

metroSTOR Webinar Summary

Engaging High-Rise Residents in a Food Waste

19.11.24

Summary

Introduction

Nigel introduced the webinar, thanking Livvy Drake from Sustainable Sidekicks and Sandy for their contributions. He highlighted the pressing need to address food waste, which constituted 25–30% of total waste and significantly contributed to greenhouse gas emissions. With the UK preparing for mandatory food waste recycling in all residential buildings, the session focused on overcoming challenges in high-rise settings and applying the learnings more broadly.

Insights from the Trial

Livvy Drake shared the findings from a three-month trial in three high-rise blocks in Kirkcaldy, Fife, involving 258 units. The trial, supported by funding from Zero Waste Scotland, aimed to introduce food waste recycling to flats—a demographic often considered challenging for such initiatives. The trial's objectives were to maximise participation, identify barriers, and inform future rollouts. Livvy emphasised that the study sought to shift the narrative around food waste services in high-rise buildings.

The trial highlighted key challenges, including space constraints in flats, limited visibility of social norms due to communal living, and concerns about odours, vermin, and the durability of caddy liners. Despite these issues, many residents were motivated by environmental benefits, a desire to reduce refuse smells, and social influences.

Infrastructure and Design Solutions

Livvy outlined the infrastructure designed to address these challenges. Smaller, foot-pedal-operated bins were placed outside each block, prioritising convenience. Residents were supplied with caddy liners, although concerns about their strength led to recommendations for double-bagging. Proximity to disposal points played a significant role in encouraging participation, and residents appreciated designs that minimised physical contact, such as bins with foot pedals.

Communication Strategy

Livvy explained that the communications were designed using behavioural science principles. Materials were crafted to make residents feel valued, including messaging that celebrated their selection for the trial and encouraged participation. Clear, visually appealing bin signage and leaflets guided residents, while follow-up posters highlighted the collective impact of their efforts. Feedback loops, such as updates on the tonnage of food waste collected, reinforced positive behaviour.

Trial Outcomes

The trial achieved an average collection of 45 kilograms of food waste per week per block. Participation remained steady throughout, with most residents emptying their bins every two to three days. Contamination was minimal, largely due to effective communication and bin design.

Recommendations for Wider Rollouts

Sandy discussed plans for expanding the initiative across more high-rise blocks and mid-rise flats. He stressed the importance of phased rollouts to test and refine methods, engaging caretakers for doorstep collections, and continuing to highlight the practical benefits of food waste recycling, such as reduced smells and cleaner communal areas.

Lessons Learned

Livvy encouraged organisations to understand the motivations and barriers of their target audience, emphasising that messaging should resonate with residents' everyday experiences rather than focusing solely on environmental goals. Sandy said we shouldn't give up on flats, adding that high-rise recycling was both feasible and impactful with the right engagement and infrastructure in place.

Next Steps

The project was expanded across Fife, with promising early results. Additional trials were planned to explore the applicability of these methods in mid-rise and private housing settings. A focus remained on refining communications and infrastructure to maximise participation and address emerging challenges.

Closing Remarks

Nigel concluded the session by thanking Livvy, Sandy, and the attendees for their contributions. He invited participants to share insights and feedback and reminded them to check the metrostor.uk website for webinar recordings and resources.