

# Collections Blueprint: Residual waste restriction



## Merthyr restricts residual waste

In January 2015, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council replaced every household's 240-litre bin with slim-lined 140-litre models, the first step in a collection service overhaul designed to hit recycling targets and avoid unnecessary fines.

Merthyr Tydfil was falling short of targets set by the Welsh Government, registering a Wales-low recycling rate of 48.2 per cent. As part of the government's Towards Zero Waste strategy, local authorities missing the government's statutory recycling targets would be fined depending on the shortfall. That year, Merthyr was subjected to a fine of £224,000 for missing the target of 52 per cent, as well as an additional fine of £24,600 for exceeding its landfill allowance.

The council was helped through the process by the Welsh

Government's Collaborative Change Programme, using its modelling exercise to project a significant financial saving for the authority through the service change and gaining a financial investment of £2 million towards new collection vehicles, containers, and a depot at the waste team's office.

Under the old system public participation in the recycling service was quite low, particularly with food waste collections, which were only used by 34 per cent of residents. An analysis of the service found that in using 240-litre bins, even with fortnightly collections, many residents saw no need to separate their material into the recycling.

By reducing the capacity of residual waste bins, with a strict ban on side waste, the council intended to 'squeeze out' recyclable material from households' residual waste streams and push it into the recycling system. This would significantly reduce disposal costs, increase revenue through recycle sales and increase recycling.

### **A focus on behaviour change**

Ahead of the switch to 140-litre bins for residual waste, the council embarked on an extensive nine-month communications programme, preparing residents for the changes that were coming and explaining their purpose.

Materials for social media, posters and leaflets were developed with the help of WRAP and Waste Awareness Wales with

a focus on behaviour change rather than just awareness of the service. The entire service was rebranded for the switch, with a dedicated website developed for spreading the message of recycling in Merthyr.

Council wardens completed a door-knocking campaign and hosted a number of public events in the lead-up to the service update to further explain the changes in person, and all council employees received strategic guidance on why the changes were being made.

### **Financial and environmental results**

Following the restriction of the amount of residual waste residents could put out for collection, the county's recycling rate immediately rose above the previously missed target to 53 per cent. Moreover, in the second quarter of 2015/16, the authority recorded residual waste generation of 51 kilogrammes (kg) per person, down 12 per cent from the previous year's figure of 58kg.

Alongside the reduction in the size of the general waste bin, the council introduced a comprehensive kerbside-sort recycling service, including a separate food waste collection. As well as saving money through avoided disposal costs, the higher quality of recyclable materials collected through the new kerbside-sort system is generating a significant income for the authority, where before it had to pay a contractor to take the waste away.

