

*Understanding the barriers
that exist for Kent households
when recycling their
food waste*



Food Waste Recycling

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Kent
Resource
Partnership



About SILK

The Social Innovation Lab for Kent (SILK) was set up in 2007, with two central tasks. First, to provide a creative, challenging environment for a wide range of people to work together on some of the toughest challenges the county faces. And second, through drawing upon cutting edge practice in the sectors of business, design, community development and social sciences, SILK set out to embed a way of working across the council that puts people - citizens - at the centre.

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Qualitative Research into Food Waste Recycling

Objectives

To understand the barriers that exist for households regarding food waste recycling and to explore what incentives or communications could encourage higher rates of food waste recycling.

Thanet District area

In our first round of gathering insights, SILK accompanied Thanet District Council to their Food Waste Roadshow, located at Sainsbury's Westwood Cross. Thanet's objective was to promote food waste recycling for their area and had on display a variety of helpful stickers and both the grey food caddy and outside food waste bins. Both bins were available for Thanet DC residents to take away for free, along with any information they needed to help them with their food recycling.

SILK wanted to find out from the residents of Thanet the following questions:

- Do you have a food caddy in your kitchen?
- Do you have a food bin outside?
- What do you think of it?
- What would make it easier for you to use it?

With these questions we were then able to explore further depending on their answers.

The majority of people approaching the stand were interested in the display of bins and wanted to know more about what was 'going on'. By explaining that Thanet DC was promoting food recycling amongst households, many people were shocked to learn that it wasn't the 'norm' and *'wasn't all people doing it anyway'*.

The core group of people that we spoke to were 'retired' singles or couples with a few young families/mums. All were from the Thanet DC area and lived local to Westwood Cross.

When asked the question 'do you have a food caddy?', the majority replied with 'yes'. When asked 'what do you think of it' and 'what would make it easier for you to use it', this provided definitive themes of responses.

Grey kitchen caddy:

Many people complained about the design of the kitchen caddy. The lid has vents on the top and a lot of the respondents complained how it 'smells' and 'attracts flies and maggots'. *'I tend not to use the bin in the summer as it attracts the flies and worms'. 'I've had to buy my own kitchen caddy because it was attracting the flies and it was smelly'. 'The grey bin is crap!' 'Caddy used is convenient, although emptied regularly as attracts flies'*. It was a mixed response as to where they kept their kitchen caddy. Some kept theirs outside or in garages however, one respondent kept both bins inside so it didn't attract any flies. *'Both bins kept indoors as feel it would attract flies outside'*.



Food bags:

Almost all of the respondents complained about having to buy the specific food bags for the kitchen caddy. This was more to do with the cost associated with them – an approximate cost of 25 bags is £2.25. Although you can use newspaper or kitchen roll to wrap food in, many respondents felt this was far too messy and the caddy would smell that much more and would need to be cleaned almost every day. *'The bags are expensive'. 'The bin gets messy if I don't use the bags'. 'Bags are expensive although have to be used as using newspaper is dirtier and bins need to be cleaned more often. Thanet DC should clean the bins'*. Respondents also complained about the fit of the food bags. *'Bags are very tight on the kitchen caddy. It would be nice if Thanet DC provided the bags'. 'Thanet DC should supply bags at reduced rate'*.

For those who answered 'no' to using their food bin, we wanted to know why. Many of these respondents told us that they composted their waste instead. This group of people tended to be the older generation. *'I was brought up in the war, we had to eat everything'. 'I have very little food waste'. I don't use food bins as it's a dirty process, I compost instead'. 'I don't do it as I didn't think of food waste as being recyclable'*.

Some of the other answers were to do with the amount of space they had in their kitchens, which led to them deciding not to use the kitchen caddy and recycle their food waste. *'Space in kitchen for the caddy is an issue, but I do it as I realise its important to recycle'*.



Future communications:

A few respondents didn't believe the food waste was actually collected separately and that it was all thrown in together with the rest of the bin collections. *'I don't believe it is collected separately, it all just goes to a landfill'*. When we explained that the collection was actually a split lorry some were shocked to learn this, however some respondents remained sceptical. One particular gentleman explained that he specifically went to look at the vehicle on one occasion and saw it all being mixed together in one vehicle. *'I'm not convinced this doesn't happen regularly and therefore I will no longer separate for recycling'*.

Another older gentleman who was a keen recycler had tried to persuade his neighbours to do food recycling. He explained that it had fell on *deaf ears* and that his neighbours *'did not believe it was all being collected separately'* after witnessing, what they thought, was the bin men just *'chucking'* all the food waste into the same lorry. We discussed together what would help alleviate some of these assumptions/misconceptions. He suggested some promotional information leaflets with a range of the assumptions/misconceptions that people have, along with perhaps a picture of the split collection lorry to show what happens to the food waste. *'People need more information about what happens to food waste - how it's processed needs to be available'. 'I would like more information on Thanet DC website about where it goes and what happens to it'. 'I thought plastic bags could be used as liners'*.

Any concerns that were brought up by the respondents that had to do with bins not being collected and why food waste wasn't collected in their area were directed to the Thanet DC team on the stand. They were then able to take specific details and look into why this was happening.

Maidstone Borough area

Maidstone Borough Council had been holding their roadshows in various locations across the borough to promote food recycling, offering support to residents and providing information following the 'No Food Waste' stickers on refuse bins. They had on display various information leaflets and some handy giveaways, one being a roll of kitchen caddy bin liners. Alongside this promotional material, they had on display their black and orange outside food bin and the grey kitchen caddy, which they had a surplus supply of and were giving away.

SILK attended two roadshows, the first was at the Farmers Market in Maidstone town centre and the second was Sainsbury's. Unfortunately the second venue was not in a prime location for the passers-by going to shop in Sainsbury's, they had directed the stand towards the back end of the car park which was far away from the store entrance which did not attract the attention it could have.

People approaching the stand were drawn in by the giveaways or had specific questions they wanted answered by Maidstone BC, not just specifically about food recycling. When asked the question 'do you have these bins at home' the majority of people said 'yes' and were offered the kitchen caddy bin liners and any other information they would like to take away. The majority that responded 'no' to the question all went on to explain that they had recently moved home and the previous owners/tenants had taken the bins. One respondent said they had phoned Maidstone BC and requested a new food bin and was told it would cost £25, however, that is not the case, and the charge for a new food bin is £5. Although, the £5 charge is for the outside bin only and many of the residents who had gone ahead and ordered a bin reported that they expected to receive the kitchen caddy as well, as they assumed they came as a set and saw the kitchen caddy as just as essential as the outside food bin.

Many people asked if they could get a new kitchen caddy, however, Maidstone BC do not stock or sell these bins and suggested various outlets where people could buy a new one. It was also reported that people moving in to new build properties would also have to purchase their outside food waste bin as they are not automatically provided by Maidstone BC alongside the refuse and recycling bins.

A few respondents we spoke to mentioned that they had seen the new 'no food waste' stickers on their bins and felt they had been 'told off' rather than seeing the stickers as a reminder to not put food waste into their main refuse bins. Maidstone BC explained that all bins received the new stickers and that this had prompted some residents to order food waste bins, especially during the promotional month, as these were free.



Swale Borough area

Swale Borough Council had been attending pre-arranged events locally to raise awareness of recycling and food waste recycling. SILK attended a Children's Easter arts and craft event hosted by Milton Creek County Park. The event was free and it was extremely well attended with over 500 registering families visiting.

The Swale stand had on display the grey kitchen caddy and various items that were being given away, for example, shopping bags, fridge magnets, pens and air fresheners along with rolls of kitchen caddy bin liners.



Everyone approaching the stand asked what we were promoting and was keen to take away the 'freebies', especially the young children. The majority of the respondents were mums with young children and many of the families lived locally to the park where many households are part of the local housing association group (Amicus).



Once people knew we were promoting food waste recycling it was easy to engage in a conversation about how they recycle food in their household.

From those that we spoke to it was evenly split between them actively recycling their food waste to not doing it at all. For those respondents that said they didn't recycle their food waste the following common responses were given:

- The bin smells
- I don't have time
- I can't be bothered
- I don't have the space for the bin
- I feel it's too much hassle
- The bags are too expensive and should be free

When prompted to talk more about why they 'couldn't be bothered' some of the respondents explained that '*it's easier to just scrape the plates clean into the normal bin*'. Some families explained that they had tried to recycle their food waste but found it a '*bit too much hassle*'. Vikki from Swale BC was very engaging and encouraged these families to give it another go by suggesting ways to make it easier to use the food caddy. For example, by keeping the small kitchen caddy close by on the worktop when peeling vegetables or clearing dinner plates, the food waste can go straight into the bin.

The overall impression from the group of respondents that currently do not recycle their food waste was less that they didn't want to do it, but more a lack of knowledge of how to recycle and also the challenge of getting into a new routine/habit.

If any of the respondents mentioned that they didn't have a kitchen caddy or even the outside food waste bin, Swale BC told them to ring the Council and ask for a new set of bins, which does not incur a charge. At hearing there is no charge for the bins, people were encouraged and went on to say they would '*give it a go*'.

Some of the respondents that approached the stand also talked about recycling in general:

- It's too confusing regarding the plastics
- The website does not have enough information on it about what can and can't go in the blue bin
- I pay my council tax so why should I sort through the rubbish?
- I try but it's easier to throw it in one bin

Recommendations

Engagement

- Districts to continue with their own specific engagement events, e.g. 'roadshows' or attending locally run events. Each borough/district will need to allocate a budget for the engagement as 'giveaways' on the stand is a massive draw for everyone approaching. For example 'bags for life', food caddy bin liners, etc.
- Aim to engage with residents that might not necessarily approach a 'council' stand by walking about nearby. It may be that those residents who actively recycle are happy to approach rather than those residents who don't currently recycle.
- Stands to display all refuse bins. As observed at the Thanet roadshow, the big display of the kitchen caddy and black outside food bins drew the eyes of passers-by. Also suggest pop up display banners which depict the relevant subject.

Information

- 'Myth-busting' – address the statements residents say about recycling. Many residents still believe waste is taken to landfill sites and food waste and other collections are not separated in the refuse lorries. Suggest promotional material be designed showing the refuse lorry with its separate compartments.



- All districts to make it clear on their websites about what goes into each bin, some residents are still unclear on what can be recycled and what can't. Include further information about what happens with this waste. For example food waste in Swale is turned into compost which the local farmers use on their crops.
- Locally based recycling/educational staff within each district could hold specific co-design focus groups with residents to address some of the myths and work together on tackling these and how best to inform their residents. Specific activities could include working with children via the local schools to design different information.
- By tackling some of the above it will address the confusion that residents have about recycling overall. Hearing conflicting stories from the media about what can and can't be recycled adds to the confusion, alongside the fact that people move from different areas within Kent and each district seems to have different coloured bins and different arrangements for recycling.

Refuse bins and kitchen caddy bin liners

- Some districts replace their food waste bin and kitchen caddy for free; for some districts there is a charge and some only offer and charge for the outside food waste bin.
- Could all the districts pull together to look into providing kitchen caddy bin liners for residents at a reduced cost? Swale identified that after promotions and other school events they saw a significant increase in tonnage. In other parts of the country this is already happening, for example Manchester City Council http://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200084/bins_rubbish_and_recycling/6026/see_which_recycling_bin_to_use

- Certain outlets that sell the kitchen caddy liners are not suitable although they look like they are. Maybe a list of outlets where they can be bought which are the right ones be added to the information on the website.
- To combat the residents views, particularly in Thanet, that do not use their kitchen caddy as it smells and attracts flies, would be to source new bins that do not have the vents on the top.

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