

# Benefits of Consistency in Household Recycling Collections in East and Mid Kent



## Summary

In 2007/8, against a backdrop of a wide range in household recycling collections in the 4 councils in East Kent, a Management Group was formed to address the lack of consistency in services and explore opportunities for cost savings.

In 2011, the 3 Mid Kent Councils sought to achieve the same goal which would result in consistent services across the whole of East and Mid Kent.

The councils addressed the variations in services including differences in materials collected for recycling, frequency of collection, containment and delivery arrangements.

Aligning services across the 7 boroughs was a challenge however the benefits have been significant for all concerned as they have been able to **increase recycling** whilst making **substantial savings**.

## Key Facts

- A predicted net benefit of **£60 million saving** over the period 2010/11 to 2022/23.
- Average recycling rates across East and Mid Kent have risen from **31.41%** in 2010/11 to **45.30%** in 2014/15.
- Both projects have played a part in reducing Kent's overall tonnage sent to landfill from **29.15%** in 2010/11 to **11.07%** in 2014/15.

## Background

The East Kent management group (formed in 2007/8) comprises the four waste collection authorities of Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council, Shepway District Council and Thanet District Council, working in partnership with Kent County Council (KCC) in its role as the waste disposal authority. The Mid Kent group (formed in 2011) is comprised of a similar cluster of three districts: Ashford Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council and Swale Borough Council, also working with Kent County Council. Both clusters are a subset of the Kent Resource Partnership (KRP).

There was significant variation in services across the clusters. Residual waste collections varied from weekly to fortnightly and recycling collections from weekly multi-stream to fortnightly commingled. Some services were provided in-house and others were contracted out.

## The ambition

There were three key aims for the projects:

- To achieve a more consistent method of collection across the respective areas;
- To reduce whole services costs for the Kent taxpayer; and
- To raise recycling performance towards 50%.

Key principles that underpinned the projects were agreed. These were:

- They would adopt a 'whole service cost' approach by putting the Kent taxpayer at the heart of strategic decisions;
- Openness and trust within clusters including 'open book' accounting and sharing of data;
- Each council would be no worse off than their original financial baseline position;

- Waste collections authorities would commit to changing their collection service provision to a common service methodology that would maximise recycling whilst delivering cost efficiency;
- Containerisation costs would be covered by KCC on an 'invest to save' basis with the capital investment funding being recovered during subsequent years from the savings in disposal costs; and
- The project would deliver improved performance as aligned to Kent's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

## The outcome

Each of the East and Mid Kent councils' evaluated the cost efficiency of various collection methodologies taking on board expert consultancy support.

Following the options appraisal the most appropriate method of collection was identified as:

- Food waste collected weekly;
- Mixed dry recycling collected every other week; and
- Residual waste collected every other week.

In East Kent, roll out was split into two phases – Dover and Shepway District Councils implemented new services in 2011 with Canterbury City Council and Thanet District Council joining in 2013. All three councils in Mid Kent rolled out their services in 2013. Two contracts were awarded for the clusters – one for East and one for Mid Kent.

## Key challenges

The key challenges that were overcome were:

- Reaching an agreement on the consistent method of collection through engagement with officers, lead Councillors and Chief Officers.

- Inter Authority agreements - this involved lawyers from each of the respective council's agreeing changes around the table and using a third party lawyer where necessary.
- Financial arrangements - in adopting the joint working arrangements all income and costs of processing would be received and borne by KCC. This would remove the risk of recycle market volatility from districts budgets. However to ensure Districts would be at no financial disadvantage, where Districts previously received income directly for materials, the value of this income would be reimbursed to them by KCC. Any additional revenue costs arising from an increase in the cost of associated with the change in collection costs would be funded by KCC.
- Policy moderation – overcome through joint workshops.

## The benefits

Key benefits achieved through these projects include:

- An estimated net benefit of **£60 million savings** over the period of 2010/11 to 2022/23.
- An **increase in the average recycling rate** across the East and Mid Kent councils from 31.41% in 2010/11 to 45.30% in 2014/15. In Ashford Borough Council the recycling rate increased from 11% in 2012/13 to 55% in 2014/15.
- **Reduced Kent's overall tonnage sent to landfill** from 29.15% in 2010/11 to 11.07% in 2014/15.
- The opportunities for **consistent communications** across the areas

## Further improvements

A key priority for both the East and Mid Kent projects going forward is to build on the current performance and contribute to a Kent-wide 50% recycling rate by 2020. This is being supported by the KRP through consistent communications

using WRAP 'Recycle Now' materials. The authorities within the West Kent area are at the early stages of evaluating any further joint working opportunities within their own respective cluster.

**“The Kent Resource Partnership exists to serve the interests of Kent’s service users and taxpayers. The East and Mid Kent projects are meeting customer expectations and delivering strong environmental performance with impressive financial savings. I am delighted that councillors and officers across Kent showed the vision and determination to make the decisions that deliver these creditable achievements.”**

**Cllr Rory Love, KRP Chairman**

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