



Councillor Claudia Webbe

Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Labour Member for Bunhill



Dr Therese Coffey MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Town Hall
Upper Street
London N1 2UD

W www.islington.gov.uk

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T: [REDACTED]

9th August 2017

Dear Dr Coffey,

Thank you for your interest in Islington Council's recycling rate and your letter of 27th July 2017 addressed to the Leader of Islington Council, Cllr Richard Watts.

As the Executive Member for Environment and Transport this has been passed to me for a response.

Amongst comparable London boroughs, the Council is proud of its record and past performance at improving recycling, particularly in the face of the many challenges that face an inner city borough. In that context, any drop in performance is also a matter of concern for us.

However, along with some other councils, the published 2015/16 NI 192 rate of 29.4% that you highlight was actually under-reported due to new technical data entry issues with the Waste Data Flow system (Q100 household/non-household splits). We have calculated our correct NI 192 for the year as 30.6%, and we agreed with Waste Data Flow in June that we would in due course receive a clarification letter from Defra with a revised 2015/16 NI 192 figure.

Aside from this one contested year, Islington's annual recycling rates have not dipped below 30% since 2009/10, and we are now pleased that Waste Data Flow is provisionally showing our 2016/17 rate as 31.6%. London benchmarking also suggests that the Council is retaining its position as having the third highest recycling rate amongst all twelve Inner London Boroughs. In 2016/17 we also appear to have the second lowest 'residual waste per household' figure of all London Boroughs.

The above notwithstanding, the Council shares in your priority and commitment to further improvement and welcomes your interest in the particular challenges densely populated inner-city Councils face in this regard. In general terms, we support the points made in the recent LWARB briefing 'Recycling in a dense urban environment'.

In 2015/16, changes in legislative reporting requirements on recycling facilities had the effect of greater scrutiny of mixed dry recycling being collected from communal recycling sites and this did result in previously accepted levels of non-recyclable materials in recycling loads being rejected as

‘contaminated’. This, and subsequent actions by collection crews in avoiding emptying contaminated recycling sites in the first place (to avoid contaminating whole loads), had a negative impact on our recycling rate, and our tonnages did slip as a result.

Islington faces particular challenges in achieving higher recycling rates as it is the most densely populated borough in England, with an unusually high proportion of properties that are ‘flats/maisonettes/apartments’ (82%). Achieving high recycling rates, particularly in purpose-built blocks of flats (over 54% of total dwellings) is historically difficult, particularly for food waste. Furthermore, the very small area of garden space across the Borough means we cannot make the significant contributions to overall recycling rates from garden waste that other Outer-London boroughs consistently achieve. The high population and property density with low average external storage areas also makes consideration of any potential move to fortnightly refuse collections fraught and unpopular.

Our refuse and recycling collection service has been delivered ‘in-house’ since 2013, and our strong performance is as a result of an excellent weekly door-to-door collection service for mixed dry recycling, garden waste and food waste for some 54,000 street properties, a high quality network of communal recycling sites for estate properties and a nightly recycling collection service for flats above shops.


We work closely with our partner Authorities in the North London Waste Authority, and the NLWA itself to deliver joint communications and waste minimisation activities and we work closely with bodies such as Resource London and WRAP to learn from best practice.

A number of initiatives are currently underway to further improve our recycling rate, including:

- A three-year capital programme to improve recycling sites, including installation of new recycling site enclosures, new recycling bins, better signage and improved communications.
- Fleet replacement, with purchase of larger and more efficient collection vehicles
- Use of bin-fill technology to improve scheduling of communal recycling sites and reduce overflowing
- Rescheduling of street property collections (on a ‘village principle’ basis) to deliver a more efficient service
- Participation in the three-year ‘TriFocal’ food waste communications project, and support of national ‘Recycling Week’.
- Actively tackling communal recycling site contamination with a range of actions including targeted communications, recycling site improvements and recycling bin lid redesign

Members of our ‘Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee’ are also currently considering undertaking a review of household waste recycling and which would provide us with an excellent opportunity to identify further initiatives for improving the service we provide to residents, and push on with increased levels of recycling.

In terms of support from Central Government, we would welcome a better regulatory framework enabling Local Authorities to take sensible, measured enforcement action where residents refuse to take part in good quality recycling services, as well as clearer strategic support for waste reduction



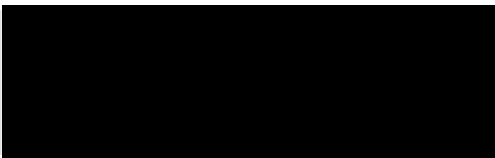
and circular economy initiatives, reflecting the clear political direction as seen in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We would also strongly support further action to drive down the amount of packaging produced by supermarkets and food producers, more deposit and take-back schemes, and extension of environmental taxation (of the sort applied to plastic bags) to cover other non-essential disposable and environmentally damaging products.

Finally, as mentioned at the outset, we still await the formal clarification letter from Defra about the revision to our reported performance against NI192 in 2015/16, and we would be grateful for a resolution to this as soon as possible.

I trust that this clarification of the actual position in 2015/16, together with an account of our proactive approach to seeking continuous improvement, can allay some of the concerns you express in your letter. If there is any further information or activity that we can contribute to support London-wide and national moves to make recycling easier and drive different behaviours in our communities, then we will be pleased to do so.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Claudia Webbe
Executive Member for Environment and Transport

C.C.
Cllr Richard Watts – Leader, London Borough of Islington

