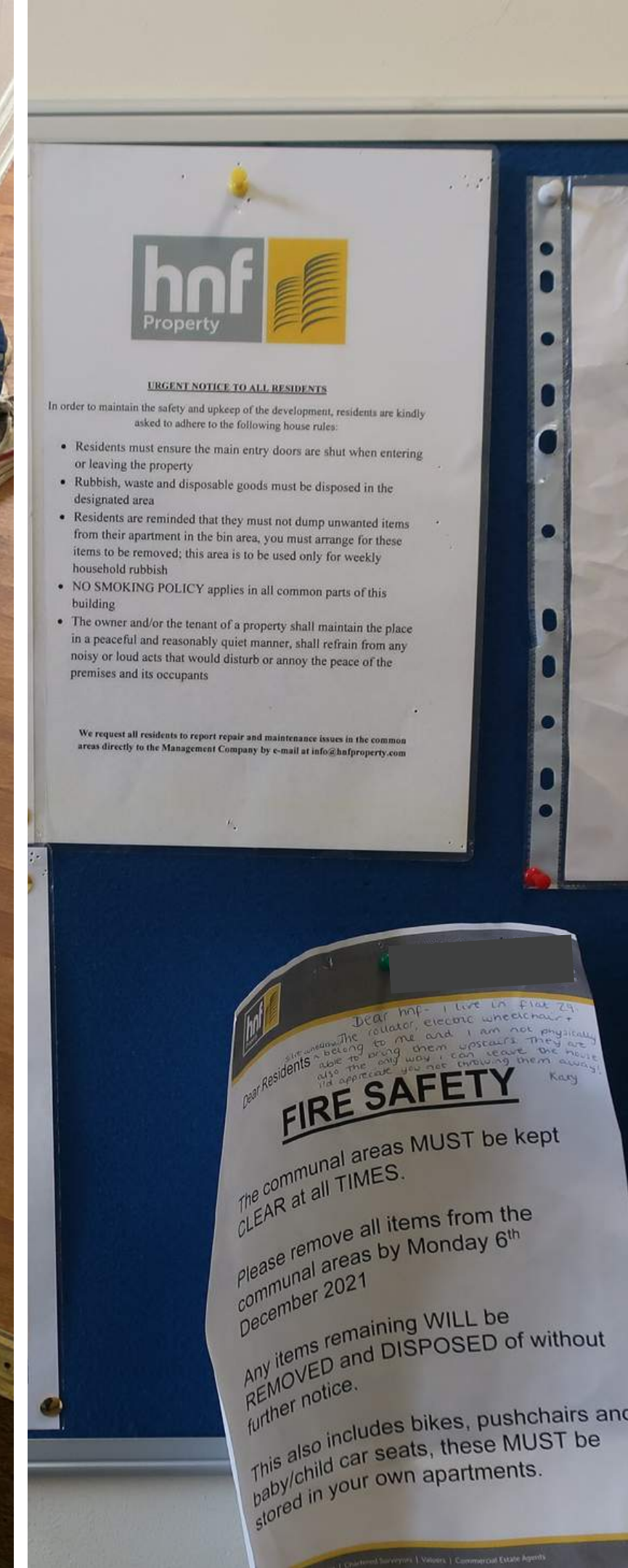
"The agency told us what day rubbish would get collected... but the recycling stuff we sort of had to figure out on our own through Google."

Rosie, 35

A few of the respondents were informed about recycling rules by their landlord or letting agent. This tended to be during informal conversations when they first moved in, or through information displayed in communal areas. In either case, the information passed on by landlords often did not feel that clear to tenants.

"I was told nothing about recycling from the landlord whatsoever... I think they don't think it's their responsibility to tell you."

Eric, 52



People tended to be motivated by social norms, rather than the rules themselves

Many could not recall receiving information on where and when to put their recycling, and instead found their information in other ways, through word-of-mouth and observing what others were doing.

For many, conforming to social norms seemed to be a greater motivation than following exact council recycling rules. People tended to copy whatever other residents and businesses were doing in their street - regardless of whether this was in line with local collection rules.

"We were never told of a designated waste point when we moved in...but when we moved in, we saw that's where the shop below and the shops either side were putting their waste."

James, 26

"[The council] ask you to put it on the street, outside the door to the building. But it feels a bit unnecessary when there's [a space] 10 metres away. That's where I see most other people put theirs. Then I don't have to see it just outside my door. Plus it looks bad when I go out and just dump the bag."

Marta, 40

Most people asked flatmates, neighbours, and shop owners, or used a trial and error approach based on what they thought might be right, and were then corrected by others.

For example, Archie (25) was told by his agents that they didn't know about his recycling process, so he asked others in the area, such as the pub nearby, the café downstairs, as well as neighbours and other tenants for the information.



Unclear communication added to the perception that recycling wasn't being properly dealt with

Most people thought that recycling in London probably wasn't very effective. They based this on how well they perceived waste collection services to be working, as well as information picked up from online sources and word-of-mouth.

Some people observed waste collection trucks picking up general waste and recycling at the same time, and assumed this meant that materials weren't actually being separated. Some had heard that the UK ships waste to other countries, and wondered if this was the case for London's waste services.

"It feels as though there are lots of rumours about England selling their waste to other countries, so it feels difficult to make a personal impact."

James, 26

This scepticism was often supported by a lack of clear communication from the council.

Absence of leaflets or on-street signage contributed to residents feeling that they didn't have clarification from their local council about where their waste and recycling actually goes.

"I don't really know what happens with my recycling once it goes to be recycled... I wish I had more knowledge of the city council... I wouldn't know how effective [recycling] is."

Rita, 25

This resulted in many residents feeling in the dark about what happened after they had left their recycling on the street. Many were also not motivated to go to the council website for information, and as such did not see information about where their recycling went.

"Well I read in the newspaper that you think your recycling is recycled, but actually it's just getting shipped off to landfill somewhere."

Karen, 54



How were people
recycling in their
home?



Storage presented a challenge for many - but it wasn't the main determinant of recycling

As the previous examples in this report have demonstrated, storage of residual waste and recycling could be challenging - particularly for residents with weekly collection. For example, Laura (26) struggled to store furniture packaging when she first moved into her new flat:

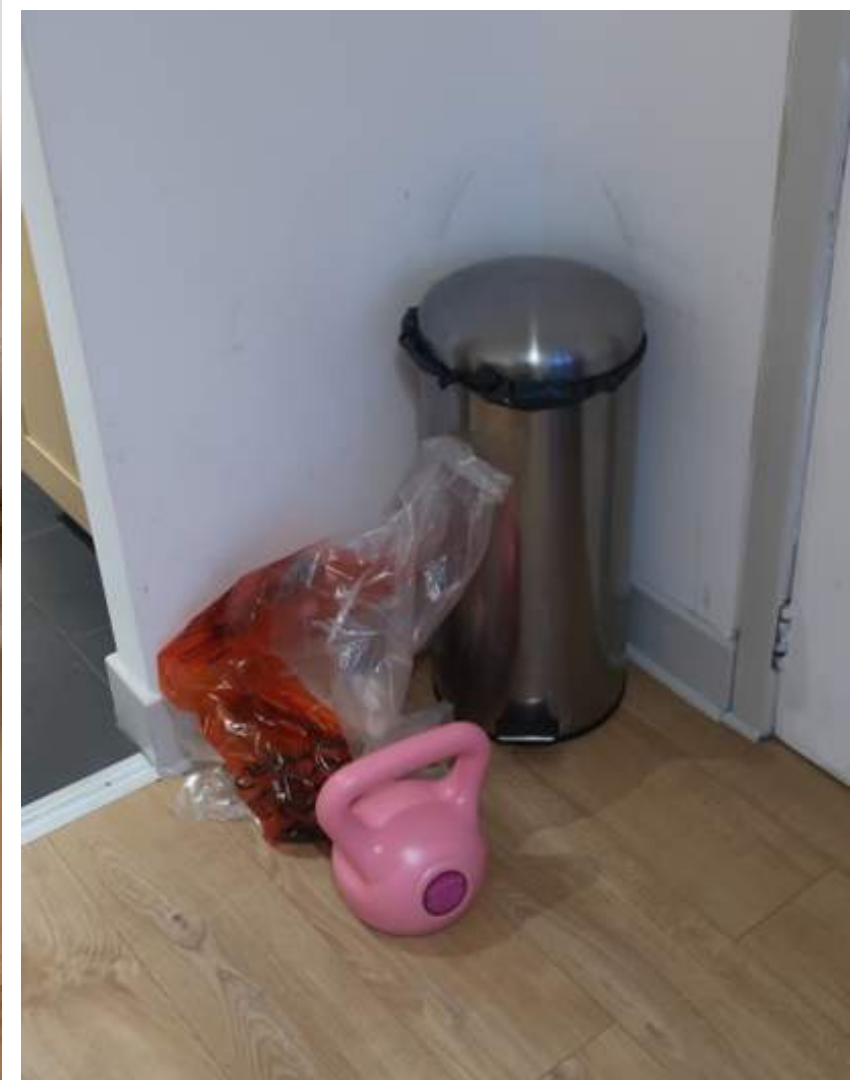
"When we first moved in we had loads of rubbish and we had nowhere to put it... we were just living in a field of cardboard for ages."

Similarly, Dina (25) mentioned occasions where seeing friends would create extra waste.

"Say we had some people round at the weekend and there were loads of cans and stuff like that. Then it can be a bit of an issue...we'd have to put it on the balcony until collection day."

Both Dina and Laura had to find ways to accommodate their residual waste and recycling inside due to their weekly collection. Considering most of the sample were actively trying to recycle, this was the case for the majority of residents with weekly collection.

However, whilst limited storage was cited as an annoyance for many in flats above shops, this did not affect their decisions to separate recyclable waste from their residual waste inside their home and recycle it separately on the street. Other factors - like the pressure of social norms, or the threat of financial penalties - tended to have more influence, which will be discussed in the next section.



Some people had issues with accessing recycling and waste collection sacks

For those in the sample who received their recycling sacks through the post on a roll, obtaining sacks was rarely an issue. However, those who actively sought out more sacks - either from a collection point or via the council's website - often encountered issues with obtaining them.

"When I'm asking for recycling bags, which they're very, very poor at delivering, that's the main time I have contact [with the council]."

Alan, 36

For some respondents, the process of collecting sacks from local pick-up points was not straightforward. Marta (40) had to visit several libraries, and eventually was only given one roll but no more than that as she didn't live in the catchment area.

Dina (25) accidentally came across a sack collection point at her local library. A lack of

signage meant she was initially confused about what they were:

"So it's not like we get told that or anything... There was a huge box with loads of them in...I was almost wondering what they were to begin with."

A few of the respondents had never actually received sacks in the first place. Lack of clear guidance and delivery of sacks meant that people found their own ways of recycling, following their own instincts rather than official council provision.

Even when sacks were received, some people did not find them suitable, and were not using them at all. Robert (49) found the size of the bags to be inconvenient, claiming they were too big for him to fill up. Instead, he used his own shopping bags.



Most people were recycling based on prior knowledge, habit and what worked for them

Across the sample, there was a lot of variation in how well people were recycling. While there were a couple of people who were not recycling at all, most people believed that they were recycling fairly well. However, people's understanding of recycling was largely based on assumed knowledge and prior experiences - rather than their latest local recycling rules. People tended to rinse and separate materials based on what they thought might be right, and did so inconsistently.

James (26) learnt about recycling when he was growing up:

"I think it [recycling] sort of was on the rise whilst I was in school and I grew up in Hackney, so I think that it's been fairly prominent part of my life and like culturally as well."

Despite this, he couldn't recall receiving any direct advice from the local council. Since then, he had not sought out any further information about recycling in his local area. Similarly, Frankie (31) was relying on knowledge he learnt at school:

"I just recycle what I think I can recycle... I don't check."

Daniel (42) was also not motivated to check, and separated different materials using his gut.

"Well I just use guesswork...like if it's cardboard then I know I can recycle it, or a yoghurt pot, I think that can be recycled."

As demonstrated by these examples, most people were not motivated to check their local recycling rules - tending to stick to long term habits. Without effective feedback or communication from the council, there was little incentive for people to proactively seek out information that would require them to change these habits.



Some people were open to the idea of separating food waste - others were already doing it

While many people were not keen on the idea of separating food waste, some thought that it was a good idea and one was already doing it. Robin (41) was already separating waste in food bags from the library, despite his street not having provision. Regardless, he would put out his food waste along with his recycling when it became full. Robin picked up this habit from his family, and felt he ought to continue it.

Those who were more open to food waste collection typically had done so before, such as Georgia (23).

"In Norwich we had a separate food bin with food bags... I think it works better. It's not necessarily hygienic, but obviously it can be recycled separately."

Some who had had food waste collection previously were frustrated now that they no longer had access to this service in flats above shops.

"When I had food waste recycling, I was taking the bins out once a week. But now I take the binbags out twice a week, which is annoying."

Karen, 54

Those who weren't open to food waste collection were mainly concerned about hygiene. The idea of storing 'rotting food' inside was offputting - despite the fact that they were already technically doing this, but just in their general waste bin. Others, like Hannah (34), were concerned about attracting pests:

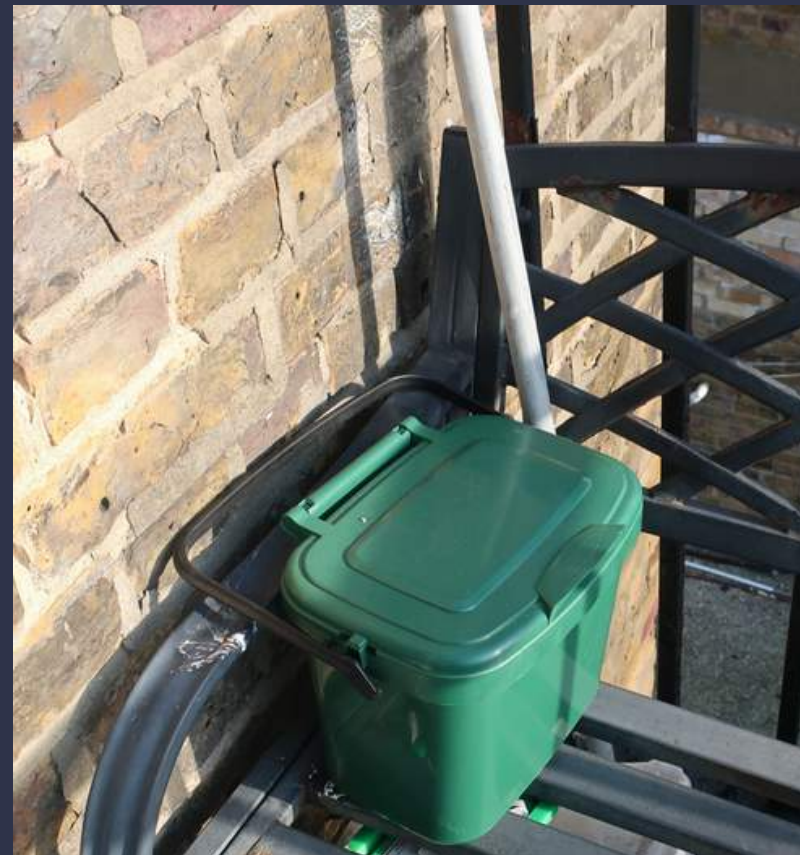
"I know people do it, but I'm not into that. I don't want rotten food anywhere near my kitchen."



CASE STUDY

Ernie, 24

“It’s just an extra thing to do. There’s not a lot of space on the kitchen side... Food stinks a bit... A big green bin with old food in wouldn’t be very appealing.”



Ernie and his grandma got their food waste bin delivered over a year ago, but haven’t started using it since then. Because they have the rubbish chute, they can take their bin out with food in as and when, and Ernie finds the idea of having food left in the kitchen very unappealing. He said that they could leave it outside on the balcony then maybe he would, but don’t think that’s likely.

How were people
disposing of their
waste on the street?



Many people were adapting their disposal habits based on what they saw others doing around them

Due to on-street collection, behaviours around waste disposal are more visible to residents in FLASH than for those in HMOs or PBFs. This greater level of visibility means that residents in FLASH are more likely to be influenced by the disposal habits of others than the exact council rules around waste collection.

Residents who lived in less tidy areas could feel less motivated to make sure they were obeying the rules. For example Alan, who lives on a market street, thought that the strict twice daily time-banded rules in his street didn't make much sense:

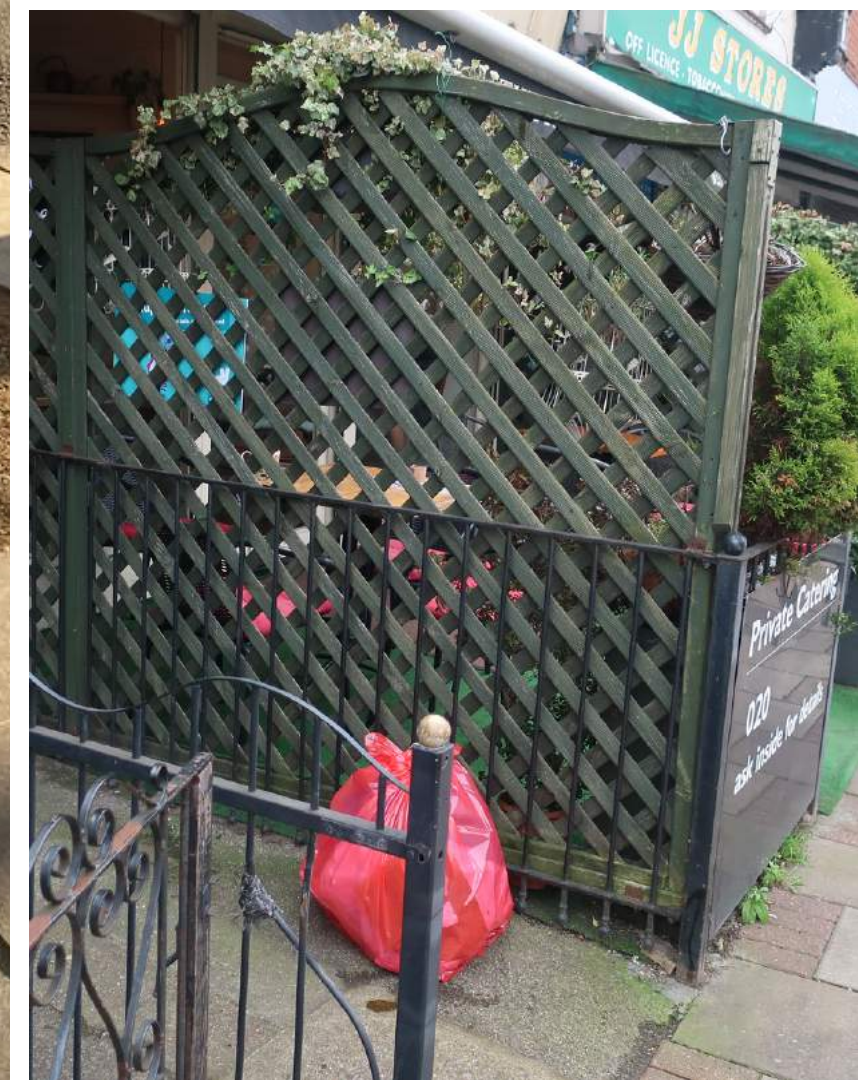
"I don't see why people putting the rubbish or recycling out at say five would be any worse than at six, considering the market has dumped a load of junk already."

Alan, 36

Equally, those who lived in tidy areas could feel more motivated to keep things clean. For example, Marta lives on a tidy street that has time-banded weekly collection. Residents on her street obey the time-banding but put their bags in one pile, rather than outside their front doors, going against exact council ruling and doing what they feel looks best:

"...that's where I see most other people put theirs. I think it's nice because then I don't have to see it just outside my door...plus it looks really bad when I go out and dump the bag."

Marta, 40



Frequency of collection determined how visible other people's disposal habits were

As demonstrated by Alan (36) and Marta (40), frequency of collection does not necessarily determine how tidy or messy your street is. However, it does directly impact how visible other people's disposal habits are.

For residents with a daily collection, waste rarely piled up in the street for long and was usually taken away very promptly, meaning that residents were not that aware of waste ever being put out. With no feedback from the council and less visibility of others' waste behaviours, some who had very frequent collection were not motivated to reflect on their recycling behaviours and would simply want to get rid of their rubbish without a second thought, adopting an 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude.

"I've never had an issue... I think it's pretty good that they pick it up everyday... If you put it out in the evening, it'll be gone by morning."

Frankie, 31

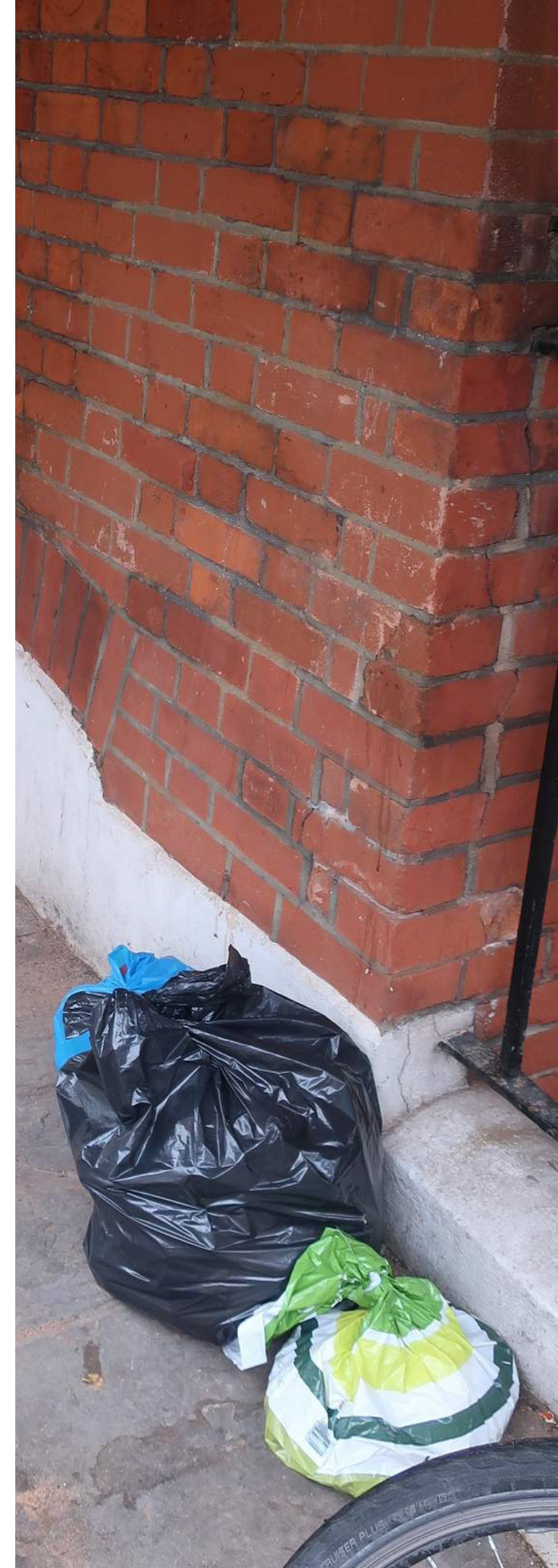
On the other hand, a weekly collection made other residents' behaviours much more visible. In many cases, residents with weekly collection witnessed waste piling up in the street prior to collection day. While some residents felt bad about contributing to this messy environment, the amount of waste visible meant there was little accountability for their own disposal habits and reduced their motivation to keep the street tidy.

Johnny (26) had a weekly collection and frequently saw waste piling up in the street and people putting sacks out at the wrong time.

"Here it just feels like you can just throw your rubbish on the street. When we were in the North we had something saying about how our road wasn't recycling properly...which showed a degree of care of what was actually being put in the right bags..."

As with Johnny, a weekly collection shaped how effective people perceived recycling in London to be. Moreover, some people observed waste collection teams collecting general waste and recycling in the same vehicle, and subsequently thought their recycling probably wasn't actually separated.

Whilst it is not possible to say definitively that very frequent or infrequent collection directly impacted people's desire to recycle correctly in the sample, it seemed that visibility of waste on the street did sometimes produce a lack of faith in recycling being dealt with properly in FLASH.



CASE STUDY



Frankie, 31

"I've never had an issue...I think it's pretty good that they pick it up every day...If you put it out in the evening, it'll be gone by morning."



Frankie lives with his girlfriend in a spacious flat with a private entryway. Daily collection means that he can take out the rubbish and recycling when it is full - usually every 2-3 days. Frankie was told by his landlord that he could leave waste anywhere on the street, but wasn't given much more information. Like many people, he recycles based on what he assumes is right and wouldn't think to check local rules online. Consequently, he doesn't know if what he is recycling is correct. With such frequent collection, Frankie has never needed to learn the rules and can't really see what others are doing around him, so his motivation to improve his recycling habits is low.

Most people hadn't received any feedback about how well they were recycling

Without any feedback, peoples' recycling and disposal behaviours were left unchallenged. For many people, the fact that their waste/recycling was consistently collected - even if they put it out at the wrong time, in the wrong place, or in the wrong bags - seemed to reinforce the idea that they were doing the right thing. Similarly, lack of feedback about the types of materials they were recycling meant residents had few reasons to actively assess the accuracy of their recycling.

A few people did receive various forms of feedback - from landlords, businesses, neighbours and the council. In most cases, this motivated people to improve their recycling disposal behaviours - particularly if there was a threat of a fine.

Some, like Johnny, received feedback by word-of-mouth from neighbours and businesses. Others, like Hannah, assumed their landlord had put up a notice following mistakes made by residents:

"I saw a notice in the hallway saying you're not to use black bags [for recycling] as they won't be collected."

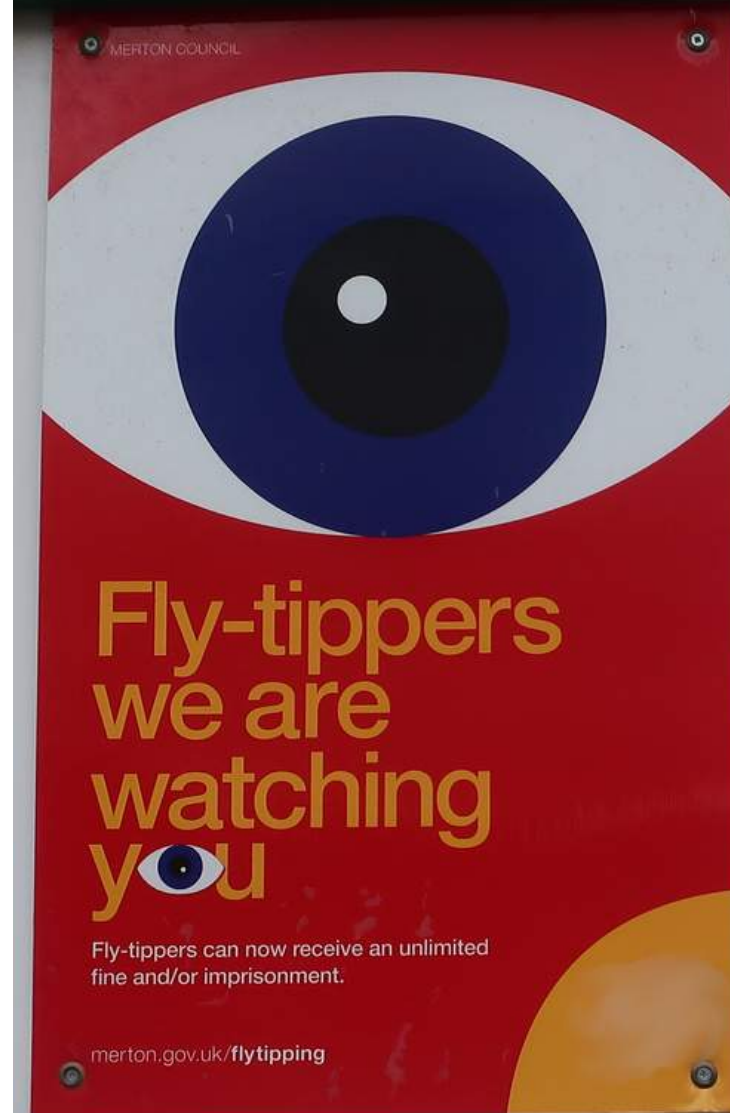
Hannah, 34

However, a few received feedback from the council that included the threat of fines. Alan received a 'reminder letter' about collection times, and Elliot (next page) went through several fine sagas:

"...at some point very recently, the council put a letter through the door reminding us of the waste collection times."

Alan, 36

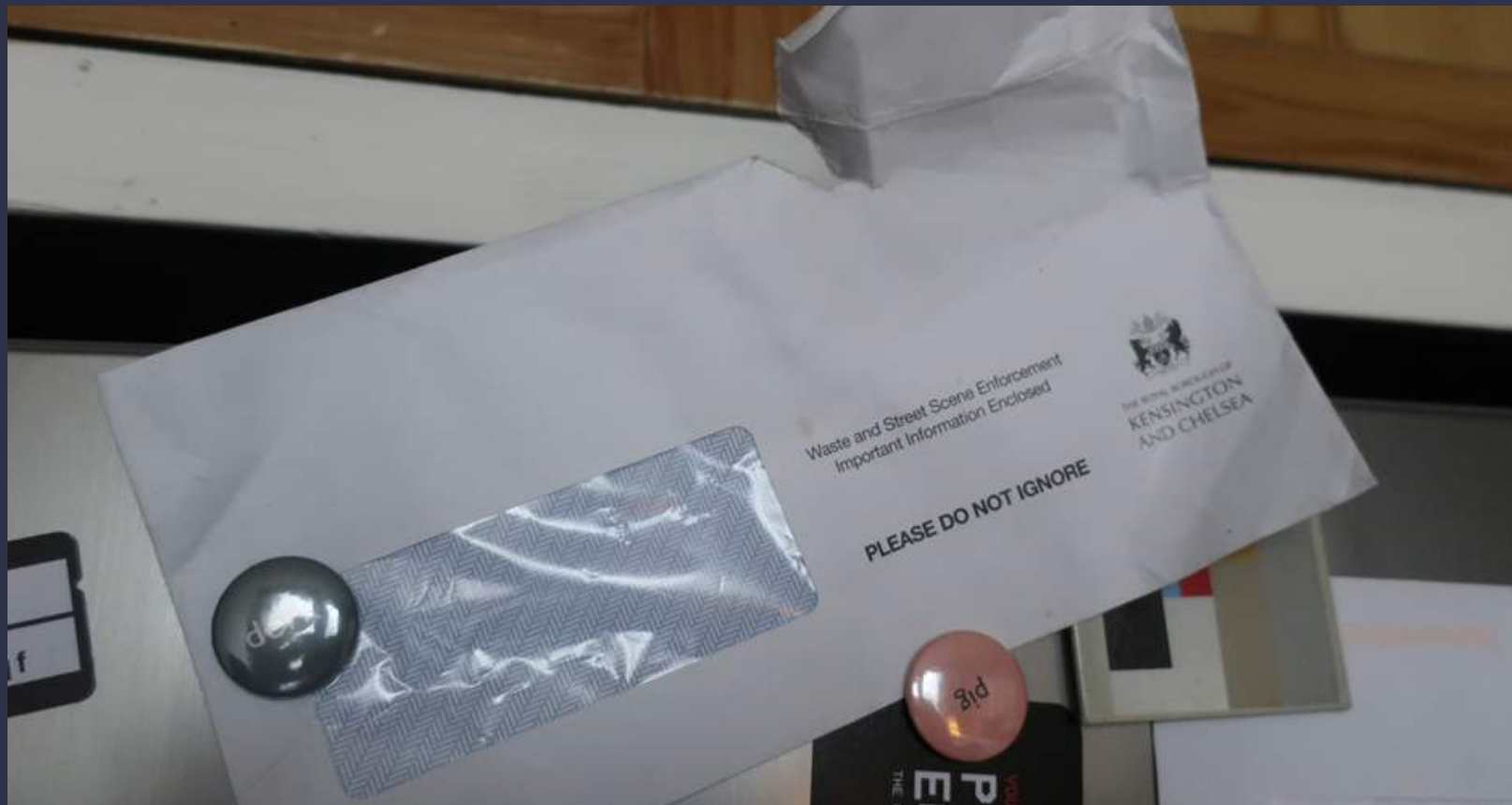
As shown by Hannah and Alan, receiving feedback not only helps people to change their behaviour by holding them to account, but also gives the impression that the council care about recycling. This care makes people believe that the process is worthwhile, and have greater trust that waste will actually be recycled.



CASE STUDY

Elliott, 24

“You’re supposed to put the bins out at a certain time the night before they get picked up... we got fined £150 for putting them out too early... we didn’t know it was that strict.”



Elliott is a student who lives with three flatmates and they have twice weekly rubbish collection. Shortly after moving in, they were notified of a £150 fine from the council for putting their rubbish and recycling sacks on the street too early. Since then, to prevent it happening again, they keep tally of when they put it out on the street. Although they are much more vigilant in their on-street disposal behaviours, he believed the council cared more about the appearance of the street rather than the quality of their recycling.

The majority of streets visited lacked any on-street signage about recycling

Lack of signage compounded the lack of feedback and increased peoples' reliance on copying the behaviours of others.

The only example of on-street signage (pictured) was damaged, outdated and difficult to read. As with other examples of communications around recycling, the actual rules are unclear, seeming to specify that residents have to leave their waste out before 6am on the day, rather than the night before.

The sign specifies leaving waste at the front edge of the property, but is actually itself located at the designated collection spot used by residents - the corner of the street.

A few people also mentioned feeling self-conscious about the act of leaving waste on the street, and the lack of information and signage legitimising the process exacerbated this.

"It feels like I'm littering and it feels really messy. It's quite embarrassing to walk out of my flat and just dump it in front of a tree."

James, 26

Having clear signage about where and when to do this could increase people's motivation and confidence in following the process correctly.



Relationships with businesses, landlords and the council



Most residents had positive or neutral relationships with the shops below them

Within the sample, tension between residents and the shops below them was rare. Some shops below were also owned by the landlords themselves. In general, most people reported low levels of contact, often limited to exchanges about deliveries.

Of those few who did report minor tensions, issues were mostly related to household subjects like repairs and storage.

However, some of the respondents reported more difficult relationships with other businesses in the street, which tended to be hospitality venues like bars or restaurants.

"At night when you're trying to sleep you could feel the vibrations from the music... I had to complain."

Ellie, 49

In two other cases, respondents turned to the shops below when faced with issues around recycling. As long-term residents, both Zack (59) and Nancy (43) had good relationships with the shops below them and were using their bins. Zack didn't believe he had access to on-street recycling, but the shop below allowed him to use their general waste bins. Nancy didn't receive any recycling sacks, however the shop below permitted her to use both their general and recycling bins.

"We've never received sacks...they tend to skip over us...but thankfully the funeral directors below are happy for us to use their bins."

Nancy, 43



Some people had problems with how businesses disposed of their waste

As evidenced in the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) research, some businesses have limited space to store their waste inside prior to collection times. This finding was reflected in this project, with Hannah (34) citing issues with the restaurants below.

"I can't park my car because some of the restaurants are dumping their rubbish in the resident's bay... so I had to move all these bags out of the way so I can park."

Hannah, 34

Another resident, Ellie (49) claimed that the hospitality businesses in her area were not using private waste collection services and contributing to the household waste bins on the street. According to Ellie, the waste was so extensive because collection was weekly, allowing waste to rot and attract pests.

"What annoys me is that a lot of businesses just throw whatever in the wheelie bin or on the street, and that makes it very messy and attracts pests."

Ellie, 49

However, while some people were frustrated with how businesses disposed of their waste, generally their disposal did not affect how effectively residents recycled in their home.

There is confusion, however, about the way businesses' waste is collected, and businesses and residents often are not aware of each others' different collection schedules. Because this difference isn't communicated by the council, businesses or landlords, residents can be confused by the variation in behaviour they see around them, and have less clarity around their own collection times as a result.



Some businesses complained about how residents were disposing of their waste

Some of the shop owners and staff interviewed recalled frustration about residents who put their waste and recycling sacks out at the wrong time of day, causing waste to pile up in front of their shops during business hours. The gift shop above Frankie (31) reported that the sacks were placed directly in front of the shop window, narrowing the pavement and appearing unhygienic.

"Sometimes they [residents] put it out in the middle of the day... it piles up in front of the shop... so people don't want to stick around the area and we don't get as many window shoppers."

Gift and clothing shop

This was also the case for a grocer's in one council. Residents would put their waste in front of his shop, which, being in the presence of fresh fruit and vegetables, he saw as hugely off-putting for customers. As a result, he would move the residents' waste to the back alley behind his shop and keep it there until his commercial collection at the end of each working day.



People felt sensitive about their relationships with their landlords

Initially, the aim was to include conversations with landlords and letting agents of those in flats above shops as part of the research. However, throughout the process of recruitment, it became clear that most residents did not have easy-going relationships with their landlords and weren't comfortable with sharing details.

Many of the respondents did not want to attract any attention from their landlords, and some were in active disputes over rent and repairs. For Eric (59), avoiding contact with his landlord was a priority as to ensure no rent increase.

"With my landlord, I don't want them to know anything about repairs because then they'll look and say you're out of agreement... here's another rent increase."

Eric, 59

Issues tended to be prevalent for both short and long-term tenants. For Robin (41), who had lived in his flat for over 10 years, his letting agency tried to charge him for repairs he didn't believe to be his fault.

"...The window wouldn't open, it was broken... they sent someone round to fix it but then said I had to pay £60. I wrote a formal letter saying no, it's wear and tear... then they backed away."

Robin, 41

Of those who did occasionally contact their landlords and letting agents, very few had asked them directly about recycling and waste collection rules.



When prompted, most thought responsibility for recycling lay with the local council - not landlords

Although a small number of people in the sample had reached out to landlords to find out about recycling rules, most residents did not associate them with knowledge on the topic. This aligns with the findings from the previous research on HMOs.¹⁰ Most residents reported receiving minimal information from landlords and letting agents about managing their waste when they first moved in, so they were rarely assumed to be the point of contact when it came to seeking out information about recycling. Marta (40) was one of the few who did contact their landlords.

"When I came to my first viewing, he didn't know what to do with garbage. I asked him later on and he found out on the council website and texted me."

Marta, 40

Across the sample, very few respondents recalled seeing any information about recycling displayed in communal areas. Of those who did see information in these areas, it was not clear to them who was responsible for putting it up.



Conclusions and recommendations



Recycling can be shaped by increasing motivation, knowledge and ease

Previous research on different types of residential housing pointed to opportunities to improve recycling by making it easier, more motivating, and increasing knowledge, in alignment with the COM-B model of behaviour change.

This report builds on this insight and explored specifically how motivation, knowledge and ease could be shaped for people living in flats above shops.

Making recycling easier for FLASH is inherently challenging.

Due to the unavoidable nature of on-street pickup, and restrictive time banding, the recycling drop off process for residents in FLASH is inevitably less easy compared to other types of housing (e.g. those with communal or individual outdoor bins).

Short of radically redesigning the process to do away with kerb-side pick up, focus should be on not making recycling any more difficult, particularly relative to residual waste.

An example of this is with obtaining recycling bags, where some respondents reported finding it difficult to know where to get hold of bags and a lack of clarity about when or where they would be available.

Any touchpoint where the process of recycling is in any way more difficult than the process of getting rid of residual waste is vulnerable to nudging residents away from effective recycling.

To recycle well, people must be motivated

Recycling behaviours of neighbours are more visible in FLASH, and therefore people are even more driven by fitting in and doing what everyone else does. Recycling is all placed together on the kerbside, and there is therefore reduced accountability and opportunity for people to know if what they're doing is right. This visibility of waste on the kerbside often also causes the street to look chaotic and messy, and as a result, some people don't have a lot of faith in what happens next, and do not know whether their waste is

actually recycled. This not only affects their motivation to place their sacks neatly and in the correct place on the street, but also can affect their motivation to recycle materials properly in the home.

Recommendation:

Find ways of giving feedback and making it more visible to residents whether they, and their neighbours, are doing the right thing or not, and more actively inform them what happens to their recycling.

To recycle well, residents need better information

Recycling rules are more complicated for FLASH. FLASH are likely to have different waste collection rules compared to other types of houses or businesses on the same street, or often from other types of housing in which people previously lived. In some cases, waste collection rules are different for FLASH from one side of the street to the other, falling under the boundaries of different boroughs.

Those living in FLASH also appear to be lack information about how and what to recycle. Those living in FLASH

typically have shared entryways and unreliable post delivery, meaning that residents feel like they do not receive communications from the council. FLASH residents also usually rent their properties, receiving little to no information from their landlords and no on-street information. When coupled with residents' lack of motivation to seek out information from the council, residents in FLASH usually feel uninformed, and it's much less clear what the 'right' thing to do is.

Recommendation:

There is a need to invest in a wider array of accessible communication channels, using alternative routes than post, to give people a greater chance of knowing what they should be doing and feeling motivated to develop their knowledge of recycling in FLASH.

Acknowledgements

ReLondon is LWARB, renamed – a partnership of the Mayor of London and London’s boroughs to improve waste and resource management in the capital and accelerate our transition to a low carbon circular city. Our mission is to make London a global leader in sustainable ways to live, work and prosper by revolutionising our relationship with stuff and helping London waste less and reuse, repair, share and recycle more.

Revealing Reality is an independent social research agency, working with regulators, government and charities to provide insight into people's behaviours and experiences.

We often conduct detailed qualitative research to observe how people utilise systems in place - capturing a range of different perspectives to understand their habits and experiences. We have previously conducted research into waste management and disposal, understanding people's motivations and behaviours to provide organisations with

suggestions to inform and adapt their policies around littering and recycling.

Visit www.revealingreality.co.uk to find out more about our work or to get in touch.