



WIN case study October 2010:

Communal Containers in City Centres – Brighton & Hove and Bristol pave the way and reap the benefits!

On street, communal container systems for residual waste and recycling collections have been used successfully in European cities such as Rome, Paris and Barcelona for many years. In the UK, communal containers are working well in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and in the London boroughs of Westminster and Hammersmith & Fulham. This case study focuses on the use of communal containers in two English cities – Brighton & Hove and Bristol.

Firstly an established scheme in Brighton & Hove where the council began trialling communal containers for refuse collection in 2004. Since then, the scheme has expanded to include around 30,000 properties. Secondly, Bristol City Council, whose more recent trial has included the use of communal containers for both refuse and recycling collections. WIN reviews both schemes, exploring how the projects have developed; the benefits and cost savings; operational challenges and reveals the lessons both councils have learnt along the way.

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1.0 Table 1 - Brighton & Hove City Council and Bristol City Council Communal containers Service Overview

	Brighton & Hove	Bristol
Coverage	Approx. 30, 000 properties	Approx 1, 100 properties
Round details	Two rounds on a four day rota. Ten hour shifts, seven days per week. Two vehicles work on each day with a spare vehicle in the fleet.	Residual containers emptied three times per week. (It is hoped to reduce this to twice per week shortly) Recycling containers are emptied twice per week.
Vehicles used	Farid side loaders.	Information not available
Crew	One driver plus one operative to check container before emptying.	Information not available
Container capacity	3, 200 litre.	1, 280 litre for residual waste & cardboard. 240 litre for dry recycling. 140 litre for food waste.
Households served per container	In general 40 households / bin.	Bespoke provision of containers but in general enough provision to allow for 240 litres capacity / HH.
Public Health & Safety	People in containers is a real issue for BHCC. Measures implemented to minimise risk to public safety include:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warning stickers • Review of lid design • Visual checks before emptying • On-board camera checks 	There have been no issues with people in containers. Where incidences of containers being moved has occurred they have been secured to the highway.
Estimated £££ savings	Estimated £1 Million saving over seven years. Plus significant additional savings from rounds review.	Information not available
Residents response	Through consistent communication and promotional activity, initial negative press and opinion was managed. Ongoing satisfaction surveys were taken to monitor the situation, which now show a positive resident satisfaction level.	Bristol CC have received an outstandingly positive response from residents. Introduction of the scheme was low key. Resident involvement and steering has been integral to roll out.



2.0 Brighton & Hove City Council discover Streetscene solutions and save a cool £1 Million over seven years

Background

In February 2004, Brighton & Hove City Council's (BHCC) in-house refuse, recycling and street cleansing service 'City Clean' commenced a twelve month trial of on-street communal refuse containers to around 3,000 properties. Around 150 containers with a 3,200 litre capacity were placed in 24 of Brighton & Hove's city centre residential streets.

At the time, BHCC were looking for the most appropriate way of containerising refuse. The existing method of black sacks with no containerisation had led to significant problems. Rubbish being strewn across the streets was a common sight – particularly in city centre areas where multiple occupancy buildings are predominant. Alongside the trial, a number of factors were monitored to assess the impacts and to help with future decision making. These factors included street cleanliness, incidences of fly tipping, running costs, press coverage and levels of resident satisfaction.

Results of 2004 trial monitoring

Street cleanliness improved...

ENCAMS (now Keep Britain Tidy) surveys for street cleanliness showed that streets in the communal container areas were on average 10% cleaner than non-container areas. Communal container areas scored on average 64 and non-communal container areas 54.

(Scores were based on a range of 1 – 100 with 100 being the cleanest).

Fewer roads were found to be unsatisfactorily cleansed...

Communal container roads were less likely to be unsatisfactorily cleansed. Results for % roads unsatisfactorily cleansed showed:-

- Communal Container Roads: 27%
- Non-Communal Container Roads: 62%
- Overall Brighton & Hove 2003-2004: 28%

Public survey 2004 & consultation 2008

Together with the initial trial, focus groups were held and a customer satisfaction survey was carried out in 2004. Later on in January 2008, alongside plans for a possible expansion of the scheme, a full public consultation exercise was conducted.

Public consultation in 2008 showed that the majority of affected residents were in favour of the scheme...

The detailed consultation process began in January 2008. Every affected resident received information regarding the proposed bin locations for their own and surrounding streets. Council officers met residents and conducted site visits to discuss the issues, offering to have meetings with resident groups & associations.

Ward Councillors were engaged in the process...

The Ward Councillors were briefed via email prior to the consultation and council officers offered to meet each Councillor on site in their individual wards to look at site specific concerns. Regular conversations with Councillors continued after the roll out.



In addition, Cityclean consulted internally with planning, conservation, highways departments.

Results of the public consultation – which received a 29% response rate – showed that the majority of affected residents were in favour of communal bin scheme.

For more details about the research undertaken and decision making process, including all results of the 2004 survey; running costs; enforcement data and feedback from focus groups, please see the following document:

[BHCC Communal Containers Trial Interim Research Report \(July 2004\)](#)

Expansion of scheme in 2009

Based on the 2004 trial results and the 2008 consultation results, an expansion of the scheme took place in 2009 with a further 27,000 properties receiving communal containers in a range of areas across the city.

The scheme has been running successfully in this expanded format ever since and is generally working well. Brighton & Hove report that there are very few complaints and some compliments.

The success of the scheme has been dependent on a number of factors and Brighton & Hove are confident that the communal container approach remains the best and the most cost effective solution for containerisation of waste in the city's central areas.

Why have communal containers worked well in Brighton & Hove?

- Brighton & Hove has a large number of multiple occupancy buildings and a large transient population with students in rented accommodation etc.
- Achieving consistency and longevity in communications with residents is often challenging.
- Refuse collected in black sacks was/is frequently incorrectly presented or presented on the wrong collection day.
- Seagulls, vermin and foxes split bags and scavenge, dispersing litter further.
- High density of population and lack of space in city centre prevents wheeled containers being a viable option.

How do communal containers benefit residents?

- Communal containers are more convenient for the householder - residents are not required to store waste in their property as it can be placed in the communal bin 'little and often'.
- There will be no missed collections as containers are in situ 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.
- Bank holiday collections / missed collections will no longer be an issue



Managing public expectation and minimising risks

Although there were a range of advantages which accompanied the introduction of communal containers in Brighton & Hove, there were inevitably some risk factors that BHCC identified during focus groups, public consultations and at the time of the expansion. Some of these risks are outlined below:

How do communal containers benefit BHCC?

- Communal bin collections are more efficient, resulting in significant collection cost savings. For example - fewer staff being needed to provide a refuse collection service to the city centre. Previously, a refuse vehicle collecting black sacks would have required a driver plus four collectors. A communal bin vehicle requires a driver plus one to carry out safety checks.
- Manual handling is virtually eliminated with communal containers, making it a safer form of refuse collection for BHCC waste & recycling operatives.

- Those requiring assisted collection may be unable to use communal containers.
- A loss of car parking spaces.
- Visual appearance of container detrimental to street scene.
- Objections from residents having containers outside their homes and concerns about house prices being affected.
- Negative press coverage
- High winds making lids rise & crash.
- Containers unclean and smelly, particularly in the summer.
- Concerns that containers would overflow and attract fly tipping.
- Public Health & Safety risks regarding people entering bins.



BHCC made efforts to minimise any potentially negative aspects by giving residents the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process and a chance to have their say in where the containers would be positioned.

BHCC also introduced measures such as a bin cleaning programme and assured residents that emptying schedules would be consistent and regular. In general, feedback from the focus group participants in 2004 was that, for the majority of residents, the advantages of the scheme outweighed the disadvantages. The following excerpt includes an overview of comments from focus group participants.

Feedback from focus groups, 2004

“Many respondents agreed that the streets were cleaner with the communal containers and were pleased not to see rubbish from split bin bags on the street. They were prepared to put up with fewer parking spaces and more noise for residents living close to the containers; homeowners believed that less rubbish enhanced their property’s value. Basement flat residents were particularly happy to have the containers and not to have other people’s rubbish left in the basement.”

The main reports of dissatisfaction were received from residents living in streets where the litter problems had not previously existed to such an extent, for example where rubbish had been contained in bin cupboards.

Enforcement and Health & Safety

The use of communal containers gives rise to a specific set of issues which include misuse by traders, fly tipping and health & safety implications.

Enforcement...

BHCC report some misuse of communal containers by businesses but maintain that it is no more of an issue than the dumping of trade waste in general. If the council suspects misuse by traders, warning letters are sent. The council has prosecuted a hotel in the past for using the communal containers. To help to minimise misuse, all containers have small apertures so that larger items cannot be disposed of inside the containers. Fly tipping is sometimes an issue when larger waste items are dumped next to the containers.

Mike Moon, Operations Manager at Brighton & Hove City Council commented...

“I think the containers do attract fly-tipping but that waste would have probably been tipped in an alleyway which may not have been removed as quickly. We can deal with it more efficiently from communal bins because we know it is there”.



Public Health & Safety

A major concern regarding larger on-street containers involves people entering the containers and becoming trapped or falling asleep. BHCC report that they have had four such incidences to date where (sleeping) people have been tipped into the collection vehicles from communal containers during the emptying process.

The HSE report that there have been three fatal incidences in 2009/10 due to this problem and recently released the following guidance:- [People in Commercial Waste Containers](#) which helps to address some of the issues.

BHCC have protocols in place which help to prevent incidents from occurring. These include:-

- Clear and blunt stickers placed on the containers saying “Risk of serious injury or death”.
- BHCC are currently reviewing the lid design with the manufacturer to see what other safeguards can be put in place.
- An operative visually checks each bin before it is emptied.
- Driver also visually checks container as it is tipped using on board camera.

Communications & Expectations

Consistency of communications and firm policy decisions were adopted from the outset..

The scheme did receive some negative press and public opposition at the start and during the trial phase. Brighton & Hove CC worked hard to manage this situation and tackled issues of dissatisfaction by including Ward Councillors and residents wherever possible in the decision making process.

Setting out clear principles but applying logic to their implementation and interpretation was a key factor in helping to drive the project forwards. The following helped in this approach:-

- Rationale for locating containers was provided to residents via the consultation information. This information was referred back to during discussions and negotiations with residents.
- Complaints about bin locations were dealt with after a few months in order to let the scheme bed in (unless there were concerns about H&S or other urgent issues).
- Residents and Councillors were persuaded that the scheme had to apply to a whole area, it would not be viable to exclude streets within a communal bin area, simply because most residents opposed it (because you’d have two services running and not realise savings).



Jan Jonker, Head of Strategy Cityclean / City parks at Brighton & Hove City Council said...

“In practice we had to be very flexible in our approach, and in our discussions with residents because the issues raised varied a lot depending on they type of street they were in (whether there were shops, width of pavement, house frontages etc).”

Ward Councillors were heavily involved right from the start of the project. Officers kept in regular communication with them, conducting site meetings and resolving issues as they emerged. An important factor in the projects success was the level of Member support so officers ensured Councillors were kept fully up to speed on the scheme.

Costs and savings

The expansion of the scheme in 2009 cost £615,000, including purchase of a new vehicle, but the council estimates that seven years on, almost £1 million will have been saved by the use of the communal system alone. These calculations were based on the following projections provided in 2008:-

Table 2 – Cost projections 2009 – 2016

Year	Operational Saving £ pa	Capital Repayment £ pa	Saving £ pa after capital repayment
2009/10	£158,000	£123,000	£35,000
2010/11	£224,000	£123,000	£101,000
2011/12	£229,000	£123,000	£106,000
2012/13	£235,000	£123,000	£112,000
2013/14	£241,000	£123,000	£118,000
2014/15	£245,000	£0	£245,000
2015/16	£253,000	£0	£253,000
TOTAL	£1,585,000	£615,000	£970,000

Finance Officer Consulted: Mark Ireland August 2008

In addition to the £1 Million savings identified through the use of the communal containers, a restructure of other refuse and recycling rounds has led to even more significant service delivery savings for Brighton & Hove.

One additional cost which has impacted on the project was the unexpected provision of an extra crew member to meet new health & safety requirements. Brighton & Hove CC are looking at options to reduce this cost or to use the resource more effectively with a view to finding another solution in the longer term.

Future plans

In Brighton & Hove’s strategy a commitment as been set to trial communal recycling in October 2011.

Contacts & Links

Tracy Phipps, City Clean, Brighton & Hove City Council - Tracy.Phipps@brighton-hove.gov.uk
 Brighton & Hove City Council web page - [Communal Refuse Containers](#)
 WIN (www.win.org.uk) Email - win@southeastiep.gov.uk



3.0 Bristol City Council's bespoke system scores high with 96% of the public surveyed in trial area wishing to keep the new service and a 64% increase in recycling tonnage collected!

Background

Bristol City Council took the decision to trial communal containers for residual waste and recycling in 2009, largely in response to a number of pressing Streetscene issues.

Residents had a lack of storage space for the three collection receptacles they were being asked to use. Receptacles were often left in-situ on the street as residents struggled to find adequate off street space for storage. Pavement users such as parents with pushchairs; wheelchair users; the elderly and disabled residents were finding the obstructions difficult and unsafe.

Street litter was also an issue of growing concern as were the presence of foxes, vermin, seagulls etc. Streets were cluttered and untidy and Streetscene was considered poor.

From the outset, three main aims of the project were to:-

- Improve the appearance of Bristol's streets.
- Help increase recycling rate.
- Improve customer satisfaction.

Residents were expected to benefit from:-

- Clear pavements, without obstructions and litter.
- An easier system whereby there would be no requirement for storage of containers within the property and no requirement to place containers out at designated collection points on specified dates / times.



Initial trials & subsequent expansion

The initial trial took place in seven sites. These areas were chosen specifically as residents living in these streets had frequently complained to the council about the issues of black bags, litter and obstructions.

Residents were given a bespoke communal bin system to use in place of their individual wheelie and recycling containers (which were taken away). The new system included separate containers for residual waste, food waste, glass, paper, card and cans. The roll out of the trial took place as follows:-



Initial Trial

October 2009: Five locations in the Clifton area – (200 householders) swapped individual containers for communal ones

March 2010: Drummond Road & Gwyn Street – (80 households)

Expansion

August 2010: St Paul's area – (800 households)

Getting residents on board

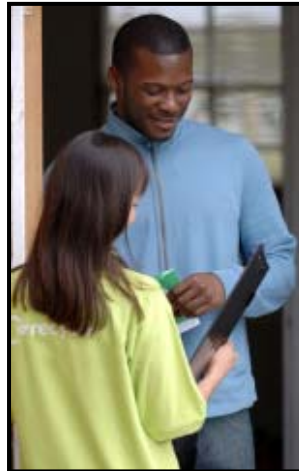
It was important to Bristol CC to get their communications right from the outset. A programme of informal consultation and dialogue with residents has been very effective in gaining support and has helped to minimise many of the perceived risks. Activities have included:-

Neighbourhood forums– Representatives from the council met with neighbourhood forums prior to the roll out of the new service, alleviating concerns answering queries and giving more details of what the trial entailed.

Leaflets & Letters were sent to all affected residents with maps indicating proposed bin locations.

Members engagement - Executive Members were consulted and involved right from the outset. They were asked to highlight potential trial sites and were involved at every stage of the communications plan,

Door stepping



Waste officers went door-to-door to households in the trial area one week prior to the new containers being introduced, supplying residents with free compostable liners for their food waste. Home owners also received a jute recycling bag for carrying their paper,

bottles, cans and cardboard to the communal containers.

Residents' choice - Residents were invited to voice their opinions throughout the trial and the council was committed to honouring their wishes.

Teresa Crichton, of Bristol City Council commented...

"We said that if it didn't work or if the residents didn't like it we would do our best to resolve the issues. If all else failed the council could revert to the old service. The results have spoken for themselves and I am not aware of any current opposition to the scheme."

An open invitation to participate – Residents were invited to get in contact with the council if they thought their own area could benefit with a communal bin system. Bristol CC reports that many residents in other areas have done just this.



Minimising risks

Alongside the benefits, a number of areas of risk were identified. The council aimed to minimise the impact of these issues with solutions as outlined below.

Table 2 Bristol City Council Communal Containers - Risks identified and resolved

Risk	Solution
Fly tipping / misuse by traders	Bristol CC firstly identified any commercial premises within the area. Prior to communal containers being rolled out Enforcement Officers visited these premises to check that they had the required Waste license and to inform them that if they do use the containers that they will be prosecuted. Residents are also encouraged to report suspicious behaviour or suspected trade waste abuse. Recycling containers are locked and have small apertures.
Increased fly tipping	Bristol CC report that actual flytip (not black bags) is about the same amount as prior to communal container roll out. One advantage is that at least they are taking it to one place and not all over all the streets as before. The bulky waste service is being promoted using Bristol’s ‘Waste Doctors’ and this service has received an increasing number of requests.
Higher tonnages collected	Bristol CC do accept that the general tonnage of residual waste collected from the householders using communal containers may have increased due to use by non-residents and waste that would otherwise have been fly tipped entering this collection route. However this waste would have existed regardless of the communal containers and would have ultimately ended up being disposed of in the same way.
Containers being vandalised/stolen	Containers are secured to the highway if necessary.
Overall bin capacity too small	Bin capacity provided would be at least equal to current capacity of 240 litres / household
Residents may have to walk a short distance (up to 50 metres) to dispose of their rubbish	Assisted collections were still offered for those households who required it. The council endorses community spirit and asks the community to help neighbours where possible. Householders are also encouraged to dispose of waste little and often. In customer satisfaction surveys 92% of residents felt that containers were within reasonable walking distance from the house.
Parking spaces lost	The council have been very careful about bin placement and have found that residents are often willing to loose parking spaces for the sake of clean and clear streets.
Bin locations could be opposed	Bristol CC are working with residents to find resolutions to complaints.



Customer satisfaction

A survey was carried out in the original (March 2010) trial area of Drummond Road and Gwyn Street. Results showed that:-

- 100% of people thought the streets were cleaner as a result of the scheme.
- 96% wanted to keep the new service.
- There had been a 64% increase in the recycling tonnage collected in the two streets.

Further surveys were conducted in the Clifton Road area and results showed:-

- 92% of people thought that the streets appearance had improved since the introduction of the communal containers
- 88% wanted to keep the new service
- 47% of people thought they recycled more since the introduction of the new scheme
- 81% of people liked not having to store waste in their home

Further surveys are currently being undertaken in the St Paul's area. Results so far indicate a very positive reaction.

Ongoing monitoring

Bristol CC are monitoring waste arisings and recycling tonnage. Figures will be available in the future. Compositional analysis is also planned.

Costs and savings

Providing this service has cost 30k to date however this does not include the collection cost as the contractor is servicing from existing capacity.

Future plans

The council have plans to expand the scheme into other areas and are also asking Councillors and residents for recommendations. Areas earmarked for the expansion include sites where side waste issues and fly tipping are known to be problematic. 1000 further households are due to join the scheme in November 2010.



Contacts & Links

Teresa Crichton, Waste Service & Streetscene
Bristol City Council
teresa.crichton@bristol.gov.uk
0117 9223190

Waste Improvement Network
www.win.org.uk
win@southeastiep.gov.uk