

CASE STUDY



Date of service launch	January 2022
Number of households targeted	61,570
Collection frequency / format	Weekly / kerbside
Number of households registered	4,396
Pod collection volume (to date)	25 tonnes

Ipswich Borough Council



Having officially declared a climate emergency in July 2019, Ipswich Borough Council committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. A Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan set out sustainable best practice measures to be adopted.

As part of this drive, the Council expanded its waste management service. In January 2022, a weekly coffee pod recycling service was successfully introduced, in partnership with Podback. In its first year more than 25 tonnes of pods were collected from more than 4,000 households across the borough – effectively diverting these materials from general waste for recycling.



The approach

Ipswich Borough Council was the fifth UK local authority to launch a dedicated coffee pod collection scheme in partnership with Podback.

Head of Waste and Fleet Services, Christopher Taylor comments:

“With a clear drive to increase kerbside recycling rates, we work hard to embrace best practice solutions and Podback really appealed. While coffee pods only comprise a small fraction of household waste, any new and innovative solution to help residents reduce, re-use and recycle more is something we are keen to adopt. And right from the start, Ipswich residents have really engaged with Podback.”



To enable pods to be collected as part of the weekly household waste and recycling service, specialist cages were installed on the council’s fleet of 14 refuse and recycling vehicles. Podback worked with the council team to develop a three-month communications campaign to launch and promote the service.

Two weeks before collections were due to start, households across the borough were sent a leaflet explaining the new service, and encouraging them to sign up to receive their Podback recycling bags.

A second reminder leaflet was sent out six weeks after the service launched, prompting those who were yet to register to do so. As COVID-19 restrictions were still in place during the launch period, additional promotion relied heavily on digital channels, and in particular social media (*namely Facebook and Twitter*).

Amplifying the message by boosting the planned Facebook content for a week not only had an immediate impact on household registrations, but also generated positive engagement from residents who used the platform to ask questions and share the information with their friends and followers.

During the initial 12 week launch campaign, 3,500 residents signed up for the programme. Registrations have grown consistently since, to over 4,400 households within the first year of operation. More than 25 tonnes of pods have been collected from households, effectively diverting them from the general black bin waste disposal.

The Local Authority perspective

Reflecting on the partnership, Christopher Taylor says: “When we first met with the Podback team, we were unsure about the appetite locally for a Borough-wide collection scheme for coffee pods. There were preconceptions that maybe Ipswich residents didn’t use the machines at home so would not sign up to the service.

“However, it’s fair to say now that we made an excellent decision to introduce the scheme! With sustainability such an important part of everyday life now, preventing unnecessary waste is important, so demand for our pod collection service has rocketed since first being introduced.

“From day one, we saw the initiative as a 50/50 partnership. By installing specialist cages on our existing vehicles, rolling-out the programme was quick and easy. The support from Podback when it came to promoting the campaign was really valuable too – especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when communicating with householders was more difficult.

“Unlike some third party collection programmes, the Podback service is supported by manufacturers. As such, councils can roll-out the programme on a cost neutral basis. Alongside managing the development of the service, Podback supports with resourcing collection fleets, paying for necessary equipment, funding any additional costs relating to the time of waste management staff and organising onward logistics to the material reprocessors.

“We’ve been really pleased with the programme so far and would absolutely recommend Podback to other local authorities. Alongside offering residents an additional recycling stream, it’s allowed us to direct more from residual waste – aluminium, plastic and food (the coffee grounds).”



Specialist cages on vehicles



Podback collection service in action

RECYCLE WITH
Podback
THE POD RECYCLING SERVICE

Welcome to Podback.

HOW TO USE YOUR PODBACK RECYCLING BAGS

- **1** Drain pods of any liquid before placing in bag. Caution: contents may be hot.
- **2** Fill the bag with used pods. Do not fill above the dotted line.
- **3** Tie the bag. Remove any excess liquid from the bag, release any air and tie the handles.
- **4** Place your bag out for collection with your other waste and recycling containers by 6am on your normal collection day.

 Ipswich recycles



Awareness campaign
marketing materials



The challenge

Across the UK, c.5.3 million households own a coffee pod machine, with more than two billion pods sold every year¹. But while coffee consumption is at an all-time high, there is widespread consumer uncertainty about what to do with used pods. Research conducted by YouGov on behalf of Podback found that more than a third (35%) of coffee pod consumers were not aware that pods can be recycled, while nine in ten (90%) admitted that they'd like to be able to recycle their coffee pods through their usual household recycling services.

For local authorities and their waste management partners, their small size and the fact that they contain wet coffee grounds makes pods difficult to recover and recycle using current municipal material recovery systems. This means that pods are widely regarded as a contaminant, ending up in residual waste stream.

¹Neilson Total Coffee Database (2021)

About Podback

A not-for-profit coffee pod recycling service created in partnership with the biggest names in coffee pod systems (NESCAFÉ Dolce Gusto, Nespresso and Tassimo), Podback is focused on developing a nationwide recycling service for beverage pods and is partnering with local authorities to roll out free kerbside collections for residents.

With funding provided by the pod manufacturers themselves, the whole process is delivered on a cost-neutral basis; an early example of Extended Producer Responsibility. This means that councils can eliminate the landfilling of coffee pods and further increase their recycling rates completely free of charge.

Pod recycling journey

All used plastic and aluminium beverage pods collected by Podback are sent to reprocessors within the UK. They are first shredded to remove the coffee. For plastic pods, this process takes place at Allensway Recycling in East Yorkshire

The plastic is recycled by Bright Green Plastics in West Yorkshire and used in the manufacture of a range of products, including industrial packaging, furniture and building products. Aluminium pods are reprocessed by Tandom Metallurgical Group in Cheshire. They are shredded, melted and fed back into the aluminium supply chain and used in the manufacture of drink cans and car components.

The coffee grounds are sent to anaerobic digestion facilities, where they're processed to generate renewable energy and soil improver. Pod recycling bags are recovered for recycling by a specialist film reprocessor, based in Yorkshire.

For more information about Podback, or to discuss rolling-out a coffee pod recycling service in your local authority, email: will.french@podback.org.

