

## **metroSTOR Webinar Summary and Transcript**

### **Simpler Recycling: Are *you* ready?**

17.06.25

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## metroSTOR Webinar **Summary**

The webinar explored the implementation of Simpler Recycling for people living in flats, with speakers from Islington and Southwark sharing their experiences. It covered the practical, strategic, and engagement challenges of introducing improved recycling and food waste services on estates.

### **Islington: Nicole Blagoeva**

Nicole outlined Islington's three-year programme to improve dry mixed recycling on council estates. Key points:

- Focus on estates with insufficient recycling capacity.
- Improvements delivered in five stages, starting with internal stakeholder consultations (e.g. housing, fire safety, caretakers).
- Strong emphasis on resident engagement, using door-knocking, posters, QR codes, and online platforms.
- Use of accessible bins and estate-specific planning.
- Early data shows up to 20% increase in recycling rates on upgraded sites.
- Contamination is managed with appropriate placement of refuse bins and use of fixed apertures; cardboard access is still a challenge.

### **Islington: Jean Hughes**

Jean described the borough's communal food waste recycling rollout:

- Initially rolled out to council estates, later extended to private blocks.
- Uses WRAP's toolkit, 5-litre caddies, liners, and educational leaflets.
- Caddy colour may change due to low popularity of brown.
- Bin housing units improve appearance, security, and participation.
- Communication includes Islington Life magazine, community events, and a vehicle-naming competition ("Food Waste Muncher").
- Private landlords are approached directly and offered installation and supply support.
- Messages emphasise ease of participation, environmental benefit, and cost savings.
- Support for older residents includes easy liner collection, accessible bins, and occasional caretaker help.

## **Southwark: Michael Greenhalf**

Michael shared Southwark's experience of a borough-wide rollout:

- Agile project planning with six new food waste collection crews mobilised by October 2024.
- Food waste recycling made compulsory; non-compliance could result in general waste not being collected.
- Success depended on data accuracy, early planning, and cross-team collaboration.
- Enclosed bin units were vital for acceptance and improving participation.
- Communications started after rollout, with a shift towards persuasion planned for later in 2025.
- Outcomes so far: increased dry recycling, reduced residual waste, and two percentage point increase in overall recycling rate.
- Average food waste captured is around 40kg per household per year, with more potential to be realised.

## **Panel Q&A Highlights**

- Bin enclosures were agreed to support participation, aesthetics, and fire safety.
- Contamination is mitigated by balanced provision of recycling and refuse bins.
- Funding came from internal programmes in Islington and capital reserves in Southwark; DEFRA funding does not cover enclosures.
- Both boroughs expect timeline pressures due to supply chain delays.
- Support for older residents includes accessible bins and informal caretaker help.
- Barriers persist due to siloed housing and waste teams; closer collaboration is needed, even more so with external RSLs (Housing Associations)

## metroSTOR Webinar **Transcript**

### **Nigel Deacon**

Thanks so much for joining our webinar on simpler recycling and the implications for rolling this out for people living in flats. I am extremely grateful to Nicole, Jane and Mike, who have joined us to share their experience from the London boroughs of Islington and Southwark. They have been working on this for a while and will be sharing their insights. We will share slides and the recording within a few days, usually once we have tidied up the bits and pieces—usually me removing things like ums and hesitations that never come out well in a recording. Please feel free to use the chat to say where you are from, what the weather is like, what you would like to take away from this, and any questions or observations as we go through. As I always say, I do not like making long introductions, so let us get some slides up and we will hand over in a moment to Nicole.

### **Nicole Blagoeva**

Hi all. It is nice to meet you. I am Nicole and I work on Islington's recycling team, focusing on projects to improve recycling on estates specifically.

### **Nigel Deacon**

Thank you, Nicole. Hopefully everybody can see the slides now.

### **Nicole Blagoeva**

Just to clarify, I look after dry mixed recycling improvements on estates rather than food waste. My colleague Jean will speak about her project later. I will take you through what we do to improve dry mixed recycling on council-managed estates. As part of our service commitment, we aim to increase recycling rates. I believe everyone here is trying to do that in some way. The programme is specifically for council purpose-built blocks and began around two years ago. It is a three-year programme with funding and aims to ensure that all estates have sufficient recycling capacity. I am sure this is an issue for most of you—lack of proper recycling capacity prevents residents from disposing of their recycling. Our first priority is to ensure sites are conveniently located within the estate grounds. This is challenging in Islington due to space constraints. Local recycling facilities are maintained to meet at least the Flats Recycling Package Standard. We engage with residents to increase recycling at these sites. We also review, case by case, whether refuse chutes are useful for sustainable waste management, and explore alternatives to help residents recycle more and manage waste better. We have pledged to include bins with greater accessibility, such as second aperture openings for people with disabilities. We are expanding food waste recycling facilities to all purpose-built blocks of seven or more households, where space allows for communal food waste bins. Our programme structure is based around a lead officer (myself) and two additional officers who work across different parts of the borough. We divide the borough into three parts and assign a project list to each officer annually. We then visit estates one by one to carry out improvements.

We deliver our projects in five stages. Stage 1, and to me the most important, is consultation with internal stakeholders. This includes visiting the estate and planning what we are going to do. Internal stakeholders include the housing team—our first site visit is always with them—estate coordinators, caretakers, collections team (usually supervisors or sometimes the crews), fire safety team, and the housing transport management team when parking bays may be affected. We also involve the trees team to ensure we do not harm protected trees, and the grounds maintenance team. In Stage 2, we engage with contractors and suppliers, such as

metroSTOR, sharing our proposal and conducting joint site visits. Stage 3 is external stakeholder engagement with residents, TRAs, TMOs, neighbours and councillors. Stage 4 involves on-site delivery of the project. We monitor progress with a comprehensive spreadsheet, collect resident feedback, track capacity data, and assess whether our work has had an impact.

Resident engagement can be complex. Where there is an obvious problem with waste or recycling, residents are usually active. When there is no visible issue but we know improvements are needed, it is harder to engage people. For smaller estates, we send a consultation letter explaining the project and bin locations, post messages on noticeboards, and do some door knocking. For estates over 50 households, door knocking is less feasible, so we use our online platform and custom communications—posters, leaflets, recycling surveys, and more. We also post on estate boards.

We use the Let's Talk Islington platform for consultations. It is simple and accessible. We send letters with a QR code linking directly to the consultation page, and we provide paper copies for those who are not tech-savvy. The platform gives a brief project description, how to get involved, key dates, and contact details of the project officer. It also includes the proposal for review and comment.

We use estate posters and trifold leaflets, especially on larger estates, to draw attention. These have been effective, generating good engagement. After project completion, we send a simple feedback card with a QR code linking to a survey, or residents can return it by post. It has just three questions to keep things straightforward, and response rates have been very good. We are also monitoring recycling tonnages—currently on a few sites, but we plan to expand. We are chipping more bins and tracking tonnages. Initial data shows a promising 20% increase in recycling where we have increased capacity, improved bin location, and engaged with residents. We have delivered engagement on 45 estates so far.

That equates to about 5,000 households to date. I have included some before-and-after photos showing the kind of work we do. The images speak for themselves. Usually, the problem is not enough bins. This is a large project we did with our architects' team. These are the main points of my presentation and our approach to recycling improvements. It is a lengthy process, though shorter for smaller estates where we just send an informative letter and allow time for feedback. Larger estates require more planning and engagement. We recently created a report from our feedback cards for the past two quarters. Resident feedback is largely positive—it looks better, feels cleaner and encourages more recycling. We know we are on the right track, though we are still learning. We are now confident in what we are doing. I will take questions at the end and will now hand over to my colleague Jean. Thank you.

### **Nigel Deacon**

Excellent, Nicole. Thank you very much. Super interesting. Now we will hear from Jane.

### **Jean Hughes**

Hello everyone. Food waste recycling in estates and blocks— We already had about half of our council estates with food waste recycling in place for over eleven years, and a couple of years ago we completed the rollout to the rest of the borough, including private blocks. The first thing I would recommend is the WRAP toolkit as your one-stop shop for guidance and best practice. It covers barriers, solutions, and has a particularly useful Section 8 for communal food waste recycling in blocks, along with excellent succinct resources. We developed our own materials, but WRAP's are very strong. It also addresses how to maintain participation over time once the initial motivation fades. For the practicalities, I will speak about what we did following that.

There are different ownership types—council-owned, TMOs, co-ops, RSLs like Peabody, and many private blocks with multiple managing agents who often change. This can be quite challenging. Islington has about 49,000 households in purpose-built blocks.

This is the basic equipment we provide: 140 or 240 litre wheelie bins with a lid-in-lid design to prevent people dumping general waste. We also offer optional bin housing units, and we have tried to install those on most council estates. Nicole's team includes these when improving estates. These units stop bins from moving around and are more aesthetically pleasing.

Everyone gets a 5-litre kitchen caddy. We are considering changing the colour as brown is not very popular, and we may offer a choice. We provide rolls of compostable liners at the rollout stage. Although waste goes to anaerobic digestion, we still recommend liners. Residents can collect them free from any Islington library or buy their own. We also provide an instructional leaflet.

Our leaflet is wordy but covers everything we can. It is instructional, motivational, and tries to normalise the behaviour by showing that many others are doing it. The top left explains what happens to food waste once collected. There are top tips, a list of where to pick up liners, and a section on reducing food waste with links to useful resources like Love Food Hate Waste.

For communal food waste recycling, provide all necessary equipment—do not expect people to request it. Find a suitable location for bins, ideally near existing recycling points. Involve estate or block management and residents—mainly TRAs. Pre- and post-rollout communication is crucial, and WRAP has tools for this. Ensure access to liners and a reliable collection service. When the system breaks down, it is hard to rebuild trust. It is tempting to redirect food waste collection vehicles to street properties during service issues, but try to avoid this. Dedicated vehicles help prevent this temptation. Washing bins regularly is also important.

Site considerations include checking for enough space, the presence of slopes (food waste bins are heavy), and access details such as keys, fobs and codes. Locate bins near existing recycling points where residents are used to going. Avoid placing them near windows or places where smells might affect people. Consider pulling distance due to the weight and manual handling guidelines. We generally allow for one 240-litre bin per 30 households or one 140-litre bin per 15–18 households. Future-proofing is important, whether that means adding more bins or increasing collection frequency. In our borough, food waste is collected weekly.

For private blocks, we initially invited landlords and managing agents to contact us—responses were minimal. We then began visiting sites, checking the foyers for contact information on managing agents, as these often change. We conducted site visits to identify locations and access needs, then contacted the agents with visuals showing there was room for a bin, its proposed location, and a map. This makes it harder for them to object. We also offer to distribute equipment directly—caddy, liner and leaflet left outside each flat—or ask the agent where they would prefer it left. In most cases, we distributed it ourselves, sometimes offering to do it for a fee. We had little to no funding at the time. Agents can also pay for additional bin washes, either as a one-off or on a regular basis, and can pay for bin housing units. We offer to order and install these for them, taking advantage of economies of scale.

We followed up by checking if people were actually using the service. We launched a borough-wide campaign covering both estates and street properties. We used electronic noticeboards on council estates and other promotional materials. One highlight was our food waste vehicle naming competition, inviting schoolchildren to suggest names. We selected 15 and invited our recycling champions to vote. The winning name was “Food Waste Muncher”—the vehicle has become a character in its own right and is well received at community events. It is eye-catching as it travels around the borough.

We also did door knocking, mainly on street properties, but a smaller campaign covering about 1,500 households in estates. These were informal chats—"Hello, we are from recycling. Do you recycle your food waste?" The responses varied. Common concerns included smell, which we addressed by encouraging the use of liners and suggesting emptying every few days. We reminded people that food waste left in the refuse bin indoors is usually there longer. Some said they had no space for a caddy, so we suggested using any small container. Others claimed they had no food waste, so we pointed out things like eggshells and banana skins. We explained that meat and dairy cannot go in home composting, but can go in food waste bins. People were often amazed to learn what happens to the waste. Effective messages included: even a small amount matters; one banana skin can generate enough power to charge a smartphone. We also mentioned the council saves over £100 per tonne compared to general refuse, freeing up budget for other services. For those already participating, we reinforced messages around food waste reduction.

This slide shows the kind of messages we used on electronic noticeboards—similar to the points just mentioned. The QR code links directly to our food waste recycling web pages.

This is our Islington Life magazine, which included a feature and a video. The article featured Manrico, one of our recycling officers, demonstrating traditional Italian cooking with stale bread and tomatoes. The magazine goes to all households and is also online. Our strapline was "Do amazing things with your food waste."

That is it. Overall, it went down well. My key takeaway would be to make it as easy as possible for people. Provide all equipment during door knocking so they can act immediately. Do thorough site visits, especially for private landlords, to ensure you have everything in place and make it easier for them to comply. Thank you.

### **Nigel Deacon**

Thanks, Jean. That is really interesting. So we now move across to Mike.

### **Michael Greenhalf**

Good morning, everyone. Move past the title one. This slide shows some basic facts about Southwark's borough profile. We are a surprisingly varied borough in terms of geography. Some areas feel like villages in the Home Counties, others like central London, with high-rise buildings and busy town centres. We also have an ethnically and culturally diverse population, which creates a wide range of communication needs and styles. I will not go into detail, but the slides will be shared afterwards for anyone interested.

We began discussions with our contractor in early 2023 about the contract variations needed to enable the rollout. The plan was to get everything agreed and in place so that once DEFRA funding was confirmed, we could proceed immediately. We then went to our cabinet member for approval, which was a rubber stamp for a plan already agreed in principle. We prepared early to avoid delays in supply chains, particularly for vehicles, which would have pushed the project back. Given we started in April 2024 with an October 2024 rollout target, timing was tight. It became an agile project: we sprinted to launch, got the service running, and continued refining after rollout. We had contingencies in place, including hiring vehicles since we could not obtain all six needed before October. It added some cost, but this was manageable within the project budget.

The key was good pre-planning. All six new crews were successfully mobilised on 21 October. This created momentum and allowed us to engage later with property managers who had not yet taken action. We made it clear that this was not optional. If a property did not accept food waste bins, we would not collect general waste that contained food. We were prepared to use Section 46 powers, though most property managers accepted the bins and agreed to promote the service. The focus was on rolling out the service smoothly, stabilising collections, and launching broader communications to boost participation. It was about starting well and then building on that foundation.

Key lessons learned: a single large rollout was the right choice for Southwark. Of our 150,000 households, about a third in street-level properties already had the service. That left roughly 100,000 households to include in one coordinated rollout. Phased implementation would have taken longer and cost more. One thing we might have done better was stronger communications earlier on, particularly with property managers. That could have helped implementation in certain locations. However, a more intense early campaign might have been difficult for new crews still learning routes. We recruited six new crews, some of whom were backfilled from existing teams, while others were completely new.

If we can recycle enough food waste, it could potentially cover the cost of providing the service. We are not there yet, but it is achievable within a couple of years. Units on estates were critical to acceptance. Residents would not have taken brown bins seriously, even with LED tech. The enclosed units look better, can display instructions clearly, and raise awareness. Data is also crucial. You need to know how many flats are in each block or estate, how to access them, who manages them, and other details like keys and codes. Getting your data tools and systems right at the start is vital. Sometimes multiple geographically separate blocks share a property manager and must be treated as one for service purposes. Councillor support also helped—councillors often know who to speak to locally and can make things happen. Next slide please.

What would we do differently? More upfront engagement with residents and property managers. We framed this as a statutory obligation rather than a voluntary scheme, and we stayed consistent with that message: you must separate food waste. A softer, more persuasive message might not have been as effective. However, if we had more time and resources, we could have improved communication and possibly achieved better early participation. We would also have scheduled our major communications campaign earlier in the process. Post-launch communications have focused on instructions—what, why and how. Our next phase is persuasion, simplifying the message, and will begin after the summer holidays. We should also have engaged ward councillors earlier. We had strong cabinet support, but more local input would have helped. There is still a question about whether six months was enough time. I think it was better to push through with a clear focus, deliver the project, and fix things afterwards rather than stretch it out. Next slide please.

The primary objective was achieved: food waste recycling became a business-as-usual service without negative press. Tonnage levels have been reasonable, though not outstanding, and participation is still low in communal areas. We expect to add about two percentage points to our recycling rate. If all food waste was captured, it would add over 20 points. So we are about 10% of the way there—still a long journey but a positive start. We have also seen an increase in dry recycling and an early fall in residual waste, suggesting that the food waste rollout has encouraged overall recycling behaviour. We received a 'highly commended' award in the Service Change of the Year category at the LARAC Awards. Thank you.

### **Nigel Deacon**

Thank you, Mike, and congratulations. That was excellent. We really appreciate everything you shared. We now have quite a few questions and may not get to them all. One question relates to the 2026 deadline—do you think you will achieve it in Islington and Southwark?

### **Michael Greenhalf**

If we were starting now, the biggest difficulty would be sourcing vehicles. Councils launching now would likely struggle to meet the statutory deadline due to supply chain delays. I expect there will be some flexibility granted in cases with demonstrable procurement challenges. Another question was about staying within the DEFRA budget. There were some reasonable assumptions in the model, but the funding did not include the cost of the food waste collection units—the metal enclosures for the bins. We funded those from reserves, roughly £750,000. Our strategy was capital-heavy: spend up front and try to balance operational costs over time. Not all authorities will be able to do that.



**Nigel Deacon**

Jean, how about Islington? That has been funded from internal budgets for some time, has it not?

**Jean Hughes**

Yes, we funded it ourselves. We moved ahead, especially with private blocks, before external funding became available. We managed it, though that is why we could not provide bin housing for every site. If landlords wanted units, they had to pay. Fortunately, half of our council estates already had food waste recycling in place, many with bin housings. It was about finishing the job. Now we are focusing on flats above shops and will use the new funding for that. The real issue now is timelines and supply. Everyone is doing this at the same time, so delays are likely. Hopefully, there will be some flexibility.

**Nigel Deacon**

Excellent. We will take a few more questions. Feel free to raise a hand if you would like to ask something. One question—are we generally agreed that bin housings or enclosures help participation, particularly on estates?

**Nicole Blagoeva**

Yes, but they need to be combined with increased recycling capacity. Residents like them—we ask about appearance in our surveys and get positive feedback. They improve aesthetics and encourage use, but only if there are enough to meet the block's needs. We also look at location. If bins are at the front near a main road, we try to move them to reduce fly-tipping. So location and capacity are key. They also improve fire safety and are easier to keep clean.

**Maria Warner**

Thank you. I had a question for Nicole regarding Phase One of your project. You mentioned having funding before starting Stages One to Three. How did you secure that initial funding for such a significant project? My second question is about contamination. We have used some metroSTOR units with fixed apertures. How have you addressed contamination in those bins?

**Nicole Blagoeva**

The funding question is a difficult one for all of us. We secured funding from an internal programme called Thriving Neighbourhoods. It was approved for three years before we started, so we knew we had a sufficient budget. Now, approaching Year Three, we realise we need more. It is never just the recycling that needs work—refuse systems often need updating too, but our funding was strictly for recycling improvements. Regarding contamination, it is a problem on all estates, including ours. One approach is ensuring there are refuse bins nearby. If we install five recycling bins, we will usually add a couple of refuse bins to reduce cross-contamination. Where we have only recycling bins, contamination increases. Apertures are effective at preventing large black bags, but we do receive a lot of feedback about cardboard—people find it difficult to fit flattened boxes through the slots. We are working with Streetspace on a cardboard-specific solution. The fixed apertures limit bulky waste and have helped reduce contamination. Many bins are lockable, but in reality, they are often left open, so the units and apertures are vital to maintain some control.

**Jan Taranczuk**

Excellent presentations from everyone, thank you. For those who do not know me, I am an old housing manager—older than you, Michael! I am interested in your thoughts on information sharing between London boroughs. Are all boroughs in a similar position, or is there still silo working? Also, how are you supporting older or less able residents with food waste separation?

**Michael Greenhalf**

Yes, the split between housing revenue account and general fund can cause silo working. Housing departments often focus on housing-specific functions and do not prioritise waste, which is seen as someone else's job. You need a conscious effort to break down these barriers. In Southwark, some housing officers are very engaged, others less so. When tenants are disengaged, the mindset is "we throw it away, and you collect it". Closer working between housing and waste teams is essential. It brings benefits like better estate condition, reduced complaints, lower cleaning costs, and improved resident satisfaction. Poor waste management can trigger a cycle of decline, starting with one dumped bag. Bin enclosures raise standards and provide capacity, which helps break that cycle. Regarding older residents, many are actually more engaged—they grew up conserving resources. Sometimes it is younger households, juggling work and childcare, who are harder to reach. Older residents are often the backbone of successful recycling on estates.

**Nicole Blagoeva**

We have installed accessible recycling bins with a second, lower opening for older and disabled residents, and have received excellent feedback. We also try to locate the bins as conveniently as possible—close to the blocks and within the estate boundary. It helps with accessibility and visibility. Reaching every resident is difficult, especially with QR codes and online surveys, but many residents will phone us directly. We do door knocking where possible. Realistically, we will never reach 100% engagement. People tend to respond when something is wrong. If everything seems fine, it is hard to get feedback. But we continue learning and trying new approaches.

**Jean Hughes**

If an elderly resident cannot get to the bins, caretakers sometimes collect their food waste for them. We also try to make food waste recycling as easy as possible. For example, concierge offices on estates stock compostable liners so people can collect them easily.

**Nigel Deacon**

Jane, that links to another question—could you say more about recycling champions? Do they help with this sort of engagement?

**Jean Hughes**

Recycling champions can help, but we are trying to reinvigorate the scheme. Some are very engaged and might help at a stall, but most are not doing outreach or door knocking. We do not expect them to go into the community and collect waste. Ideally, they talk to neighbours, distribute leaflets, and promote good habits in small ways.

**Nigel Deacon**

Thank you. Another question was about kilograms per household—do we have any data on that, or could we share it in future?

**Jean Hughes**

We will need to report back on that later.

**Michael Greenhalf**

I will post some figures in the chat, but it is very variable and often unstable. Engagement visits and leaflets can lead to short-term increases, but we do not yet know if these are sustained. Our collection rates vary between 20 and 80 kilograms per household per year, averaging around 40. It is a long way from full potential. We still see lots of food waste in general refuse, but this is a journey. Our aim was to provide capacity while keeping bins no more than half full, and we will add more bins as needed. Reliability is key. One notable difference in Southwark—we did not provide cornstarch liners. Residents can buy their own, just as they would with refuse sacks. This decision reduced operational costs, and we think it is a fair expectation.

**Nigel Deacon**

That often comes up. Thanks again to Nicole, Jean and Mike. This has been a fascinating discussion. For everyone attending—thank you. To keep the conversation going, especially between waste and housing teams and with registered providers, we at metroSTOR are happy to help. We talk to landlords and know who the waste teams are, so we can help build those connections. Thanks again, and enjoy the rest of your day.