



Taking Stock

Perception vs the reality
of who benefits from
clothes donated to
textile recycling banks.



Methodology

This research was carried out between February - May 2019 and comprised the following elements:

- 1** A Public Opinion online survey conducted by YouGov for TRAIID gathering the views of the UK public who had used a textile recycling bank in the last 12 months. The sample size was 1,126 and weighted to be representative of British adults who use textile banks according to gender, age, social demographic and education. This survey was carried out between the 15th and 23rd February 2019.
- 2** A Freedom of Information (FOI) request submitted by TRAIID to 342 Local Authorities in England requesting the numbers of textile recycling banks placed on council land operated by commercial companies and charities. 95% of Local Authorities responded. The FOI was carried out between February and March 2019.
- 3** Literature review: evidence gathering from key reports.

About TRAIID

TRAIID is a registered UK charity (297489) working for 20-years to tackle and solve the problems caused by producing, consuming and wasting clothes. Keeping clothes in use for longer is at the core of TRAIID's work. We do this by providing convenient ways for the UK public to reuse clothes, while delivering sustainable education to people of all ages to raise awareness of the powerful environmental and social benefits of reducing our clothing footprint.

TRAIID commits the funds raised from reusing clothes to global projects benefiting the people and places making our clothes. From supporting cotton farmers to grow organic, to helping retailers to eradicate child and bonded labour from their supply chains.

Foreword

In addition to raising around £295m for good causes each year, the charity retail sector makes a huge contribution to our environment. For example, by:

- diverting over 327,000 tonnes of textiles away from landfill and into reuse and recycling;
- saving local authorities £28m of Landfill Tax in the process;
- reducing carbon dioxide emissions by about 7m tonnes through its re-use activities.

TRAID are a particularly good example of this. They do a huge amount to tackle the problems caused by producing, consuming and disposing of clothes. And they practice what they preach by collecting items for reuse through their network of textile banks. It is fair to say that if you want an antidote to fast fashion, or an ethical place to donate your unwanted clothes, they are the people for you.

Charities like TRAIID, and our 400 other members, are only able to achieve these fantastic outcomes when people are easily able to donate used items of clothing to them. To a large extent this relies on support from local authorities who govern rules around parking and unloading on high streets, and of course own a lot of land where textile banks can be located.

As this report demonstrates, a number of councils are not being helpful towards charity shops in this second regard.

Some councils do not provide any collection bank facilities at all, and of those that do, only a quarter exclusively give these banks to charity collectors. In fact, TRAIID reveal how in some cases they have been asked to remove their collection banks by councils, only to see them replaced with banks run by commercial companies.

“TRAID ... do a huge amount to tackle the problems caused by producing, consuming and disposing of clothes”

Such policies seem to be at odds with public awareness and public attitudes. The report's unique and ground-breaking polling has demonstrated that fully **two thirds of textile bank users have no idea that some of the textile banks they are putting their clothing into are run by commercial operators.**

When armed with this knowledge, most people have a clear preference for giving their clothes to a charity operator. 88% would prefer to use a textile bank run by a charity and 79% think local councils should award all textile bank contracts to charities.

"There should be far more transparency in this area with clear labelling on each bank"

This seems a clear argument for TRAIID's first recommendation, that there should be far more transparency in this area with clear labelling on each bank. This would help residents in every community to make an informed choice about where to send their donations. **No wonder 95% of people surveyed support this kind of transparency – we would too.**

We also fully endorse TRAIID's other recommendations which are flexible and reasonable enough in allowing councils to still take commercial decisions, but would not remove any more of these vital sources of stock from our communities.

We look forward to working closely with TRAIID to present this excellent report, and to assist them in promoting its recommendations to policy makers in central and local government. Let's get to work.

Robin Osterley

The Charity Retail Association's CEO

88%

would prefer to
use a textile bank
run by a charity



Summary

This report presents the findings of research aiming to gain insight into the UK public's knowledge about how textile recycling banks are managed, who benefits from the clothes put into them and what motivates local residents to use textiles banks to recycle clothes. **For the purposes of this report, we define textile banks as 'Metal containers placed on a piece of land for the public to use to donate clothes for reuse and recycling'.**

This research reveals that the majority of textile bank users expect their clothes to support charities. However, during the last decade, with the increase in the value of second-hand textiles, there seems to be more commercial companies running textile banks on behalf of local authorities.

The budget cuts that local authorities are currently experiencing has pushed many to seek new ways to generate income. Increasingly, some local authorities are raising extra revenue by charging textile recycling collectors a fee – a fixed price per tonne of clothing collected – to place banks on council land.

The impact of textile bank removals for TRAIID

Since 2009, the removal of TRAIID's textile recycling banks from council-owned land to be replaced by commercial companies and resulted in:

An annual loss of 200 tonnes of clothes, shoes and textile equivalent to stocking two TRAIID charity shops

An annual potential loss of over £850,000 of TRAIID's charitable income.

Yet, the higher the price gets, and the more common it becomes to contract out the right to collect textiles on council-owned land, the harder it is for charities operating textile banks to compete with the prices offered by commercial companies.

If charging expensive fees for placing and operating textile banks on council land becomes the new normal, it poses a serious threat to the incomes of charities such as TR Aid.

This research found that **84% of textile bank users believe that donating their unwanted clothes to textile banks is an important way to support charities.** In addition, **88% overwhelmingly prefer to use a textile bank run by a not-for-profit charity,** rather than a commercial company.

Key Findings

Research surveying textile bank users has found that:



66%

would reduce or
stop donating clothes
to textile banks run
by commercial
companies



Local Authorities and Textile Banks

This report also uses information gathered by TRAIID under a Freedom of Information (FOI)¹ request. The FOI request asked local authorities to confirm the number of textile banks on council-owned land which are operated by charities and the number operated by commercial companies.

Based on the answers received, the FOI revealed that:

38% of local authorities only have textiles banks run by commercial companies

25% of local authorities only have textile banks run by charities

36% of local authorities have textile banks run by charities *and* commercial companies

13.8% of local authorities do not have any textile banks

11% of local authorities collect clothing only at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)

Although many local authorities across the country continue to work with charities to increase textile recycling and reuse rates in their local communities, this data shows that most councils in England now allow more commercial companies than charities to operate textile banks. This is taking place at the expense of charities as charity-led textile banks are usually removed to accommodate a commercial company.

This does not only result in direct losses due to charity-led textile banks being squeezed out in favour of commercial companies, but as local authorities increasingly contract out the right to collect textile for substantial fees, charities are often unable to enter the bidding process due to unaffordability.

Yet, this survey shows that this is not what textile bank users want. **79% state that they want local authorities to award all textile bank contracts**

to charities rather than commercial companies. In addition, **74% said they think that councils should make raising funds for charities the top priority when awarding contracts to collect textiles.**

The findings show that the majority of those surveyed were unclear about who profits from the clothes they put into textile banks.

86% were unaware that commercial companies may sometimes pay local authorities to place a textile bank on council land

67% were unaware that textile banks are sometimes run by commercial companies

43% did not know if the textile banks they used were run by commercial companies or charities

Only 5% of people expected the clothes they put into textile banks to be sold to make profits for commercial companies.

Textile bank users ... assume that their clothes donations benefit charities and not companies.

67% of textile bank users report that they are unaware that textile banks are sometimes run by commercial companies indicating that they assume that their clothes donations benefit charities and not commercial companies. In some cases, clothes *donations* – commonly understood as a gift for a charity or to benefit a specific charitable cause – are being given to commercial companies without the donors' knowledge.

In light of these findings, this report calls for more transparency and better communication with the public regarding who profits from the sale of clothes put into textile banks. Textile bank users agree. **95% of those surveyed believe that textile banks should be clearly labelled to show who benefits from the sale of clothes.**

Greater transparency could influence the donation habits of textile bank users. When asked, **66% of those surveyed said that they would reduce or stop donating clothes to textile banks run by commercial companies.** However, this is not a reason to keep local residents uninformed or confused about who profits from the clothes they donate. On the contrary, these findings reveal an opportunity to *increase* reuse and recycling rates by harnessing the public's motivation to support charitable causes through their clothes donations.

Recommendation

- 1** Greater transparency about who benefits from the clothes put into textile banks on council sites. For example, clear labelling on textile banks detailing the organisations profiting from the proceeds.

- 2** A commitment from local authorities to ensure that at least 60% of textile banks on council sites are charity-led. This will also make it easier for local authorities to meet their responsibilities under The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012² to consider the social value offered by potential suppliers in enhancing the social, environmental, economic and general well-being of the community.

- 3** A commitment from local authorities which seek to raise funds from textile bank contracts that existing charity textile bank providers will not be removed, and that commercial companies will be placed in addition to, not instead of, charities.

1. These findings were based on a FOI request submitted between February and March 2019. 342 Local authorities across England were contacted. Of those, 325 local authorities or 95% submitted a response.

2. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 became law on 8th March 2012 and requires public sector organisations such as local authorities to consider the potential for suppliers to deliver services that enhance the social, environmental, economic and general wellbeing of the area and people with whom they will be working. Thanks to this act, there is an emerging emphasis on social value questions in tenders and Pre-Qualification Questionnaires, showing the increasingly important nexus between social value and tendering.

References

95%

want textile banks
to be clearly labelled
so they know who
benefits from their
clothes donations.



67%

are unaware that
textile banks are
sometimes run
by commercial
companies



Contact:

Andrea Speranza
Head of Campaigns and Education
andrea@traid.org.uk

Published by TRAITD in September 2019

Written by Andrea Speranza
Edited by Leigh Mcalea
Designed by zerofee.org

While TRAITD has taken all possible steps to ensure the accuracy of this report, it does not accept responsibility for any loss, damages or costs experienced by or arising from reliance on this report. Readers are responsible for assessing the accuracy of the contents of this document.

UK registered charity number 297489
Find out more at www.traid.org.uk



TRAID

51 – 53 High Road
London N22 6BH

info@traid.org.uk
www.traid.org.uk

 **@TRAID**

UK registered charity number 297489