

Transforming Textile Recycling on Merseyside: Consultation process follow-up with charity organisations

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3 Executive Summary

This project was commissioned by Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority (MWDA) as a follow-on from the recent review of the recycling credits scheme for textiles. It was intended to consult with the current and potential beneficiaries of recycling credit (charities and community groups) to inform them of the outcome of the review, the recommendations that had been made and to explore the issues and options around the proposed future strategy.

39 different organisations operating in Merseyside were invited to attend the event, and 10 ultimately attended. The workshop was held on the morning of Friday 7th October 2011 at the Holiday Inn, Liverpool. It was structured to provide the attendees with an overview of textile recycling across Merseyside, the findings and recommendations of Envirolink's initial recycling credits review and finally for an informal, open forum discussion exploring the issues of communications and the proposed Textile Recycling Fund.

The charities who attended the workshop and participated in the discussion were evidently extremely engaged and pleased to be involved in the process. They were happy to openly share their thoughts and ideas and approached the workshop in a positive manner.

The general feeling of the group was a positive response to the proposals for a forum for future engagement with the sector and for improved communications with and information for householders. On the subject of the dedicated fund, some (although limited) concern was expressed around the loss of recycling credits and much further detail will be required around the structure and objectives for a fund aimed at improving textile recycling across Merseyside to enable further input and comment from charity groups.

This consultation exercise has provided an excellent platform for future engagement with the charities and community groups sector, and MWDA are now in an excellent position to build upon this and develop their future textile recycling strategy with an engaged and involved charities and community groups sector.

4 Introduction and Background

Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority (MWDA) is undertaking a detailed review of their recycling credits scheme for textiles with a view to assessing its current effectiveness and defining a future strategy for improving recycling of household textiles across Merseyside.

A recent review undertaken by Envirolink looked at the status of other Waste Disposal Authority schemes across the UK, consulted with some current and potential beneficiaries of the recycling credits and analysed in detail some of the options MWDA could consider adopting. The review finished with a list of recommended strategies for MWDA to adopt in order to improve textile recycling across Merseyside. The report was completed in September 2011.

Having considered the findings of the report, MWDA proposed to proceed with improved communications with charity and community groups, with improved communications to householders around issues of textile recycling and to initiate a fund to help support groups and organisations with their projects for improving textile recycling. Aligned with this, MWDA are also considering a reduction in the value of the recycling credit payment for textiles, whilst replacing the balance of value of the payments with an equivalent sum for the 'textile recycling fund'.

In order to ensure clear communications with the charity and community groups, and to gain their further input into the developing strategy, MWDA commissioned Envirolink to host and facilitate a follow-up consultation workshop.

4.1 Project scope

This consultation process was intended to focus on certain charities and community groups, those currently (or potentially) recycling household textiles on Merseyside who currently (or potentially) claim recycling credits for textiles from MWDA and who had been involved in the initial consultation undertaken during the previous piece of work.

It did not involve any charities or groups who were not previously involved, nor did it consider any of the issues of recycling credits for other materials.

4.2 Project aims and objectives

The aim of this project was to feedback to charity organisations on the findings of the original recycling credits review, and to gather further feedback from these organisations on proposals that MWDA are currently considering implementing.

The project was aimed to compiling a detailed, named list of locally based charity organisation contacts, organising and facilitating a consultation workshop with these organisations, providing them with the relevant information and ultimately gathering their thoughts on MWDA's proposals and input to the future strategy for improving recycling of household textiles across Merseyside.

5 Methodology

In order to achieve the above stated objectives, the project was undertaken in the following way:

Step 1 Gather information on charity contacts

Step 1 of this project was to contact all charity organisations to get individual, named contacts, and to compile a comprehensive list of these contacts in order to invite them and maximise potential attendance at the consultation workshop.

Step 2 Administration of the workshop

A range of tasks relevant to organising a successful workshop was then required. These included:

- Arranging and administering a suitable venue at which to host the event, in consultation with MWDA.
- Inviting all charity contacts to the meeting, and managing all responses to the invitation process.
- Compiling a presentation detailing the findings of the recycling credits review and charities questionnaire feedback, along with other relevant information that may effect the consultation process.

Step 3 Facilitate the consultation workshop

Having organised the workshop, the main part of this project was to run, facilitate and present at the workshop, and to gather the feedback made on the day.

Step 4 Compile feedback report

The final step was to compile a summary report for MWDA detailing the feedback and ideas presented at the meeting.

6 Consultation Workshop

The workshop was designed as a structured but informal conversation between MWDA and the participating charity groups, aimed at ensuring the provision of clear contextual information and gathering as much of the charity's informed thoughts on the issues as possible.

The workshop was held on Friday 7th October 2011 at the Holiday Inn, Liverpool from 09.30 to 12.30.

3.1 Workshop agenda

The following agenda was used to achieve the aims and objectives of the workshop:

- 09.30 Arrival & coffee
- 09.45 Welcome - Carl Beer
- 10.00 Textiles recycling on Merseyside: the context – Barbara Jones
- 10.30 Recycling credits: background review – Ian Stephenson
- 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.15 MWDA's proposals: a new strategy – Barbara Jones
- 11.30 Open forum discussion – facilitated by Ian Stephenson
- 12.30 Workshop close

3.2 Invitees and participants

Invitations were sent to 39 different charity and community group organisations. The detail of all of the organisations invited to attend is provided in the Appendices.

Of those invited, the following attended and participated in the workshop.

Carl Beer	MWDA (Opening remarks only)
Neil Ferris	MWDA
Barbara Jones	MWDA (Presented on the context of household textiles recycling across Merseyside)
Sarah Marshall	British Heart Foundation
Karen O'Donaghue	British Heart Foundation
Mark Wilson	St Joseph's Hospice
Jackie Northover	North West Air Ambulance
Alison Usher	Willowbrook Hospice

Brian Cunnah	Willowbrook Hospice
Chris Broom	Shelter Trading Ltd.
Annie Merry	Faiths4Change
Simon Dodd	Claire House Children's Hospice
Brian Halliwell	Queenscourt Hospice

7 Workshop Feedback

The key element of this project was the gathering of feedback from the consultees. During the course of the morning, general notes were taken on comments made and points raised during the initial presentations and discussions. During the 'Open Forum' discussion, detailed notes were taken of all comments made by the participants.

The Open Forum discussion was structured around three distinct questions:

Question 1:

"How can MWDA best communicate and engage with sector organisations like yourselves?"

Question 2:

"How can MWDA best communicate with householders – those who supply the textiles – and what should the message be?"

Question 3:

"How could the proposed 'Textile Recycling Fund' best be structured to achieve greater textile recycling across Merseyside?"

The following comments were noted during the morning:

General discussion points:

- Recycling credits themselves are not well understood.
 - None of the charities advertise that they can accept all types of textiles (including the poorer quality), even though most of them will accept them.
 - Most household donators of textiles are 'self-filtering' in terms of the textiles they donate.
 - Shop donations tend to be good quality materials, textiles banks worse.
 - All charities stated that they could accept any quality material, and that they could cope with increases in textile volumes.
 - The issue of bogus collectors and the 'creaming off' of good quality textiles is a major problem for charities.
 - The group felt that rag merchants have a part to play in textiles recycling, especially helping 'police', and that they should be involved.
- The group were aware of examples of bogus collectors delivering to rag merchants, and therefore engaging properly with them could only help to reduce the charity problem.
- The example of running bespoke campaigns, collaboratively between charities and local authorities, was discussed, the 'RECAP' example being highlighted.

Question of engagement with MWDA:

- There is an existing national Charities Recycling Association (CRA) forum. The CRA's AGM is on 3rd November.
 - British Heart Foundation are currently producing a document on how best charities can work with Local Authorities.
The work has looked at best practice, and will showcase 3 case studies looking at collaboration on a district level.
 - A proposal was made from the room that for any funding of third parties by MWDA, funding should only go to those that participate in the MWDA engagement process.
 - Although the national CRA was suggested, there was a comment made that any forum should be locally based.
 - Annie Merry suggested looking at the Community Activist Network (Joe Taylor) as a potential model to engage with a large group of charity and community sector stakeholders. The CAN use 'webinars' to engage, this could be a useful model for MWDA?
 - The issues of charities 'commitment' to the process was discussed, with all wanting to know clearly what would be expected.
 - It was commented that there should be a clear focus on charities & groups that will focus on textiles.
 - The question was raised as to what this charities engagement forum was expected to achieve.
The group discussed that it should be about information and giving charities a voice at a sub-regional level.
 - It was suggested that the forum should include textile recyclers, to assist with addressing wider charity concerns e.g. that of bogus & illegal collectors.
 - A suggestion was made that the forum should be a support mechanism for charities
 - More consideration should be given to involving the commercial sector, especially considering what their drivers would be.
 - The group generally agreed that any engagement forum should be based upon very clear questions requiring very clear outputs.
 - All charities present agreed that they would be interested in exploring a 'joint initiative' with MWDA, along the lines of the RECAP model (Recycling in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough).
RECAP run 6 events a year e.g. fashion shows, 'mend and make-do' sessions, children focussed activities etc.
Lots of charities come together to support the process.
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Question of engaging with householders

- Halton Haven stated they send out a newsletter twice a year to their database (i.e. existing customers).
Their textiles advertising clearly states that all textiles, including rags, are acceptable.
They provide a warehouse for the drop off of items.
- The group generally felt that for an individual charity to give the message that all textiles, including rags, are acceptable to them, would be counter-productive.
It may encourage individuals to send rags to that charity, and good textiles elsewhere.
- The group agreed, however, that as a collective, the message that charities can accept all textiles would be acceptable.
This message should be sent from the Authority level on behalf of a collective charities forum.
- The idea of a Merseyside 'Rag Bag' was discussed, and even that of a Merseyside 'Charities Forum Collection Bag'.
- It was noted that much focus was being placed on bag collections, and not to forget those charities that only operate direct shop donations.
- Whilst some charities already send out the clear message that they will accept rag, the key barrier to householders recycling their rag material is that of convenience.
- A comment was made that regular, high quality kerbside collection is therefore the only way of overcoming the convenience barrier.
- Another big issue for householder donations is that of self-selection of better quality materials into donations.

Question of the fund

- The issue of schools was discussed, and the fact that many currently use commercial collectors.
 - The question was asked; could the fund support a forum to help schools use charity organisations?
 - The nature of the fund objectives was discussed, and precisely how the outcomes & results of any fund spending would be monitored.
 - The fund objectives should be aligned, helping to increase the overall income for charities whilst also achieving a reduction in textiles in the residual stream.
 - A final suggestion was made by Sarah Marshall of BHF that MWDA could trial a reduction in credit payments (such as 50% that currently paid) whilst putting the balance of current payments into a separate fund. This would allow for the effectiveness of such measures to be properly assessed.
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8 Workshop Feedback Analysis

The workshop attendees were, in the main, the organisations who responded to earlier elements of the consultation i.e. the original workshop invitation and consultation questionnaire. As such, they could be considered as highly engaged in both the process and influencing the potential changes to MWDA's recycling credits strategy.

This was certainly found to be the case during the workshop. For a subject that had the potential to be quite technical (in terms of payment mechanisms and communication strategies), the workshop was specifically structured so as to encourage as much discussion as possible and the attendees responded extremely well.

All participants were engaged, interested and particularly keen to enter the group conversation and the morning was lively in terms of group discussion.

In terms of the general 'mood' amongst the consultees, it was initially clear that all charities are facing some significant issues at present; bogus charity collectors, thefts of textile materials, shop break-ins and even a charity van hijacking was mentioned by one participant as reducing the quantity and quality of stock they are able to sell. Along with increased competition from the commercial marketplace, many charities expressed concerns about wider financial issues. Some concerns were raised (during the earlier parts of the meeting) about the potential for the loss of the recycling credit from MWDA, although this certainly wasn't a pervasive and strongly expressed position.

On the key subject of encouraging the recycling of *all* grades of textiles, and notably specifically targeting the lower grades that currently enter the household waste stream, all the charity organisations expressed concern. Whilst they all stated that they could and would accept all grades of cleans textiles, they were also careful to point out that they target the higher grades as this is where they realize the greatest returns. None would be willing to specifically, unilaterally advertise that they would accept 'any textiles' (old socks, ragged tea-towels etc.), but as a collective with a third party such as MWDA, they would be happy to approve this message.

Despite the concerns, all participants remained extremely receptive to the messages presented both by MWDA (in terms of textiles recycling on Merseyside and their strategy proposals) and Envirolink's findings from the review of recycling credits.

It was the open forum discussion that was intended to gather the groups specific thoughts and ideas on the key issues of stakeholder communications, householder engagement and information, and the possibility of a dedicated fund aimed at promoting improved textile recycling.

The overall view of engagement with textile stakeholders was extremely positive. It was, however, accepted that there are many competing interests in the textile recycling sector, and whilst a wide-based forum is to be encouraged, certain groups (such as commercial operators) may wield too much influence and control the agenda. What was clear from the discussion was that MWDA should provide some clear objectives for such a forum and maintain control of the

direction of the group. Not surprisingly, all the charities agreed that they would like to be involved and also see benefit from doing so.

The issue of engaging with householders raised the concerns about the unilateral advertising of all textiles. The most positive outcome from this particular element of the discussion was that all the charities favoured a collective approach to this, encouraging all Merseyside's households to recycle all their textiles.

What was most evident from the discussion around the potential 'textile recycling fund' was that in the absence of any clear definition of how the fund should operate, what its objectives should be, who the recipients should be etc., the discussion about a pot of money could have taken much longer. A number of almost too detailed issues were discussed (such as a fund supporting charities to recycle with schools).

The final remark from the group discussion on funding came from Sarah Marshall of British Heart Foundation. Having obviously considered all she had heard during the morning, Sarah suggested that a possible way forward that could be of mutual benefit to both MWDA and charities would be to reduce the recycling credit payment (suggesting a 50% cut) whilst using the remaining balance of money to create the textile recycling fund. This would allow MWDA to maintain control over their budgets whilst also testing the efficacy of a separate fund and simultaneously continuing to support the wider charity network, a potentially 'Win:Win' way forward for MWDA.

Overall, the group expressed their praise and thanks to MWDA for the engagement process, for involving them as charities in the whole decision making process, involvement that they all welcomed and looked forward to continuing into the future. It was a positive meeting, and an excellent platform for a longer term engagement process with Merseyside's charities and community groups.

Appendix 1 - List of consultation exercise invitees

The following organisations were invited to participate in the consultation workshop.

Age UK	St John's Hospice Wirral
Barnardos	St Joseph's Hospice Association
British Heart Foundation	Willow Bank Hospice
British Red Cross	Woodlands Hospice
Cancer Research	Cats Protection
Claire House Hospice	CVS Halton
Community Recycling Network	EWR Recycling
Faiths 4 Change	Extracare
Hoylake Cottage Hospital	Halton Haven Hospice
KIND	Liverpool Charity Voluntary Services
Marie Curie Cancer Care	Liverpool MS Society
Newton Family & Community Association	Save The Children UK
North West Air Ambulance	Shelter
NSPCC	Social Enterprise Network
Oxfam	Sue Ryder Care
Queenscourt Hospice	Wirral Environment Network
Roy Castle Foundation	Wirral Waste Action Group
Royal School for the Blind	
Salvation Army	
The Samaritans	
Scope	
St John's Ambulance	

Appendix 2 - Consultation process supporting information

Appendix 2.1 Detail of communications with charity and other third sector organisations during the consultation process.

- **First email to consultation invitees 26th September 2011**

“Good afternoon.

Your organisation was recently invited to participate in a consultation exercise on Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority’s (MWDA) recycling credits scheme for textile materials. You are invited to attend a follow-up meeting with MWDA, details as per the attached letter.

MWDA Recycling Credits Scheme Consultation Workshop

Venue: *Holiday Inn, Liverpool City Centre, Lime Street, Liverpool L1 1NQ*

Date: *Friday 7th October 2011, 09.30 – 13.00 hrs*

Your organisation’s views and ideas are extremely important, and MWDA would welcome your participation in this workshop.

*In order to accept this invitation and confirm your place, please either **reply to this email or call Ian Stephenson at Envirolink on 01925 855 775 or 07875 762 715.***

Kind regards,

Ian Stephenson (on behalf of Carl Beer, Chief Executive, Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority)”

- **Email sent to participants following the workshop**

“Good afternoon,

Many thanks for your participation at the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority (MWDA) consultation event in Liverpool on Friday morning. MWDA were extremely pleased at the response and involvement from the group, and we hope that you equally found the morning of value.

The next step will involve collating the comments received from the group on Friday into a summary feedback report for MWDA. MWDA will then consider this as part of their current review of the recycling credits scheme and methods of improving textile recycling across Merseyside before making a final recommendation to the Authority's Members.

As mentioned on Friday, if you have any further comments or ideas you would like included as part of the summary report, please write (email or letter) or telephone me before the end of this week, and I will ensure your feedback is included in the report.

Once a final decision on the new strategy is made, MWDA will contact you directly to inform you of the outcome and future strategy.

Thank-you once again for your valuable participation in this process, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Ian"

Appendix 2.2 Letter from MWDA included in the consultation questionnaire invitation

Textiles Recycling - Maximising the Benefits

As an active recycler of textiles, your organisation was recently invited to participate in a consultation exercise on the future of household textile recycling across Merseyside and the recycling credits scheme.

We appreciate the responses we have received to date which have informed the options being examined by MWDA. The Authority is now giving serious consideration to the trial introduction of a dedicated community fund to replace or supplement the existing scheme of recycling credits and specifically targeted to support increased local textile recycling activities across Merseyside. The detailed nature of the fund, how it will work and who will be eligible remains the subject of ongoing discussion and engagement with the sector and MWDA would welcome your input to this discussion.

You are therefore invited to a meeting to discuss this proposal, any potential changes to the payment of recycling credits and the impacts on your organisation and the sector. The meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn hotel, Liverpool City Centre, on Friday 7th October at 09.30am.

Envirolink Northwest will manage this consultation exercise on our behalf. Should you have any questions, please contact Ian Stephenson at Envirolink in the first instance on 07875 762 715 or 01925 855 775.

I hope that you are able to help us further develop this worthwhile project to help get us all recycling more and ultimately make Merseyside a place where nothing is wasted.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Beer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Carl Beer,
Chief Executive
Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority**
