Taking Stock

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

traid

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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 TRAID 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 TRAID 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 TRAID

TRAID 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 TRAID'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.

TRAID 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.

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

Charities like TRAID, 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, TRAID 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.

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 TRAID'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 TRAID'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 TRAID 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 TRAID

Since 2009, the removal of TRAID'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 TRAID charity shops

An annual potential loss of over £850,000 of TRAID'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 TRAID.

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:

Textile bank users

- **88%** prefer to use a textile bank run by a charity
- **84%** believe that donating clothes is an important way to support charities
- **67%** are unaware that textile banks are sometimes run by commercial companies
- **68%** said that local authorities should not charge charities for the right to place and operate textile banks
- **95%** believe that textile banks should be clearly labelled to show who is benefiting from the sale of the clothes
- **66%** would stop donating entirely, or donate less frequently, if their local textile bank was run by a commercial company
- **79%** think local councils should award all textile bank contracts to charities
- **56%** would sign a petition to encourage their local authority to award textile bank contracts to charities

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 TRAID 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 2012)[2] 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.**

References

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.

The benefits of textile reuse

Producing new clothes has a significant impact on limited natural resources.[1] Currently, the fashion industry is ranked fourth in terms of its negative environmental impact, just below housing, transport and food,[2] while globally, textile production contributes more to climate change than international aviation and shipping combined.[3]

What is fast fashion?

"Fast fashion refers to clothing, which is produced relatively quickly to capture current trends, but which as a result of typically being poorly made (for example in terms of durability) often ends up as waste following a short lifespan.

The impacts of this are severe, with 300,000 tonnes of clothing in UK household residual waste going to landfill or incineration in 2015. We want to address this, in line with the 'polluter pays' principle. As we consider policy proposals for the environmental impacts of clothes, we will give particular attention to fast fashion including as we consider an EPR for textiles."

Defra's Resource and Waste Strategy for England

Over the last 30-years, fast fashion has become the dominant industry business model on our high streets and online. Rapidly-changing trends and low prices drive people to buy more new clothes than they could possibly wear at an unprecedented rate leading to increased consumption. In 2016, for example, it is estimated that 1,130,000 tonnes of clothing were purchased in the UK a staggering increase of almost 200,000 tonnes from 2012.[4]

Compared to other European countries, the UK consumes the highest number of items of clothes per person[5] and research also suggests that the UK has the lowest expected active life of clothes in Europe of only 3.3 years.[6]

Efforts to encourage the UK public to understand the importance of giving longer life to clothes, and to make reusing them easier, has been shown to reduce the volume of textiles being sent to landfill or incineration.

The charity retail sector plays a key role in collecting unwanted clothes for reuse and recycling. Charity shops are currently the UK's main clothing collection infrastructure, providing a range of services for the reuse or recycling of clothes.[7]

In addition, some charity retailers such as TRAID[8] also offer textile banks to the UK public to collect unwanted clothes for reuse and recycling. The potential benefits of increasing the routes available to the public to reuse and recycle clothes are far reaching and include:

1.a. Environmental savings

The total carbon footprint of clothes in use in the UK increased by 2.2 million tonnes of CO_2e between 2012 – 2016.

Fibre and fabric production are the highest contributor to the carbon footprint of clothes and it is increasing due to the rising demand for clothes and the rapid turnaround of fashion trends.[9]

Moreover, the water footprint of clothing in active use in the UK in 2016, including the water consumed overseas to make our clothes, was 8 billion m^3 of water.[10] It would take the entire population of the UK 276 years to drink this water.

This is why extending the life of our clothes by wearing them for longer, and passing on what we no longer need, is one of the most eco-smart actions that the public can take to reduce the water and carbon footprint of their clothes. Research has shown that for every tonne of clothes reused in charity shops, 11 tonnes of CO_2e is saved.[11]

1.b. Diverting waste from landfill and incineration.

In the UK it is estimated that 300,000 tonnes of clothes are sent to landfill or incineration each year.[12] High levels of textiles in the waste stream cause a wide array of negative environmental impacts. From chemicals leaching into groundwater and soil, to the release of methane emissions - a greenhouse gas twenty times more potent than carbon dioxide and a significant contributor towards global warming and air pollution.

In addition, textile waste is a significant economic cost for local authorities with the standard rate of landfill currently at £91.35 per tonne.[13] According to WRAP, the estimated annual cost to the UK economy of sending clothes and household textiles to landfill is approximately £82 million.[14]

By contrast, the economic benefits delivered by the charity retail sector's work keeping over 327,000 tonnes of textiles out of landfill are estimated to have saved around £28 million in landfill tax.[15]

1.c. Generating income for charitable causes

For many charities, clothes donations made by the UK public are an important source of income, and for some, the only source of income.

For example, between 2008 – 2018, TRAID's work to reuse and resell donated textiles raised £46,946,607 for our charitable objectives to increase textile reuse, to educate the UK public on the environmental and social impacts of clothes and to support global projects improving working practices in the supply and production chains making our clothes.[16]

In addition, the funds raised by UK registered charities from the sale of donated clothes are legally bound to be used to benefit the public.

Certainly, the individual act of donating clothes to charities results in a positive feedback loop for society both in the UK and globally in a multiplicity of ways, from education programmes, to health care, to eradicating global poverty.

References

1. Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group (2017) Pulse of the fashion industry, p.10.

2. WRAP (2017) Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion, p.2.

3. Ellen Macarthur Foundation (2017) A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future, p.20.

4. WRAP (2017) Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion, p.9.

5. EAC (2019) Fixing fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability, p.4.

6. WRAP (2017) Banbury, Mapping clothing impacts in Europe: the environmental cost, prepared by Sarah Gray, p.4.

7. EAC (2019) Fixing fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability, p.43.

8. Other examples of UK charity retailers operating their own textile banks include the British Heart Foundation and Scope.

9. WRAP (2012) Valuing Our Clothes: the evidence base, p.52.

10. WRAP (2017) Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion, p.14.

11. WRAP (2016) Textile Market Situations Report, p.7.

12. WRAP (2017) Valuing Our Clothes: the cost of UK fashion, p.25.

13. www.gov.uk/government/publications/landfill-tax-increase-in-rates/landfill-tax-increase-in-rates (accessed 24 April 2019).

14. Ellen Macarthur Foundation (2017) A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future , p.20.

15. Demos (2016) Shopping for good: the social benefits of charity retail, p.11.

16. https://www.traid.org.uk/traid-projects/ (accessed 24 April 2019).

How textile recycling banks operate

Currently, there are a number of ways local residents can donate clothing for reuse and recycling including bringing clothes to charity shops, putting them into textile banks - metal containers placed on a piece of land for the public to use to donate clothes - or using a Household Waste Recycling Centre.

However, textile banks provide some benefits which other routes to reuse do not offer. For example, textile banks are accessible to local residents at all hours, while the quantity and quality of textiles is easy to monitor and measure including how much is reused vs how much is recycled. In addition, once textile banks have been purchased or obtained from the contractor running costs for local authorities are low.[1]

According to an estimate from the Textile Recycling Association (TRA) there are around 20,000 textile banks across the UK, with England the biggest user of textile banks with approximately 16,000 in operation.[2] Textile banks operate in different ways depending on three key factors:

Location

Typically, textile banks are positioned in places with easy public access including highways (such as a high street), car parks, schools, churches and community centres. Textile banks are usually located on:

– Land owned by local authorities
– Land owned by private companies or individuals

Collectors

There are three main types of collectors operating textile banks:

– Charities
– Commercial companies
– Commercial companies subcontracted by charities

Price

Landowners sometimes charge a fee to allow the collector (whether a charity or commercial company) to place a textile bank on their land. This is usually a fixed price per tonne of clothes collected. The combination of these factors – location, collector, price - results in a variety of textile bank collection scenarios including:

1 Commercial companies run a textile bank collection service. The company gains permission from the landowner to place textile banks. Depending on the agreement made with the landowner, the company may be charged for the right to place the textile bank or there may be no charge. The textile collector sells the clothes donated for profit directly to wholesale markets.

2 Charities run their own textile bank collection service raising income by using the donated clothes to stock its charity shops. Clothes that can't be sold in shops are sold to wholesale markets. The charity gains permission from the landowner – either a local authority or private owner - to place the textile bank. Depending on the agreement made, the charity may be charged for the right to place the textile bank or there may be no charge.

3 Commercial companies pay a charity a fee to use its branding on its textile banks. The textile collector pays for the collection costs and a fee (if required) to the landowner. The textile collector sells the clothes donated for profit.

4 Charities subcontract the textile bank collection service to a commercial company paying them an agreed fee. The charity pays a fee for the collection and a fee (if required) to the landowner. The charity gets the clothes donated and raises income by selling the clothes donated in its charity shops and to wholesale markets.

References

1. Wrap (2016) Textile Collection Guide. A guide for local authorities and textile collectors, p.6.
2. This is an estimated calculation of the number of textile banks in operation from the Textile Recycing Association in the absence of available statistics.

For charity versus for-profit

Textile banks are vital to the ongoing supply of clothes to stock thousands of charity shops. Clothes donated to charities are sold in charity shops (priced per garment) and unsuitable items are sold to wholesale (priced by weight) raising income which is committed to a wide variety of charitable causes for public benefit.

The charitable impacts of clothes donation

Clothes donations made to TRAID's network of textile banks enable us to stock our charity shops and generate funds which we commit to our charitable objectives. Between 2008 – 2018, clothes donations have enabled TRAID to meet its charitable objectives including:

Committing **£46,946,607 of income** to divert textile from the waste stream, educate the UK public on sustainability and support global projects to improve environmental and social conditions in the fashion industry

Educating **89,777** people of all ages on sustainability

Diverting **23,499** tonnes from landfill and incineration

Equivalent to **37,598,400m³** of water and **223,241** tonnes of carbon

Supporting **6,500** cotton farmers in Benin and Ethiopia to convert to organic farming and stop using hazardous chemical pesticides and fertilisers

However, during the last decade, the increase in the value of second-hand textiles seems to have led to an increase in commercial companies operating textile banks on behalf of local authorities.

In addition, deep budget cuts have meant that many councils face increasing challenges to reduce costs and some have looked to textile recycling contracts to raise extra revenue.

This has seen local authorities issuing tenders for contracts to choose a provider to operate textile banks. In most cases, it is the *price* offered by the potential contractor which is given most weight when awarding the contract, rather than for example the social value. The current trend of local authorities looking to generate an income from textile banks seems to be favouring commercial companies.

How losing textile banks impacts charities

In 2016, **TRAID** was asked to remove its charity-led textile banks by Brighton and Hove City Council and were replaced by a commercial collector.

The removal of 21 charity-led textile bank sites in place since 2006

A loss of 91 tonnes of clothes, shoes and textiles

The loss of £160,000 of annual charitable income

While charities are able to enter the tender process, they are often unable to compete on price because commercial companies are able to take bigger risks on the price and length of contract. For example, in 2012, a consortia of seven London councils began a procurement process for a pan-London framework for the collection of textiles from recycling banks.[1] TRAID was unable to bid for the contract due to unaffordability.

The 'winner takes all' model of textile tender processes often sees charities being removed from prime local authority textile bank sites resulting in a loss of valuable charitable income.[2]

Yet, the additional social and economic benefits to local authorities offered by charity-led collectors far outweigh the sole economic benefits offered by commercial companies. For example, charities add enormous social value

to communities by raising funds for an array of causes from health care to fighting poverty. They are also more likely to reuse and resell donations locally and nationally through charity shops selling less abroad.

The vital role played by UK charities in encouraging a culture of reusing clothes through their 11,249 charity shops,[3] is acknowledged by Defra in its latest Waste and Resources Strategy:

Charities add enormous social value to communities by raising funds for an array of causes from health care to fighting poverty

"Collaborative action, especially with third-sector organisations is an important part of effective support for reuse. Second-hand clothing for example, largely by the charity sector, have been very successful in the UK with the approximately 323,000 tonnes going through charity shops in 2016/17."[4]

In addition, according to the Charity Retail Association (CRA), in 2018, the UK charity retail sector contributed over £295m to charitable causes while adding value and opportunities for local communities including:

Volunteering. The charity retail sector is the biggest source of volunteer opportunities in the UK with around 230,000 people currently volunteering in the sector

Employment. 23,000 people are employed in the charity retail sector creating stable and sustainable local jobs.

Thriving high streets. Charity shops help to attract footfall to high streets while providing a supply of affordable sustainably sourced clothing.

However, the escalating pressure that charities are facing from having to compete with commercial companies in recent years represents an unprecedented threat to one of their most important fundraising avenues.[5]

The efforts from charities and the CRA to highlight this threat to local authorities, so far, seems to have been unheard with many charity

textile banks replaced by commercial companies. However, what cannot be ignored is the call of local authorities' own residents to prioritise charitable causes when it comes to who benefits from the clothes they donate to textile banks.

References

1. https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2012/may/14/charities-textile-collection (accessed 28 May 2019).

2. In 2012, charity textile banks were removed from 140 sites across Hertfordshire when its 10 local authorities collectively awarded a commercial company a three-year contract in exchange for a payment of £800,000 a year. This resulted in the removal of all charity-led textile banks on council land. https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2012/may/14/charities-textile-collection (accessed 28 May 2019).

3. https://www.charityretail.org.uk/charity-retail-association-maps-every-charity-shop-in-the-uk (accessed 24 April 2019).

4. Defra (2018) Our Waste, our Resources: a strategy for England, p.57.

5. https://www.charityretail.org.uk/charity-shops-the-ethical-and-sustainable-alternative-to-fast-fashion (accessed 28 May 2019).

What the public wants

This research, as well as other significant studies, reveal that the single biggest motivator for the public to donate clothes is to support a charity.

Crucially, **88% of textile bank users overwhelmingly preferred to give their unwanted clothes to a charity-led bank**.

Public perceptions

84% regard textile banks as an important way to support charities

88% prefer to use a textile bank run by a charity

74% believe that using private companies to collect clothes from textile banks reduces the opportunity to support charities

79% think that local authorities should award all textile bank contracts to charities

When residents put unwanted clothes into a textile bank, most consider it a *donation*, commonly assumed to be something gifted to a charity and to benefit a cause, not to generate profit for a commercial company. Currently however, in the UK, more local authorities are placing textile banks run by commercial companies, rather than charities.[1]

Local authorities

38% work exclusively with commercial companies

36% work with both commercial companies and charities

25% work exclusively with charities

An important challenge for local authorities contracting textile banks to commercial companies is that residents report that they would reduce or stop donating their clothes to a commercially run textile bank.

This could result in a fall in textile reuse rates at a time of rising clothes production and consumption.

However, maximising financial revenue should not trump the environmental imperative to divert textiles from the waste stream, increase reuse and reduce greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to climate change.

Nor should the focus on revenue ignore the preference of residents to donate clothes to charity-led textile banks.

There are still many local authorities that do understand the additional social value which charity textile collectors offer and currently, 25% of local authorities in England work exclusively with charities, while 36% have a mix of charity and commercial collectors.

There are still many local authorities that do understand the additional social value which charity textile collectors offer...

There are many examples of excellent partnerships between local authorities and charities, and a significant number of councils acknowledge the environmental and social contributions of charities and understand the importance of supporting them.

References

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.

TRAID in partnership with the London Borough of Hackney

Working in partnership with the London Borough of Hackney since 1999, TRAID runs a network of 85 charity textile banks and now also offers a free home collection service to every household in the borough. These services support thousands of local residents to boost clothes reuse and recycling significantly reducing the borough's carbon, water and waste footprint.

TRAID's education team also works closely with Hackney Council to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of our clothes at repair cafes, workshops and schools across the borough. At free repair cafés, local people come together to learn how to extend the life of their clothes, rather than throwing them away. In Hackney schools, TRAID's reuse and recycling activities have enabled thousands of children and young people to explore the impacts of fast fashion on the environment, and what we can do about it.

Partnership summary

3,548,155 kilos – that's 12,418,542 items of clothes – diverted from landfill

33,707 tonnes of carbon emissions saved

Equivalent to 5,677,048 litres of water

Cut the amount of landfill tax by £196,066

> "Hackney Council has worked closely with TRAID for over a decade and, together, through our network of banks across the borough, our residents have diverted over three million kilos of textiles away from landfill to be reused, supporting good causes in the UK and overseas. International textile manufacturing alone produces in excess of 1.2 billion tonnes of planet-heating carbon dioxide annually. We cannot address the climate emergency unless we tackle fast fashion. That's why we're committed to drastically reducing resource depletion, waste, and greenhouse gases by continuing and developing our relationship with TRAID. We know that every item donated makes a difference to people's lives on many different levels."

Cllr Jon Burke, Hackney Council Cabinet Member for Energy, Waste, Transport and Public Realm

95%

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

The need for transparency

Textile bank users care about what happens to their donations and want to know who benefits from their clothes. **72% of those surveyed said they cared about what happened to the clothes they put into textile banks.**

While textile bank users were clear that they expected their clothes to benefit charities rather than commercial companies, the majority surveyed simply did not know that commercial companies often operate textile banks.

Textile bank users were clear that they expected their clothes to benefit charities

The research revealed that the public's expectations about who is benefiting from the clothes they donate to textile banks are not being met. **67% of those surveyed were unaware that textile banks are sometimes run by commercial companies**, nearly half did not know whether the bank they used benefited a charity or commercial company, and **86% did not know that local authorities sometimes receive payments from commercial companies for the right to place a textile bank.**

This highlights a lack of transparency about whether the clothes put into textile banks are benefiting charities or commercial companies. The public should know whether charities are generating incomes from their clothes donations or companies are profiting from them.

Residents using their local textile bank want more transparency. **95% want textile banks to be clearly labelled so they know who benefits from the sale of the clothes they donate. 79% want local authorities to award textile bank contracts to charities and 74% think that councils should make raising funds for charities the top priority when awarding contracts for textile banks.**

In light of this, support for charities and partnerships with them should be encouraged and promoted by local authority waste departments and sustainability teams.

Conclusion & recommendations

This research reveals that textile bank users overwhelmingly prefer to give clothes to charities and that they want their local councils to actively support charity textile collectors.

Charities are increasingly priced out of sites, or removed in favour of commercial companies. This is not what local residents want.

Although many local authorities understand, support and value the additional social and economic benefits offered by charity textile collectors, the majority of councils are currently partnering with commercial companies.

The confusion and lack of understanding about who operates textile banks benefits commercial companies which are expanding their presence on council sites. This expansion has led to diminished returns for charities which are increasingly priced out of sites, or simply removed in favour of commercial companies. This is not what local residents want.

This trend is already threatening the work of many charities who rely on clothes donations from the public as an important source of income. For TRAID, to date, textile bank removals represent a loss to the charity or around £850,000 per year.

This research also reveals a significant public appetite for greater transparency and better communication when it comes to knowing who benefits from their clothes donations with 95% of textile donors calling for textile banks to be clearly labelled to show this information.

Additionally, 66% of textile bank users say they would stop or reduce their clothes donations to a textile bank if they knew it was run by a commercial company. This may have an impact on a council's ability to meet recycling targets and other significant environmental benefits associated with reusing clothes.

In light of these challenges we recommend:

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 2012)[1] 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.**

When local authorities replace charity textile banks with commercial companies, charities lose income and the social and economic benefits this income brings.

These recommendations seek to create a fairer solution which suits all parties while continuing to provide the UK public with the opportunity to support charities, which they clearly want.

With around 300,000 tonnes of textiles still going to landfill every year, and the consumption of new clothes rising, increasing the number of textile banks to ensure charities don't lose out to commercial collectors but can instead co-exist, is one simple and effective solution.

By listening to residents, improving transparency about who profits from donations made to textile banks and ensuring commercial collectors do not push out charity textile banks, local authorities can continue to support charities and their residents while potentially boosting reuse and recycling rates.

References

1. 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.

67%

are unaware that textile banks are sometimes run by commercial companies

Annex:
Waste Framework Directive

The Waste Framework Directive aims to reduce the amount of waste across the EU and increase recycling and re-use. The WFD has introduced a waste hierarchy which prioritises different waste management options based on their environmental impact

The European waste hierarchy refers to several steps that should apply as a priority order in waste prevention and management legislation and policy:

– Prevention
– Preparing for re-use
– Recycling
– Recovery
– Disposal

Each EU Member State is responsible for incorporating this into domestic law. This hierarchy is a key consideration for policy and service decisions, both nationally and locally.

The European Landfill Directive (1999/31/EC) aims to reduce reliance on landfill as a disposal option. It seeks to decrease the environmental impacts of landfills and reduce the risk to human health while imposing a consistent minimum standard for landfills across the EU. This Directive sets targets for the UK to progressively reduce the biodegradable municipal waste being sent for disposal in landfill.

The Landfill Tax: it has been introduced as a mechanism in allowing the UK to meet its targets set out in the Landfill Directive for the landfilling of biodegradable waste. The amount of tax levied is calculated according to the weight of the material disposed of. The landfill site operator is responsible for paying the tax and will pass the cost on to businesses and local councils. Landfill Tax per tonne in England: from April 2019, standard rate £91.35.

The EU ‘s Circular Economy Package: in April 2018 the European Parliament adopted the new Circular Economy Package, aiming to increase municipal waste recycling targets and lower the amount that is still being sent to landfill. The package also looks to extend separate collections for textiles household waste by 2025 Despite Brexit, the UK has ratified this new proposal and will work towards its implementation.

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