

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and
Rural Affairs
via email

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Dear Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

English Local Authority Recycling Rate for 2015/16

Thank you for your letter on 27 July 2017 concerning the drop in our recycling rate in 2015-16.

I am pleased to inform you that Barking & Dagenham's recycling rate improved to 25.3% in 2016/17 (up from 18.9% in the previous year), and our performance in the first quarter of 2017/18 was 30%.

There are a number of factors which contributed to the decline.

Between March and June 2015, industrial action by drivers of the GMB trade union had a significant impact on the borough's ability to collect and recycle. During the strike, crews were unable to collect any recyclable materials separately. Consequently, both recycling and general waste, including side waste, were collected together. This resulted in high levels of contamination. I am pleased to say this was ended as soon as the strike was resolved.

In August 2014, our waste disposal authority reported a fire incident at the Mechanical and Biological Treatment plant (BioMRF) which produces recycling materials at the 'back-end' process. It took nearly 16 months to bring the facility back to its full capacity. In August 2015, the BioMRF resumed operations. Although this did not help improve our recycling rate for 2014/15 (which remained at 24%) it is now back at full capacity.

We also face some very difficult financial conditions which we are taking steps to address through the transformation of our services. Nonetheless, we face very real pressures in this part of London as a result of a rising and increasingly transient population. This meant we have had to make changes to our waste collection service, resulting in the cessation of separate mixed glass kerbside collections. This contributed approximately 4% towards our recycling rate.

In September 2016, we replaced our free garden waste service with a chargeable service which has resulted in a 60% reduction in the tonnage of green waste collected in the first quarter of 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. We anticipate increased participation next year.

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We have undertaken other initiatives to increase our recycling rate. Our Cabinet Member for Environment & Street Scene, Councillor Linda Rice, is running a campaign from September 2017. It is called 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' and is a no tolerance approach to those who continue to produce side waste that includes the sanction of a Fixed Penalty Notice.

We also working closely with Resource London and other partners to develop ways of improving recycling performance. Resource London's recent support encompassed:

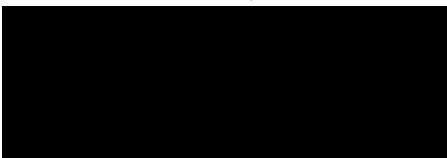
- Options Report 2016 "LBBD declining recycling performance"
- ICT workshop July 2016
- Recycling Managers Training course June and November 2016
- Recycle Week 2016
- Restart Party and a sewing workshop
- Recycle Week 2017 funding (via joint ELWA project)

One of the challenges we face are the lack of financial incentives around enhanced recycling. The waste disposal contract that the East London Waste Authority has with Shanks lacks a differential gate fee for recycling and domestic waste. This is not due to be retendered until 2027. Unfortunately we are bound by a contract that currently charges £125 p/t for waste and recycling disposal, making ELWA one of the most expensive levy rates for recycling in London.

I would welcome your comments on how we might use the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to enable us to redirect our recyclate to a more competitive re-processing provider.

As you may expect, achieving high recycling rates against the back-drop of government cuts in recent years has been challenging for the borough. Nonetheless, as our Waste Strategy for 2016-2020 states, we remain committed to reducing waste at source and aim to exceed 30% recycling rates and work toward the national target of 50%.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Darren Rodwell
Leader of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham