Podback®
THE POD RECYCLING SERVICE

CASE STUDY

Date of service launch	July 2021
Number of households targeted	48,671
Collection frequency / format	Separate pass (bookable service)
Pod collection volume (to 1.10.22)	10 tonnes
Number of households registered	2,500

Chichester District Council

As part of a Council-wide commitment to sustainable best practice, Chichester District Council partnered with Podback – the UK's first dedicated coffee pod recycling service – to roll-out a coffee pod recycling trial. Introduced alongside a textile and Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) collection service, more than 2,500 households have since signed up to the initiative, with 10 tonnes of pods diverted from the general waste stream.

The challenge

Across the UK, c.5.3 million households own a coffee pod machine, with more than two billion pods sold every year. Research conducted by YouGov on behalf of Podback* found that more than a third (35%) of coffee pod consumers are not aware that pods can currently be recycled, with nine in 10 (90%) stating 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 by current municipal material recovery systems. This means that pods are widely regarded as a contaminant, ending up in the sorting plant "fines", and ultimately the residual waste stream.

With a Council-wide commitment to sustainable best practice, and having recently declared a climate emergency, Chichester District Council is committed to hitting ever-higher recycling rates and ensuring protecting the environment is embedded even further into the delivery of council services. Having undertaken a waste composition analysis project in 2018, the team knew that almost 60% of general waste thrown away by residents could have been re-used or recycled, while 6% of textiles and WEEE was being incorrectly placed in general waste bins.

Amie Huggett, business manager at Chichester District Council, commented: "We had decided to roll-out a separate WEEE and textile collection service but, during the planning process, met with the team at Podback and discussed the opportunity to include used beverage pods.

"While pods comprise a relatively small fraction of household waste collected across Chichester, we support any solution that can maximise recycling rates and minimise general waste. It therefore seemed hugely beneficial to residents if we trialled a kerbside collection for coffee pods, as part of our new textile and WEEE collections."

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* YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4323 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th - 11th September 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

The approach

The trial covered 75% of households in the district and, initially, offered residents a regular collection of small WEEE, textiles and coffee pods. Residents were required to register for the service with Podback, and were sent a supply of recycling bags. The collections were offered as a scheduled service, every four weeks as a 'separate pass', using a dedicated vehicle.

The service launch was promoted by a 12 week marketing communications campaign, including a two phase leaflet drop to households, press articles and advertisements in the Council's own publications, and regular social media posts. The council's communications team created additional content and carried out a door-stepping campaign.

After six months a programme review was carried out, and the team decided to revise the service to help optimise efficiencies and improve the user experience. The service was updated to a bookable system, enabling residents to book collections from a list of pre-scheduled pick-ups via the Council website, rather than rely on the timetabled service. Using the online portal residents can also book regular pick-up slots.

The results

In the first six months of the trial, 2,100 households had registered for the coffee pod recycling service and almost 500,000 pods were collected. In the three months since updating the programme to a bookable service the results have been hugely positive. Householder registrations have increased to 2,500 and the number of collections booked, and volume of pods collected has noticeably increased.

In total, more than ten tonnes of pods have now been collected from households since July 2021, diverting more than a million pods from general waste.

The Local Authority perspective

Reflecting on the partnership with Podback, Amie said: “Many local authorities would be rightly concerned that implementing a new collection service could prove costly and problematic. However, from our very first conversations with Podback, they gave us the confidence to push forward with our plans.

We leased an electric vehicle to service the collections, and Podback funded a third of the cost. They also covered additional costs relating to the time of waste management staff and organising onward logistics to the material reprocessors.

“To help create widespread awareness and drive sign-ups, Podback supported with a tailored communications campaign. This, alongside our own activities, helped to create a real buzz.

“We’d absolutely recommend Podback. We found the team to be knowledgeable, collaborative, supportive and highly experienced. They understood our challenges and delivered an effective solution.”

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 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, with the plastic then recycled by Bright Green Plastics and used in the manufacture of a range of products.

Aluminium pods are reprocessed by Tandom Metallurgical Group, which sees them shredded, melted and used in the manufacture of drink cans and car components. The coffee grounds are sent to anaerobic digestion facilities, where they’re used to generate renewable energy, while pod recycling bags are recovered for recycling by a specialist film reprocessor.

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