

metroSTOR Webinar Summary and Transcript

Flats Recycling: Why we *Should* close refuse chutes

23.01.25

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Introduction – Nigel Deacon

Nigel Deacon introduced the webinar, thanking attendees and panellists. He outlined the focus: the rationale for closing refuse chutes in high-rise flats and the associated benefits, such as improved fire safety and increased recycling rates. The panellists included Helen Scott (Sheffield City Council), Dean Butterworth (Sheffield City Council), Harriet Turpin (London Borough of Hackney), and Adam Briggs (Citizen Housing).

Sheffield's Experience – Helen Scott

Helen Scott highlighted Sheffield City Council's journey in closing refuse chutes. Of the city's 24 tower blocks, chutes in four were closed as part of a £7 million fire safety programme. The closures addressed issues like frequent blockages, odours, noise pollution, and fire hazards. Challenges included outdated chute designs unable to accommodate modern waste sizes, lack of cleaning programmes, and resident complaints about noise and hygiene. Future plans to close chutes in 20 more blocks will involve a £45 million investment. Continuous resident engagement, including consultations and transition periods, was critical to gaining acceptance. The closure has reduced waste management challenges and improved recycling rates significantly.

Regulatory Context and Risk Assessments – Dean Butterworth

Dean Butterworth delved into the regulatory aspects, emphasising the need to comply with fire safety and building safety regulations. He stressed that organisations must identify their "responsible person" and ensure clear governance and accountability for fire safety decisions. Dean explained that bin chutes are high-risk, with fire services in some areas mandating immediate closure due to safety concerns. He advocated for robust risk assessments that consider chute integrity, potential fire spread, and operational hazards. Dean recommended closing chutes entirely to eliminate risks rather than relying on complex and costly maintenance.

Hackney's Approach – Harriet Turpin

Harriet Turpin described Hackney's Estates Recycling Programme, which integrates chute closures with recycling infrastructure improvements. Hackney's approach focuses on creating tailored solutions for the borough's diverse population. To date, works have been completed on 17 estates, with plans for 24 more. Harriet emphasised the importance of resident engagement and equalities impact assessments to ensure accessibility for vulnerable groups. Improvements included new external bin stores with appropriate fire-safe designs and layouts that encourage recycling. Harriet highlighted the programme's success in doubling recycling rates on some estates, though closures remain vital for achieving optimal results.

Citizen Housing's Pilot Programme – Adam Briggs

Adam Briggs shared Citizen Housing's pilot project in Coventry, which involved closing chutes in one estate with four tower blocks. Challenges included resident resistance and ensuring accessibility for those with mobility or temporary health issues. Citizen Housing implemented assisted and additional waste collection services to support affected residents. The project's success was attributed to clear communication, engaging residents through drop-in sessions, and ensuring external bins were conveniently located. The organisation plans to expand the programme across its 36 high-rise blocks and 24 mid-rise blocks over the next three years.

Common Challenges and Lessons Learned

All speakers acknowledged challenges, such as resident pushback, accessibility concerns, and managing the financial and logistical complexities of chute closures. Effective solutions included ongoing communication, educational campaigns, and implementing assisted waste collection services. Harriet and Dean highlighted the importance of aligning chute closures with broader waste management and fire safety policies.

Benefits of Closing Refuse Chutes

- The speakers unanimously agreed on the benefits, including:
- Improved fire safety by mitigating chute-related fire risks.
- Increased recycling rates by making external bins the sole disposal option.
- Cleaner communal areas and reduced maintenance issues, such as chute blockages and odours.
- Potential for repurposing chute spaces for alternative uses like cycle or mobility storage.

Conclusion and Next Steps – Nigel Deacon

Nigel Deacon concluded the webinar by thanking the panellists and attendees. He encouraged further discussions and collaboration on implementing chute closure programmes. Key takeaways included the need for strong risk assessments, resident engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure successful implementation.

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Introduction – Nigel Deacon

Flats Recycling - why we should close refuse chutes

Nigel Deacon

Welcome everybody. Thanks for joining our first webinar of 2025: flats recycling and why you should think about closing refuse chutes. Please feel free to put as many questions, observations and comments in the chat so that we can speed up that process and stick your hands up at the end. We want to make contributions. There will be a recording. Slides will be circulated as always.

Huge thanks to the panellists that have agreed to join us today for this webinar: flats recycling and why we should close refuse chutes. Don't just take it from me, let's see what the experienced practitioners have got to say. You'll be hearing from Helen Scott from Sheffield City Council, Dean Butterworth, also from Sheffield City Council, Harriet Turpin, London Borough of Hackney and Adam Briggs from Citizen Housing. I think it's going to be a really interesting session. It's great to hear their experiences around closing chutes and the reasons why they did that. We're going to hand over now to Helen.

Helen Scott

Thank you, Nigel. Hello, good morning, everybody. My name is Helen Scott and I work for Sheffield City Council and I'm the Service Manager in our Estates and Environmental Services team.

Why did we close our chutes in Sheffield? We have 24 tower blocks across the city and today, we've closed four of those and they were all single staircase. That chute closure was part of a wider scope of programmed fire safety work to those blocks. The primary reason for closure was therefore fire and building safety. However, what it did do, is it addressed several historic problems which we had and still have with chutes across the city.

One of the main [problems] which many of you will be able to relate to is blockages. The hopper heads and chute size are no longer fit for purpose. These blocks were built in the 1960s so that the chutes were built with small bags in mind and obviously people these days are now putting larger black sacks and other things down there so it's a huge resource issue, to address those blockages. Across the city, odour is also a problem. We don't have an ongoing chute cleaning programme here in Sheffield, so that is a problem. We get a number of complaints about smells coming from the chutes. We did a trial a few months back where we cleaned the chutes on one of the tower blocks and it did have an impact straight away but we found very quickly that those problems came back. Really, for there to be any major impact, we determined that we needed a schedule in place for chute cleaning, which unfortunately, at the moment, we don't have the budget for. Noise pollution is also an issue. People throw all sorts down the chutes, but even just glass jars can make quite a large noise when going down, which obviously impacts on the other the residents in the block. Flies from food waste [were also a problem] where bags haven't been tied securely and this food waste that has sort of spilled out into the chutes and got stuck onto the inside. It is an issue and really [has] a general impact on the cleanliness and hygiene of communal areas – where people have left bags outside hopper heads without pushing them down the chutes and then they've created spillages and so on – but also the fire risk that is created by leaving black bags and other things next to the hopper heads. It's a huge problem for us. So, just

a couple of pictures there in terms of some of the things that we experienced: bags being left, rather than being put down the chute where we've not rotated bins quick enough and they've become overflowed and overflowing underneath the chutes. Pizza boxes [are a] huge problem for us, where people have tried to put those down the chutes and that's obviously created blockages.

So, how we got approval: being a local authority, we may have different approval routes to many of you on the call. Back when we did the first four tower blocks, it was a cabinet member approval route and at that time it was a £7 million capital allocation that we had. That work was completed in July 2024. Moving on, we are going to be closing the chutes on the remaining 20 tower blocks across the city, but we now have a committee system in place, so any approval will go to our Housing Policy Committee. We're now looking at a £45 million capital allocation for that piece of work. All our capital budgets are approved by full council for any variations or slippages. The programme as we move through is managed internally by officers via our Homes Programme Group, which is chaired by the Head of Investment.

How did we get residents on board? Obviously, letters, newsletters, we had some in-person events where people could come and look at the design of the external provision that we were going to be putting in place. It was important that we liaised with the tenants and residents' associations in the areas the local councillors too. Communication was key, really. We did have some negativity, that was expected, but it was important that we dealt with that negativity as quickly as possible and gave customers as much information as we could.

We carried out equalities impact assessments and that allowed us to understand the demographic profile of each block and highlighted any vulnerabilities with customers that lived in those areas – it meant that we could tailor our approach in terms of that. So, continuous engagement throughout; what would be happening, when, how? We [had] some of our waste support officers on site throughout the process to answer any questions and deal with any concerns that the customers may have had. What worked well was that we had a transition period. Rather than the change happening overnight, we had about a four-week period whereby the chutes were still open, but the external bin provision was also there to use. It just gave customers a little bit of time to adapt to the changes and obviously, it was a massive change for many customers so there was a need to re-educate customers on how they now needed to dispose of their waste correctly.

Did it increase our estate management duties? Well, there is a need now, certainly after a weekend, to ensure that any excess waste is cleared from the external provision, where bins have become full and customers have left bags in and around those bin pods. Also, on one of the tower blocks, it is very close to some neighbouring maisonette blocks, so often what we find is that those customers tend to come across and use the bins that are really for the tower block. That can create some capacity issues. But on the whole, there's less waste left on internal landings because the hopper heads are no longer there. This was a huge resource issue for us, whereby we'd got estate staff having to walk every morning, 15 floors of each block, just to check for any communal waste that had been left. Also, there are no longer any blockages in those tower blocks to deal with and no need to rotate the bins. We've had to maybe change how we do things and manage things slightly differently, but on the whole, it's not increased the workload at all.

Finally, have we seen any increase in recycling? Well, yes, a number of these blocks didn't have any provision in place prior to chute closure so we've obviously seen a large increase in recycling around the blocks. There was a need again to increase information and educate customers about how to recycle correctly. We did that with educational packs, ensuring that signage was correct and also ensuring the apertures on the external

provision were right, in terms of ensuring that there was no cross-contamination of bins with general waste. It's highlighted that there's actually a need for more provision. Customers have really got on board and are recycling more so that's been a real positive.

That's it from me and I'll just hand over to Dean Butterworth now.

Dean Butterworth

Thank you very much, Helen. I'm going to talk more around the regulatory side of things and you're probably going to hear quite a bit of this in some of the other presentations that you're going to get as well.

Through regulation, there are various things that we've got to make sure that we do. As anybody working in the building safety world at the moment knows, we've got to check fire doors and there's a potential in the future that we might have to check window safety in high-rise blocks. We need to be checking smoke seals on hoppers and door plates. One of the challenges that we've got, is how do we comply with the regulation and the requirements that are in there? At the minute, we know potentially some of the customers that we deal with don't want to let us into their properties. It's a challenge that we've got. So, when we're saying that we're going to check hopper heads and we're going to make sure that seals are working adequately, how do we get into those properties? The regulator of social housing and the building safety regulator in many instances will require us to demonstrate that we've put adequate systems in place to be able to demonstrate that we are 100% compliant. One other thing about keeping your hoppers, for argument's sake, is as a landlord, if you can't get into a property to check if one of those hoppers is still safe, are you actually going to take that resident to court to force access and if they continue not to let you in, are you actually going to evict that customer? There are regulatory requirements on you to get in there.

Bin chutes are a challenge for us, as Helen's outlined in relation to the maintenance. They get blocked on a regular basis. Fire services across the country are all different. Some of you will be working with fire services who are saying, "Yes, you can keep your bin chutes as long as you put adequate measures in place to make sure that they are safe." Some of the other fire services that you will deal with, such as Sheffield and South Yorkshire, will say, "Close them, close them quickly, if you don't close them quickly, we're going to serve you with a prohibition notice." We had an experience back in January 2023, where the fire service knew that we were closing and two days before we completed the work, they decided to serve us with a prohibition notice at 4.00 in the afternoon and told us we had to empty every flat within that building and rehouse them temporarily. Obviously, that is a challenge for organisations. We've got high-risk, high-rise buildings. There are lots of regulatory issues that we need to address.

One of the things I just want to talk about is who's responsible for making some of these decisions, to ensure that we are demonstrating to the key regulatory agencies, whether it's the building safety regulator, regulatory social housing, your fire service, or whoever it is, that you've got appropriate governance routes in place. One of the questions I would ask yourself is if you know who your responsible person is? Who is the ultimate person responsible? It doesn't have to be a person; it can be the organisation but is that very clear and is that very clearly set out for you as officers and also your organisation? You'll note for your high-risk, high-rise buildings that you will have the pit boxes, the personal information boxes at the bottom, that should include who your responsible person is. If it's not there, find out who the responsible person is and make sure that they are very clear about what their roles and responsibilities are. For argument's sake, in Sheffield, Ajman Ali, who's the executive director of neighbourhood services, is the responsible person.

One of the challenges that I pose to yourselves is, once you've identified who that responsible person is, when they go on leave for two weeks, do you have a deputy who covers that responsibility? Do you have a proper chain of command that says who is making the decisions on all issues related to fire safety and building safety so that if you need a decision-making, you've got full governance, full tracking of the decision-making and it's very clear and accountable who is doing what. Who's your accountable person? So, on the panel today, I would say that, Adam, you're an accountable person. You're not a responsible person that sits higher up the chain. I'm an accountable person, but – do we know who we are? And again, there [should be] more than one accountable person in an organisation should something happen. So, I know that I've got an equivalent number, head of service for neighbourhood services, who's responsible for the people living in the buildings. He's also an accountable person. It's [about] fully understanding, if I go on leave, who deputises for me? If all the other accountable people go on leave, who's covering there? Just for an example, we've put the wonderful world of IMS in four of our tower blocks. The IMS system at the moment has got a habit of popping its seals and then leaking into electrics, which has happened twice over the last two weeks. What we've had to do as a consequence of that is make very quick, pragmatic decisions. Do we install waking watch? Do we move to a simultaneous evacuation? You need to make sure you've got people on the ground who understand the requirements and the regulation, who can make those decisions, but also recognise if you've not got those systems in place and something goes wrong, what are the consequences? It's the consequences for the responsible people and also the accountable people within the organisation. Even though you're working for a corporate organisation due to changes in legislation, you as individuals, as responsible and accountable people, are now potentially subject to personal fines, so it's incumbent on yourselves to make sure that you know what those systems are.

Risk assessments: How many of you risk assess your bin chutes? How many of you are risk assessing other aspects of your building safety? When I say risk assessments, it's a very clear understanding of what you've got, understanding the risks, understanding the alternative options, putting in place mitigations, making sure that you fully understand if something happens, what the consequences are and what you're going to do about that. As part of our requirements, the building safety case for all of our high-risk buildings - we're putting risk assessments into place as an addendum to those, so that we're risk assessing all aspects of safety. What we are assessing is the structural integrity. How well have your bin chutes been built and can they withstand fires? You might have a bin chute that actually in itself, gets rid of your waste, gets rid of the rubbish – but if there's a fire in there, what's the integrity of that? How quickly would it collapse? How quickly would the fire then leak into other properties? Are there home fire resistant properties that are attached to your bin chutes? Are they properly compartmentalised? If they're not compartmentalised, where is the failure within the structure and what are you going to do then to make sure that you can prevent the spread of fire? Potential vulnerabilities within your systems and I'm talking about systems now, not people, because that's a completely separate debate around vulnerabilities of people living in your properties. What would cause a chute to fail, such as a blockage or damage and then what's the risk to you? If you don't inspect your chutes on a regular basis and you don't identify a blockage and there's a fire in one of the bin store areas underneath and you've not got a damper system on, what is the consequence of that happening within the building? Most bin chutes, as we know, act as chimneys within a building, so unless we've got safe ways of working, it's going to be a problem and then [we need to] understand the potential hazards – what could injure people? If you've got your hopper heads that are attached to individual flats, like we've still got some, the individual flats will fill with smoke and what's the implication there? Some hoppers are in communal areas. So, again, if those bin seals are not working, what's the issue there? Are your automatic opening vents working well enough? Have you got enough ventilation? What's the issue? And the challenge in relation to that? What I would implore people to do is, if you've not considered undertaking risk assessments for your bin chutes, do one. Find out how you complete it and I'll say if anybody wants any guidance and advice on how to complete a risk assessment for

that, I'm more than happy for Nigel to give my details and I'll send some advice in relation to how that can be undertaken.

Risk assessments – the benefits, identifying hazards and vulnerabilities, determining the actions that you can take and helping to understand if the building is compliant within the building safety regulations. If you can tick all of those boxes and you've still got bin chutes, then you're OK, but don't sit on your laurels, particularly with bin chutes. What actions can be taken? You can install fire-resistant shutters at the base of the chutes. I'm guessing that probably still lots of your high-risk buildings have still got manual shutters at the bottom so that if you need to close the chutes, somebody's physically got to go in and actually close them down. Whereas nowadays, you can have the automatic damper systems on. When a temperature within a bin storage area gets to a particular temperature, it will automatically shut so ensure that if you're keeping your bins, you make sure they are serviced on a regular basis – and that is not just the cleaning, but it's also checking the structural integrity. Have you got structural reports that say your bin chute integrity is solid or understanding if there are challenges with the bin chute? What work needs to be done in relation to the shoot itself, the hopper head and the closing mechanism at the bottom? Ensure the chute is not used for toxic or hazardous materials. This is a challenge, isn't it? Because we've had all sorts thrown down our bin chutes and I'm sure all of you have. We've had coffee tables thrown down. We've had snooker tables thrown down! You would not think they were big enough, but anything that can go down a bin chute, we've experienced it. The toxic and hazardous materials is not something that we're used to. So if you've got fumes that are coming back up, how do we prevent those? Chutes are not operated in high winds. This is one thing that we hadn't considered until we've done the risk assessment. If you've got a bin store room linked to a bin chute and there is very high wind and the winds can actually get into the bin store room because it's not sealed properly, it will create a chimney scenario within that building. So, either make sure that your bin storerooms are properly sealed in relation to wind or understand the conditions for when you've got to close those bin stores down. I think tomorrow, the winds are going to touch 50 miles an hour. What's your benchmark for closing your bin chutes? Wind will have an impact on that. I say if any of you have bin chutes that are not being operated or any of the components are damaged, close them down and have an alternative provision in place to make sure that people can get rid of their waste.

OK, so the way forward - and this is the Sheffield way in terms of minimising all the risks - South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue expect us to close all of our bin chutes down, which we're now going to have within a programme. It'll take two years to close the bin chutes down, part of a wider programme of high rise building improvements and that's going to cost 45,000,000 to do. We've completed the 4 single staircase tower blocks and we've got 20 blocks to complete.

Early planning is needed within this because from our experience we've got to try and take the hearts and minds of our residents... somebody who's been living on the 15th floor of the tower block, who has always thrown their bin liner down the bin chute... and now you're telling them that they've got to walk out when it's snowing and raining and everything else. They're not going to be happy. Use the information that you've got from the regulator to say, "Look, some of this is out of our control. This is your fire regulator saying that you've got to do it."

Early planning for location and design: If you've got high rise buildings that are in a city centre location, your land is going to be the premium. So where do you put your waste provision externally to make sure that you're maximising opportunities, but also to make sure that those areas are not going to be misused. We've got lots of tower blocks in Sheffield that are far away from the city centre, but then we also have four that are slap bang in the city centre and we know that those waste areas will get more misuse than any of the others. So, making

sure you fully understand that ongoing communications with customers is important. But it's not just your customers, it's other stakeholders as well, such as your locally elected members if you're a local authority or your board if you're a housing association. You will get grief! You know that that is guaranteed for closing your bin chutes.

Implications for ongoing fire risk assessments (FRA): Obviously, you've got to do your FRA. Every year you are guaranteed through those FRA to get some immediate actions; some one-week actions and one-month actions. What are you doing to make sure you understand the risk of those and closing those down within the appropriate time scales? That is particularly important now because as the regulator of social housing is going round to each organisation, they will be asking you about your data, what if you got outstanding? How long has it been outstanding? What risk is it and what are your plans to close them down?

Finally on that, review the risk assessment. If you don't have a risk assessment, start one! Start to think what that looks like so you can start to second guess and future plan, what the problems might be and how you're going to overcome and mitigate those.

Nigel Deacon

Thank you, Dean. That's outstanding. Really appreciate that. So we've got a bit for questions, but if you don't mind, we'll move the questions to the end and we're now handing over to Harriet, please.

Harriet Turpin

Hi, everyone. I'm here today to give a little bit of an overview of Hackney's approach to improving fire safety and recycling on estates through the closure of chutes. I think we've had introductions, but for those of you who don't know, I'm Harriet Turpin, Project Manager at the council and I lead on the Estates Recycling Programme team. I just wanted to give a little bit of an overview of Hackney. It's a very densely populated borough and in terms of our stock, we are largely estate-based properties compared to street level. We have increasing pressure on our recycling and fire safety with the growing housing stock.

We are also a very diverse borough with areas of affluence and deprivation, which makes the challenges harder.

A bit about the challenges – as we know, estates tend to have a lower recycling rate than street level properties and as estate stock continues to grow, we're finding more barriers. There are already barriers for residents to recycle on estates, including a lack of service provision and issues with the behaviour around chute systems. These systems have been in place for a long time, but they're not in line with today's waste world, making them prone to being blocked or not used correctly, which makes it harder for residents to recycle. They have a conveniently located chute right outside their doors and it makes it easier for them to dispose of their waste rather than taking it down to the recycling bins. Therefore, it's really important that we make it easier for our residents to recycle on estates.

Here's a visual representation of where Hackney is with its recycling rates, street level compared to estates. Street level properties are performing a lot higher than our estates. It's really important, if we want to meet national targets, that we look at how and why estates are performing lower and how we can improve it. That's the challenge from a recycling perspective, but there's also the added challenge of fire safety. There's been an increasing number of fires, particularly publicised ones, happening on our tower blocks and there's growing interest in looking at ways to make the bin chutes and bin stores safer. The aim is to minimise the impact and

make these areas safer. There's increasing pressure and interest to address this and it's a co-benefit of the work we do – improving recycling and fire safety.

I think you've already covered this very well, but there's the Building Safety Act and increasing policy and legislation that we need to consider. It's especially important post-Grenfell that we make our high-rise buildings as safe as possible. The ERP I work on initially started as a recycling initiative, but we've very much adopted a fire safety culture as well. What we're doing to the bins, by closing the chutes and building bin stores, is not only improving recycling but also making these buildings and their bin store areas safer. That gives a bit of context for why we're pushing to do this work at Hackney.

What we're doing: The Estates Recycling Programme is an ongoing programme, similar to what Sheffield has been doing. We started as a small pilot and grew into more of a business-as-usual approach. Through lessons learned, we found a kind of modular approach that we can use to roll this out across the whole borough. To date, we've delivered works on 17 estates in Hackney and we're looking to do another 24 estates, which has been signed off and will be part of phase six, which we'll do in the next two years. I won't cover this too much, but for context, we started with a one-phase pilot trialling different recycling initiatives on Hackney housing, such as adding bins, improving communications and fundamentally realising that the best way to make changes is to improve the infrastructure and ensure it's appropriate and has the right capacity. That's led us to where we are today. Moving on, here's a bit of context showing what we're doing through pictures. You can see that we've got lots of recycling bins located next to a substation, which is a big no-no. We're moving these bins and creating a new bin store, shown to the left of the screen. This helps improve safety by moving the bins away from potential danger and closing the chutes. Residents now have to come down to dispose of their waste and recycling at the same location, rather than just using the chute system. If they're coming down to recycle, they need to use the recycling bins at the same time. We also have before-and-after images that show how we're not just improving recycling and fire safety, but also making it easier for crews. We've had bins placed on uneven surfaces, which are really hard for them to manage when collecting waste. This new approach makes the services more efficient and improves the estate environment, making it look nicer for residents. Here are some examples of poor bin management and placement, which can lead to fly-tipping and antisocial behaviour. Moving on to the next one, here are some examples of metroSTORs. In some cases, we're really limited on space and we have competing priorities from different service areas wanting to use space on estates for things like cycle hangers. In these cases, we may put in a metro store to improve fire safety. With the chutes themselves, we've matched the existing finishes to make it look like the chutes were never there. This encourages behaviour change by removing the chute and making it seem as though it was never an option.

As for the results, you can see that the green represents the post-recycling tonnage. We track this through fill-rate monitoring by officers and tonnage monitoring by our crews, who weigh the materials before and after collection. On the estates where we've completed work, we've seen recycling rates either increase or double, but in some cases, the recycling rates have dropped. I'd note that on the estate where we didn't close the chutes, we saw less improvement. There's definitely a positive relationship between closing the chutes and increasing recycling rates.

Moving on to the final slides, I just want to cover how we reached this point. The first step was getting a really strong business case in place and securing internal stakeholder buy-in. This was key for us, as we needed support from various areas in the council, such as fire safety and waste services. Showing the co-benefits was essential. Having strong waste storage and planning guidance is also crucial. We've set policies such as bins should be no more than 25 metres from residents and crew should not have to walk more than 10 metres to collect waste. It's important to prioritise which estates should be done first. We used fire safety actions,

the number of chute blockages, the number of recycling bins available and any other planned programmes in the council to determine this. We also did a pilot study to learn lessons before scaling up. Consultation and procurement are key. Residents need to feel they are part of the process, especially when it comes to design. If you don't have an assisted collection in place, I strongly recommend implementing one for vulnerable residents. Lastly, make sure your procurement packages are competitive and accurate. We used a direct contract award, which had its benefits. Communication is important throughout the process and specifications must ensure bin stores have the correct capacity and are designed for efficiency. Results are crucial. Capture as much data as possible, including recycling tonnage, chute blockages and repair costs. This helps track progress and improvements in service efficiency. And that's it from me! Thank you for listening. If anyone has any questions, my contact details are there if you'd like to get in touch directly.

Nigel Deacon

Thank you very much, Harriet. That's brilliant. Really appreciate that. So lastly then, we're looking to Adam. Adam, take it away, please.

Adam Briggs

Good morning, everyone. I'm going to be on fast forward to make sure we get all the questions in! I've seen some drop into the chat and I know some people will be holding theirs for the end of the presentation.

A quick introduction to myself and why I'm here. My name is Adam Briggs. For those of you who don't know me, I have 18 years of experience working in fire safety management, fire engineering and consultancy. I'm currently working for Citizen Housing in the West Midlands, covering the entire area, including Coventry, Birmingham, Hereford and Worcester. We have 36 high-rise tower blocks and 24 mid-rise blocks. I'm responsible for compiling the building safety case reports. We've had four reviewed so far and we're going through the rigorous process with the Building Safety Regulator to ensure we have everything in place.

One of the reasons we chose to close our bin chutes was to create safer environments for the residents of our blocks. These blocks are of various ages and the chutes are in different locations. We needed to maintain the safety of the people. This also makes buildings safer overall and improves the response of the fire service. When they arrive, they're only dealing with fires within a specific area of the building. With residents able to evacuate safely, the situation becomes much easier to manage.

How we did it: We identified one estate in the Hillfields area of Coventry, which has four tower blocks. This was similar to Sheffield's approach of identifying blocks for the project. We engaged with the residents, explained what we were doing and why and held a drop-in session. Residents had the opportunity to speak to us, ask questions and we made sure we could answer them. If we couldn't, we knew the project wouldn't work. We worked with Metrostore to ensure the bins were the right size and properly located. We've successfully completed the first block and are now moving on to the others in the Hillfields area.

Challenges: One issue we identified was the need for additional collection times. Some residents had difficulty getting their waste to the bins, especially families with small children or people who were temporarily ill or injured. We have building safety officers who cover ten blocks each and assist with collections for those who cannot get their waste to the bins themselves.

We also created a system for additional short-term collections. If residents have difficulty temporarily, they can

contact us and we'll assist with their waste removal. Our building safety officers and neighbourhood officers check the area regularly to monitor the buildings and surroundings.

When we first implemented the changes in Hillfields, we faced some resistance from residents, who wondered why we were removing something that had previously worked. We worked with them to identify where the new bins should be placed, ensuring they were in locations that were easy for residents to access. There was some initial pushback, but it has worked really well. We implemented the changes about three months ago and since then, only two pieces of waste have been left in the communal areas. We quickly identified and removed them.

Ongoing support: We aim to create a family atmosphere where the customer feels supported and engaged. We have a High-Rise Living Forum where we discuss waste management, recycling and other issues to ensure we address challenges and keep improving.

Our plans: We've completed the Hillfields pilot and have three more buildings scheduled for this financial year. We aim to complete them by April. One of the challenges has been involving other stakeholders, such as landscape architects, as we are changing some of the areas within Hillfields. We didn't want to start moving bins and then have to change them again later, so we've had to coordinate with these other teams.

We're working through our remaining 32 blocks on a risk-based approach, which is part of the building safety case report. This helps us ensure everything is addressed in a structured way. We're aiming to complete the work within three years, as we are also considering the mid-rise blocks, which presents additional challenges.

In conclusion: We know that trying to please everyone is impossible. If we tried, we'd all be selling ice cream! However, making everyone safe is a different matter. Engaging with customers is key and the High-Rise Living Forum allows us to work together. We meet monthly to discuss issues, challenges and processes and we involve residents in shaping decisions going forward.

Finally, we are happy to discuss our process and invite others for a site visit or a walk to exchange ideas and help you on your journey if you haven't already started. It's been going really well for us and we're happy to share our experiences. Thank you very much for listening. I think there are four minutes left for questions.

Nigel Deacon:

No, thank you, Adam, and thanks to everyone for all the information you shared there. Let's get stuck into a few questions. Ed, have you got any questions you can put out in the chat for us?

Edward Jelliffe:

Does anyone close the chutes and introduce food waste at the same time?

Nigel Deacon:

Harriet, you're probably in the best place to answer that one.

Harriet Turpin:

Yes, I mean, we at Hackney have generally got estates with food waste already. However, when we put in the new bin stores, we make sure the food waste is included. So, we have done it and added food waste, but we make sure that's communicated throughout the consultation. We also do monitoring. At the moment, we're

looking into participation rates to see whether it's increased or decreased because, as a borough, Hackney has seen a decline in overall food waste recycling, and I think that's happening across London. So yeah, we did add food waste, but I don't think there's been a huge impact. We encourage residents by explaining how it's better for them in the long run, less heavy bags to carry, etc.

Nigel Deacon:

Excellent, thank you, Harriet. Good. Any other questions?

Edward Jelliffe:

There was another one for Adam, how much does it cost for the extra ongoing support, resources, etc.?

Adam Briggs:

Good question. I wouldn't be able to answer that to be fair because what we've tried to do is incorporate all services already on site and factor in the timings for the removal of the waste. So, if we're talking about other tasks that are already happening on-site, I can have a look and share the cost at a later time. But at the moment, we're just using the current resources available.

Edward Jelliffe:

What equality issues has anyone encountered and how have they been addressed?

Harriet Turpin:

I'd be happy to give Hackney's perspective and I'd encourage others to do an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) before starting any work. It's just identifying at-risk groups who might be impacted and what you'll do to mitigate those risks. At Hackney, we ensure we've got an assisted collection procedure in place. That's a formal procedure for residents who are unable to get their bags down to the bin stores. I'd encourage others to have something similar because there will be instances where residents are physically unable to get to the bins.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you. That's really helpful. Helen, you did an impact assessment as well, didn't you? Did that bring out any additional points of learning, would you say?

Helen Scott:

Yes, I mean, as Harriet and Adam have both said, there are obviously customers in tower blocks who may be unable to easily get down to the external provision. As Adam pointed out, it's not just people with disabilities or the elderly; it could also be customers with young families and children. So yes, as Harry mentioned, it's really important to do the Equality Impact Assessments to highlight who those customers are and what their vulnerabilities are, and how we can best support them.

Adam Briggs:

One of the challenges... can I just add to that, Helen? One of the challenges we had was a customer in a tower block who injured himself doing sport. He broke his leg and had six weeks where he couldn't carry his bags down, and he couldn't rely on his neighbours to do it for him. So we identified quite quickly that some people may not think they need assistance, which is why we've made efforts to communicate with customers, saying if you have any issues, whether it's for one day, two days, six weeks, or two years, let us know, and we'll assist you where we can.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you for that. Good.

Edward Jelliffe:

If we're using safety as a reason for closing the chutes, are we putting ourselves in a position where we're saying the buildings aren't safe because we are failing to maintain them properly?

Nigel Deacon:

Go ahead, Dean.

Dean Butterworth:

Yes, I think there are two ways of looking at this. You can make your building structurally safe in relation to construction and mitigations. Adam's point was very pertinent in making sure people are safe. You can spend a lot of money making sure the bin chutes are compliant and structurally sound, but when you do the risk assessment, there will always be a risk. To ultimately mitigate that risk, you could close them. From a people perspective, that removes the risk of a fire spreading from the bin store, through the chute, and into individual properties. You can make them safe, but for ultimate safety, I'd always propose closing them.

Nigel Deacon:

That's very clear. Would you say that the increased combustibility since the buildings were built, like the combustibility of the waste, makes the chutes less capable of handling the volume of material? The controls could be easily damaged, and being able to say hand on heart that the chute is in compliant condition every day is challenging, isn't it, because of the human element? Also, the infrastructure is now outdated.

Dean Butterworth:

Yes, it is outdated. But it comes back to the educational piece. Sometimes we struggle to communicate with 100% of our customer base on key aspects of tenancy management and building safety. All it takes is someone to throw the wrong waste into the chute, and it becomes a risk. I'll ask anyone here who manages bin chutes in high-rise buildings: Do you have a daily inspection of those chutes? We might have a weekly inspection, but someone could block it within hours. To mitigate the risk, it's best to remove the issue completely and close the chutes.

Nigel Deacon:

That's clear. And if you add lithium-ion batteries, for example, or other high-risk items, it takes the situation to another level, doesn't it?

Dean Butterworth:

I'm sure mobility scooters and everything else are another workshop, Nigel!

Adam Briggs:

Can I just add something in there? One of the benefits we've found in closing the bin chutes and planning the closure is making sure that the area previously used for the chutes can now be used for something else, like mobility scooter storage. In some blocks, we've even created cycling stores. We've used this as leverage to close the chutes and plan for better use of the space. That area can be used for things like mobility scooter storage, or cycle stores. We've had blocks that wanted cycling storage, so this was a good opportunity to close the

chutes and incorporate that into future plans. So there are lots of learning points we can capitalise on.

Nigel Deacon:

I think Harriet will back me up here, disposal of lithium-ion batteries, specifically, is a major concern now for waste disposal.

Harriet Turpin:

It's ever-increasing, and it does put more risk in for us. But I think it's all about messaging. If you're taking something away, you need to communicate why. It's better to explain what's being done and why, rather than just removing things without context. The same maintenance issues will be there, even if you improve the chute systems. We've also provided storage solutions for garden tools when we've removed the chutes for residents who have community gardens. Sometimes giving something back, like that, is a good way to balance the impact, as long as it still meets fire safety criteria.

Nigel Deacon:

Great point, Harriet. Thank you.

Edward Jelliffe:

Can landlords or managing agents charge residents for closing chutes, and would it be classed as an improvement?

Dean Butterworth:

I'll pick that one up to start with and then bring in others. I think it's up to the individual organisation. If you have robust leasehold charging systems in place and have communicated well in advance, it's appropriate to charge. After Grenfell, many organisations decided it was inappropriate to charge leaseholders for fire safety work. I think that was fair for a time, but we've had enough time since 2017 to put safe working practices in place and engage with leaseholders on future capital projects. I don't think rent-paying residents should subsidise the improvements for leaseholders.

Nigel Deacon:

That's excellent. It'd be great to continue to put questions and answers in the chat, share documents, and keep that going. Huge thanks again to Helen, Dean, Harriet, and Adam for the time and effort they put into this today. It's been hugely informative. We're looking forward to further events, both live and online. Let's keep this conversation going. Thanks again to everyone who attended. Really appreciate it. Enjoy the rest of your day and we'll be in touch very soon. All the best.