

metroSTOR Webinar Summary

Communal Waste Management Roadmap Webinar

29.02.24

Summary

We've expanded our working group discussions on high rise waste management to include all sorts of communal buildings, because we find the same principles apply pretty much everywhere.

Following our first session we identified the need for a step-by-step roadmap process that anybody can pick up and follow to identify the challenges, the different stakeholders and the impact it's having on them, and then develop a brief, look at different ways you can address that, and then get everybody you need on board to deliver it.

We've been working in the last three or four months with several organisations picking specimen projects and running them through a process, which we keep developing to make it more effective, and we got to the point where we wanted to share it with you and get your feedback.

Overview

The roadmap is divided up into the following stages where we're looking at:

- Assessment of site
- Measuring stakeholder impact
- Root causing symptoms
- Options Appraisal
- Business case
- Implementation Plan

Site Assessment

We'll be sharing a template for this, but here's some initial thoughts around the things that we look at when we go to assess a site.

First of all, we're looking from a fire perspective, do we have the right number of bins, what size, what streams, what distance are they from building openings? Are they secured, do the public have access to them? Is there any evidence of bin fires, any evidence of bulky waste, side waste or fly-tipping?

Then we're looking from the waste and recycling perspective. Is it accessible for residents? Is accessible for the bin crew? How easy are the facilities to use? We're looking at recycling quality, is there any recycling going on? Is it so contaminated that it can't be used? Have the bins got the right signs?

And I'm taking a wider look as well at the neighbourhood and saying, is this affecting the residents' amenity? Quite often it can have adverse effects on the appearance of an estate. Are we getting resident complaints? How many, what's the general view there? Is there evidence of anti-social behaviour and vermin?

Stakeholder Impact

The next step is to look at who's actually affected, what impacts are going to be occurring. So first of all, from a waste recycling perspective, we're looking at how many missed collections, how many rejected bins, how much recycling is actually being collected?

Then building managers and caretaking, dealing with the side waste and chute blockages, how much time do they actually spend doing that?

How much of a problem is this for housing management, how many complaints, what sort of office time is having to be spent on dealing with those complaints and those issues?

With the fire safety team, are there any FRA actions outstanding? Is there evidence of bins which could be a fire risk, any history of smoke-logging events? The fire and rescue service are actually quite keen to get involved in projects like this, especially high-rise buildings.

Then the residents themselves, what are their issues in respect to the waste and recycling? They are often very unhappy with the situation in terms of building safety, anti-social behaviour, the smell, litter, vermin, and actually documenting that is really powerful.

Looking at discussions with the repairs and maintenance teams, how much they're actually spending. Keeping the buildings safe, functional and chutes compliant can be quite costly.

Designing Out Crime Officers are not exactly stakeholders in terms of impacts but they're certainly keen to get involved and offer valuable advice regarding reducing arson risk and ASB.

Then also getting the views of ward councillors and elected members because these guys often are bearing the impacts of the issues and how they affect residents.

Root Cause Analysis

So next we're looking at what's actually causing the issues that we're experiencing, and we we run everything through the 5C criteria to identify and resolve each of the issues identified, and the symptoms summarised on the left could be caused by a deficiency in any combination of these factors:

Capacity – have we got the right number of bins for the people that are living there, the number of bedrooms, number of flats relative to the waste and recycling streams that the council collecting and the frequency of collections. Is there any authorised use, people from other houses coming in using the communal bins? Is the bulk waste in evidence?

Accessibility – can everyone that lives there get to the facility easily, is it easy for people to operate, if they've got to lift dirty bin lids and wade through piles of side waste and stuff to get there, will it work?

Communication – have we shown clearly what we want people to actually do, what goes in each bin and where you take stuff that's non-compliant, are we communicating that properly for people that may be speaking a number of different languages?

Compliance – mostly fire risk, is there is a situation where a fire or smoke could spread inside the building, have we got unsecured bins?

Cleanliness – have we designed the facility so that it stays as clean as possible? Is it being kept clean and tidy?

So in this hypothetical situation, we need to add food waste and look at how we deal with bulk. This is a typical high rise building where there are chutes and the problem with that is because it's so easy, people don't recycle very much. The hoppers are too small, so people tend to leave stuff on the landings and then if you come to use the external bins, they're always dirty and there's sidewaste. We're aware that the signage isn't good, and there has been some history of smoke logging. There's lots contamination and the bin area is not very clean.

So now we've identified what the problems are and what we need to do to resolve them, and we list out the key things that we've got to achieve.

Options Appraisal

As always there a number of routes that we could choose from, including doing nothing. You could install screens, you could install locking frames, or you could lock bins up in enclosed housings, but different levels of investment, of course, may deliver differing levels of effectiveness and value over time.

We can get the right capacity with all of them, some of them will give us the ability to limit unauthorised access, some of them won't. Some of them will give us the ability to provide bulk storage, some of them won't. Some will be more much more accessible than others. Some will make the communication easier than others, and clearly some will be more effective at reducing the fire risk.

Business Case

This has a number of different aspects, including environmental, economic and social.

Environmental

If we can get more clean recycling and make our processes more efficient with less vehicle movements and less emissions, that's all pointing in the right direction as to as far as sustainability is concerned.

Economic

We're also looking at potential cost savings, it could be your maintenance of the building, the caretaking and waste disposal. And if you're a council and you can increase the amount of recycling then you're reducing the amount of residual waste and generating a saving.

If you're a housing association that won't be applicable to you in quite the same way, but if you can reduce the fly tipping and the contamination, the missed collections, then it's definitely going to reduce your operating costs.

And in terms of resident wellbeing and safety, there's clearly some big benefits to be had here in terms of reduced fire risk and just a more pleasant neighbourhood.

And what we've done with the next stage is to expand this and put some pound notes to it. Again, they're estimates, if you play around with the numbers, you can get to a point where you can say, look, if we invest this money in this capital project, then we can project savings in different areas and we're going to calculate what our payback period will be.

Option 1 – no investment

The first option is to continue the status quo as a benchmark to compare with. We're not going to make any investment and we're going to put in all our maintenance and caretaking costs, the bulk removal and time we spend dealing with complaints, our waste disposal costs, and let's say it's costing us £16k per annum to carry on doing what we've always done.

Option 2 – £45k investment in bin housings

The second option is to put the bins in external housings, fully enclosed top-level investment. And what we've got then is potentially a saving in terms of repairs and maintenance, caretaking and waste costs of £17k per year, meaning we get paid back on that investment within two and a half years or just over.

Option 3 – £25k investment in bin screens

Our second intervention is that we're going to put the bins in a screened enclosure. In some places it can work really well, but I'm going to say this is quite a demanding environment and there's still going to be quite a bit of cost to keep that all in good working order, more cost to caretakers because putting corrals outside often seems to attract more fly tipping and disposal costs accordingly are also going to go up. We are getting a bit of recycling, but not really as much as we should do, so we're going to get £3k saving per year, which means it's going to take eight years to get that back if, if at all.

So sometimes a bigger investment is going to give us a bigger saving and a quicker payback. Not always, but I think it's important to look at the different environments that you're working in and some will definitely justify a more substantial investment, it will pay for itself.

Social Value

We've then got the social return on investment, and I haven't got the numbers to put in here yet, but we're doing some modelling with HACT to calculate the social value created as a consequence of the intervention that you've made.

This is where the resident surveys are really important, because if beforehand we've got, let's say ten people saying there is a problem here with crime and anti-social behaviour, there's drug dealing going on in the bin store and afterwards they say that's not a problem anymore, then that has a social value.

If X number of people say there's much less litter, there's less smell and it's a more pleasant neighbourhoods, you don't get the rats, now it looks better and it's safer and it's great because we can recycle, all those things have a social value.

Discussion Points

Reducing the average officer time to solve fly tipping complaints would have an impact, as would reduced costs of removal, the emissions of running that truck as well as the staffing, the actual cost of owning and running that truck, then highlighting how much of that money could be reinvested into the community.

How can we get people to understand that there is actually a personal benefit to them, some organisations said, well look, if we can reduce the outgoings on your estate, we can actually start to invest some of that in back into your community area with benches or litter bins. Seen a great campaign from Fife Council on Food Waste collection saying, look, if you put your food waste in here it's actually powering the local primary school.

Are there issues with increased fly tipping in communal areas when chutes are decommissioned or do residents generally take to the change fairly easily? A client told us yesterday that they had a very small period of pushback from residents at first, but now they're really on board and apart from a very small amount of waste ending up in the lifts, it's been a complete success. And they didn't have to spend £30k on repairing the chutes or £3k clearing the sheets every month and the external housings cost c. £16k.

Implementation Plan

So having made a decision then on which route we're going to be taking, whether it's doing nothing, whether it's installing a solution that costs lots of money or a little money, whatever it is, we've also found it helpful to involve or keep those stakeholders on board as we work through a project.

Now, the reason being that anything like this has lots of moving parts and it only needs one of those parts to fall down, one person didn't do the thing that everybody thought they were going to do, and the result is then not as good as it should have been. So we set out clearly as part of our road map what the individual stakeholders have got to do.

We want the waste team on board to formally agree the number of bins, the collection points, what signage they want to see on them, what symbols, what colours, make sure we get something which people recognise.

The caretaking teams will still need to keep their areas clean, tidy, sometimes rotate bins from bin rooms to an external deposit point. The housing team may need to offer assisted collections to vulnerable residents if we're closing chutes, although this often doesn't need to continue long once they get used to the idea.

There's a lot of work needed from the housing team in terms of consultation and getting everybody on board with the changes, and if we can get people on this journey with us, it just makes a huge, huge difference. What we find is actually most people want to do this. It's just that we haven't made it easy enough for them.

The repairs team need to make sure there's something in there for whatever maintenance is required. There might be some training required to staff and spare parts they need to keep so they can swap things out quickly if they get damaged.

We also set this out on a timeline with who's responsible for the different actions and the time that's likely to be needed for these, whether it's the planning, whether it's a consultation, some of these could be concurrent.

Our interpretation of planning law is that the installation of structures like bin stores that are bolted to the ground, planning officers will say yes planning permission is required. If you're a council, though, rather than a housing association, there is a Part 12 exemption from the general development order, which allows you to put structures up on your own land as long as it's not more than 4m high and 200m³ in volume.

Getting planning for a bin store in a communal setting is not normally difficult. Planners accept that we need that infrastructure, and their responses are generally positive, but it adds time, complexity and costs to the process, and it is well to be aware of that.

Discussion Points

Interesting challenge with a 5-storey block of flats above a supermarket where chutes were closed 6mths ago and even with assistance for elderly and single mothers, most of the residents are dumping rubbish outside the entrance rather than walk it down five flights of stairs, then round the back of the supermarket service area into a bin storage area behind security fencing. Discussed guidance in the British standard indicating that a bin store should be within 30m of the front door of each flat, which is almost certainly contributing to the issue. Recommended looking for a more accessible locations to address the obvious inconvenience factor, and this may need to include a fire-resistant or even access-controlled store.

Discussion regarding Councils removing recycling bins because the housing associations don't have the knowledge or resources to deal with the contamination, even though they work alongside them, give them graphics and things like that. Acknowledged that it's not easy to make recycling work in communal settings such as blocks of flats where people don't take ownership. But it is definitely possible to move the needle using established behaviour change principles - make clear what you want people to do, then make it as easy as you can for them. Simpler Recycling means that by April 2026, we've got to be getting separate dry recycling and food waste from every residential property, and we're confident that we can do that.

Student lets also a challenge due to constant turnover so have to constantly educate them. Recommend starting to prepare now for upcoming legislative changes so we can learn from our mistakes and have effective strategies in place.

Next Event

Just to signpost our next event, where we're actually going to run an onsite session at Brentford Towers in Hounslow where they closed their chutes a couple of years ago. So the final date is still to be confirmed hoping to be April and we'll be providing you with lunch. There's lots of people that you know on this journey somewhere along the lines. Doesn't matter if it's not chute closures that you're looking at, these basic fundamental principles apply in almost every situation.

We'll do another online event in June-July and then we will run some further sessions a bit further north and could be Wolverhampton, could be Sheffield, so we'll keep developing this road map. We'll share it with you, we'll have templates and things that go with that. But yeah, please do share your thoughts and ideas and we'll keep improving and getting better at what we do.