

CASE STUDY



Date of service launch	April 2021
Number of households targeted	56,150
Collection frequency / format	Weekly / kerbside
Pod collection volume 30.9.22	20 tonnes
Number of households registered 30.9.22	3,400

Cheltenham Borough Council



As part of a continued drive to increase kerbside recycling rates, Cheltenham Borough Council partnered with Podback to implement a weekly coffee pod recycling service. The first local authority to partner with Podback, the service launched in April 2021 and within 18 months had diverted over 20 tonnes of pods 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.



Karen Watson, Cheltenham Borough Council

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.

In April 2021, Cheltenham Borough Council became the first local authority to launch a kerbside recycling service for coffee pods, in partnership with Podback, the not-for-profit coffee pod recycling scheme.

Karen Watson, environmental partnerships manager at Cheltenham Borough Council, says: “Across the Borough, our recycling rate sits at more than 50% – a fantastic achievement. Alongside regular consumer engagement campaigns, this has been made possible through the provision of separate collections and educating households about the widespread benefits of recycling.

“While coffee pods comprise only a small fraction of household waste streams, we’re always on the lookout for new and innovative solutions to help residents recycle more.”

The results

Within 12 months of launching the weekly kerbside service, 3,100 households had signed up, and 1.5 million pods had been collected. And the service continues to gain momentum, by the end of September 2022 household registrations had increased to 3,500 and over 20 tonnes of pods had been diverted from the general waste stream.

The Local Authority perspective

Reflecting on the partnership with Podback Karen Watson says:

“As an authority we aim to be innovative, and were both pleased and excited to be a Podback pioneer, offering our local residents the opportunity to recycle their plastic and aluminium coffee pods every week.

“The Podback team worked hard to ensure the initiative fitted seamlessly into our existing kerbside collection processes – minimal disruptions to residents, maximum impact. What’s more, the care and attention put into communicating the service helped to create a real buzz.

“While stringent budgets often make embracing new initiatives quite challenging, and at the time we were still in the midst of managing resources during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Podback team made it clear that introducing a service with limited budget wouldn’t be an unachievable goal. Alongside managing the development of the service, this included resourcing collection fleets, paying for all necessary equipment and funding any additional costs relating to the time of waste management staff, and organising onward logistics to the material reprocessors.

What’s more, the integrated communications campaign to inform and engage householders helped us make the most of collection availability from day one – Podback really is an all-encompassing solution!”

“Feedback from residents and councillors has been overwhelmingly positive. Our residents love how easy it is for them to recycle their coffee pods alongside their everyday household recycling, our elected members have also been impressed by the service.

“With the UK Government’s Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for packaging facing implementation delays, joining Podback also offers local authorities an opportunity to see the benefits of proactively adopting EPR schemes.

“It has allowed us here at Cheltenham to direct valuable resources from residual waste – aluminium, plastic and food (coffee grounds) - and offer our residents an extra recycling stream.”

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

