

UNDERSTANDING WASTE MANAGEMENT IN HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION: A TENANT PERSPECTIVE

**RESEARCH REPORT
FEBRUARY 2021**

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

Keep Britain Tidy is a leading independent charity with three goals – to eliminate litter, prevent waste and improve local places. We have a long history of successfully delivering campaigns and programmes that have positive impacts for society and the environment at a local, regional and national level.

In 2015, Keep Britain Tidy launched the Centre for Social Innovation, becoming the only UK charity to take a systematic approach to applying behavioural insights to tackle litter and waste issues. The Centre focuses on understanding the root causes of these issues through high-quality behavioural insights research and uses this together with behavioural science to design, pilot and scale behavioural interventions.

What makes the Centre unique is that we have expertise in both research and behavioural insights *and* litter and waste. We believe bringing these two areas of expertise together is key to tackling the issues effectively.

We work together with private, public and third sector organisations, local authorities' managerial and operational staff as well as communities, to design interventions which are cost-effective, measurable and practical to deliver. In this way, we ensure that the interventions we develop are scalable. To date, over 290 local authorities and other organisations have implemented one or more of our tested interventions.

We have won numerous awards for our work including Nudge Awards 2018, AIM

Nudging for Good Awards 2017 and the Charity Awards 2016.

We are a Company Partner of the Market Research Society and all of our work is conducted in line with the Market Research Society Code of Practice.



ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) present specific waste management challenges. In addition to generating more waste than other property types, anecdotal evidence from local authorities suggests these properties often produce low recycling rates, high levels of recycling contamination, as well as incorrect presentation of waste and fly-tipping.

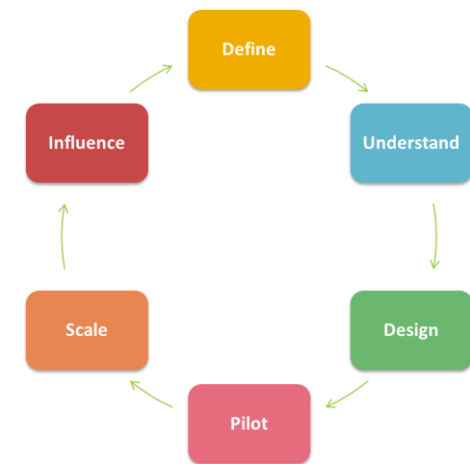
There is limited understanding of what is driving these specific behaviours, particularly in the larger, 'harder-to-reach' HMOs. In addition, within London, the number of HMOs have doubled in the past decade and this trend is predicted to continue¹, creating additional need for detailed understanding of the issues.

This research, therefore, aimed to better understand waste management issues in HMOs from the perspective of tenants.

Specifically, it looked to identify the contextual and behavioural factors that are driving current waste management behaviour among this group, as well as tenants' own ideas for improving waste management in HMOs, ultimately identifying practical recommendations for local authorities and others in tackling these issues.

The research sits within the 'Understand' component of our Social Innovation Framework, which aims to gather new insights into the underlying drivers of behaviours using robust and in-depth research. We will explore how these insights can be applied to improving existing policy and practice, as well as

the development of new, targeted behavioural interventions. Where appropriate, we will look to pilot interventions in the real world, in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders to gather evidence about what works and what should be scaled for broader impact stakeholders.



The Centre for Social Innovation Framework

¹ Guide to Improving Waste Management in the Domestic Rented Sector, Resource London, 2017 <https://resourcelondon.org/wp->

OUR RESEARCH PARTNERS

We would like to thank our six local authority partners for their contributions to the design and delivery of this research, which helped to make it a success.

We would also like to acknowledge that their financial contribution made this research possible and led to new insights into waste management behaviour in HMOs that other local authorities can now benefit from.

Our research partners were:

- London Borough of Camden
- London Borough of Haringey
- London Borough of Harrow
- London Borough of Hounslow
- London Borough of Lambeth
- London Borough of Newham

We hope you find this research useful and look forward to future collaboration opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The research aimed to better understand waste management in HMOs from the tenants' perspective. Specifically, it looked to identify the contextual and behavioural factors that are driving current waste management behaviour among this group, as well as tenants' own ideas for improving waste management in HMOs, ultimately identifying practical recommendations for local authorities and other stakeholders in tackling these issues.

Method

The research used an online methodology in three stages:

1. Ethnographic diaries with 72 HMO tenants to better understand the context of living in a HMO and how this impacts on waste management.
2. Six online focus groups and 32 telephone interviews carried out with tenants, to further explore behavioural drivers of their current waste management.

3. Three co-design workshops with HMO tenants to explore and develop their intervention ideas for improving waste management in HMOs.

Key Insights

- HMO tenants are individual households leading separate lives under the same roof
- Communication between tenants is limited – particularly about waste
- Most tenants do not receive information about waste when moving into a HMO
- HMO tenants do not typically seek out waste information from the council
- A minority of landlords are actively influencing correct waste management in their properties
- However, a separate minority of landlords are actively influencing incorrect waste management – mostly for bulky waste
- There is a perception that waste rules are determined by the landlord
- Waste practices and perceptions can 'hop' from one property to another
- Incorrect practices are difficult to change
- Bin refusal is effective in changing behaviour, where implemented consistently and with feedback
- Most tenants who believe they cannot currently recycle in their property would like to
- Recycling is often viewed as optional
- Indoor bin set-up directly influences recycling behaviour
- Packaging and labels are used to determine what items should be disposed of in recycling
- There is a lack of awareness among HMO tenants on correct disposal of bulky waste

METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out between June and August 2020 by Keep Britain Tidy, supported by research agency Public Perspectives, and comprised three stages. It utilised online and video approaches, allowing the research to take place during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stage One – Ethnography

Online diaries were completed by 72 HMO tenants (12 participants per local authority area). Diaries were completed over five days, using the digital qualitative research platform FocusVision Revelation.

Participants completed a range of tasks, submitting photos, videos and written accounts, providing insight into the context of living in a HMO. Tasks included providing an account of their

typical day, providing waste and other key information to a fictional new tenant, and writing a letter to their local council or landlord.

Stage Two – Qualitative research

Participants were then invited to take part in either an in-depth telephone interview or video focus group session, in order to further explore behavioural drivers of their current waste management behaviours.

Telephone interviews were carried out with 32 HMO tenants, and a further 30 tenants participated in six video focus groups (one session per local authority area).

Stage Three – Co-design

Three video co-design workshops were carried out with 18 HMO tenants (three participants per local authority area). The workshops guided participants through a process to help them develop ideas of behavioural interventions to improve waste management in HMOs.

All data was analysed in the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, using thematic analysis. As a thank you for their time, participants were given a cash gift following the research.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

The research aimed to recruit 'harder-to-reach' HMO tenants in larger or more problematic properties. Criteria for recruitment therefore included:

- Tenants who had individual tenancy agreements in place, rather than one shared agreement for the property
- Tenants did not know each other well and did not know each other prior to moving in
- Tenants represented a range of HMO sizes, but the sample was skewed towards those from larger properties
- Demographics of tenants typically reflected local populations and priority target groups for partnering authorities

Recruitment was carried out by experienced market researchers, Public Perspectives, using a range of methods.

Recruitment took place across the whole of the partnering boroughs, but was targeted in locations with a high density of HMOs, identified by the local authority partners.

PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR HMOS

Demographics

The age of participants ranged from 18 to 68 years, with an average of 32 years. 58% of participants were female, and 42% male. The research included participation from the following ethnicities and nationalities: White British, Black British, Black African, White Irish, Black Irish, Asian British, Asian Australian, White Australian, White New Zealand, White American, Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese, Greek, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Polish, Lithuanian and Czech.

Employment status ranged from students to those who are unemployed or retired, and a variety of full-time, part-time or self-employed occupations. Some example professions of the participants included teacher, warehouse worker, music producer, hospitality worker, chef, IT assistant, anaesthetics assistant, HGV driver, photographer, tourist guide and digital marketer, among others.

Some participants reported working two jobs and many worked very long hours, spending little time at home. Others were working at home due to COVID-19 when the research was being conducted.

About the tenants

Some participants were single, living on their own within their room or unit of the HMO. Others were living with a partner, and some with children who lived in the property some or all of the time.

The length of time tenants had lived in the property prior to the start of the research ranged from less than six months to a minority who had lived in their current property for more than ten years. Some tenants had lived in many HMOs prior to their current property, whereas for others this was their first experience of doing so. A number of participants were also new to the UK or new to London.

Fitting with what we already knew of HMO tenants, participants were highly transient, often having lived in multiple

previous countries, but also transient within London, and often not staying in one property for very long.

Tenants also discussed varied reasons for why living in a HMO was appropriate for them currently, mentioning factors such as income/budget, saving to buy a property, saving to get married, personal circumstances, requiring a property with a short lease, and HMOs offering more overall living space than other property types (eg a one-bedroom flat).

PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR HMOs

About the HMOs

Participants' HMOs ranged from smaller additional licenced HMOs of three bedrooms or units, to those with 20 or more, although the research was intentionally skewed towards larger properties. Property type varied hugely and included semi-detached and terraced houses, purpose-built apartment blocks, houses converted into flats and flats above shops.

All properties had some communal facilities, typically kitchen and bathroom space.

The service provision in place for waste disposal at these properties was also varied. This included wheeled bin or boxed collections, on-street time-banded collections, as well as communal Eurobins.

“My building is divided into seven little studio flats – three of them have a shower cabin inside and four flats are using the shower on the landing. Each flat has a kitchen space.”

Dariusz

“This is a house that’s been split and there is another unit upstairs, and we share our bins with that flat upstairs.”

Libby

“I actually live in the living room and three other girls share a double room.”

Diana

“It’s a house with shared facilities, two shared kitchens. It’s very multi-national, mostly Polish and Spanish people. It’s quite large, I think around 20 people.”

Arek

“It is quite clear that the apartment was designed for a family or single household as opposed to a HMO.”

Justyn

PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR HMOs

Types of HMOs

The images below were taken by participants of their HMOs, as part of their online diary task, demonstrating the range of property types engaged in the research:



KEY INSIGHTS: CONTEXT OF LIVING IN A HMO

HMO TENANTS ARE INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLDS LEADING SEPARATE LIVES UNDER THE SAME ROOF

It was evident from the research that this group of 'harder-to-reach' HMO tenants did not operate within their property as single households. Rather, they acted as multiple households under the same roof, with very different and separate routines, habits and lives. When it comes to waste management, attitudes and behaviours vary within the property, and communication is often lacking.

This insight is particularly important when looking at how best to communicate with HMO tenants regarding waste management and related issues. As these tenants did not see themselves as a single household, communications must go some way in addressing the individual.

"...even though we're living in the same flat theoretically, we're kind of different households... We're living parallel lives. There's not much common space where we get together and talk about duties and recycling. There is more of an individualised culture ... where maybe you want to do that and recycle but somebody else is not going to bother ... You're going and coming back at different times, you just have a very separate existence."

Daniel

"I live on my own."

Paul

HOUSING STANDARDS AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES ARE MORE OF A PRIORITY THAN WASTE

Waste disposal was seen as a low priority issue for HMO tenants. Living in a HMO very often brought other stressors or concerns and dealing with these was often much higher priority than waste disposal and related issues.

Specifically, housing standards were frequently discussed as a key concern or issue that is likely to take up time and energy of tenants. Participants discussed HMOs often being busy, with many fellow tenants and little communal space, and many described their property as being in need of repair. This ranged from requiring updating or decorating, to issues that tenants believed to be illegal conditions. Very often properties would be of a poorer standard than they had appeared in photographs or at a viewing, which again created concerns.

In addition to housing standards, the shared household responsibilities that come with living in a HMO, such as cleaning communal kitchens, bathrooms or living rooms, were more of a priority

than waste. Very often tenants had cleaning rotas in place, although these typically focused on non-waste responsibilities.

It should be noted here that landlords of many HMOs, particularly larger properties, employ cleaners for communal spaces, some of whom are responsible for dealing with household waste (eg taking waste and recycling from shared kitchen spaces to outside bins).

We should bear in mind that cleaners of HMOs are an additional group who need to be targeted with communications about waste disposal, likely via the landlord or agent who employs them.

“The house has mould, potentially illegal roofing in the bathroom, my curtain is being held up by a screwdriver and we have no lounge room.”

Kaitlyn

“The thing I dislike most about my home is a room that isn't fully sealed-off from the elements.”

Chevonne

“When I first moved into the flat I was really surprised and a little sad about what bad condition the flat was in. It was obvious the landlord didn't really care about keeping the flat in a nice condition.”

Jucha

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TENANTS IS LIMITED – PARTICULARLY ABOUT WASTE

Many factors of living within a HMO were limiting opportunity for communication between tenants. Many participants in the research reported a lack of communal space in their HMOs to socialise with fellow tenants. Living rooms had often been converted into additional bedrooms, limiting the amount of overall communal space. What seating space remained was often not large enough to allow all tenants to be there at the same time.

When it came to kitchen space, tenants explained these were often suited to one person cooking at a time. Tenants therefore often rushed to cook so others could use the facilities, or purposefully avoided this space until others had left.

In addition, tenants often had opposite working patterns to one another, meaning the times of the day when they were in the property together was limited. Language barriers were also discussed as a contributor to an overall lack of communication, in addition to the high turnover of tenants.

Therefore, when issues arose around household waste management (eg fellow tenants not separating recycling), participants talked about finding it difficult to raise these with people who they did not know well or didn't communicate with often. When communication or confrontation was required among tenants, other issues mentioned earlier sometimes took priority above waste (eg noise, smoking indoors, repairs).

Communication was made easier in HMOs where a WhatsApp group or similar type of tool or set-up was used.

“The house has a variety of working schedules which means there is pretty much always at least two people sleeping all the times.”

Nazar

“Turnover is high. You can teach someone what they should be doing, but in a couple of months they will be doing the same mistakes, so it is tough for people to keep on top of this.”

Mara

“Unfortunately the people in the house are not very communicative and that is why we only discuss what is strictly necessary.”

Ovidiu

“I only speak to one person who works in a similar job as me.”

Sajid

HMOs MAY BE PRODUCING DIFFERENT TYPES OF WASTE TO OTHER PROPERTIES

There were some suggestions from research participants that the set-up and context of living within a HMO, and the types of residents who live in these properties, may be leading to different types of waste being generated.

Participants discussed unsociable or long working hours, or their type of work, as influencing what food they prepare and eat at home, and therefore the associated waste they generate. For instance, residents working in hospitality or on the road may generate very little food and food-packaging waste. Other tenants discussed the need to use the kitchen quickly to allow others to use it, as something that influences their cooking and eating habits, and therefore the associated waste they have to dispose of.

As this issue was not explored in depth within the research, this is potentially an area of future exploration - to better understand the waste composition in HMOs, whether this varies significantly from other property types, and how this insight could be applied in better informing waste management approaches.

“Most of the house works in hospitality so we don’t use too much food because we eat in our workplace most of the time.”

Davide

“I don’t use the kitchen much because it’s busy, so we have a lot of fast food, takeaway rubbish which goes in the recycling.”

Muzni

SOME HMO TENANTS SUGGESTED A LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY OR CONNECTION TO THE PROPERTY

Some research participants indicated an overall lack of connection to their property. Often, this was related to the fact that they do not own the property and do not intend on staying in the property for any extended period.

For some, this appeared to lead to an overall lack of responsibility for the property and, in turn, a lack of responsibility for its upkeep and maintenance, including managing waste correctly.

There were some indications that this lack of responsibility was potentially two-fold for tenants who are sub-letting, as these tenants were even further removed from the landlord and accountability for correctly managing the property.

“I do not feel I have a home. I am living in a shared house.”

Anna

“Because it’s not my property, I feel less responsible. It deflects to someone else, I just pay the rent”

Jovan

RELATIONSHIP AND COMMUNICATION WITH THE LANDLORD VARIES

The level of communication tenants have with their landlord varied hugely. For some, they reported being in frequent and direct contact with the landlord either via text, phone or in person. Some HMOs have established WhatsApp groups between the landlord and fellow tenants, and others have landlords who live nearby and visit frequently. For the majority, however, communication with the landlord was extremely limited.

Some tenants had no direct communication with their landlords at all, and this is done via a letting agent or property management agency instead. In this instance, agents were effectively playing the role of the landlord. However tenants reported that agents also varied in their levels of contact and responsiveness to issues. Similarly, those tenants who were subletting often had no contact with a landlord or letting agent and communicated only with a 'lead tenant'. This is often someone who is renting the property as a whole and who is responsible for communicating

with the landlord on behalf of other tenants.

With many HMO tenants finding communication with landlords (or those acting as the landlord) difficult and slow, this impacted on resolving issues that arose in the property, including when it came to waste.

"I have no contact with the landlord, he's not bothered. And the property manager, his attitude is 'I'll get round to it when I'm ready'."

Jovan

"We have created a WhatsApp group with our agency, so for any maintenance issues you should directly text them so they can come and fix [it] immediately."

Davide

KEY INSIGHTS: SOURCES OF WASTE INFORMATION

MOST TENANTS RECEIVE NO WASTE INFORMATION WHEN MOVING INTO A HMO

The majority of HMO tenants “figured it out” when it came to what they should do with their waste. They based this on what they saw, looking to the bin provision inside and outside, and any associated signage or information around the property or bins themselves. In addition, they observed and copied the behaviour of other tenants or neighbours, and a few asked fellow tenants how to dispose of their rubbish.

Very few landlords (or letting agents acting as the landlord) provided any detailed information to new tenants on the management of the property, including about waste management. For those who were more engaged in introducing new tenants to the property, providing waste information did not typically come into these conversations.

This highlights the importance of making waste management rules and expectations clear within the infrastructure of the property, including the need for clear bin signage and supporting information, to enable residents to draw the right conclusions when they are using these sources of information to determine their behaviour.

“Nobody told me what to do, I just figured out using my eyes and ears. I was here during the day and I soon figured out when the bin men came.”

Alvin

“The landlord has never actually told me anything about rubbish. I just asked the neighbours and they told me this is what you do – put it all in one.”

Dariusz

“The landlord lives far away and doesn’t come to the property a lot – I follow what the others are doing.”

Kadesha

HMO TENANTS DO NOT TYPICALLY SEEK OUT WASTE INFORMATION FROM THE COUNCIL

The vast majority of HMO tenants participating in the research did not seek out information on waste from the council. If they contacted or sought information from anyone regarding waste, it was more likely to be from their landlord or letting agent. The minority of tenants who proactively sought out council information typically used the council website.

In addition to this, HMO tenants did not feel communicated to by their local council. Many recalled having never received any information from the council besides Council Tax bills, although participants explained they would very much welcome communication from the council, and would like to be made more aware of the waste services in place.

The council communications that did appear to be reaching tenants were those that had some level of permanence or longevity. These were communications such as bin collection calendars, stickers on wheeled bins, and council letters

which had been displayed in a communal place, typically by the landlord.

In addition to having this type of permanency, we recommend that council communications must therefore be delivered directly to HMO tenants, with no assumption that these residents will actively seek it.

“We do have a calendar on the fridge from [the council] which is really handy, it says which day they collect on.”

Natalie

“There is a disconnect between us and the council.”

Daniel

“The information will need to come to us. I’m interested in the environment, but I’m not that interested that I would look it up on a website to find out. Flyers or stickers on bins – put that information right in front of my face and force me to read it.”

Linh

“There’s a sticker on the inside lid of the wheelie bin out the front that tells you what gets recycled.”

Sarah

A MINORITY OF LANDLORDS ARE ACTIVELY INFLUENCING CORRECT WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THEIR PROPERTIES

While the majority of landlords were providing no waste information to their tenants, a minority were doing so. Importantly, where this was happening, it was effective in leading to correct waste management behaviour.

Typically, the motivation for this was deemed to be the landlord wanting to avoid fines for incorrect waste management, such as recycling contamination or presentation of side waste; either the landlord has been fined in the past or was aware of the possibility of this. In some cases, landlords had lived in the property prior to the current tenants and were, therefore, more aware of how waste should be correctly managed at the property, or were personally invested in doing this.

This communication between landlords and new tenants regarding waste typically took place informally, on signing contracts or handing over keys.

This demonstrates the vital importance of the role of the landlord in improving waste management in HMOs.

“The landlord briefed me when he gave me the keys, told me how all the recycling and rubbish works, told me about emptying the bin and said make sure you recycle because otherwise the council will send him a letter and will fine him £400 if they find things that weren’t put in the correct bins. So that’s never happened.”

Mara

“The landlord is very concerned about it [recycling]. When I had the interview with them, they told me it was a rule I had to follow. We have a good relationship with the landlord, they lived in the house for a long time with their kids, they really care about the house and the neighbours.”

Blanca

A MINORITY OF LANDLORDS ARE ACTIVELY INFLUENCING INCORRECT WASTE MANAGEMENT – MOSTLY FOR BULKY WASTE

Some landlords, again a minority, were actively providing their tenants with incorrect waste information that was directly leading to fly-tipping. In these instances, landlords asked their tenants to dispose of bulky waste items on the street, sometimes telling them to include a 'take me' note or, in some cases, the landlord visited the property to do this themselves. Participants in the research explained they believe this was done in an attempt to avoid collection costs.

Again, this is illustrative of the influence landlords have on their tenants' waste management behaviour and the importance of ensuring that landlords provide correct information and facilities to allow tenants to dispose of waste correctly.

“My landlord didn’t want to pay for it... he said the collection is too expensive... so he said to go into the estate across the road at late at night [to dispose of it], but said it’s at our own risk and we will get a fine if we’re caught.”

Amie

“Our landlord told us to put it on the street... I think its random people who take it. If it wasn’t being taken we would bring it back in but they are taking it. Now it has clicked that this is fly-tipping, he’s obviously giving us incorrect advice.”

Freya

“Everything belongs to him, all the furniture, so if it breaks it’s up to him to come and put it on the street. It’s pretty easy from that perspective.”

Mara

THERE IS A PERCEPTION THAT WASTE RULES ARE DETERMINED BY THE LANDLORD

There was an overall perception among tenants that waste rules are determined by the landlord and are unique to each property.

Where landlords were providing waste information or 'rules' to their tenants, this was often seen as something the landlord had decided themselves. For instance, if an HMO did not appear to recycle, this was largely accepted by tenants as 'how things work' in that property.

Where landlords were providing no waste information, tenants could often believe this meant that their landlord wasn't particularly strict about how waste is dealt with.

In this way, tenants often believed it was normal and correct to deal with waste in very different ways, in properties within the same borough. We therefore need to employ consistent messaging to HMO residents to better instil the idea that rules are determined not by their landlord but by the council and that all residents within one authority should be disposing of waste in largely the same way (eg what materials are accepted for recycling, how bulky/excess waste should be disposed of).

"My landlord here isn't very strict about recycling but I've had landlords in the past who really are"

Ambi

"I'm not very satisfied with how it works... I would like to segregate my rubbish and recycle it but we've not been provided with separate bins for recycling and food and general, the landlord hasn't given us anything."

Dariusz

"Even though this is my third house in [this borough], this is the first house where I've been allowed to recycle."

Amie

SOME PROPERTIES HAVE CLEAR ‘HOUSE RULES’ FOR WASTE, WHETHER RIGHT OR WRONG

While the majority of HMO tenants were ‘figuring it out’ for themselves, for some there were clear ‘rules’ in place for waste when moving into their new HMO. Rules were often communicated to new tenants by ‘lead tenants’. As mentioned earlier, lead tenants are those who rent the property as a whole and sub-let rooms, or are the longest-standing tenant in a property, often holding the main relationship with the landlord and having responsibility for communicating with the wider tenant group.

These ‘rules’ were usually in place when the landlord had had experience of enforcement in the past (typically bins being rejected for recycling contamination or side waste) or there was a proactive tenant, usually a lead tenant, who has set the rules. Interestingly, rules could have been set by a current tenant or a past tenant who had since moved out of the property but the rules had remained the ‘done thing’.

Typically, rules set by the landlord and following an experience of bin refusal were leading to correct waste management. However, where rules had been put in place by tenants, these were not necessarily correct. This was dependent on where the tenant was seeking their information, which we now know was not typically from council sources.

“When I moved in, the girl who is in charge of everything she told me how it works... I think it should be possible [to recycle] but they told me there is only general waste. I don’t know why there isn’t recycling, they just told me what to do.”

Diana

“By our fridge there is a poster about what can be recycled... He [lead tenant] printed it off... it didn’t say [the council] on it, it wasn’t a council document.”

Sam

WASTE PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS CAN HOP FROM ONE PROPERTY TO ANOTHER

Where no clear rules for waste were evident in a HMO, and tenants were 'figuring it out for themselves', participants in the research explained they often disposed of waste in the same way they had done in previous properties. If tenants were doing the wrong thing in their previous property, or lived in a different borough with a different waste service, this easily lead to incorrect waste management in their new property.

If tenants had lived in multiple properties where correct waste management was not immediately obvious, this could lead to and reinforce incorrect perceptions about waste. For instance, some participants thought that recycling services were not typically offered to HMO residents, or that waste is managed in the same way irrespective of where in the country you live.

These insights again highlight the importance of making correct waste management clear to any new tenant entering the property, through bin provision and supporting information embedded into the infrastructure of the HMO.

"I don't remember being told, but because I've come from somewhere with recycling I just knew what to do."

Natalie

"I moved from another house in a different area and they do the same [recycling], each house is the same. Everywhere in this country does the same."

Paul

"What I've noticed is when you share with people, they don't recycle. I've been sharing with people for two years, it's easier and you don't have to argue. My friends don't recycle either and they share with people as well."

Diana

KEY INSIGHTS: OTHER BEHAVIOURAL DRIVERS

INCORRECT PRACTICES ARE DIFFICULT TO CHANGE

Where clear waste rules and practices were in place in a HMO, these generally remain unchanged for a long time. Due to many of these rules being based on inaccurate information, this was often leading to the continuation of incorrect waste management behaviours.

Rules were often followed without question and seen as 'how it works' for that property. In some cases, where individual tenants wanted to be able to change how things were done, for instance starting to separate recycling, this was often deemed as too difficult to influence. Here, participants discussed not wanting to cause conflict with fellow tenants or things quickly reverting back to how they were done before if anyone tried to implement changes.

This resistance to change was often leading to a fatalist attitude among tenants of 'what's the point' in trying to recycle, for instance, when others were not going to do the same. This was particularly the case in large HMOs or where bins were shared with other

properties, such as apartment blocks, and therefore an individual's attempts to recycle were impacted on by the behaviour of fellow tenants and other neighbours who share their bins.

"I have no idea, maybe I can speak to the landlord... But I'm not in charge in this house, the rules are set up already. I don't think they would take it the right way if I start to change the rules."

Diana

"When someone tries to recycle, like maybe they have left some papers or magazines next to the bin for separating, but then after a few hours someone puts them inside the general bin."

Arek

"Where I lived before, the people did not separate. I did myself, but most people there were putting it in all together. It was more than ten people so I didn't want to argue. I put a sticker on the fridge to tell them what to do but it wasn't easy, I wanted to save my energy."

Anna

BIN REFUSAL IS EFFECTIVE IN CHANGING BEHAVIOUR

Among research participants, the perception that bins would be rejected for presenting side waste or contaminating recycling varied hugely. Where bin refusal was seen to be implemented consistently, and with communication to explain the reason where necessary, it was highly effective in correcting these behaviours.

Conversely, where bin refusal was not seen to be happening or at least not consistently enforced and side waste or contaminated recycling were taken either immediately or eventually, this was leading to the continuation of incorrect behaviours. Bin refusal being implemented with communication was discussed as being particularly important for large properties with contaminated recycling, as a way of helping tenants understand specific contaminants and correct their behaviour.

Side waste:

“Once we got too much waste... and we knew if it doesn’t close they won’t take it. In my first house in [this borough] we put it [excess waste] outside the bin and it was two weeks they didn’t take it and I learned the lesson so I said this time let’s keep it inside. I put it in the bin when it was emptied.”

Mara

“We do sometimes need to put boxes next to the bin or extra general waste, sometimes they get collected, it’s like however the garbage men are feeling.”

Libby

Recycling contamination:

“I learned very quickly that [the council] take recycling very seriously because I put a plastic bag in the recycling bin, it was not collected, so we make sure now. Nobody told me, where I came from before it wasn’t an issue, I learned the hard way so I haven’t done it again. I wouldn’t have been as inclined to recycle – I recycle more now than I used to where I used to.”

Natalie

“You have to be careful what you put in the recycling as they check and if they see a black bin bag or something they won’t take it, and we share a bin with the whole building.”

Laura

KEY INSIGHTS: RECYCLING

MOST TENANTS WHO BELIEVE THEY CANNOT CURRENTLY RECYCLE IN THEIR PROPERTY, WOULD LIKE TO

While there were many participants in the research who believed there was currently no recycling provision in place for their property, the vast majority of these tenants wanted the opportunity to be able to separate their waste. This is a hugely positive and encouraging finding.

Tenants had different motivations for wanting to recycle; some have been used to doing this in previous properties or places they have lived, others talked about wanting to 'do their bit' for the environment.

Some tenants were more indifferent when it came to a desire to recycle in their HMO, but said they would do so if it the opportunity was offered.

"We don't have any separation, it's very unfortunate. I was very shocked, I arrived here after living overseas I realised that there is no recycling here."

Thais

"It's only recently I've been more aware of being green. I would like to recycle, though it does bring more my way."

Deng

"I don't think it's more effort [to recycle], it's not a big deal it's just having more bins, just put it in the right bins. If I had the chance I do it, I would."

Diana

RECYCLING IS OFTEN VIEWED TO BE OPTIONAL

Where recycling wasn't seen to be actively imposed, either by the landlord, the council or fellow tenants, there was often a perception that it is at each tenant's discretion whether they choose to recycle or not. This was directly leading to low recycling rates in these properties and, in some cases, excess waste exceeding the capacity of wheeled bins.

With HMO tenants looking to their landlord for waste information, we suggest more should be done to ensure landlords are making their tenants are aware of the local recycling provision and are adhering to this.

“If you can do it you do, if you don't do it, it's ok, that's the premise. It's mostly because the council want us to do it... I think if I was told don't recycle, I would put everything in the general bin.”

Muzni

“We don't separate recycling inside. It was never explained when I moved in, it's up to everyone's discretion whether they do it or not. I try a little bit myself but we generally put everything in the main bin.”

Mary

“Everyone in the house has their own rubbish bin and decides whether they want to recycle or not, this is not a must.”

Raul

INDOOR BIN SET-UP DIRECTLY INFLUENCES RECYCLING

Appropriate bin provision for separating recycling inside the HMO, as well as clear signage and/or information alongside this, was leading to correct recycling being presented for collection. Likewise, where separate indoor recycling bins were not provided and/or there was a lack of clear signage or instruction to explain what bins should be used for which waste, this very often led to no or minimal recycling being presented.

While there were exceptions to this, with some tenants finding their own ways to separate recycling despite the lack of bin provision, this was a very clear and consistent finding. Also linked to this, HMO tenants typically had one bin in their individual bedroom, meaning that waste disposed of in these rooms often did not get separated.

While some tenants might be motivated to purchase a bin for their room or a communal space, landlords are generally seen as being fully responsible for this. Therefore, more onus must be put on

landlords to offer bin provision that clearly matches the council recycling provision. For boroughs with source separated recycling, this includes providing bins for these separate waste streams.

“We do recycle a lot because the bin is already there and there is a sign to say what can go in there.”

Entian

“We have all main bins in the kitchen, they are part of the infrastructure of the house – general, recycling and compost... I don’t think we’re allowed to put food waste in general rubbish because there is a big sign saying no food waste.”

Linh

“We don’t have a dedicated recycling bin in the house, that’s the main reason [for not separating recyclables]. I suppose we could ask the landlord to do this.”

Mary

“We put it in whichever [outdoor] bin has room in it because the kitchen bin isn’t separated and [the council] take it. I don’t know if they ever look for evidence of contamination.”

Alvin

“I don’t really recycle the stuff in my room, like makeup boxes etc. That stuff just goes in a carrier bag and into the general waste, unless it’s a large item like a cardboard box.”

Daisy

PACKAGING AND LABELS ARE USED TO DETERMINE WHAT ITEMS SHOULD BE DISPOSED OF IN RECYCLING

With HMO tenants not seeking council information about recycling and landlords not typically providing this information, packaging and labels were often used to determine what could and couldn't be recycled. This finding is supported by previous Keep Britain Tidy research², which highlighted how packaging and labels are often a confusing and conflicting source of information for residents and lead them to put the wrong things into their recycling.

Linked with this, tenants also had different attitudes to over-recycling, depending on their perception of the waste system and how it works. Some preferred to dispose of as much as possible in their recycling, with a view

that these items will be sorted by 'someone' at the end of the process. Others were concerned about making a mistake and causing issues in the recycling process. Such perceptions and misconceptions should be considered when communicating to tenants regarding recycling.

"We look at plastic packaging to see because some of them say whether it's recyclable. Sometimes it says on the label to check locally but personally I've never done that. I guess I've never thought where to look for that information."

Erica

"I recycle... anything they will take really. I know they go through a checking process so if I'm not sure I would rather put it in there and let those people at the end to decide whether it's recyclable, rather than risk it go to landfill."

Carlos

"If I'm not sure I won't recycle it. My knowledge of post collection is really bad. I guess I just worry about causing more work down the line."

Sam

² Inside the Head of the Contaminator, Keep Britain Tidy, 2020

<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/resources/Inside%20the%20Head%20of%20the%20Contaminator%20Research%20Report%202020.pdf>

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%20Research%20Report%202020.pdf

KEY INSIGHTS: BULKY WASTE

THERE IS A LACK OF AWARENESS OF CORRECT DISPOSAL OF BULKY WASTE

The majority of HMOs in the research were furnished by the landlord. Participants explained it was therefore generally the responsibility of the landlord to dispose of bulky waste when necessary. The majority of participants had therefore never needed to dispose of a bulky waste item, leading to an overall lack of awareness of how this should be done correctly.

This may explain why there was a low awareness among HMO tenants of council services to dispose of bulky waste, such as paid collections or Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs), however awareness of HWRCs was slightly higher.

Rather than council services, HMO tenants were more likely to think of other methods of collection when discussing what they would do with large items. As well as asking the landlord, this included using apps or websites to sell the item, hiring a 'man with a van' or donating items to charity.

This lack of awareness was coupled with the social norming effect of seeing neighbours in the local area dispose of bulky waste items on the street, and seeing these items being collected, leading to the perception that this was the 'right thing to do'. In addition, there was an overall lack of awareness of the consequences (eg fines) of fly-tipping among this group of residents.

"We've never had to get rid of [bulky waste]. I know we would have to call someone, I don't know very much about it. I see people leave them in the street... in a couple of days they are gone. Maybe the council take it, sometimes they have a note saying "please take me". I know it's illegal but people do it. It's a grey area."

Davide

"I have a table so I'm trying to figure out how to put in the bins. I don't drive and my mum's car isn't big enough so I would rather keep it and one day cut it up and put it in the recycling bins."

Natalie

"Electrical items, you leave them in front of the house... Random people would take it away... and sell it or repair it, I don't know. I'm not aware of anything else. I just put my rubbish out and they collect it and it works."

Paul

"I believe I went through the wrong protocol – I had to get rid of a bed I was so unsure what to do, so I dismantled it and laid it next to the bins and the neighbour told me it was wrong, it got taken."

Raul

KEY INSIGHTS: EXCESS WASTE

NO HMO TENANTS IN THE RESEARCH ADMITTED TO FLY-TIPPING BLACK BAGS

We are aware from local authorities that there are some indications that HMO tenants may be disproportionately contributing to fly-tipping of black bags. However, in discussions around the ways in which tenants dispose of excess waste, no participants admitted to leaving (fly-tipping) black bags. As this research did not identify a link here between fly-tipping of black bags and HMO tenant behaviour, this may represent an area of future research to understand this more deeply.

What tenants were doing with excess waste varied hugely, although appeared to be highly dependent on the perception of the borough's side waste policy. In areas where bin refusal policies were seen to be implemented consistently, some tenants kept back excess waste to put out on the following collection (eg in a 'spill over' bin). Others explained that their awareness of the no side waste policy motivated them to avoid generating excess waste entirely, by increasing recycling for example.

Where bin refusal wasn't seen to be happening or was not consistently implemented, with excess waste being collected either on every occasion or 'eventually', tenants continued to present this next to bins for collection. Other tenants also explained that they avoided generating excess waste by using certain wheeled bins as an overflow, typically those collected fortnightly.

“Because the recycling is collected every other week, it gets filled up so we end up using the general waste bin, especially for items we’re not sure about.”

Ambi

“General waste gets filled up very quickly... because it’s taken every other week. We do keep a small bin for emergencies and it’s used every time. It gets full after a week so we need to squeeze it in. Recycling gets full up but it’s manageable... we can keep it back for a week.”

Manish

“The recycling bin is full to the top. That gets picked up every two weeks, it’s like an overflow.”

Alvin

IT IS OFTEN SEEN AS THE COUNCIL OR LANDLORD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO INCREASE BIN CAPACITY, IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH EXCESS WASTE

For those tenants who were consistently generating excess waste, this was seen as an issue with the bin provision rather than with how the property was managing waste. It was therefore seen as the council or the landlord's responsibility to solve this by increasing bin capacity at the property.

While this can be a solution, storage space for wheeled bins is often an issue at HMOs and it is not always possible to provide more or bigger bins. More onus should therefore be put on landlords to support their residents to reduce excess waste through correct recycling in the first instance.

“[Excess waste] is something the council are responsible for. It’s logistical rather than something the public can take action on”

Daniel

“I have thought about asking for more bins but there is no point because landlords are not willing to pay that money. I think it was £60 so they won’t fork that out.”

Natalie

KEY INSIGHTS: TIME-BANDED COLLECTIONS

TIME-BANDED COLLECTIONS CREATE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SERVICE

Many of the HMOs represented in the research were flats above shops or in commercial areas and therefore had time-banded, bagged collections in place. As tenants with this service did not have wheeled bins to act as a prompt for how waste should be disposed of, many reported confusion of their waste service provision. Many were unsure of how they should recycle or believed that no recycling provision was in place for their property.

We know HMO tenants are learning what to do with their waste from what they see around them. What they are often seeing are more conventional single-household properties with separate bins for general waste, recycling and food waste, and other properties like theirs who do not appear to be separating recycling. This indicates to HMO tenants that a recycling service is not available to this type of property.

Some tenants with this service also believed that bulky waste, small electrical items and other types of waste could also

be disposed of at the designated collection point on-street, so long as they were put there within the correct times. As these items are collected and tenants do not receive any communication to say they should do something different, this behaviour is reinforced.

It is useful to note here that council communication regarding the times that waste should be presented, and consequences for not adhering to this (eg fines), did appear to be reaching HMO tenants, either directly or via the landlord. This type of communication therefore provides opportunity to address some of the misconceptions that exist around this service.

“I would like to segregate my rubbish and recycle it but we’ve not been provided with separate bins for recycling... The bin bags were orange at the beginning and now they are see-through but people use anything.”

Arek

“This [bulky waste] all goes into the designated area, literally everything. We’ve never had any communication from council about this... It would be the same for a chair or sofa or ironing board, they still take it.”

Dariusz

RECOMMENDATIONS & POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. HMOs vary hugely and waste behaviour is influenced in many different ways – one size does not fit all. A range of approaches are therefore required to improve waste management in these properties.
2. Waste information needs to be disruptive and brought directly to HMO tenants, with the assumption they will not actively seek it.
3. Council communications to tenants must be targeted at the individual in order to be salient, rather than the household eg:
 - Use language such as *‘To all current tenants living at 33 Park Road’*
 - Make council branding bold and clear to highlight this is an ‘official’ communication for current tenants that needs to be read
4. Address the perception that all HMOs have different recycling provision. Use consistent messaging where possible to highlight the items which **all** properties in the borough can and should recycle.
5. Consistently enforce no side waste policies and bin refusal for recycling contamination, along with communication (eg bin hangers). Consider training to standardise practice across crews.
6. Develop communications to specifically target HMO tenants whose landlords are asking them to fly-tip their bulky waste items
7. Consider specific approaches for HMOs with time-banded collections eg:
 - More regular communications to address high turnover of tenants (eg together with frequent delivery of sacks).
 - Consider specific communications, making it clearer to new tenants which sacks are for general waste and which are for recycling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Tenants expect the landlord to be a messenger of waste information. We therefore suggest the most effective way of ensuring HMO tenants have both the facilities and information to dispose of their waste correctly is a top-down approach from the council, encouraging landlords to put this in place. Some considerations in doing this are:

Explore ways for improving council communication with landlords eg:

- Increased enforcement of HMO licensing schemes.
 - For some households with direct relationships with landlords, communications delivered to directly to the HMO can often be easily passed onto the landlord via tenants.
 - As letting/property management agents are often seen as ‘the landlord’, consider how they can be engaged. In addition, consider how contracted cleaners can be communicated to, likely via the landlord who employs them.
 - Consider including more specific rules on waste within licensing schemes (eg a requirement to display waste disposal information in communal spaces, to provide for separating recycling indoors and to embed waste information within the property eg through more permanent signage).
 - Make it as easy as possible for landlords to provide the correct information to their tenants (eg providing resources such as signage, information booklets, bin stickers and guidance or signposting to best practice examples).
9. Consider further research to fill remaining gaps in the evidence, including to:
- Identify and explore any relationship between HMO properties and fly-tipping of black bags
 - Explore food waste recycling in HMOs in more detail. As this research did not focus specifically on this, and food waste recycling will be implemented across the country in the coming years, this represents an area for further exploration.
 - Identify any further evidence that HMOs are producing different types of waste to other property types, and how this can help to inform waste management approaches with this group (eg via waste composition analyses).

SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED BY PARTICIPANTS

Below are the suggested interventions which participants in the research believe would be effective in improving waste management in their HMOs. These are organised into key themes.

Council communications

- Most HMO tenants would like to be communicated to by the council via letters or other printed information through the post.
- Posted communications must avoid using language 'to the current occupier', as these do not get opened.
- Communications should make it clear that it is from the council, for the attention of all current tenants, using language on the envelope such as 'please share this with everyone in the residence'.

- Provide information or resources that can be kept and/or displayed in communal spaces, such as stickers for bins (at the point of use), posters, booklets or magnets.
- Use imagery/pictorial communications and/or translation to address language barriers.
- Provide education on why recycling is important, what happens to it afterwards and the potential cost savings to councils for improving recycling rates.
- Door-knocking from waste operatives to educate on correct waste disposal and check bin provision.
- An advertising campaign on waste collection vehicles to provide continually updated information on the borough's recycling performance and target, encouraging residents to continue their efforts to recycle.
- Supportive waste information on bins, such as images of what can and cannot be recycled.
- Help waste crews to know which properties are HMOs (eg via a sticker on their bins), to identify that this property may need to be communicated to in a different way. For instance, communication could then be directed to the landlord rather than the property itself.

SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED BY PARTICIPANTS

Changes in infrastructure or service

- For properties where bins are being used by businesses or others who shouldn't be, provide lockable bin storage, allowing tenants to take responsibility for their own bins without this being impacted on by others.
- An app for everything to do with waste disposal, including what you can recycle and how to dispose of bulky waste in a specific area
- Deposit-return schemes for recyclables such as glass bottles.
- A bulky waste disposal day once a year, where all items can be left on

the street for collection, on that one day only.

- Make access to recycling bags easier for residents with bagged collections. For instance, if you show your Council Tax bill you can collect the bags from local shops.
- A council scheme where bulky waste is collected and gifted to households who can use it, incentivising use of the scheme - as residents will know their items will go to a good home.

Feedback and enforcement

- Provide information on fines and no side waste rules to increase residents' awareness, while ensuring the correct

facilities and information are in place to begin with.

- Direct feedback communications from waste operatives to explain reasons for bin refusal, such as bin tags and stickers on bins.
- A dedicated waste officer for HMOs, responsible for engaging with tenants and landlords, ensuring bin provision is correct, and posting warning letters when needed.
- A mandatory course for tenants or landlords who fail to adhere to waste rules, like a driver's speed awareness course.

SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED BY PARTICIPANTS

The role of landlords

- Make it mandatory for landlords to provide residents with the correct information and facilities to dispose of waste correctly.
- Landlords or letting agents to provide booklets to new tenants, as something they can keep and refer back to, informing about how different types of waste should be disposed of in the borough.
- Put waste rules in tenancy agreements or contracts.
- Make it mandatory for landlords (or letting agents acting on their behalf) to visit the property on a regular basis to check on waste management/bin provision issues.
- Place permanent signage in communal spaces to communicate the 'do's and don'ts' for waste

“Landlords get a lot of money for not doing a lot. They should set their house up in a way that works.”

Thomas

“Councils could make it mandatory for landlords to put rules in the tenancy agreement or contract. Like when they say stuff shouldn't go down the drain because it blocks it. It makes you more cautious.”

Georgios

“The most effective way would be for them to liaise with the actual owners of the building... it would have more strength. Go through the landlord and then they would be responsible to make sure the rules would be obeyed. People move in and out so often, so if the landlord is the one to inform us, that would be the most effective way. The council should aim to contact the landlords first and make sure the information is passed on.”

Dariusz

NEXT STEPS

The Centre for Social Innovation is expert in developing effective interventions using behavioural insights and wider frameworks. Previous examples of interventions we have developed included:

We're Watching You: A glow-in-the-dark 'watching eyes' poster intervention to prevent dog-fouling based on the insight that people tend to allow their dogs to foul under cover of darkness. This achieved a 46% reduction across 17 local authority pilot areas and has now been scaled through over 100 partners.

Social Impact Stencils: This intervention addressed our research insight that fly-tipping is perpetuated by the fact that fly-tipping often collected quickly and without repercussion, and involved stencilling fly-tipped sites with a message highlighting

the social impacts of the behaviour. This achieved a 67% reduction across four pilot sites and we are now preparing to scale the intervention nationally.

Two-Bag Challenge: This intervention asked residents to produce no more than two bags of waste, using behavioural insight approaches and messaging. During the challenge, the number of households presenting two bags or less per week increased by 39% compared to the baseline (2,026 households across two pilot areas). Average weekly tonnages for waste and recycling decreased in one of the two target areas; from 16.72 tonnes during the baseline to 15.74 tonnes during the challenge.

Following this research, Keep Britain Tidy will be applying the insights to the development of new interventions aimed

at improving waste management in HMOs. These will draw on the behavioural insights this research has uncovered and wider behavioural science.

We will be seeking partners and funding to pilot interventions to improve waste management in HMOs, gathering evidence of the types of initiatives that should be implemented at scale.

We will also be carrying out a review of current policy and legislation to identify any areas where this should be amended to better support local authorities and other stakeholders in dealing with incorrect waste management in their HMOs, and implementing the recommendations of the research.

GET IN TOUCH

For more information about this research or our wider work, please contact:

Lizzie Kenyon

Director – Centre for Social Innovation
Keep Britain Tidy

lizzie.kenyon@keepbritaintidy.org