

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY CHALLENGE

SESSION REPORT

How does the council apply evidence and best practice to influence resident behaviour change to boost recycling rates?

01/03/2021



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Chair's Foreword

The issue of waste and recycling is one filled with debate and we know that waste management impacts on the quality of life of all residents with overflowing bins, fly-tipping and waste dumped on estates creating an unpleasant environment that can lead to other anti-social behaviours.

As the former Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety portfolio, I am pleased to present this report that seeks to understand the extent to which the council is applying best practice and evidence-based approach with tackling its recycling rates and to how this guides the council's behaviour change work.

This report makes a number of practical recommendations for the council and its partners to consider and put into action and improve recycling rates. The recommendations are also intended to support the council's focus on making the most of efficient use of resources, moving towards early intervention and prevention.

This report acknowledges that whilst there has been successful behavioural change for kerbside properties on recycling i.e. housing; a large proportion of the borough's flatted properties remains a key strategic challenge. This issue is further compounded by the fact that flatted properties only yield 50% recycling that the average kerbside. Given the physical size of the borough, future growth of the borough's housing development will largely consist of flatted type of properties. Currently, over 80% of the borough's population are living in flats¹ and this is unlikely to change.

This report learns about the findings (gives context) conducted from research on behaviour called 'making recycling work for people in flats' that took place between August 2017 to November 2019 that involved a collaboration of partners led by Resource London (part of London Waste and Recycling Board) and Peabody within eight inner London boroughs including Tower Hamlets (across 12 selected estates).

The Challenge Session's Scrutiny Committee heard from council's Waste and Recycling Service along with its key partner Resource London on how they have used evidence based and best practice to guide their behaviour change work. This session helped the scrutiny Committee made recommendations for the council's Waste and Recycling Service to take forward.

I'd like to thank following people who contributed to this challenge session:

- Gemma Scott from Resource London who provided an account of the partnership research project on behaviour change across 12 Peabody Estates in London to help frame the discussion
- The Cabinet Member for Environment Councillor Asma Islam and team of council officers who gave an overview on their project work and responded to scrutiny questions
- my scrutiny colleagues who supported the discussion and helped to construct some of the recommendations

Councillor Bex White

Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety



¹ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/WasteStrategy_final.pdf

Summary of Recommendations

Using Evidence and Research to Deliver Behaviour Change

1	Take forward the case study brought by Committee Member of a development in their ward to see how the planning process has been working historically
2	Review the location of estate bins to minimise contamination by passers-by
3	Making changes to physical barriers to help influence positive behaviour change
4	Reconsider clear bag provision for flats as an intervention to aid behaviour change on recycling

Improving Mainstream Delivery through Pilot Project

5	Investigate and application small grants programme for small private developments along the lines of the SME energy efficiency programme
6	Ensure the council's Waste and Recycling Service factors in the cost element for Flats Recycling Package and demonstrate the value of the council's existing initiatives for example mixed-recycling-collection when undertaking cost-benefit analysis
7	Review the pilot of the food waste to flats scheme and the target audience. Develop plans so that council's Waste and Recycling Service is ready to go when this statutory duty comes in

Influencing Residents' Behaviour Change to Increase Recycling

8	Schools programme, working closely with the young mayor to improve engagement with young people and support behaviour change on recycling
9	Using Influencers of particular age groups (18-34) to engage, motivate and channel key messages to improve behaviour change on recycling

Media Campaigns to Support Resident Engagement with Recycling

10	Improving recycling education messaging so there is a common framework of understand from residents
11	Recycling performance targets to be more ambitious (stretched) not just realistic and resident contribution to be framed in how progress is being made a local level

Introduction

- 1.1 The study of behaviour change is an established discipline, sometimes known as behavioural science that supports a more realistic understanding of what makes people tick. It is primarily concerned with understanding behaviour and developing effective interventions to influence it. Behaviour change interventions may include activities, policies, products, and services designed to make a difference to the way people act.
- 1.2 Understanding behaviour change and developing behaviour change interventions should be a part of the council's approach to responding to complex issues and achieving desirable outcomes for the borough and its residents, businesses, and communities.
- 1.3 One of the biggest challenges the council faces is around waste management Having to balancing priorities between promoting recycling and protecting consumers against harmful chemical substances in recycled materials; there is also lack of real data collection as well as quality aspects related to recycling; energy recovery of waste; and waste prevention.
- 1.4 Recycling is the process of converting waste products into new materials and objects which would otherwise be thrown away as rubbish. It also helps to reduce the consumption of raw materials and therefore reduces energy, landfill sites, lowers the greenhouse gas emissions and tackles climate change. Recycling² is an integral component of modern waste reduction i.e. reduce, re-use and recycle. Additionally, increasing recycling helps to conserve natural resources, protects the natural ecosystem and wildlife, cheaper than waste collection and disposal.
- 1.5 Tower Hamlets council's Waste and Recycling Service is charged with this task and they can be thought of as 'interventionists' whose goal is to design and implement programmes or interventions that produced the desired behaviour changes to improving recycling rates.
- 1.6 More broadly, policy challenges often have a strong behavioural dimension, and, in this context, the success of policy interventions largely depends on achieving sustainable changes in way people respond. Furthermore, behavioural change interventions based on social norms are considered to be popular and cost-effective that can lead to transforming behaviour outputs for increasing environment and social sustainability.
- 1.7 Motivation plays a critical role in behaviour change and this can be both from internal and external dimension. Internal motivators can include one's environmental values, beliefs, and attitudes whilst external motivators are the reasons behind affecting recycling attitudes, intentions and behaviours such as monetary incentives, community pressure or government regulations.
- 1.8 Scaling up behaviour change will often require a shift in 'cultural' change amongst different group of people within organisations and communities. It requires simultaneously targeting behaviours of different stakeholders including policy makers, commissioners, planners, service providers, users, and the general public.

² <http://www.recycling-guide.org.uk/rrr.html>

Reason for Enquiry

- 2.1 The global picture shows waste volumes increasing rapidly - the World Bank estimates a 70% global increase in municipal solid waste up to 2025. Recycling is considered as an essential part in reducing the environmental impact of waste.
- 2.2 Government bodies including the UK were required to meet the 2008 European Union (EU) Waste Framework Directive that set recycling targets - prior to Brexit, the UK was required to meet an existing EU target of recycling a minimum of 50% (by weight) of its household waste by 2020.
- 2.3 In 2018, the EU amended the Waste Framework Directive and required member nations to recycle at least 70% of all packaged goods by 2030 and for household recycling rates to be 65% by 2035. Germany³ has had the highest recycling rate in the World at 65% of all waste it produced in 2020 being recycled with the England⁴ at 44.7%, Scotland at 42.8% Northern Ireland 47.7% and Wales at 54%.
- 2.4 Locally, Tower Hamlets⁵ performs poorly in recycling 23.2%, compared to highest performing boroughs Bexley 54.1%, Ealing 52.6%, and Bromley 50.1%. With neighbouring boroughs performing at: Waltham Forest 31.6%, Greenwich 33.4%, Hackney 27.9%, City of London 29.9%, with only Newham positioned as the worst performing London borough at 16.9%.
- 2.5 Prior to 2019, the council's waste and recycling provision was outsourced to Veolia (private sector organisation). In 2019 the waste and recycling services were brought in-house to meet and deliver future improvements as agreed by Cabinet⁶ on 31 October 2018.
- 2.6 The council's Waste Management Strategy 2018-30⁷ titled 'Don't let our future go to waste' is the council's strategic approach to managing waste (including recycling) in Tower Hamlets until 2030. The Mayor also set an ambitious target of 35% recycling 2022. It further accepts that the borough needs to reduce the amount of waste created and increase the percentage that is reused, recycled or composted'.
- 2.7 In 2016, we noted a scrutiny challenge on recycling was held focusing on promoting a shared responsibility and removing barriers to improve recycling the borough. This challenge session's report focusses its energy on evidence based and best practice that influences resident's behaviour change.
- 2.8 Overview and Scrutiny wanted to understand how the council has responded to the flagging recycling rates in the borough, with a particular focus on influencing resident behaviour.

³ <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/indicator-recycling-municipal-waste>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918270/UK_Statistics_on_Waste_statistical_notice_March_2020_accessible_FINAL_updated_size_12.pdf

⁵ <https://www.letsrecycle.com/councils/league-tables/2018-19-overall-performance/>

⁶ <http://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s137457/6.8%20Waste%20Management%20Delivery%20Options.pdf>

⁷ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/WasteStrategy_final.pdf

2.9 Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety, Cllr Bex White decided to hold an Environment Scrutiny Challenge Session with the focus: How does the council apply evidence-based and best practice to influence resident behaviour change to boost recycling rates?

2.10 The Challenge Session was underpinned by the further core questions:

- To what extent is evidence based and external research applied in how the council uses its resources to achieve behaviour change on recycling?
- How is the council using outcomes of pilot projects to improve mainstream delivery?
- How is the council maximising the influence/ residents including schools who are very committed to increasing recycling?
- Can the council highlight any insights (behavioural change) on campaigns for resident engagement on recycling and the impact?

Methodology

3.1 The Challenge Session scope helped to frame the session and it considered the following factors to influence the direction of the session:

- The council's recycling rates⁸ had dropped from 26.4% in 2017/18 and in 2018/19 it was performing at 23.2% and in general it had a low recycling rate performance.
- Scrutiny wanted to understand how the council was using evidence-based research to influence behaviour change which could help to improve the recycling rates.
- How the pilot projects (behaviours) outcomes are being implemented for improvements
- Understand the different types influences that could improve behaviour change towards recycling

3.2 The scope further helped to frame of the objective of the session which wanted to establish the extent to which the Council is applying best practice and evidence approach to tackling its recycling rates and one which maps out the internal structures and guides the council's behaviour change work. It outlined its risk mitigation controls including people such as activists could come across with fixed ideas of doing things differently; and the session needs provides opportunity for robust evidence and generation of new ideas (including best practice from outside). It considered equality and diversity factors on how language impacts people with communication campaigns and how engagement from groups work with second languages.

3.3 The Challenge Session was held virtually (MS Teams) on Wednesday 23 September 2020 from 10am to 12pm chaired by Councillor Bex White (Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety).

3.4 The Session commence with the chair's overview, followed by a joint presentation on "How does the council apply evidence based and best practice to influence residents' behaviour change to boost recycling rates?" given by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm, Cllr Asma Islam, supported by council officers.

⁸ https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/WasteStrategy_final.pdf

3.5 Resource London were also invited to the session. They are a London wide partnership programme (formed by London Waste and Recycling Board (LWRAB) and Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP)) and also the government efficiency resource body. The partnership represents a single-agency approach in providing specific, focused and tailored regional and local support for London waste authorities. Resource London works closely with Tower Hamlets Waste and Recycling Service and they provided an external perspective on insights from research they conducted between 2017-19 and included factors which influenced recycling behaviour change for flatted properties.

3.6 The challenge session provided opportunities for Scrutiny Members to present lines of enquiry on the topic and helped to construct recommendation put forward by the Scrutiny Committee.

3.7 Finally, the chair concluded the session by summarising key points, and outlining potential recommendations and next steps.

3.8 Members in Attendance

Councillor Bex White	Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety (Challenge Session Chair)
Councillor Asma Islam	Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Realm (Lead of Environment)
Councillor James King	Scrutiny Member / Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Andrew Wood	OSC Member
Councillor Marc Francis	OSC Member

Evidence received from officers and experts:

Gemma Scott	Local Authority Support Manager, Resource London (part of London Waste and Recycling Board)
Dan Jones	Divisional Director Public Realm, LBTH
Richard Williams	Business Manager Operational Services
Fiona Heyland	Environmental Services Improvement Manager, LBTH
Chris Humphreys	Senior Communications Officer LBTH
Keiko Okawa	Senior Strategy and Policy Manager, Place, LBTH
James Scott	Communications Officer, LBTH

The session was supported by Filuck Miah - Strategy and Policy Officer, Corporate.

Key Findings

Resource London and Peabody Estates Project

- 4.1 The Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from the council's Waste and Recycling Services alongside Resource London (part of London Waste and Recycling Board).
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Committee noted the findings identified from the practical research 'making recycling work for people in flats' that took place between August 2017 to November 2019. The research examined how recycling performance can be improved; crucially, looking at this from the residents' view (as previous studies on flat services fitted around operational constraints and logistics of council's rather than the needs of residents). The research uses Peabody (one of the largest social Landlords in London) properties within eight inner London boroughs of which Tower Hamlets had three estates as case studies. London Borough of Tower Hamlets had been selected for the study because it holds a high proportion of flat properties despite this, there appears to be a lack of best practice on recycling evidence for flat properties. More broadly, this is a London wide issue as GLA figures suggest 85% of future developments being built will be flats. Research London indicated that their previous research findings suggest that flat services yield around 50% less recycling when benchmarked against kerbside properties.
- 4.3 Resource London suggested that this is the most comprehensive flats recycling evidence-based study conducted in the UK, focussing on dry recycling. The justification for focussing on 'flatted' properties as supposed to houses was due to the fact that there was already a successful behaviour change and increased performance for kerbside properties. Resource London also confirmed that a significant amount of funding was applied to improve recycling performance in flat properties but, despite this they remain of the view that they are no closer to understanding how to improve performance and more broadly felt in general that there is lack of reliable performance data on recycling rates for individual estates and flatted properties that often causes challenges for monitoring and evaluating interventions implemented.
- 4.4 The Scrutiny Committee heard that the duration of this particular study enabled to draw out the evidence of what worked well and took on board the critical role that monitoring and evaluation played. The research reviewed a range of activities to obtain insights on the key issues that included inventories, ethnographic research, detailed bin weighing and waste composition analysis. In addition, the research placed emphasis on 130 inventories that were examined and included comprehensive site visits across the Peabody estates to understand better the issues such as physical layout, walking routes, signage, location and quality of existing waste management facilities. It also considered other key factors such as the involvement of Resident Tenants Association (RTA) if there was an onsite caretaker and level of estate activity on recycling.
- 4.5 The Scrutiny Committee noted that finding from the Peabody estates' inventories presented a real lack of consistency of service provision to people. Furthermore, even within the boroughs, there was noticeable variance with some estates having a

good level of service whilst others did not. It also highlighted that the services focussed on operational compatibility rather than making it easy for the resident to recycle and that there remained significant outstanding issues with bin overflows for both residual and recycling waste; that signage was either poor, not clear or non-existent and this was compounded with issues of bulky waste items.

4.6 The Scrutiny Committee heard how the ethnographic study was applied to understand the different factors driving the behaviour change and barriers that residents experience with recycling and provide context to approach required to improve resident's (who live in flats) experience of recycling and included:

- How waste management routines fit into everyday life and family dynamics
- How people interact with public and private spaces they inhabit
- What the social norms are and how they will impact on individual recycling behaviour
- The justifications people make for not recycling effectively
- What people think about the communication they receive regarding waste and recycling.

4.7 The ethnographic study identified the reasons for behaviour change complexity. Whilst, residents may have good intention to recycle they are often impeded because of the issues they encounter. Someone dedicated in sorting their waste (small kitchen area) and getting down to the bins only to find bins are overflowing would increase their demotivation. It also identified issues on the lack of accountability as it is difficult to pinpoint which users might be problematic as there is a real anonymity on waste and recycling on flatted development i.e. external bins for flats are communal and used by hundreds of people.

4.8 The results also suggest that effective recycling is mostly achieved when residents are motivated. The research discovered that having the correct knowledge improves one's psychological capabilities thus facilitating the improved behaviour change as set out in the COM-B paradigm⁹.

4.9 The Scrutiny Committee also noted that the research results were shared with different stakeholder groups and the outcome of the discussion contributed to the proposed 'Flats Recycling Package' (FRP) that consisted on a common standard service across all 12 case study estates in London whilst improving the aesthetics of the sites. The research hypothesis suggested that if it was pleasant to look at then people will not want to use the provision. The 'Flats Recycling Package' common standard included:

4.10 Clean and well-maintained bin areas; adequate collection to prevent overflows; aperture large enough to accept plastic bags and locked reverse lid bins; collect six main materials; conveniently located bins; clear and visible signage; posters with recycling inside blocks; and resident informed about what to do with their bulky waste.

⁹ <https://www.laterlifetraining.co.uk/com-b-behaviour-change-model-mitchie-et-al-2011/>

4.11 The research further outlined that behavioural interventions (identified at stakeholder engagement) such as additional small recycling bins; emotive signage; feedback posters; in home storage solution and tenant information pack were integral to the FRP.

4.12 The emerging results of the research suggests that the basic minimum FRP was the key to unlocking improved recycling behaviour and acted as the main driver in delivering improved performance across all the estates. It also suggests that this had the largest impact when compared to other applied behaviour interventions. Over the course of the research project¹⁰ the overall capture rate was 22%, recycling rates¹¹ by 26% and contamination 24%.

4.13 The Scrutiny Committee noted that comparisons in level of improvement had wide variations for different estates. The research suggests that estates of poorer environment benefited from the biggest impact and most improved performance in recycling, but the results of the five behaviour interventions were less conclusive. It also identified that motivation of residents particularly 18-34 age group/renters to recycle remained an issue and limited recycling performance.

4.14 The Scrutiny Committee also heard that a 'carrot or stick' approach may not be as effective for flats as there are too many people in the development using the bins. They do not have a direct relationship like kerbside properties where it can produce a number of collections including fortnightly and produce the required capacity which has been proven to be effective in improving recycling performance.

LBTH Estates Recycling Improvement Project

5.1 The Scrutiny Committee heard from the council's Waste and Recycling Team who presented their findings on their pilot project undertaken between October 2018 - March 2019 called 'London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) estates recycling improvement project'. The project was broadly based on the results of Resource London and Peabody Project.

5.2 They confirmed that completing phase one of the LBTH estates recycling improvement project consisted of capturing the background to the project. The council commissioned 'Keep Britain Tidy'¹² to audit existing inventories of LBTH estates as well as blocks of flats in order to help the council to collate crucial insights about the existing waste and recycling infrastructure. This included detailed surveys of bin stores and recycling containers, mapping information of 2043 blocks of flats. Their results suggest a trend towards over provision of refuse and under provision for recycling. The insights also helped to discover and strengthen the need for increasing recycling and refuse capacity.

5.3 The project partnered up with stakeholders including Tower Hamlets Homes, Bancroft Tenant Management Organisation and Veolia (former contractor) to design and test practical interventions including bin frames, locked reverse lid bins (supports reduction in contamination) and disseminate joint communication to residents – providing them appropriate information and ensuring that the estates had good, visible signage.

¹⁰ The increases were from a low base to begin with

¹¹ The average recycling rates across all 12 estates pre intervention was 10.7% and post intervention was 13.4% - Resource London and Peabody Project data

¹² National independent organisation who are heavily involved in activities to reduce litter and waste with the goal of improving places

5.4 The Scrutiny Committee also noted that the council's Waste and Recycling Service worked closely with Tower Hamlets Homes Environmental Services as well as having some of the estates care taking staff in undertaking joint visits, checking conditions of the bins, leafleting and door knocking residents. The project provided scope for care takers to visit the Material Recycling Facility (MRF) and understand how LBTH recycling is sorted. The council's Waste and Recycling Service introduced better signage and improved bin stickers and obtained support from the council's Communication Service to design branded communication assets included pictorial visualisation, iconography to help residents understand the items that can be recycled and the correct bins to use.

Incentive Scheme Pilot

6.1 The Scrutiny Committee heard that the council commissioned an external organisation call Team 'Jump' to run a small pilot (supported through Mayoral pledge) between December 2019 and February 2020 across three estates i.e. Parkview, Mansford and Manchester. The rationale behind the pilot was to test if resident incentive schemes lead to increased recycling. It involved direct door campaign, leafleting residents and creating an ongoing dialogue via its newsletter and app. Vouchers were used as the incentive for the highest scoring resident and at the end of the scheme the top estate would donate its prize to a local charity. Recycling volume was measured using fill-level sensors for bins. Overall, the council felt that a longer pilot was needed to assess fully if an incentive scheme can influence recycling behaviour.

6.2 In 2011, Defra launched a reward and recognition fund in partnership with SERCO as a pilot to test innovative ideas to encourage positive behaviour, Funding was provided to 28 projects including recycling. An evaluation of the scheme was published in 2016, called 'Waste reward and recognition fund. It concluded that improvement made to recycling and reuse tended to be linked to better services, communications and promotion rather than being ascribed to the scheme's reward component.

6.3 The council's 2016 scrutiny report¹³ on 'Promoting a shared responsibility and removing barriers to improved recycling in the borough' mentions that certain pre-conditions needed to be considered for a reward and recognition scheme to be successful.

Supplementary Planning Document and council's Next Steps

7.1 The Scrutiny Committee noted that the council's Waste and Recycling Service is looking to introduce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in early 2021 to support the waste and recycling agenda for new developments.

7.2 The SPD provides specific guidance for developers on how to implement the council's policies when they are submitting their planning applications. A key element of the SPD will be the user journey and includes residents and estate management, the building/ development and how this is used once occupied. The SPD becomes critical for developers as they will need to consider and demonstrate a start to end process of how recyclable material will pass from the individual dwellings right through to its contained storage system.

¹³ <https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=120277>

7.3 The Scrutiny Committee also noted the next steps for the council's Waste and Recycling Service and includes continued stakeholder engagement, support with general communication and messaging activities, development of an online managing agent toolkit, rolling out the FRP on THH estates whilst further promoting the FRP to all the boroughs housing associations and managing agents as well as consult further on the adoption of the SPD.

Recommendations

Using Evidence and Research to Deliver Behaviour Change

Recommendation 1

Take forward the case studies brought by the Committee Member of a development in their ward to see how the planning process has been working historically

- 8.1 A Scrutiny Member used a planning issue case study within their ward area to draw out the concern on how much recycling factors as a key driver for planning applications. The Scrutiny Member undertook a site tour of Newfoundland, a 60-storey building finishing in 2020 with 636 apartments developed by the Canary Wharf Group.
- 8.2 Prior to completion, the Scrutiny Member asked the onsite project manager (inspecting the floor plates) how they intended to remove waste and recycle. The project manager responded that he did not know and wasn't informed of this. The Scrutiny Member felt that more needs to be done to strengthen influencing behaviour change given that their example highlighted developers were building without thinking through the recycling issue. The Scrutiny Member further cited that another development within their ward area where apartments were completed in 2020, continued to have an issue for accessing the bin store (basement) that required fob key access so some residents 'dump' the rubbish at the door. The example showed that there was little or no consequence for poor recycling practice and that the council needs to apply enforcement against developments and managing agents to be more proactive.
- 8.3 Furthermore, the Deregulation Act 2015 has limited that council's scope to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) and penalty charge notices to residents. The implementation of these remained difficult, they are not very cost effective and include a lengthy process for issuing FPNs with more opportunities for residents to appeals.
- 8.4 The Scrutiny Member pointed out that a council's Planning Committee is scheduled the following evening with two large developers on the agenda. The Scrutiny Member asked if the council's Waste and Recycling Service have any powers to request council Planning Department colleagues to refuse a planning application on the grounds that the developers failed compliance on waste and recycling, or the perception to address the waste and recycling aspect on the planning was insufficient. The Scrutiny Member felt that the council's Waste and Recycling Service needs to be more proactive with their planning colleagues on being critical on planning applications which are not doing enough on recycling.
- 8.5 The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that it does have representation for planning application matters. The officer collaborates with planning colleagues to advise them on submitted planning applications and part of this involves retaining the power to put forward an objection/veto if the planning application does not meet the recycling threshold. The council's Waste and Recycling Service advised that the new guidance would outline the acceptable thresholds on recycling for developers. The council's Waste and Recycling Service team indicated that it meets with developers at the pre application planning stage to discuss their plans. It also involves developers understanding that their proposals may be inadequate on waste and recycling and there

was room for improvement. The Waste and Recycling Service have put forward more realistic forecast of performance factoring in growth in flats and challenges in dealing with historic legacy of poorly designed flats. The council's Waste and Recycling Service stated that whilst the new SPD will go to addressing the issues highlighted above, they believe it would be difficult for the service to place sanctions against residents in communal properties who choose not to recycle.

Recommendation 2

Review location of estate bins to minimise contamination by passers-by

9.1 A Scrutiny Member drew attention to problems with estates recycling and they felt that a significant proportion of residents do not want recycle bins outside the flats. This often leads to bins being placed at the end of the block of flats resulting in the bins being exposed to passers-by who 'dump' their rubbish. Some housing associations have adopted to change by clearly demarking what is recycling space. The Scrutiny Member also raised the issue with estate recycling linked to the frequency of contamination of bins i.e. every one of them has a black bag and when collections are not made these become public realm issues. The Scrutiny Member felt that the council's Waste and Recycling Service needed to be more assertive with THH and Housing Associations in relocating their bins where they are not going to attract passers-by to dump litter.

9.2 The council's Waste and Recycling Service accepted that contamination and performance was a key priority to ensure that improvements and reliability is achieved. They explained that it has a strong weekly focus, targeting those crews where there have been failure resulting in improved performance, but acknowledged that weekly focus needs to continue and that the service will explore monitoring arrangements. They also added that whilst the council's Waste and Recycling Service can make recommendation to Landlord and or managing agent to placing bins in more suitable locations, this would be difficult to enforce as the managing agent/landlord has the duty of care for the property and would need to ensure fire and other risks are mitigated when choosing bin locations.

Recommendation 3

Making changes to physical barriers to help influence positive behaviour change

10.1 The Scrutiny Committee asked the council's Waste and Recycling Service if any considerations have been given to the physical interventions to help make recycling more accessible. The Scrutiny Member outlined the example of living in a fourth-floor block (designed in 60's or 70's) and having to throw the rubbish into bins which are 1.5 metres high. The Scrutiny Member added that the recycling were placed outside and that people would often leave the recycling at the bottom of the bins rather than throwing it in to the bins as they are not required to go into the bin store which creates a real issue for access, recycling and disposing of waste properly. The Scrutiny Committee questioned if there should be considerations for physical change and not just behaviour for the recycling systems. The Scrutiny Committee enquired as to why Underground Refuse Storage (URS) systems are not been more widely implemented but ultimately, as far as a discussion point the Scrutiny Committee felt that physical interventions would aid in changing people's behaviour.

10.2 The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that current work with Tower Hamlets Homes estates will allow the service to consider physical adaptations that can be made to recycling infrastructure on the estates but with the caveat that ultimately these decisions remain with the Landlords as they manage the estates. Opportunities to identify particular estates and adaptations or changes to the infrastructure may be a subject to challenges on the historical housing stock because of the difficulty to retrofit different systems to existing housing stock i.e. there may be utilities under the ground that prevent those chambers from being sited. However, the council's Waste and Recycling Service indicated that there are likely to be different opportunities for different locations for what can be put in place.

10.3 The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that they have been heavily involved in the wider use of URS across the borough, but the challenge continues as some sites have waste bins for URS whilst others do not have access to recycling systems that work. There continues to be historical challenges to make them work efficiently and, in some cases, URS have not worked because people from other nearby estates are using the URS leading to bin overflows. The council's Waste and Recycling Service does accept that they have to be more proactive with the URS in terms of further promotion and embed it as part of the supplementary planning guidance work. The Cabinet Member for Environment also suggests it's an important consideration that should be raised at the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum.

Recommendation 4

Reconsider clear bag provision for flats as an intervention to aid behaviour change on recycling

11.1 The Scrutiny Committee asked about the council's pink (now clear) recycling bags and what's happened to them. The perception of using pink recycling bags is viewed as a behaviour intervention to help with recycling. Some Scrutiny Members cited that their social media engagement on the topic of recycling with constituents led to conversations around how to access the pink recycling bags. Whilst Scrutiny Members clarified that a lack of pink recycling bags should not prevent or limit people to recycle, there was a strong indication that people were fixated on the pink recycling bags.

11.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment acknowledged that the current lockdown (as a result of the pandemic) disrupted residents from collecting the clear recycling bags from their local Idea stores and added that discussions with Tenancy Residency Associations (TRAs) and the opening of other community hub locations will provide coverage for people to collect recycling bags. There is also a broad agreement that behaviour need to change particularly the residents' mindset as the goal is now to recycle without bags. However, to implement this behaviour change it needs to factor in how the process can be made easy for residents, understand how it fits within their lifestyle and home environment. Simplicity can be viewed as to the degree of ease for a recycler to recycle waste taking on board factors such as the distance to recycling facilities, container design, time required, and knowledge about what and how to recycle. The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that this will form part of their key messaging (used on council leaflets, literature and promoted on council Website) and encouraging residents to recycle 'go loose' and place recyclable items directly into the bins without needing the council recyclable bags to engage with recycling activity.

Improving Mainstream Delivery through Pilot Project

Recommendation 5

Investigate and application small grants programme for small private developments along the lines of the SME energy efficiency programme

- 12.1 The Scrutiny Committee wanted to understand the cost and financial implications for the council on rolling the 'Flats Recycling Package' out more widely, the financial pressures on the council budget and if the scheme will be sustainable enough to roll out further. The Scrutiny Committee asked if the council considered making small grants available to small privately managed buildings (not part of council's major housing association) that may wish to undertake work and help the council improve its recycling targets.
- 12.2 The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that they will be rolling out the 'Flats Recycling Package' to THH estates only in the next phase. They confirmed, the Mayors priority growth funding allocated £400,000 to deliver the expansion to those estates (approximately 20,000 properties) but commented that that council does not have the funding to replicate this across the borough although its expectation is that managing agents will need to use their own funding stream to implement the FRP unless the council is able to bid for other funding streams for this programme.
- 12.3 The council's Waste and Recycling Service further commented that savings can be achieved by reducing the level of contamination and paying for materials to be processed by a paying gate fee cost. This means that a greater level of contamination in recycling increases the cost for paying out for processing, so there is an incentive to focus on reducing contamination in dry recycling. Interventions such as reverse locked bins, residents understanding of what can be recycled as well as engaging managing agents / care takers to manage the waste and recycling bins on their estates including removing visible contamination before collection will help with delivering some savings.
- 12.4 The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that they would investigate if and how the small grants programme can be applied to support smaller privately managed developments to help improve the council's target towards its recycling rates.

Recommendation 6

Ensure the council's Waste and Recycling Service factors in the cost element for Flats Recycling Package and demonstrate the value of the council's existing initiatives for example mixed-recycling-collection when undertaking cost-benefit analysis

- 13.1 Resource London confirmed it partnered up with RSLs, Housing Associations and London councils to develop a diagnostic cost benefit tool for Flats Recycling Package with the aim of offering a comprehensive understanding of the cost benefit for rolling out the package. LBTH officers are represented on the advisory group and Tower Hamlets will be one of the first local authorities to pilot this scheme.
- 13.2 The council's Waste and Recycling Service commented that there is a general consensus amongst London Councils that this will cost the capital millions of pounds to roll out these schemes and interventions. They further expect London Councils to lobby the government for funding (given that there has been significant underfunding for a

number of years across England on the waste and recycling cause) as recycling not only produces financial but environment benefits for the Country.

Recommendation 7 Review the pilot of the food waste to flats scheme and the target audience. Develop plans so that council's Waste and Recycling Service is ready to go when this statutory duty comes in

14.1 The Scrutiny Committee raised their concerns on food waste recycling, and they felt that the focus was framed on the wrong people. Whilst a pilot scheme took place a few years ago with housing association flats, the Scrutiny Committee commented that they never receive calls for food waste recycling from social tenants but rather from private owners or shared ownership property owners. The Scrutiny Member raised the issue that despite having several schemes in the borough, many young professionals (working in the city and believe in the green agenda) have complained that there is no food waste recycling in their dwelling. The Scrutiny Member pointed out that the council should be consulting resident association groups to generate interest and apply pressure on managing agents to allocate space for food waste recycling.

14.2 The Scrutiny Member also drew attention to a recent meeting they had with Peabody residents, almost all of whom were shared owners on Fish Island Village (near the Olympic Site). Some of the residents asked questions as to why they don't have any food waste recycling system. The Scrutiny Member felt that this indicated that something went wrong on the planning front. The Scrutiny Member was of the view that the council need to be firmer with housing association and move expediently on the food waste recycling agenda.

14.3 The council's Waste and Recycling Service confirmed that they are aware that the Government is looking to mandate separate collections for food waste recycling with funding being made available to implement this service under the new burdens' requirement. The council's Waste and Recycling Service accepted that this is currently not within the portfolio - food waste recycling for flats, but they intend adopt and deliver this provision as identified in the waste strategy 2019. They acknowledged that delays with legislation from DEFRA have slowed the progress of this provision. The council accepted that currently it does not have the required funding to expand into food waste recycling service but on the back of the consultation of waste strategy the service is aware that food waste recycling is an area that residents are keen to progress and expect to be delivered.

Influencing Residents' Behaviour Change to Increase Recycling

Recommendation 8 Schools programme, working closely with the young mayor to improve engagement with young people and support behaviour change on recycling

15.1 The Scrutiny Committee noted that there had been good capture of insights on motivation factors for behaviour change. However, they wanted to understand further as to why it was difficult to engage with young people and achieve positive behaviour change for recycling. The Scrutiny Committee accepted that school children of a certain age are passionate and engaged with the environment and understand the science but they asked if there are insights about the change from children being highly motivated on recycling to a significant drop in motivation where young people are difficult to engage. The Scrutiny Committee questioned if it was a case of young people who are de-

motivated were never really motivated as children. In light of this situation, the Scrutiny Committee questioned as what the council and its partners know about young people and the key issues for young people leading to de-motivation and what the gaps are for young people.

15.2 The Scrutiny Committee heard from the council's Communication lead for Environment who accepted that it would be difficult to offer an explanation as to why the same group of young people highly motivated as school aged children then lose their motivation when they become older teenagers (without tracking these age groups from the beginning). The council Communications officer also accepted that the council possibly didn't do as much directive behaviour interventions with schools in a structured way i.e. tracking back 15 years ago, so that young people now potentially were not exposed to the behaviour interventions as the children who received this support. However, the council had previously undertaken campaigns on Sugar Smart, brief on Clean Air Quality targeting school children.

15.3 Schools acknowledged that there is a real passion amongst children for this. However, the communication officer was of the view that a call for action is not only for school children but their parents, ultimately this is where the change in behaviour for recycling will come from. Council Communication Service have considered taking forward using some of their digital assets that schools can use within their setting as well as home schooling.

15.4 The council's 2016 scrutiny report on 'Promoting a shared responsibility and removing barriers to improved recycling in the borough' outlined that (former) Veolia's Education Officer worked with schools; attending workshops and assemblies as well as setting up competitions for schools to compete on who recycles the most. The council previously used a recycling mascot attending schools and public events and getting young children involved with recycling through influencing behaviour early on and using this age group as catalyst to influence their parents. It also reported that Bywaters Material Recycling Facilities offered site visits to school children to have a hands-on educational experience about recycling.

Recommendation 9

Using Influencers of particular age groups (18-34) to engage, motivate and channel key messages to improve behaviour change on recycling

16.1 Social norms often describe what a certain age group considers to be typical or desirable behaviour for certain situations, this can also be considered as a popular approach in which organisations can influence behaviour change. People are especially motivated to understand and follow the norms of a group that they belong to and care about.

16.2 The Scrutiny Committee heard that one of the key challenges for the council's Waste and Recycling Service was on improving its engagement and relationship with the 18-35 age group to support behaviour change on recycling. The Committee heard from the council's Communications Lead for Environment portfolio who explained that the engagement with this age group (18-35) has remained an enormous challenge and that this age group is one which they most lack (in terms of subscription) on the council communication channels. The communications officer felt that this age group would not just be getting its information or following council as there are growing number of other

influencers who may have stronger impact. Although COVID-19 has brought about increase request for local advice and information from this age group, in the main the council needs to improve on this. The communications officer also outlined that the council is trying to engage with Queen Mary's University (QMU) as they have a significant membership of this age group attending their premises for study. The council, previously involved QMU with the last couple of big clean up campaigns as well as trying to sign up newcomers at 2019's freshers' week to council communications. The council also intends to engage and connect with this age group.

16.3 Resource London identified (research carried out of the past five years)¹⁴ this age group 18-35 are the hardest to reach and are not sure the reasons for this. As children they are engaged but when young people move home to a big city or flat share their lives change inextricably with much more 'on the go' lifestyle and flat sharing can increase complexities.

16.4 This age group have a real distrust of getting information from official sources and they indicated that they don't want to hear from the councils as this is not where they get their information from. Resource London suggests that recruiting particular influencers on social media (that are trusted) by the age group and use those platforms to spread the message given the distrust of authorities. A report commissioned by SUEZ¹⁵ in 2015, also suggested that recycling rates are falling in areas where there is an increase in multi occupancy dwellings particularly as this correlates with this age group.

Media Campaigns to Support Resident Engagement with Recycling

Recommendation 10

Improving recycling education messaging so there is a common framework of understand from residents

17.1 One of the Scrutiny Member offered a comparative reflection on what they observed in Germany who have five receptacles to deal with different waste and recycling contents. Using this example as reference, the Scrutiny Member commented that almost 50% of residents within their ward were born overseas and possibly have different levels of education and understanding on standards for recycling. The Scrutiny Member believed that it was equally important to level up residents' education and understanding as to why recycle. The Scrutiny Member felt that it's just as important to explain to residents as to what happens to the recycled waste from when it enters the bin and include the overall benefits of recycling. The Committee felt it's important to get residents to understand the value of recycling and information appears to have two elements: one theoretical and one practical. A theoretical element informs people about the benefits of recycling and its impact on the environment, and the practical communication informs people how and where they can recycle. Moral incentives tends to happen when a type of choice is considered as the right thing to do. Furthermore, knowledge has to be more specific of how recycling affects the environment and affirms that act of recycling has a positive effect regardless how small. Environmental laws and regulations have a major impact on people's behaviour. Both the law and morality act as a catalyst to channel our behaviour,

¹⁴ <https://resourcelondon.org/>

¹⁵ https://www.circularonline.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/SUEZ_At-this-rate-report.pdf

they both offer different motivation. The law acts by threats of sanctions if the regulations are flouted whereas morality functions by affording individuals with guilt or praise.

17.2 This issue was also reported within the 2016 council's recycling scrutiny report in that some residents assume that they were complying with council's rules by applying recycling behaviour based on their previous authority. Although, the 2016 scrutiny report recommended publicising recycling to residents through English Speaking for Other Languages (ESOL) session, it appears there is insufficient data to demonstrate the correlation between ESOL and improved recycling behaviour.

17.3 In 2011, the council collaborated with Veolia (contracted waste services) and commissioned a design team to develop a creative communications campaign using the strapline 'recycling makes sense in every language'¹⁶. Development of the campaign was established using the translation of community language and images proactively encouraging residents to recycle more. The Campaign routes included DLR Platforms, local streets, recycling collection vehicle, selected local bus routes, park and lamppost banners, public LCD screens and posters within Idea Stores; council's website, press releases including translations; local schools and events.

17.4 Veolia's contract specification also required them to publicise communications on recycling such as 'Lets Sort it, Right Stuff, Right Bin' campaign notifying residents to place waste in the correct bins as reducing contamination saves money with the strapline ' You might think it's just a bin but putting the wrong stuff in the wrong bin costs Tower Hamlets over £500k per year'. The campaign was formally launched in late 2015 and focussed on contaminated recycled waste in communal bins. There was some correlation between the campaign at the time and reports of an increase of 15% rise in acceptable loads (estates recycling) to the Material Recycling Facility (Bywaters) and an 8% in recycling tonnage.

Recommendation 11

Recycling performance targets to be more ambitious (stretched) not just realistic and resident contribution to be framed in how progress is being made a local level

18.1 One of the Scrutiny Committee Members reflected on when they became a Ward councillor for the borough and at that time the council's recycling rates were extremely poor, so much so that the council undertook significant interventions which helped to increase performance beyond 20%.

18.2 Whilst the Scrutiny Committee appreciates the council's Waste and Recycling Service efforts in making genuine progress and acknowledged some of the difficulties that the team faced in driving improvements. The Scrutiny Committee did not agree with targets being set at realistic and they felt it needs to be more ambitious so that council is striving to reach it. To support this, the Scrutiny Committee felt that more pressure needs to be applied on housing associations to adopt the council's recycling strategy whilst simultaneously involve residents in the process to deliver broader behaviour change on recycling.

¹⁶ London Councils 'Helping London recycle more best practice case studies (May 2012)

18.3 The Scrutiny Committee Member used a live situation within their ward. Local residents wrote to the council's Waste and Recycling Service about missed collections cited their frustration with the lack of response from the service provider as well as threatening to stop recycling practices. Despite the threat, they continued to recycle in the hope that things will improve. The example was used to illustrate that genuine residents want to do the right thing but often these obstacles hinder the progress. The Scrutiny Committee felt that there remains continuing issues that need to be resolved despite bringing the waste and recycling service in house.

18.4 The Scrutiny Committee commented that if these are the most engaged people who get frustrated and are thinking of giving up recycling behaviour then there are a whole lot of other residents that are not bothered with recycling and just put their waste in the bin and as such the Scrutiny Committee is of the view that the council needs to improve their performance both in initial collection and follow up collection. Developing a regular communication dialogue culture of keeping residents informed of the progress on recycling as a result of their contribution will help to spread the ethos put recycling in a more sustainable footing.