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Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Parliamentary Undersecretary of State
Department for Environment, Food &
Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London, SW1P 3JR

20 September 2017

Dear Dr Coffey,

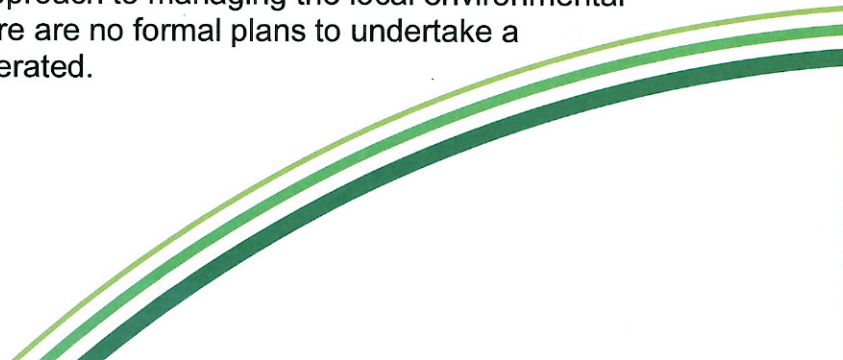
Thank you for your letter of 27th July 2017 and apologies for the late reply. We are pleased to see that recycling is one of your key priorities, as it is ours and we remain committed to achieving an increase in household recycling performance. Hackney's recycling performance has improved on the 24.8% figure in 2015/16 and published figures for 2016/17 will see Hackney's recycling rate at 27%.

I understand that you are looking specifically at local authorities with a recycling performance of less than 30% shown by 2015/16 figures. For the vast majority of those authorities you will find significant similarities that influence recycling performance and this is particularly the case in London. These circumstances are well recognised within the waste industry and I welcome your interest in wanting to understand for yourself the combination of factors that currently restrain a step change in recycling growth in Hackney and elsewhere.

Hackney has made significant investment in its waste and recycling services to ensure that whoever or wherever you are in the borough, residents receive the most comprehensive recycling service as can practically be delivered.

What's working well?

Hackney's waste, recycling and street cleansing services are operated by the Council's in-house environmental operations team. The last review of the service was undertaken in 2012 when recycling moved from kerbside sort to a co-mingling service for street based households. At the same time the recycling service was also brought in-house to join existing in-house services for waste and cleansing enabling a fully integrated waste, recycling and cleansing service delivering operational savings and efficiencies. The service is now also fully integrated with estates cleansing for Council housing to deliver a comprehensive approach to managing the local environmental quality of Hackney's public realm. There are no formal plans to undertake a further review of how the service is operated.

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The Council provides one of the most comprehensive waste management and recycling services in London and our approach is well regarded in the waste management sector. In addition to re-use, textiles, dry recycling and green waste collections, separate food waste collections are provided across Hackney through communal facilities provided on estates and door-to-door services for street level properties.

As a Waste Collection Authority, Hackney is working in partnership with six other north London Boroughs and the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) which is the region's Waste Disposal Authority. We work closely with NLWA and local community groups to develop and deliver innovative recycling communications campaigns and waste prevention services that inspire and motivate Hackney residents to recycle and reduce their waste. Many of these award winning waste prevention services have been in place since 2005:

- Re-use and repair schemes, for example furniture, waste electrical and electronic equipment and textile schemes;
- Prevention schemes including nappy schemes, community composting, unwanted mail and food waste prevention initiatives;
- Traditional and digital media communications campaigns and numerous outreach activities.

We also recognise the expertise within the local third sector in the reuse business and for this reason we have had longstanding formal agreements delivering reuse services for residents, including a contract with a local charity since 2007.

Recently we also undertook a joint procurement exercise for our recycling incentives scheme with two other London boroughs; Camden and Bexley. This is a three year campaign based on a community points model with cash vouchers for individuals and donations to charities. The scheme aims to embed sustainable waste behaviours through the rewards, in turn driving an increase in the recycling rate as well as reducing waste arisings.

Are there particular reasons affecting waste and recycling locally to you?

Notwithstanding our thoughtful and committed approach to recycling and waste prevention, the challenges to further improve recycling performance remain formidable.

The Council is committed to providing more affordable and good quality housing and to meet our housing need 1,750 homes need to be built each year between now and 2033. Increasing housing growth is producing additional waste that requires collection, treatment and disposal capacity. Significantly, higher density development is necessary to deliver new homes and the ratio of high-rise, house conversions and flats above shops compared to street based housing is growing. Purpose built blocks of flats alone account for 52% of Hackney's housing stock and 60% of street level housing is made up of flats from housing conversions. The current recycling performance in flats is already holding back overall recycling performance improvement the exposure to increasing disposal costs is clearly evident. Combined with the need to fund new waste disposal infrastructure, the future financial impact on Hackney is considerable.

Other issues impacting on Hackney's current recycling performance include:

- High levels of deprivation.
- Recycling contamination on estates.
- Low level of food waste participation (streets and estates).
- Inner London streetscene offering less external storage space for waste containment.
- Smaller percentage of garden waste contributing to recycling.
- Limited enforcement powers.


Transient populations, houses of multiple occupation, flats above shops and high rise blocks mean residents are harder to reach through the traditional communications channels like leaflets and door knocking. Householders without English as their first language and relatively high levels of digital exclusion present an additional barrier. We have tried to overcome these barriers by working with resident groups, producing targeted materials in other languages and engaging local people to carry out door knocking. We have run successful behaviour change campaigns, like Hackney's Food Recycling Experiment, which won several awards in 2015 and led to a significant increase in take up of our food waste collections, however we still see low levels of participation in a number of areas of the borough.

All of the above issues are recognised at a London level and the Mayor of London through the London Waste and Recycling Board and Resource London has initiated projects to look specifically at estates recycling, contamination and food waste. Hackney officers are involved with and supporting all 3 initiatives and our innovative work and investment in recycling over many years has been recognised.

Are the obstacles outside your authority's control that may affect your recycling rate?

Achieving the highest possible recycling rates will require a clear and supportive national vision of waste reduction, backed up by a regulatory framework allowing us to take necessary enforcement to deal with those who refuse to use our recycling services. We do not see this at the moment and we are looking to you to provide a clear strategic lead similar to what we see elsewhere in the UK.

Local authorities, even at a sub-regional level have limited influence on the design and manufacture of products, but it falls to us to develop and implement collection and sorting/treatment arrangements for disposal and recycling at the end of their life. A circular economy approach to product and packaging manufacture would enable more re-use and recycling of materials and better public information from manufacturers and retailers about how their products and materials can be re-used and recycled would support our local education provision and service delivery. Cuts to our central government grants of c£130m has had an inevitable impact on our ability to tackle the scale of the issues we face in many areas, especially when communicating and delivering waste reduction.

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Over the longer term, what are the biggest challenges and opportunities you see in driving recycling improvements locally?

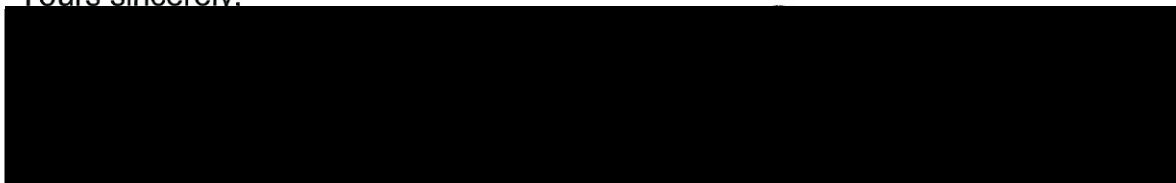
Even sustaining current recycling performance is a challenge and this is also the case nationally. We recognise that some authorities clearly have more scope to increase recycling further, but light-weighting of materials and waste prevention initiatives will have an increasing impact on recycling tonnage. The 2015/16 recycling statistics that you refer to show recycling nationally falling by 0.9% to 43.9%. All but one of the top ten authorities saw a reduction in their recycling rate. The one authority that increased their rate went up by only 0.1%.

In your evidence to the EFRA Committee, you stated that “hugely” improving recycling in urban areas such as “Manchester, Birmingham and London would really help the overall target”. “Hugely” improving recycling performance in urban areas cannot be achieved without fundamentally cracking the barrier of recycling on estates. Despite Hackney’s investment and leading approach in this area, there is still considerable progress to be made. In addition to ensuring new build properties have good provision for recycling, we have embarked on an ambitious programme to improve recycling provision on older Council housing stock through designing and building new and convenient waste and recycling containment facilities. This is an extensive and costly task, but necessary to break down barriers to recycling; yet still further work is required to improve public perception of recycling and drive behaviour change. It is essential that the Government gives recognition of the challenges and the scale of resource required to tackle the problem.

Hackney commissioned external waste management consultants to model revised collection arrangements with measures including fortnightly collection of residual waste restricted to 140 litres per household. The exercise benefitted from the data the Council holds on waste composition and residents’ participation. The most optimistic view of the modelled results show an increase of 4% on Hackney’s overall recycling rate, but implementation within Hackney’s urban streetscene would be extremely difficult.

I trust that this response provides you with a comprehensive view of Hackney’s ongoing work to improve recycling performance further, but we need further support from you and industry. Direction from Government and cooperation from industry changed the way we use plastic bags overnight. Similar action is required to tackle unnecessary packaging and we would urge you to ensure that your Government provides clear and sustained support for recycling and waste prevention in public messaging, resources and regulatory provision in order for all authorities to deliver an ambition for improved recycling and resource efficiency at local and national level.

Yours sincerely,



Philip Glanville
Mayor of Hackney

Cllr Feryal Demirci
Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods,
Transport & Parks