

FURNITURE RECYCLING SCHEME

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with details of local initiatives that are in place in connection with the recycling and re-use of household furniture and what benefits these can have to the residents of the Rochford District.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The following motion was agreed at Council on 29 July 2003 and referred to the Community Services Committee to report back to Council by 31 December 2003.

“This Council recognises that a furniture recycling scheme, along the lines of the Exeter Turn-Table Project, can improve the quality of life for many residents of the Rochford District. Council will undertake a community consultation and a feasibility study with support agencies, of the opportunities to provide or provide support for such a project.”

- 2.2 Since this motion was agreed, the recycling team has carried out research into community furniture re-use projects and in particular, what initiatives are already in place locally.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Furniture re-use schemes that are currently operating tend to be run as a community recycling project, sometimes in partnership with a Local Authority or the business sector. The principles of such projects are that unwanted furniture, of reasonable/good condition, is donated by the general public, collected by local projects free of charge and then sold to people on low incomes.
- 3.2 Unlike other types of recycling, furniture re-use / recycling appears not to have a problem with finding an end market for the goods. From data obtained from the Furniture Recycling Network, many projects have found that demand exceeds supply by up to 50%.
- 3.3 Furniture re-use projects are beneficial in several ways. There is an obvious environmental benefit to these types of schemes, as goods that would otherwise end up in landfill, are being re-used. This can be an incentive for Local Authorities to support such schemes, as if they are diverting materials

normally being collected by Local Authorities, then this can reduce the collection and disposal cost for the Authority. It can also contribute to its recycling percentage due to the slight reduction in tonnage being landfilled.

- 3.4 There can also be a significant social benefit gained from such schemes. Firstly, the initial collection, restoration and sale of the furniture is carried out by volunteers, trainees or paid staff, often coming from backgrounds that could otherwise possibly exclude them from the workforce e.g. O.A.P's, people with physical and mental disabilities and the long term unemployed. Secondly, the schemes provide furniture and other goods for a person on a low income, with the obvious benefits that that provides.

4 CURRENT SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE LOCALITY

- 4.1 There are no furniture re-use / recycling schemes currently based in the Rochford District that handle a variety of goods. Seetec College runs a computer recycling scheme and has recently put in an application for funding via the Community Recycling and Economic Development Fund (CRED) to set up a new initiative called 'Restore', which will continue with computer re-use and also introduce other small electrical items.
- 4.2 The scheme would be based in a large warehouse on the Southend / Rochford border and contain a large workshop, with a training facility, and also a counter where goods can be sold directly from the premises. One of the main functions of the scheme, aside from redirecting waste away from landfill, will be to train long term unemployed, with a goal of giving people the skills and confidence to get back to work. It is also hoped that the scheme will benefit Rochford residents by both the supply of discount computers and other electrical items.
- 4.3 The Council has written a letter of support for the scheme to assist Seetec with their funding bid and could support 'Restore' in the future through advertisement of the scheme in Council publications.
- 4.4 Seetec have also considered the potential for setting up a large scale furniture re-use centre, as part of the 'Restore' project . This could be based at the same location as the 'Restore' warehouse and therefore expand the range of service offered. The possibility of the Hamelin Trust being the partners in this scheme has been discussed.
- 4.5 There are currently two furniture re-use schemes based in the Southend Borough that also cover collections over the Rochford District. One is run by the Hamelin Trust and the other run by SAVS Community Furniture Recycling Project.

4.6 SAVS Community Furniture Recycling Project

4.6.1 Funded by SAVS and Southend Borough Council, the furniture project operates from premises in Westcliff, consisting of two paid staff and approximately four volunteers. They collect good quality furniture and electrical items for free from Southend and Rochford but do not do any refurbishment (only very minor repairs). The items are then sold at discount rates to anyone, via the shop outlet.

4.6.2 However, they do not collect constantly and at the present time collections will not be re-programmed until the level of stock has been reduced, due to the fact that their premises are only small and have a limited capacity.

4.7 The Hamelin Trust

4.7.1 The Hamelin Trust is a large charity that operates a number of different facilities across Essex. The Furniture Re-Use Project is based in Victoria Avenue in Southend and they operate a free collection service that includes the Rochford area (in addition to other areas such as Grays, Southend and Billericay). They then sell the goods in five shops located in Westcliff, Wickford, Billericay, Laindon and Grays. The project is operating on a self sufficient basis due to the level of income that it gains from the sales and also any other donations they received.

4.7.2 The Re-Use Centre has a large number of staff associated with the scheme. The people that work there have special needs, working part-time, one day per week and then they have the opportunity to do further voluntary work if they wish. They have a holistic approach to the business, looking upon it more as an initiative to help the community e.g. employing people with special needs and providing them with special skills, ranging from general office duties through to specific skilled work.

4.7.3 The scheme asks for furniture in good condition (certain types of furniture require fire labels after 1988). However, they do have facilities and skills to restore furniture, including paint effects and french polishing. They do not collect fridges/freezers or washing machines, unless they are less than two years old and in mint condition, cookers, microwaves, furniture and carpets. However, in addition to general good quality furniture, they will also collect t.v's, hi-fi's, p.c's, vacuum cleaners, lamps and rugs.

4.7.4 They are keen to expand the service further in the future but would be happy now for the Council to actively promote the service to the residents of the District.

4.7.5 Although the Hamelin Trust currently operates in the Rochford District, there seems to be a general lack of awareness of their services. By raising the profile of this project, the Council would be increasing the amount of furniture

they receive and therefore reducing our quantity of waste going to landfill. There would also be the potential to work with them in the future to expand operations and a possible link with the Seetec Re-use scheme as previously mentioned.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The initial set up of a community furniture recycling scheme would be a very large and complicated task. At present the Council could better utilise the resources already available in the locality, such as the Hamelin Trust, by advertising the service to local residents. None of the above schemes are self sufficient, which supports the fact that additional funding needs to be made available for any similar schemes and needs to be driven at the community level. Government funding can be available for such projects, principally via its Community Recycling and Economic Development Fund (CRED) but Local Authorities could not be acting as the lead, as this funding is only made to registered charities or not for profit organisations. Therefore, it would seem appropriate at this stage, to take a decision to positively promote to residents of the District, the service offered by The Hamelin Trust.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 Operational Risk

The Council would want to ensure that any operator of the furniture recycling scheme was undertaking the service in a professional and efficient manner.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The effective promotion of a furniture recycling scheme within the District would contribute to the Council's recycling performance.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

To agree to the Council actively promoting the services of the Hamelin Trust Furniture Recycling Scheme to its residents as part of its recycling initiatives through its publications such as Rochford District Matters, other promotional material and through the Council's website.

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Background Papers:

None.

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