

Norfolk Waste Partnership - Waste Free Week

Report of the findings

Summary

This report has been produced to analyse the results of a Waste Free Week initiative run by the Norfolk Waste Partnership in October 2008. It encouraged members of the public to try to be waste free for a week, and report back to the Partnership on how well they did and what problems they encountered.

The main findings of the report are:

- that 215 households, and a total of 510 people, took part in Waste Free Week.
- there was an even split of people taking part across all the districts, with only Great Yarmouth showing significantly lower participation.
- the average waste reduction for households taking part, from waste measurements taken before and after the week, was 30%.
- 57% of people said they recycled more during Waste Free Week than they had done in the past.
- that by far, the most common material still thrown away during the initiative was plastic packaging, with 50% of people unable to avoid it completely. This was also seen as the biggest problem in achieving a 'Waste Free Week'.
- the most common change people made during the week was to be more vigilant when shopping, and buy things with less or recycled packaging, or with no packaging at all.
- people took part in Waste Free Week for one of two main reasons: because they were committed to the environment, or because they saw it as a personal challenge and wanted to see how well they could do.
- Those who took part felt that there was not enough publicity in the lead up to Waste Free Week, and that were we to repeat it, with greater publicity, the participation would be much greater.
- generally, those who took part saw it as an interesting, revealing and worthwhile challenge, and many have made permanent changes as a result.

Introduction

Waste Free Week is a new initiative from Norfolk Waste Partnership which aims to raise the profile of reducing, reusing and recycling waste in Norfolk. Norfolk's first Waste Free Week ran from 27th October to 2nd November 2008.

The aims of the initiative are:

- to reduce the waste sent to landfill and increase recycling and composting
- to encourage householders to think about what they buy in relation to waste packaging
- to change future behaviour on waste reduction and recycling

Members of the public were encouraged to sign up for Waste Free Week via a number of different ways. The initiative was advertised via the website www.recyclefornorfolk.org.uk, on council websites and in council magazines. It was also promoted at events during National Recycle Week, with people able to sign up for the initiative on the spot

People who signed up received Ezines in the run-up to the week, which provided them with tips and ideas about how to prepare, and what would help them achieve the best possible waste-free results, including getting a compost bin. Two weeks beforehand a report sheet was sent out with a number of questions on, so that participants could monitor their progress and provide us with feedback on how successful they were, how difficult they found the challenge and any ways the initiative could be improved. This feedback form was also available on www.recyclefornorfolk.org.uk so that people who had internet access could provide their responses in that way.

Although originally scheduled to run at the end of September, it was decided that Waste Free Week would have more of an impact if it ran during school holidays, and so was rescheduled for half term. Although this meant that for many families the week wasn't a 'typical' one, it did mean that the whole family could get involved – children could be creative with waste leftovers, and spend more time thinking about how they could reduce their waste.

People and households that signed up were sent a pack comprising of:

- An information sheet about the event providing top tips on how to reduce waste, and information about where different materials can be recycled across Norfolk.
- A feedback report form allowing participants to keep track of their progress and note anything interesting, and how successful they were at the end of the week.
- A free reusable shopping bag to thank them for taking part in the initiative.

Incentives

All those who returned their completed report forms within a certain time frame were sent the recipe book 'Eat Well, Waste Less' and entered into a prize draw. The main prize was £100 of shopping vouchers, with second and third prizes of family tickets to Bewilderwood and Pensthorpe Country Park.

Three members of the Norfolk Waste Partnership took part in the challenge and wrote regular blogs on www.recyclefornorfolk.org.uk

Roadshows

Between the end of August and the middle of September, 12 roadshows were held across Norfolk to promote Waste Free Week and to register as many members of the public for the week as possible. Manned by both district and county council staff, the events displayed examples of recyclable and compostable items, ways to reduce waste, and leaflets and tips on how to shop and live 'waste-free'.

Report form collation

After all the answers were received they were collated so that the data could be analysed. On the following four pages is the record sheet which we asked people to fill in, either online or via a paper copy which they returned to us in the post.



Record Sheet

Waste Free Week

27 October – 2 November 2008

The aim of Waste Free Week is to see how little you can throw away in the rubbish bin, by reusing, recycling and composting as much as possible. And also finding ways to cut down on what you buy in the first place. **Please use this record sheet to let us know how you get on during Waste Free Week.**

Every household returning this form will receive a **FREE copy of the recipe book Eat Well, Waste Less**. You will also be entered into a prize draw to win one of the following:

- £100 of M & S vouchers
- Tickets to visit Pensthorpe country park near Fakenham
- A Bewilderwood 'WILD WILD WILD card' worth £99, which entitles the bearer and up to 5 guests, three visits to the adventure park near Wroxham.

Please complete the answers to the questions below, we would like to know how you got on during Waste Free Week.

1) **How many people in your household took part?** _____

2) **How much rubbish do you usually throw away each week?** If you have a fortnightly collection you might want to half the amount you collect over two weeks

Either weigh your rubbish

Weight _____ kg

Or estimate

Number of black bags _____ or How full your rubbish bin is _____%.

Please tick here if your rubbish bin is not the standard size of most bins in Norfolk (240litres) -Most Kings Lynn and West Norfolk residents have a smaller size bin

3) **How much rubbish did you throw away during Waste Free Week?** **Please record this in the same way as you did for question two.** You might want to keep some notes during the week in the table at the back of this information sheet.

Weight _____ kg

Number of black bags _____ or How full your rubbish bin is is _____%.

4) Did you recycle any more than usual during Waste Free Week, if so which materials?

5) What items/materials, if any, did you throw away during Waste Free Week?

6) What sort of changes did you make during Waste Free Week to help you achieve the challenge and will you continue with any of these changes?

7) Were there any difficulties you had in trying to achieve a Waste Free Week?

8) What motivated you to take part in the challenge?

9) Have you got any suggestions or ideas for improvement for a future Waste Free Week, or any other comments?

10) Have you got a top tip that we can publish to help others achieve a Waste Free Week? **The best tip will win a goodie bag of recycled products.**

The best tips may be used in future publications, newsletter or our council webpage. Please tick to confirm that we can publish your name and town with the tip

Please complete your details in BLOCK CAPITALS

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Tick here if you would prefer **not** to receive the free recipe book

Please return this completed record sheet to this FREEPOST address
**Norfolk County Council – Waste Free Week, Planning and Transportation
Department, FREEPOST NC22093/8, Norwich NR1 2BR**

**All record sheets must be received by 30 November 2008 in order to be entered
into the prize draw.**

See over leaf for notes page



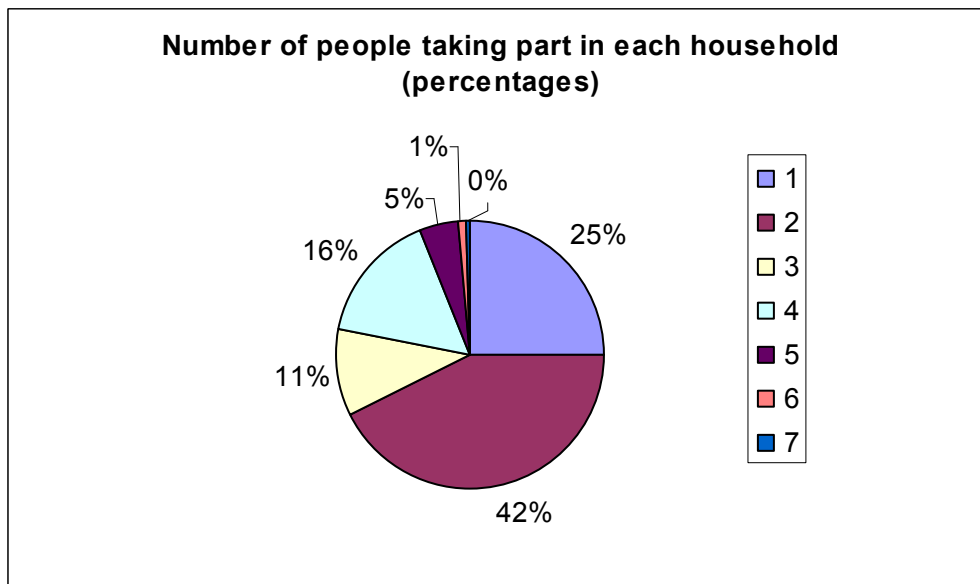
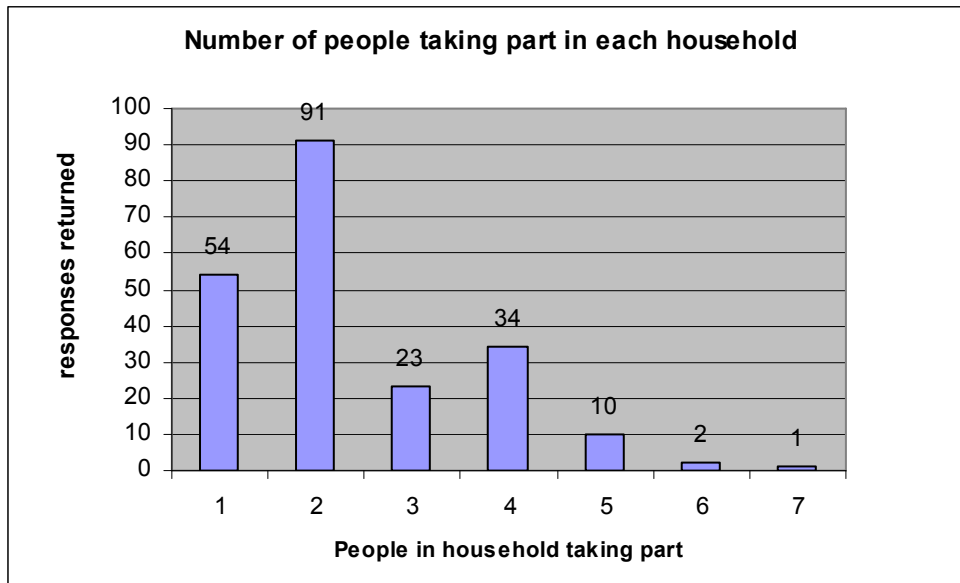
Notes: Please use this table to record any notes as you go through the week, it might help you complete the record sheet

Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

Analysis of the data received from the completed survey forms

Question 1: How many people in your household took part?

We had 215 forms returned, with a total of 510 people taking part in Waste Free Week. The breakdown can be seen below. 379 people were initially registered for the free Ezines, showing that 57% of all the people who initially showed interest carried the project through to the end, sending back completed record forms. This is a very positive response, especially when the nature of Waste Free Week meant that people could give up along the way, finding the challenge too difficult or coming across opposition from family members.

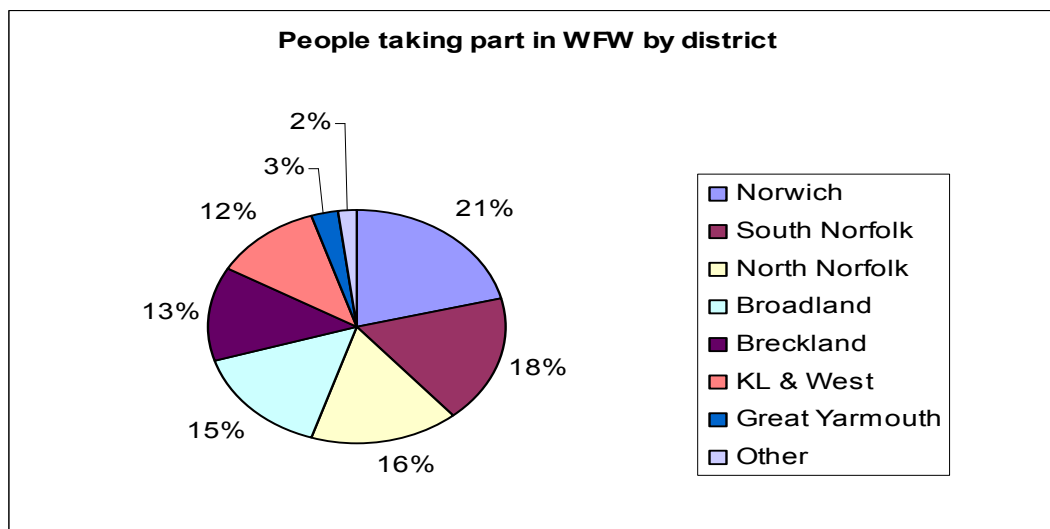
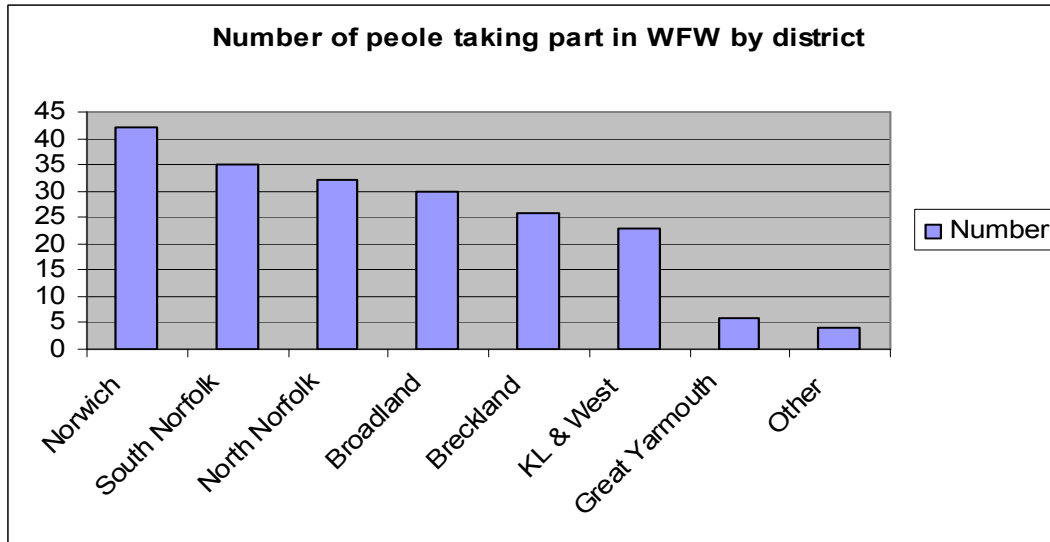


Points of interest

The majority of people who took part in the initiative were those in one or two-people households. Participation by families was significantly less, with three or more people households representing only 33% of all the people who took part.

It is understandable that Waste Free Week would be seen as a bigger challenge to people in larger households, or those with small children, but of those families that did take part reaction and response has been very positive, with children getting as involved as their parents. Several people said that they were unable to get their partner or spouse to take part, and were carrying out the challenge while their partners were continuing with their normal routine.

We also looked at how the participants of WFW were split across Norfolk districts.



There is a fairly even spread of participants in all the districts across Norfolk, with between 20 – 45 people from each district taking part in the week, apart from In Great Yarmouth, where only six people took part. However the number of road shows in Great Yarmouth was, if anything, more than in the other districts, suggesting that the lack of participation from that district wasn't anything to do with a lack of communication.

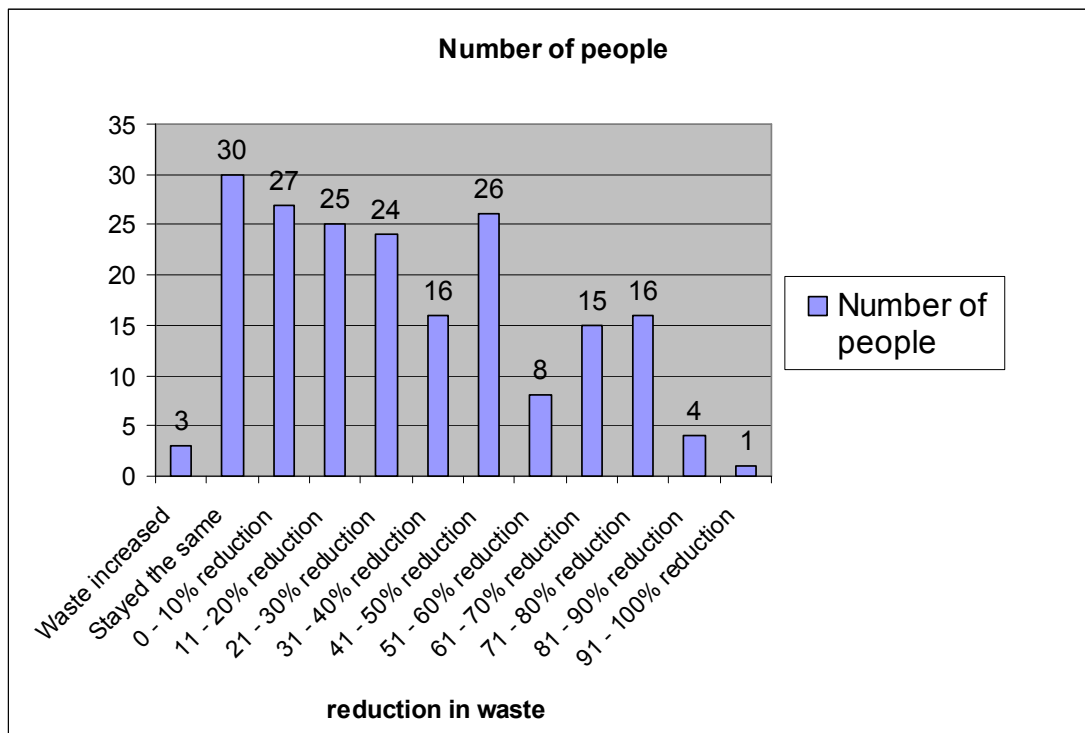
Question 2: How much rubbish do you usually throw away each week?

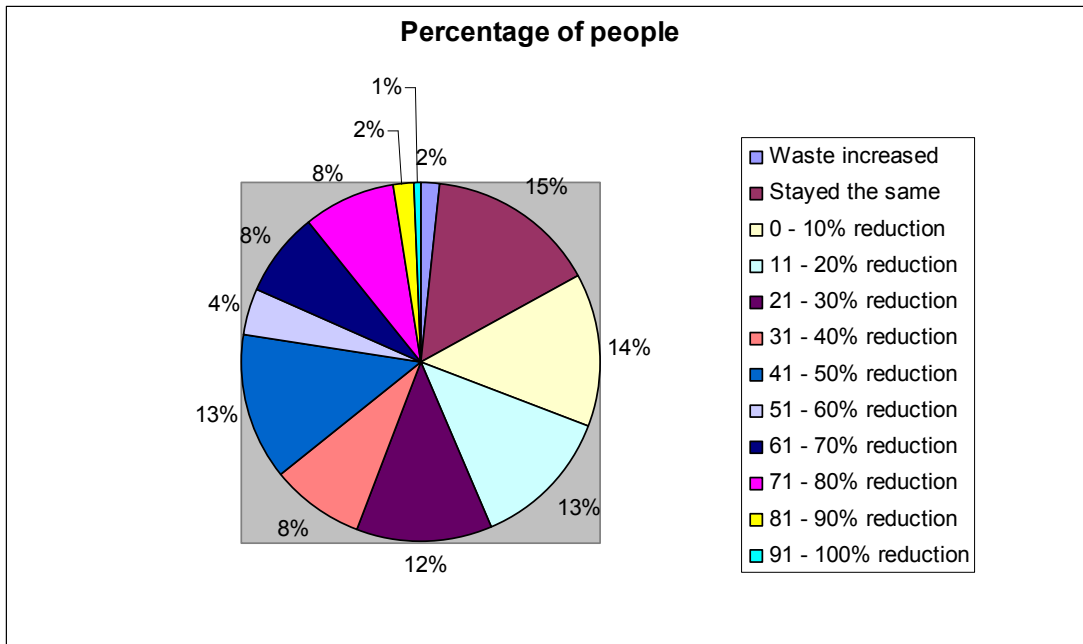
Question 3: How much rubbish did you throw away during Waste Free Week?

Participants were asked to fill in their usual weekly amount of rubbish, giving us the figure either in kilograms, number of black bags, or percentage of rubbish bin filled. They were also asked to let us know if their rubbish bin was not the standard 240 litre bin size. They were then asked to repeat this experiment at the end of the week, to see how much they had managed to reduce their waste by.

There were some instances where people recorded their before and after results in different ways, for example recording their 'before' waste amount in kilograms, and their 'after' waste result in number of bags. In these cases it was impossible to tell what their reduction had been from one week to the next.

All the data was sorted into percentages to see how much people reduced their waste by.





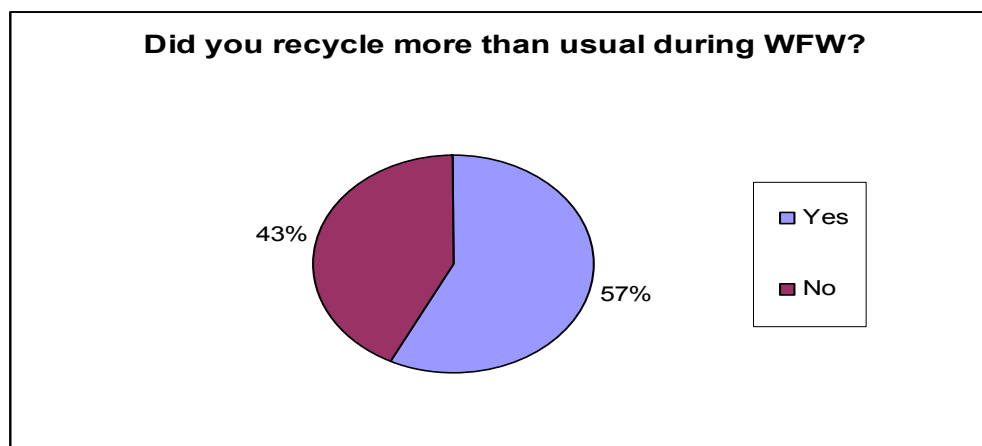
The majority of people who took part recorded a reduction in their waste, with 60% of those taking part finding that their waste had reduced by up to 50%. 23% of people saw between 50 and 100% reduction in waste, showing that the initiative made a significant difference to the amount of waste they created. 15% of people reported that their waste stayed the same, and only 2% found an increase in the amount of waste produced. The average household waste reduction as a result of taking part in the Waste Free Week was 30%.

These results demonstrate how well the initiative worked for those taking part, and the fact that the majority of people saw a reduction in their waste, even if not dramatic, shows that the small changes they were making as part of the challenge really did make a difference to the amount of waste that they were producing.

For those people whose waste stayed the same, many reported that they were already very conscious of what they threw away, and so felt they were doing all they could to minimise their waste before taking part in Waste Free Week and explained this as the reason for seeing no difference.

Question 4: Did you recycle any more than usual during Waste Free Week, if so which materials?

For the first part of the question, the responses were split into a simple yes or no, though the reasons given for this did vary:



There was a fairly even split of those who said they recycled more, and those who said they recycled no more than usual during Waste Free Week. There were several different reasons for this. Some people said they simply noticed no change to how much of their waste they recycled, whereas others said that they already did all they could, and could see no way of increasing their recycling levels.

It is worth noting however, that several people commented that the reason they recycled less during Waste Free Week than they had done previously, was because they were being more vigilant with all kinds of waste, and had less to put in both the rubbish bin and the recycling as a result. This included using reusable pots and Tupperware, buying items with no packaging at all, such as loose fruit and vegetables, and composting small amounts of paper and cardboard.

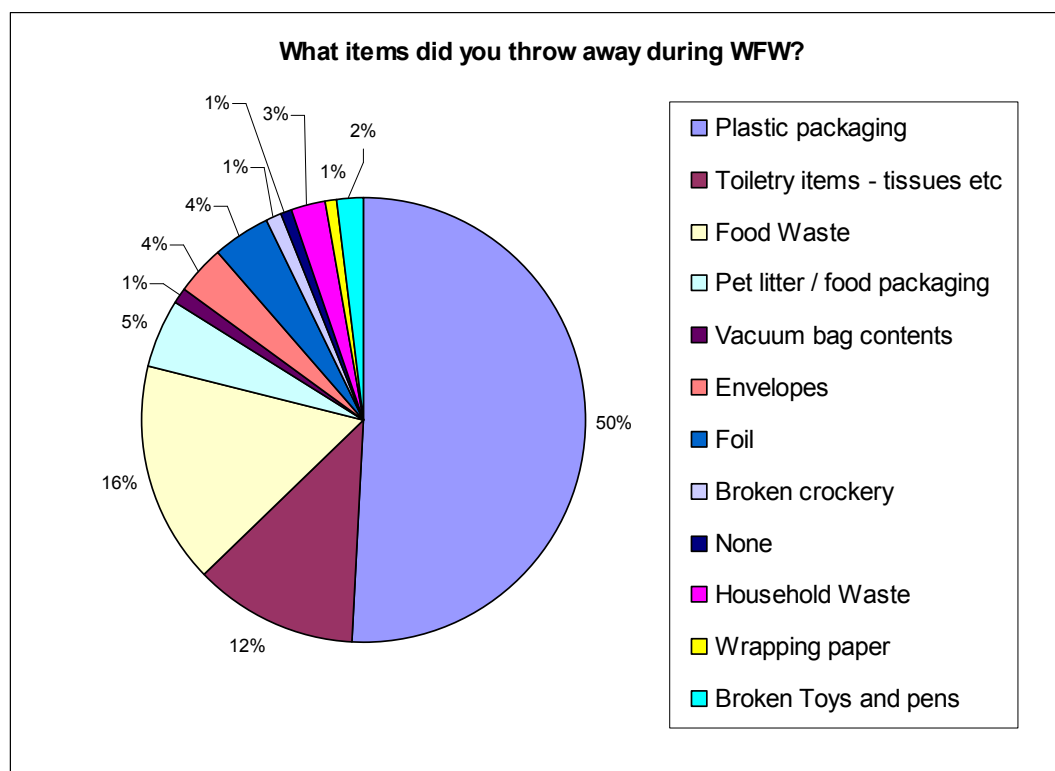
Materials which people found themselves recycling more of include paper, fruit juice cartons / tetra paks, plastic bottles, separating out cardboard from plastic in packaging, glass, batteries, food waste into the compost and reusing envelopes.

A few selected responses to: Did you recycle any more than usual during Waste Free Week? If so, which materials?

- Maybe even less, as we tried not to buy things with extra packaging, card sleeves etc. and reuse drinks bottles instead of buying new and then recycling.
- Yes – paper mainly. We put an additional recycling bin in the living room to help with separating recyclables and non-recyclables.
- Plastic bags, composted more, reused more things like ice cream containers
- Small amount more. A few things usually get chucked away at work but I brought them home, washed them and recycled them – such as yoghurt pots.
- Composted pumpkins of friends and family, took two bags of clothes to Age Concern, started a container of food and scraps for bird fat balls.
- Yes, swapped my tetra packs with a friend whose council collect from the kerb. Took textiles to the recycling centre. Used non-recyclables in children's crafts.
- Food waste, glass, paper, cardboard, plastic, metal tins and cans, household items i.e. videos, DVDs, phones, clothes through freecycle.com.
- No, but used less in the first place.

Question 5: What items/materials, if any, did you throw away during Waste Free Week?

The responses for this question were again split into areas to see what the main materials were that were thrown away during Waste Free Week. The responses were:



It is clear from the responses that the thing people had to throw away the most of during Waste Free Week was plastic packaging, showing that this is still the main problem. This was followed by food waste, and then toiletry items such as used tissues. Another notable item was pet litter, where people felt there was no alternative to throwing this in their rubbish bin.

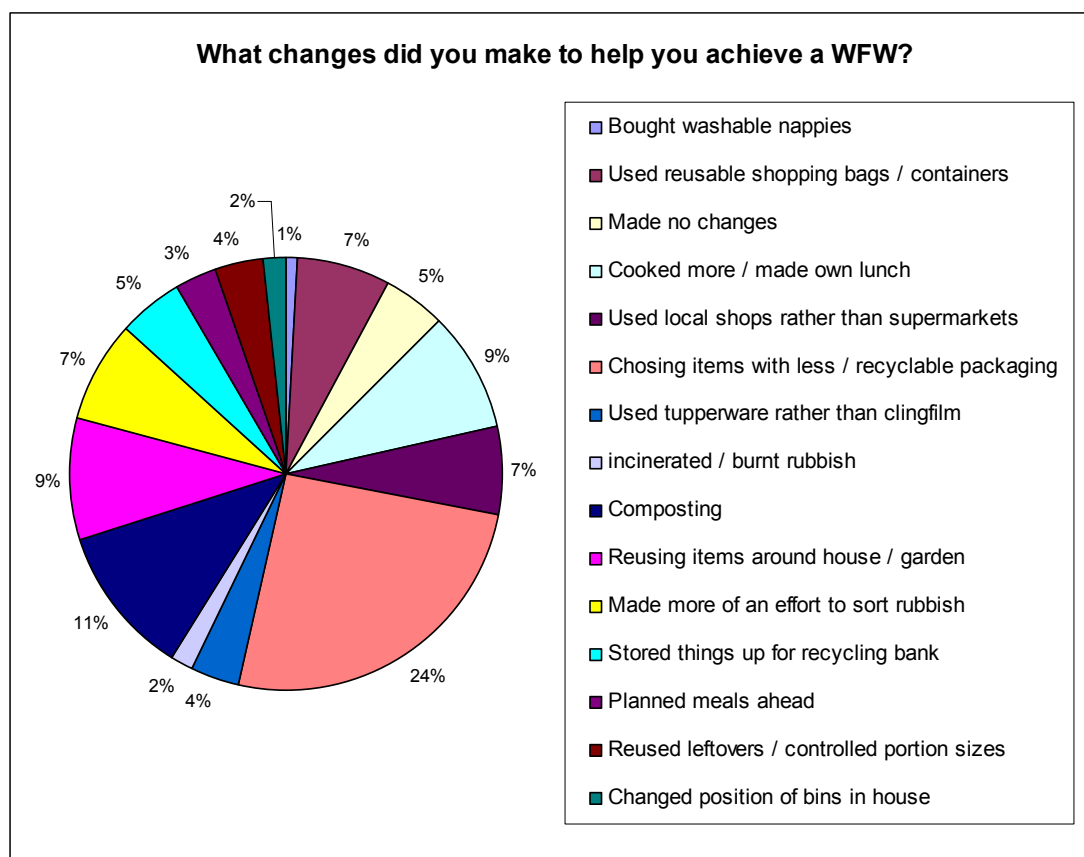
A few selected responses to: *What items / materials if any did you throw away during Waste Free Week?*

- Old felt tip pens that had run out, broken cassette tape, plastic inner bag on 10kg sack, Ecover laundry powder (outer sack is paper). We buy bulk staples - rice etc. in 2.5kg-25kg sacks but a lot of these are plastic. Some we keep and reuse but others we have to throw away.
- Plastic packaging. Also as half term all at home and did tidy up / clear out and what couldn't be jumble-saled, taken to the tip, recycled or burnt was thrown in the bin.
- Disposable nappies, food packaging, food peelings, plastic packaging around baby items – particularly shrink wrap and plastic around nappies.
- I was amazed at the amount of plastic packaging I still have to throw out even though I shop at the fruit and veg shop, butcher and fish shop. Anything from the supermarket has plastic packaging.

- Plastic coverings which supermarkets wrap everything up in – sometimes unavoidable but was aware of this and tried very hard to reduce this kind of waste.
- Children's food that they did not eat and couldn't be saved – dropped on the floor. Broken glass and pottery of dishes/cups that son broke. Covers of recyclable jars and milk bottles. Plastic covering that came in the post on some magazines and letters. Chicken bones, some wrappers of sweets that guests brought my children and Halloween treat wrappers. Plastic that oatcakes are wrapped in. Towards the end of the week, a couple of plastic bags that frozen food was stored in.
- Plastic food packaging (e.g. cereal bar wrappers, yoghurt pots and lids). Unavoidable food waste (bones, skin and fat) – one roast duck was responsible for 66% of our food waste (by weight) this week.

Question 6: What sort of changes did you make during Waste Free Week to help you achieve the challenge, and will you continue with any of these changes?

Participants were asked what changes they made during Waste Free Week to try and achieve a low amount of waste at the end of the week. The breakdown of responses can be seen below:



By far the most popular change made was choosing items when shopping that had less or recyclable packaging, with almost a quarter of participants saying that this was the main change they made. Other popular changes included composting, cooking and making own lunch, and reusing items around the house or garden that would otherwise have gone in the rubbish bin. The majority of people said that they would continue the changes beyond Waste Free Week, as they were easy to maintain as well as being worthwhile.

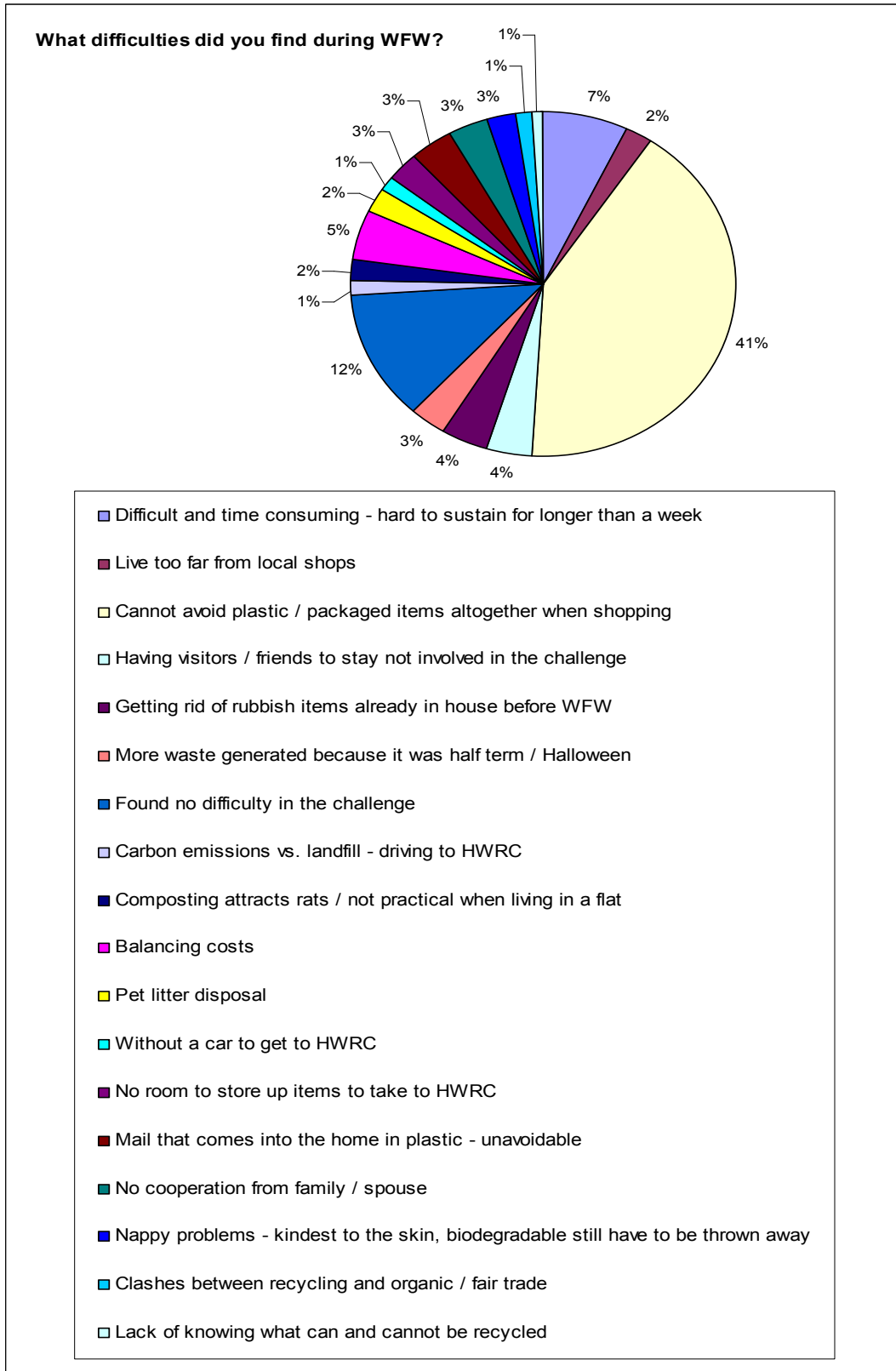
A few selected responses to: What sort of changes did you make during Waste Free Week to help you achieve the challenge, and will you continue with any of these changes?

- Washable nappies (and nappy sacks). Children decorated cotton bags to use for shopping. We grow our own veg and reuse everything possible.
- Bought fruit and veg loose from local market, no packaging. Thought a bit more whether I could reuse or recycle packaging before buying items. Will I continue with these changes – of course!
- Stock piling items I could not recycle via the council or supermarket banks. Not very likely to continue as a trip to the tip is not cost effective or pleasant.

- Reduced the amount of items in plastic packaging. Used the deli counter instead of pre-packaged meat. I am still not sure if I will keep up with these changes.
- Bought a compost bin, and this alone enables us to more than halve our rubbish both in number of bags and weight. Will definitely continue.
- No changes, this is a way of life for me.
- Baked from home, shopped more carefully to avoid excess packaging, will continue to do so, changes were really easy to make.
- Composting green waste and tea and coffee grounds, home baking, purchased vegetables from farm shop, removed waste bins from house other than kitchen.
- We were already composting and using kerb recycling, so we additionally recycled plastic cartons and saved yoghurt pots for future use. We tried to use up what was in our freezer to avoid wasting food, but much of this was wrapped in plastic and foil hence the waste. We tried not to shop as much for food and made our own bread in the bread maker. When shopping for fruit we tried to buy it loose. We used our bag for life so didn't pick up any more plastic bags, but just used the ones we had already. We made our own ready meals to freeze in glass containers.
- Normally I put my recycling to one side and put it in the wheelie bin when I go outside, the temptation is to put recycling in the normal bin indoors as it's easier, so I put a second bin in my kitchen and by my work desk so I could put recycling straight in the right bin – I will definitely continue with this and will try to put two bins everywhere there is already one.
- No real changes. We will continue to minimise as much as possible to help the fight against waste. But the real answer must be to manufacturers / supermarkets to reduce packaging in our shopping.
- I bought meat, bread and fruit from local shops rather than supermarkets. I thought really hard about my packaging of items in my weekly shop and changed items or bought an alternative if it was not waste free. I will definitely make some changes but not all of them all of the time. Kids found it hard without their crisps and yoghurts. But will try to wean them off slowly.

Question 7: Were there any difficulties you had in trying to achieve a Waste Free Week?

Participants were asked what difficulties they faced during the week, and a variety of different responses were received. The data has been reduced down into several general and reoccurring themes, and the responses are shown below:



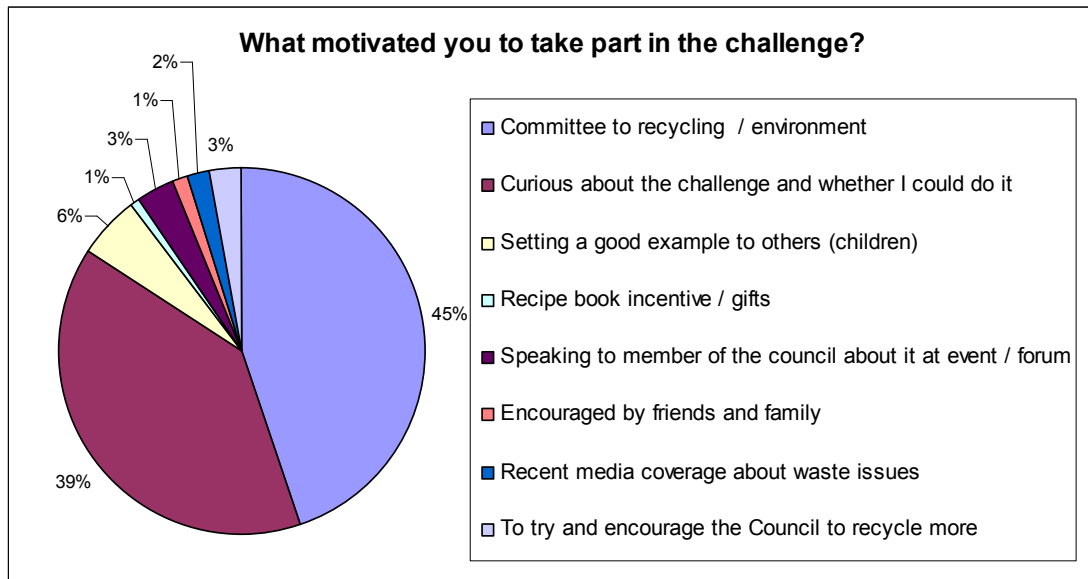
Again, by far the most common response was to do with packaging, and the fact that in many cases and for many products, plastic packaging is unavoidable. Some people found that the challenge was difficult and time consuming, and that they would be unable to sustain it for longer than a week. However 12% of participants said that they didn't find any difficulty in the challenge.

A few selected responses to: *Were there any difficulties you had in trying to achieve a Waste Free Week?*

- We live 8 miles from the supermarket so we can't buy fresh things daily. It is difficult and time consuming to sort everything and store for recycling.
- If I hadn't planned ahead before going out shopping, the convenient choices were not on the whole the best waste free choices.
- No, having been brought up not to waste anything it is quite easy to do.
- We didn't know whether it was better to drive to a recycling centre or bin our non-recyclable waste – carbon emissions vs. landfill.
- Yes, mainly financial constraints and deciding what to compromise on – healthy eating, reducing packaging, affording alternatives. Often foods wrapped in paper are premium products and are much more expensive. It is virtually impossible not to buy anything in plastic packaging.
- I don't think anyone could achieve a permanent Waste Free Week lifestyle. There are lots of things still pre-packaged which we can't do without – cotton buds, jiffy bags etc. There would need to be big changes from supermarkets and all of us.
- I love yoghurt but most containers aren't recyclable. Biggest challenge is storing stuff which can only be recycled through recycling sites e.g. cooking fat, batteries, to keep them until you have enough to go to the recycling centre.
- Trying to buy fruit and veg when short of time. Getting the other members of the family involved. Need a database on the internet of what can be recycled. Talking to people from different areas which have different recycling rules.
- Had to try and find items that the kids could have/like to eat that was waste free. Was very difficult to find things for a fussy child but will try my hardest to win him round and wean him off his favourite items with waste free ones. Also the prices of some of the items will have a bearing in the future.

Question 8: What motivated you to take part in the challenge?

There were two prominent strands of answer to this question, though they tie in with each other.



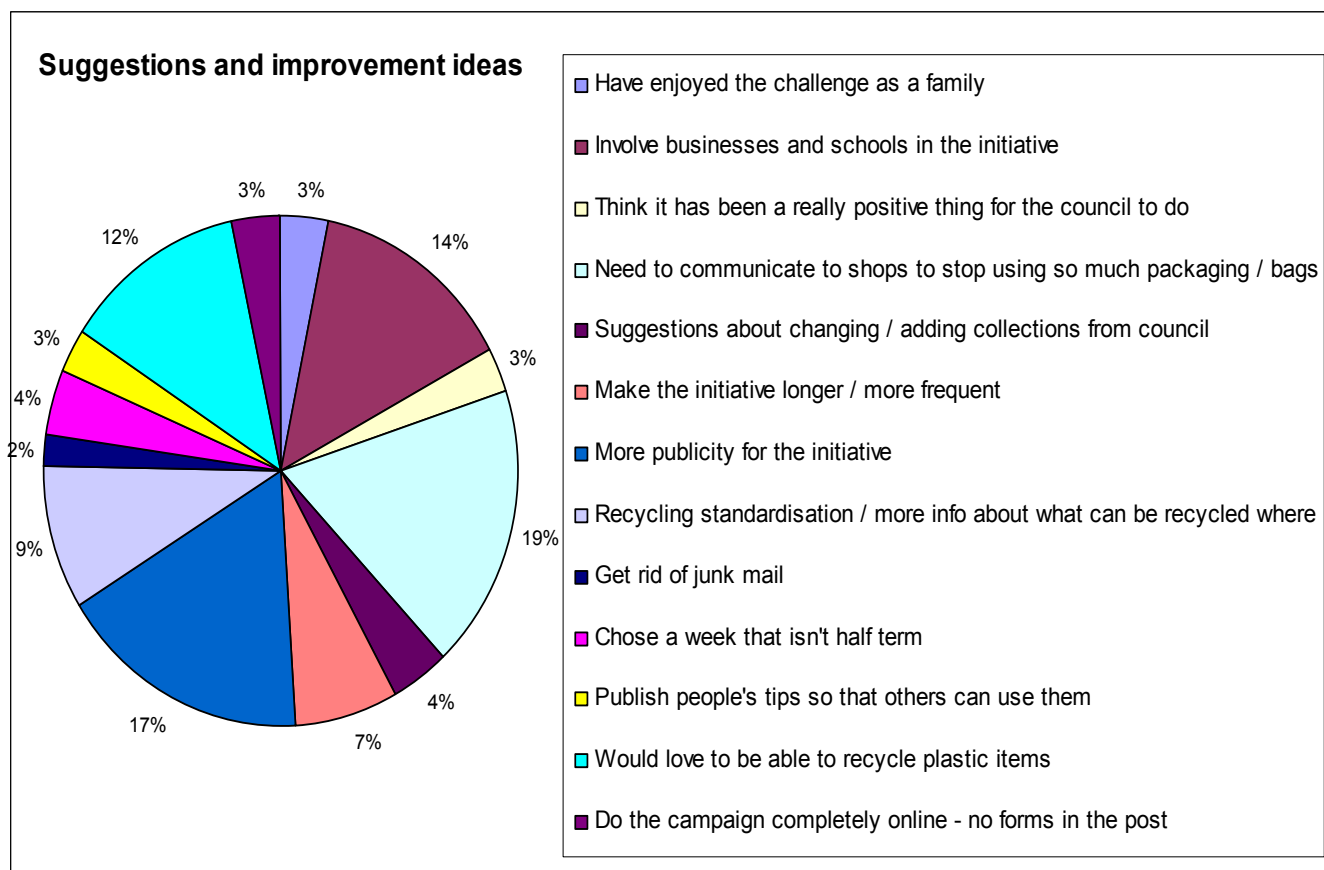
The majority of people felt that it was an important initiative to take part in, and were committed to doing what they could for the environment. Many people also wanted to see whether it was something were personally able to achieve, which shows that Waste Free Week was also seen as an interesting experiment, something people were willing to take part in, as they were easily able to measure the results – the success – of their part in the process themselves.

A few selected responses to: *What motivated you to take part in the challenge?*

- I am a registered childminder, so I wanted to set a good example to the children I care for. And I wanted to see if I could improve and cut down further on rubbish.
- We all need to change how we think about waste so I tried to throw away less.
- Half term challenge for the whole family.
- Environmental protection, avoiding waste in all senses (economic, financial, environmental) and also as a Councillor 'setting an example.'
- We have been recycling for some time now. I feel very uncomfortable about the amount of waste we produce and want to help to do something about it. My grandchildren have also been very interested in this.
- I thought we shopped and recycled pretty well but that it would make the whole family more aware of waste. I learnt that there is definitely room for improvement.
- The more waste the council has to deal with the higher the cost of waste disposal. Therefore the higher my community charges. So if we help you then perhaps you can help us with reduced charges.
- I am keen on recycling, like a challenge and very pleased with the surprise gift of a Hessian bag so felt I wanted to try the week.

Question 9: Have you got any suggestions or ideas for improvement for a future Waste Free Week, or any other comments?

This was a much harder subject to categorise, as the suggestions and comments about Waste Free Week were very varied. What was clear was that people who took part thought that it was a positive thing, and highlighted a few areas where it could be improved should the initiative be repeated. The main topics that were covered are shown below.



There were five prominent areas of comment or suggestion that were fed back through the report forms. These were:

1. The 'waste free' message needs to be communicated to shops so that they stop using so much packaging / bags.
2. The initiative would have benefited from more publicity beforehand, as lots of people the participants talked to hadn't heard about it.
3. Schools and business could be involved, to spread the message further.
4. People would like to be able to recycle plastic items other than plastic bottles, and feel this would make a huge difference to the amount of waste thrown away.
5. People would benefit from there being more information about what can be recycled where – household collections, recycling centres, special collection points etc.

A few selected responses to: *Have you got any suggestions or ideas for improvement for a future Waste Free Week, or any other comments?*

- It has been good fun as a family trying to come up with all the ways we can reuse things instead of throwing them away. E.g. bird feeders from milk containers, children's junk modelling.
- I would like to know if the refuse collections have noticed any reduction in the overall amount of rubbish thrown out. We don't have a recycling collection – it would be a lot easier for those less committed (and without transport to the recycling depots) if we did.
- Encourage companies and charities to use compostable wrappings for post. More things can be recycled and we would if there was a recycling point closer than Fakenham. To make it worthwhile we have to store rubbish until there is sufficient to make such a trip. And this poses space and health issues. If temporary recycling points could come to us on a monthly basis, in a central car park or school playground, this would encourage more recycling.
- Perhaps advertise more – if I hadn't come into the forum in Norwich I wouldn't have been aware of the Waste Free Week.
- Trying to get the county and local councils to work towards standardisation. At present there is still a lot of confusion about what you can and cannot recycle. For a future Waste Free Week we would need a detailed (recyclable) sheet of what we can recycle where.
- My conclusion was how little supermarkets and suppliers have changed to reduce packaging and wondered how much they could do if the focus was changed. How could consumers bring about change – returning all unnecessary packaging to supermarkets or their chairmen. I think many people might have been put off by being asked to achieve the impossible – should focus more on reducing waste rather than getting rid of it all together.
- One week is not long enough to achieve a realistic difference for our household. The most useful thing was speaking to the people in Waitrose as I was unsure about a lot of items that I could recycle. It would be really useful to have a website where people could check which items were recyclable for their council.
- I challenged my Morrisons manager to do Waste Free Week. Next year, get suppliers involved.
- I don't have a rubbish bin in my kitchen, just a small bag. I have a large bag for recyclables and a bucket for food waste, so it encourages the rest of the family to be rubbish aware.
- Say more in the advertising of how you need to track your waste for a week first to have something to compare. Get local shops to support it and then you could list them on a website, e.g. greengrocers who use paper bags, places that sell dry goods by weight, or butchers who will let me use my own containers. I think people are afraid to ask as they don't want to look stupid or weird.

Question 10: Participants' top tip on how food waste could be reduced.

We received very varied – and original – tips for reducing food waste. A few examples are shown below:

- Grow your own veg – cheap / no waste packaging / make your own compost / zero food miles / fresh / high nutritional / seasonal.
- Know what can go into your compost bin: coffee grounds, toilet roll inners and receipts.
- Be mindful of the fact that in making this special effort work for Waste Free Week, that you can do it thence on.
- My partner didn't want me to put the bin outside, so I put things on top of it, making it harder to use. This makes you think whether you really need to use it.
- Parents could give their children competitions to see who could recycle the most in a given period and give the winner a prize. Children could also be encouraged to produce less waste by eating fruit rather than crisps and sweets, thus fitting in with a healthier lifestyle as well.
- Plan ahead and before you throw anything away ask yourself if it can be used again for another purpose – most of the time it can.
- You don't have to use plastic bags in supermarkets to put your fruit and veg in. Put them loose in your trolley and then your own bag when it has been through the checkout.
- Keep your recycling bin near to the house and the rubbish/waste bin further away to encourage recycling. Reuse cereal boxes to post delicate items, or cut them up to reuse as note cards for shopping lists etc. Reuse glass jars for all sorts of things – spice jars, soup jars to keep soup in a fridge. Use them to keep coins in for bus fares, dinner money etc. If you use a lemon to squeeze onto salads or drinks, finish off using it by running it around sinks and cookers to clean off grease – saves cleaning product use so recycling waste cleaning containers. Use a 'microfibre' duster instead of the traditional dusters. You'll need less or no polish and so reduce aerosols thrown away to practically zero.
- If you have any children in nappies, use washable ones! If you are washing the nappies anyway, wash the wipes as well to get more use/waste less. Use 'washable wipes' available from real nappy suppliers and/or baby wipes that are biodegradable that can go on the compost after several uses and washes, when they finally fall apart.
- Keep your reusable carrier bags on you at all times, move your bin from its usual place and put a tub for recyclables in its place, then if it is recyclable you can throw it straight in. It makes you think about where to put items instead of automatically throwing them out, also when you have a party use plates and bowls you can wash up or borrow a friend's. It reduces waste and saves money buying paper ones.
- We put some of our plastic wrappers (crisp packets etc) in a warm oven for several seconds to shrink them. We then made them into badges / magnets.
- If you have an open fire, use all unrecyclable paper, card and envelopes to light fires and help reduce energy bills. Could also ask neighbours for theirs. A place (such as covered skip or garage) in every village/community where people can take non-perishable waste for others to use – e.g. scrap wood, ends of paint, small, unwanted furniture – anything unwanted which others could then just take away (like Freecycle but more local and including those without internet).
- Become lunch buddies with one or two colleagues at work. The idea is that you each make lunch one day, and on the other one of two days it is their turn. This way you never get bored with your own food, you are less likely to resort to buying food that comes intensively packaged but still only have to make lunch once for every two or three home-made lunches you eat.

Conclusions

The first Waste Free Week initiative organised by the Norfolk Waste Partnership can be considered a huge success. With 500 people from 215 households taking part and providing detailed feedback on how well they did, and what problems they came up against along the way.

The spread of people taking part across the districts was fairly even, with all seeing between 20 and 45 people getting involved in Waste Free Week apart from Great Yarmouth. Overall, 83% of the people who returned completed report forms saw some kind of reduction in their waste from the levels they were seeing before taking part, with 23% of people seeing a 50% or more reduction. The average household waste reduction as a result of taking part in the Waste Free Week was 30%.

57% of people said that they recycled more during Waste Free Week, while of the 43% who said they recycled no more or less than usual, many reported that the reason for this was that they were being much more vigilant about everything they bought and so while their waste reduced, their recycling did also as they were buying less packaging all together.

When reporting which materials were still being thrown away during Waste Free Week, 50% of people reported that plastic packaging was still the main problem, as there is currently no alternative to sending it to landfill. Food waste was also a significant problem.

One of the main reasons for running the Waste Free Week was to get people to think about their habits, and what small changes they could make in their lives which would result in them producing less waste. Of the changed people made, the most popular one was choosing items to buy which had minimal packaging, or packaging that could be recycled, with 24% of people picking this as their main change. If this were to become a wide-spread trend, then it would make shops and producers think about the way they packaged and sold their items, and so is a small but positive step towards county-wide waste reduction.

Following on from this, when reporting on the difficulties people faced with running a successful Waste Free Week, over 40% of people said that they could not avoid plastic packaging altogether when shopping. This demonstrates that many people feel that shops and suppliers provide the biggest barrier to being waste free, being forced to buy items with non-recyclable packaging due to a lack of alternatives.

When asked for the reason they took part in the challenge, nearly 50% said they were committed to the environment and recycling, perhaps demonstrating that those who decided to take part are already good recyclers.

However 39% commented that they saw it as a challenge and wanted to see how well they could do it. This indicates that the idea of a Waste Free Week – a concentrated time when people can really focus on the amount of waste they produce – has the potential for reaching harder to reach groups, as it is viewed by some as a challenge with a visible result – and therefore achievement – at the end. The short time period also means that it is a focussed period of time and not too demanding – though the majority of people who took part this time round said they would continue with the changes they had made. Only 1% said they were encouraged to take part by the incentives of a recipe book and reusable shopping

bag, suggesting that the personal achievement and positive impact on the environment were enough of an incentive for taking part.

Suggestions for any improvements to the initiative were varied, but many people wanted to get shops and schools involved, and there were also comments that the whole idea could have had more publicity to encourage more people to take part.

When asked for a top tip on how others could reduce their waste, the replies were enthusiastic, varied and many were original. People either provided tips they had discovered or had passed down to them and were already a part of their everyday lives, or they discovered new ideas during the Waste Free Week and wanted to share them.

The first Waste Free Week run by the Norfolk Waste Partnership was very successful, and the enthusiasm and feedback from those who took part, made the staff time and resources that went into setting up the initiative worthwhile. It is definitely something we would consider repeating, albeit with more publicity, in an attempt to reach more people.

It is an interesting, challenging but ultimately achievable introduction to the subject of waste reduction, and shows that many small ideas, which seem effortless once they are ingrained in an everyday routine, really can make a difference to the amount of waste households produce. And when householders begin to change their habits, the wider community is invariably affected, as good practice spreads. It is in this way that initiatives such as Waste Free Week can have a positive and lasting effect on the amount of waste being produced, as well as the recycling and composting levels, across Norfolk.