

## Council office recycling case study



In 2008 Oxfordshire councils through Oxfordshire Waste Partnership (OWP) worked with the Environmental Information Exchange (EiE) at Oxford Brookes University to carry out a series of waste audits across council sites. These audits aimed to measure the effectiveness of the council's office recycling schemes to see how they could be improved.

With OWP encouraging the efficient use of resources, increases in recycling and reduction in resource consumption, officers wanted to make sure their own sites performed well and set an example to householders and local businesses.

The 2008 audits gave a snap shot of recycling behaviour and offered recommendations on areas for improvement. Councils implemented most of these changes and in order to measure progress, another series of audits were carried out in 2011 for all district councils.

This report explains what district councils in Oxfordshire have achieved.



The table below shows the overall quantities of waste. The biggest success stories were the overall reduction in the amount of waste produced and the increase in the recycling rate to 65%.

Year	Waste tonnes/yr	Recycling tonnes/yr	Total tonnes/yr	Recycling
2008	126.88	107.24	234.12	46%
2011	61.2	112.32	173.52	65%

### What have councils done?

- Despite reducing waste overall, the amount of waste recycled has increased slightly. The overall effect is a big increase in the percentage of waste recycled, which has increased by 19% since 2008.
- A number of councils have improved waste collection contracts and changed collectors. There has been a slight swing towards using council "in-house" collection services where possible. The in-house services have been more cost effective and flexible at a time when patterns of waste generation have changed enabling more materials to be collected including food waste.
- Most councils have improved systems for printing double sided and reducing paper waste. This has had a significant impact on the amount of paper used and consequently the amount of waste produced. In the past year for example, Cherwell has cut the amount of A4 paper it uses by a quarter and its consumption of A3 paper has halved.
- Improved and increased visibility of recycling services available to staff.
- Offering advice and information to staff on how to run a 'green office'.
- Confidential waste contracts have changed and communication surrounding confidential waste has helped reduce it.

### **Cherwell District Council**

Since the original audit in 2008 Cherwell stopped using a private waste contractor and now collects its own waste. This enabled the council to introduce food waste collections and the new collections mean that 77.5% of food waste is recycled (5,200kg recycled out of a total 6,708kg). In addition the council is recycling a remarkable 80.7%.

### **Oxford City Council**

Between audits, the city council has reduced its overall waste by 17%. Their current recycling rate of 37.5% builds on the previous rate of 26.4%.

### **South Oxfordshire District Council**

The district has an office recycling rate of 69%, but across a large site in Wallingford the council has achieved a massive reduction of non-recyclable waste from 43,680kg to 21,840kg. The district council has also set up an on site compost bin which is used for composting staff tea bags.

### **Vale of White Horse District Council**

The Vale, as with all councils, has seen recycling rates increase between 2008 and 2011. They have gone from 21.8% to 38.5%. The council has made a substantial reduction of non-recyclable waste in the last three years, from 24,960kg to 12,480kg.

### **West Oxfordshire District Council**

Like Cherwell, West Oxon has started collecting its own waste rather than employing a contractor. This has helped the council achieve a significant reduction of non-recyclable waste from 10,400kg to 4,680kg and the council is now recycling an impressive 70% of its waste (10,920kg out of 15,600kg).



## What's left in the bin?

Material	Comments	Percentage
Food waste	Banana peels, tea bags, oranges (from lunches)	28
Paper towels	From catering operations and toilets.	19
Non-recyclable waste	Crisp packets, soiled items, foams	18
Paper and cardboard	Mostly food packaging and post it notes	13
Building waste	From refurbishments etc.	9
Items from clear outs	Includes binders, books, trays, etc.	6
Other plastics	Food pots, bags, hard plastics	4
Plastics and cans	Usually thrown out with lunch	3

## Next steps

Despite noting improvements and excellent recycling 2011 levels, the audits highlighted additional recommendations for future improvements:

- Other councils to follow Cherwell's lead and collect food waste for recycling. In Oxford alone 55% of the remaining waste in the bin is food waste, so considerable improvements can still be made.
- Increase awareness of recycling facilities for all employees as most waste is produced at staff desks.
- Make double sided printing even more common.

 Oxfordshire Waste Partnership Your local councils working together to improve your environment

  
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