2025

PRESTON CITY COUNCIL

RECYCLING CAMPAIGN REPORT

Preston City Council

Pledge 2 Recycle PLASTICS

RECOUP

BEYONDLY

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FOREWORD

Preston: Autumn Colours by Michael Porter Photography

Pledge2Recycle Plastics, run by the plastics recycling and resource efficiency charity RECOUP, aims to cut the confusion around plastic recycling through education, communication and consistent messages.

Alongside buying less, swapping the way we shop and using things again and again, recycling is an important action we can all take to help reduce humanities carbon footprint and resource depletion.

Working with Local Authorities enables us to reach communities and provide additional information and support to residents about recycling.

We would like to thank Beyondly for funding and supporting this project and Preston City Council for their support in delivering this campaign and making the project such a success.

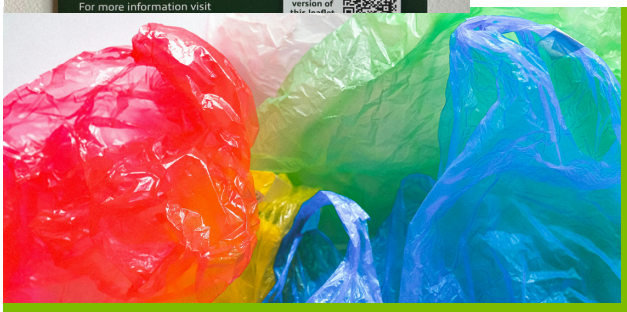
On average 1.8 tonnes of CO2e are saved per tonne of plastic recycled.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project reach
265,629

Activities

- Leaflet deliveries
- Billboards
- Community/school engagement
- Radio campaign
- Street hub/recycling van information points
- Social media campaign



Collection crews reported decrease in ‘rubbish’ and ‘plastic bags’ (non-target material) in recycling bins

More plastic, glass and cans collected in 2024/25 than 2023/24

Contamination reports from crews decreased by 13%

Material rejection rates at MRF reduced by 19%

CONTEXT

PRESTON CITY COUNCIL IS LOCATED IN LANCASHIRE IN NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Population

Preston has a population of 147,835 and of this, 74,101 are women and 73,734 are men (1). Two important points to note with regards population size is that Preston City Council's (PCC) population is expected increase by 5.1% by 2043 (2) and The University of Central Lancashire has a campus in Preston with a staff and student population of around 27,000 (3).

The percentage of people who identify their gender as different from sex registered at birth but give no specific identity is 400 (0.3%) of the population. A further 0.1% identify as Trans Man and an additional 0.1% identify as Trans Woman and a further 0.1% identify as other genders.(4)

66% of Preston residents identify as white English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. English is not the main language for 12% of the population (5). For this group 78% can speak English either well or very well but 19% can not speak English well and a further 3% can not speak English at all. This equates to 3857 resident who would need support with understanding communications (6).

In terms of disability, 18% of the population describe themselves of living with a long term condition which limits their day-to-day activities either a little (8.2%) or a lot (10%). This equates to 26, 840 residents (7).

With regards to sexual orientation, 88.5% of residents identified as straight or heterosexual, a further 7.7% did not answer the question, whilst 3.8% identified as LGBTQIA+ (8).

Dwelling Type

Preston has around 61,625 dwellings (10). Approximately 56% are owner occupied, 25% are privately rented and a further 19% are let by social landlords (11). The number of registered as houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) within the PCC boundary is 3,500 according to the Housing and Demand Assessment in 2022 (12). Accommodation type within the city centre is predominantly 1 and 2 bedroom flats and 2 and 3 bedroom terraces on the periphery of the city centre (13).

Anecdotally, issues with regards contamination of recycling bins in proximity to the city centre is that terraces or terraces split into flats with small yards often house bins and recycling containers outside the yard area to retain some amenity space which results in residents not having full control over how their bins are used which results in higher levels of contamination in these areas.

Local Authority Service

Waste collection is the responsibility of Preston City Council. Lancashire County Council is the Waste Disposal Authority. Preston City Council provides:

1. General waste collection once a fortnight (Grey Bin).
2. Yellow lidded bins and boxes (plastic, glass and cans) and red lidded bins and boxes which collect paper and card which are also collected once a fortnight.
3. Optional garden bin collections are once a fortnight (Brown Bin) at a cost of £40 a household per year.
4. Pink bags are only for residents living in residential properties that have no space for wheeled bin e.g. flats above shops. Up to three pink bags can be put out for collection per week at the agreed collection point. They are also entitled to red and yellow lidded recycling boxes.
5. Assisted bin collections are provided for people who can not move their bin to the kerbside due to either disability, ill health, or mobility problems.
6. For residents living in flats they have access to either: shared communal bins if space is restricted on site or lockable recycling bins.
7. Residents in shared housing have access to the same recycling facilities as all other properties in Preston for which landlords should ensure appropriate refuse facilities.

Recycling Rate

The recycling rates (Household waste reused, recycled, or composted/Total household waste collected) for Preston City Council are amongst the lowest in Lancashire. In 2021/22, the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting was 32.3% and this had declined further to 30.7% in 2022/23. There was a reduction of 24.2kg in residual waste during the same period (14) . For context, in 2022/23 the recycling rate for 'waste from households' for Lancashire county was 41.2% and the UK recycling rate was 44.1% (15).

Contamination

Contamination reports by crews between the 1st March 2023 – 1st March 2024 show that the wards City Centre, Deepdale, Plungington and St Matthew's have the highest levels of contamination. It should be noted this data is not wholly accurate due to operational limitations e.g. vehicle availability and crew reporting inconsistencies.

Contamination reports indicate that the yellow lidded bins, which collect plastic metal and glass, are most frequently contaminated. Some of the most frequent incorrect items placed within the recycling bins include:

- Rubbish (ie. general waste bags)
- Co-mingled (in the paper/card bin)
- Plastic film and plastic bags
- Polystyrene
- Hard plastics

The areas of Deepdale, Plungington and St Matthew's are the closest to the centre of the city and are mostly comprised of historical terraced housing with higher levels of deprivation. Many residents in the terraced properties leave their bins in the rear alleyway to retain the small amenity space a back yard provides. This means that bin content is not wholly controlled by the resident of the property.

There are also more transient populations in these wards and higher levels of houses of multiple occupancy/shared housing which means residents may miss annual communication about bins, in the council tax letter. In these wards, the percentage of people living at their address of enumeration one year ago is:

- 73.1% - Plungington
- 71.0% - St George's
- 86.4% - St Matthew's
- 74.7% - City Centre

For comparison, the figure for the wards of Fulwood, Ingol and Ashton are higher than 90% and they therefore have more stable communities. Additionally, these areas usually have higher amounts of people who do not consider English as their first language. (16)

Previous Campaigns

Previous activity and campaigns to increase recycling and reduce contamination includes:

- Information about bin collections being sent out annually with the Council Tax Rate Communiations.
- A secondary school competition held to design artwork for the new Rotopress wagon.
- ‘Clean Me' metal recycling campaign funded by Alupro to increase metal captured and the cleanliness of material.

National campaigns which Preston City Council participate in via the use of social media assets include:

- WRAP Recycle Week.
- WRAP Food Waste Action Week.

Where officers are available, community events or stalls supplement these campaigns e.g. a sustainable fashion show in Preston Markets as part of Lancashire County Council’s Second-hand September and an educational stall at the University of Lancashire as part of Food Waste Action Week.

Campaign Considerations

The main considerations for this and future campaigns were identified as:

- Ensuring the information provided was accessible to residents with limited or no English.
- Maximising accessibility for disabled people.
- Repeating campaigns due to the increase in the number of residents and transient nature of the student population.
- Reducing contamination to limit bin rejections and maximise the recycling of collected material, including plastic.

To address language barriers, the new leaflet design included photos, images and reduced text. In addition, a draft version of the leaflet was sent to Disability North West for their user group to feedback on the accessibility of the design. The feedback was largely positive. Where feedback could not be incorporated alternatives were put in place including: a QR code on the front of the leaflet to request an accessible version, use of recite on the Council's website to listen to the leaflet and, a radio campaign.

To ensure as much plastic as possible is recycled it was decided to include all materials in the campaign to reduce contamination and therefore the amount of plastic lost to landfill due to contamination issues.

Addressing the levels of recycling bin contamination in the four inner city wards was challenging, partly due to language barriers, transient population and housing stock. It was decided to run a general awareness campaign across the whole local authority area and ensure the new one could be designed pictorially to help alleviate language barriers plus the timing of the campaign would fit with the influx of returning students at the start of the academic year.

Preston Street Scene by Michael Porter Photography

Campaign

Objective

1. Increase the amount of plastic recycled and reduce contamination rates.

Method

We aimed to increase the amount of plastics recycled and reduce contamination rates by communicating:

- The types of plastic which can be recycled.
- The type of plastic which can't be recycled.
- How to recycle other materials to help reduce contamination issues

The campaign comprised several activities.

New leaflet delivered to all households

School engagement event in Plungington Ward

New social media assets & business webinar

BIllboard & street hubs in prime locations

Community events

Radio ad campaign

Reach

The campaign ran from September to December 2024. Overall we estimate the campaign has had significant reach within the community of Preston. The engagement figures for each strand of the campaign is outlined over the following pages.

Total Reach
265,629

Leaflet distributed to all households in Preston

59,607 households
Est 120,000 residents

Billboard on Walker Street
(2 week period)

22,762

2 Street hubs on Lancaster Street (2 week period)

7,964

Community engagement & insights work Plungington Ward

70

Community engagement & insights work City Centre

30

DAB · ONLINE · APP · SMART SPEAKER

CENTRAL .RADIO

Radio ad campaign (4 weeks)

90,000

New social media assets (5 weeks)

22,671

WRAP Recycle Now Social Media Assets (1 week)

1,772

Recycling Van
Flag Market City Centre

Est 300

School engagement
Elden Street Primary
Inner City Preston

60

Preston: Cityscape by Michael Porter Photography

Insights

Two community engagement events were held in and near the city centre of Preston. One took place at a Spar shop in Plungington and the second in the Flag Market in the city centre. Residents were able to pick up a copy of the new leaflet, ask questions and find out more about the recycling process. Surveys were also completed by residents and whilst the sample was small, 50 in total, the feedback gives some insights into Preston residents' recycling habits and barriers to recycling.

Spar Shop Survey

Twenty people participated in the survey and Figure 1 shows the products residents recycle. Raw meat trays, pots e.g. yoghurts and desserts, and fruit and veg trays are less likely to be recycled. When asked why they don't recycle these formats, items which have food remains on them which require cleaning was mentioned a number of times as a barrier.

Figure 1. Results from resident survey on types of plastic packaging and whether they recycle.

When participants were asked if they knew what happens to their recycling, 70% answered positively. When asked if they would recycle more if they understood what happens to the material, for example where, when and how it is recycled and what it is made into, 70% said they would be more motivated to recycle if they had this knowledge. However, when asked for reasons why they may not always recycle this was not cited as a reason.

Flag Market Survey

Thirty people participated in the survey at the Flag Market during Recycle Week (14th-20th October 2024). The focus of this survey asked about recycling from bathrooms to compliment the theme of the Recycle Week campaign. This shows residents routinely consider recycling some but not all recyclable material from bathrooms.

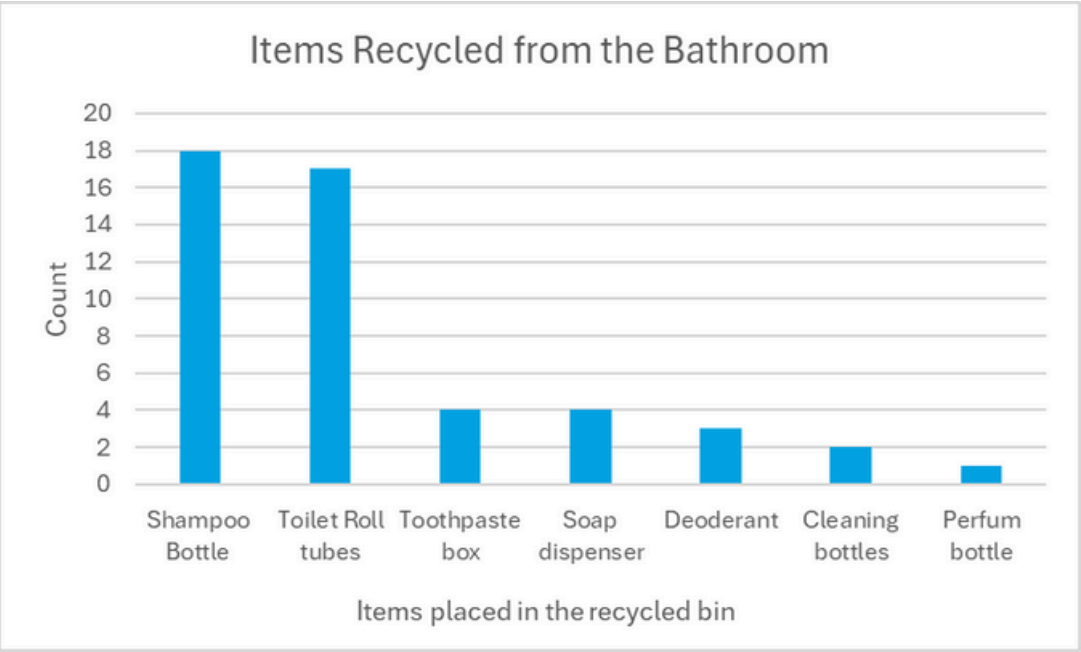


Figure 2. Results from resident survey on items recycled from the bathroom.

Flexible Plastic

Both surveys asked residents what they do with flexible plastic. Whilst the sample is small, it suggests that reminding residents how to dispose of flexible plastic is useful as a significant number of residents we spoke to placed it in the recycle bin. This practice is also confirmed by Preston City Council contamination figures.

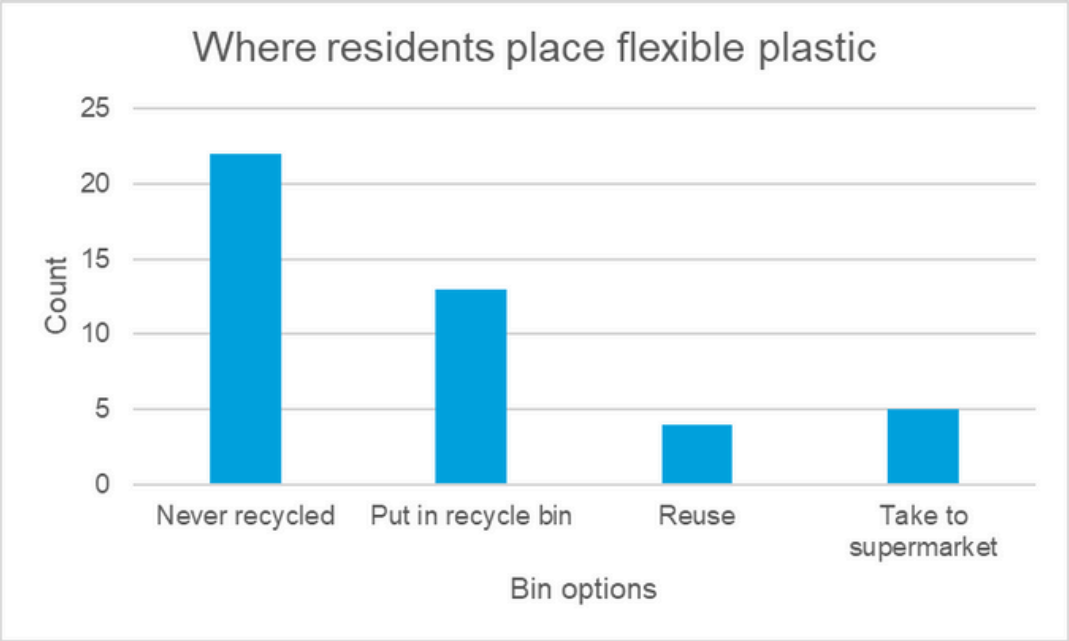


Figure 3. Results from resident survey on where they take flexible plastics

Barriers to Recycling

Both surveys asked residents about barriers to recycling. The most common reasons are included below.

"Food remains on items & I don't want to rinse it."

"Material is not collected from kerbside."

"Confused about what to recycle."

"Easier to put it in the general bin."

Considerations for Future Campaigns

Whilst the sample size for the survey is small, the results seem to reiterate the need for consistent messaging regarding:

- What can be recycled - emphasising bathroom items.
- Where to put flexible plastics i.e. general waste or take to front of store collections at supermarkets.
- Presenting items clean and dry for recycling using normative messaging.

Results

Recycling Collection Rates

The tonnages collected by Preston City Council show that more plastic, glass and cans were collected in the FY 2024/2025 than the previous FY 2023/2024, see Table 1. Despite this Table 1 shows more residual waste was collected in the FY 2024/25 than previous years.

	Year		
Tonnages collected (tonnes)	**2022/23**	**2023/24**	**2024/25**
Plastic Glass & Cans	5744	5495	5506
Paper & Cardboard	4025	3820	3687
Residual	31166	31928	33165
Annual recycling collection rate	24%	23%	22%

Table 1. Tonnages of waste collected by Preston City Council from FY 2022/23 to FY 2024/25

Table 1 and Figure 4 also show the recycling rate for Preston City Council is decreasing, evident from the annual recycling rates declining from 24% in the FY 2022/23 to 22% in the FY 2024/25 (considering tonnages collected). During the FY 2024/25 the recycling rate for Preston City Council shows a greater fluctuation and despite an increase in November 2024, this does not appear to strongly correlate with the campaign period.

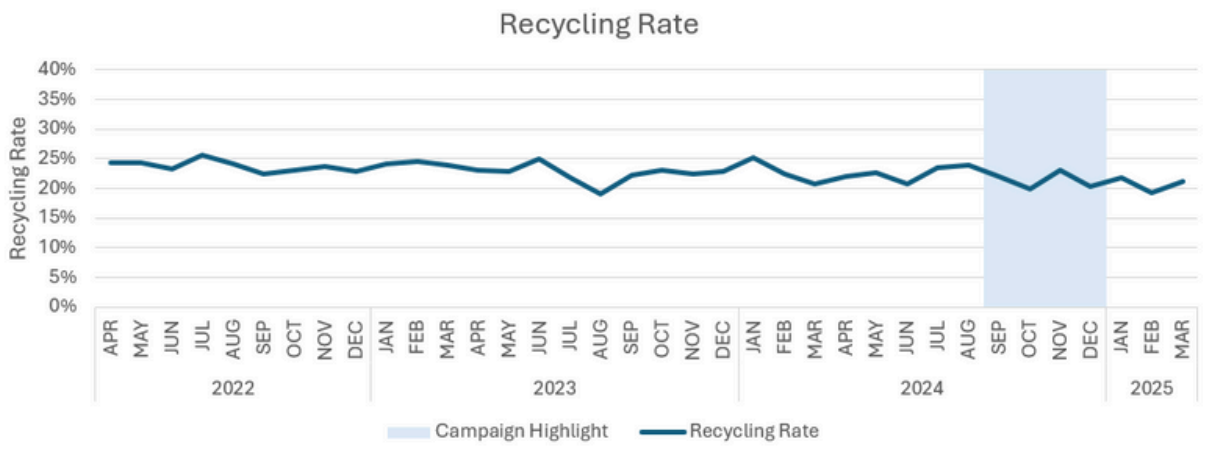


Figure 4. Recycling rate for Preston City Council from April 2022 to March 2025. The recycling rate was calculated using tonnages collected (Recycling Rate = total waste collected for recycling / total waste collected)

Figure 5 shows dry mixed recycling (DMR) (separately collected via two streams: 1 - Plastic, Glass & Cans and 2 - Paper & Cardboard) collection rates remain relatively stable with a slight decline, which could relate to lightweighting in packaging across consumer goods. In contrast residual waste shows greater variation and a slight increase.

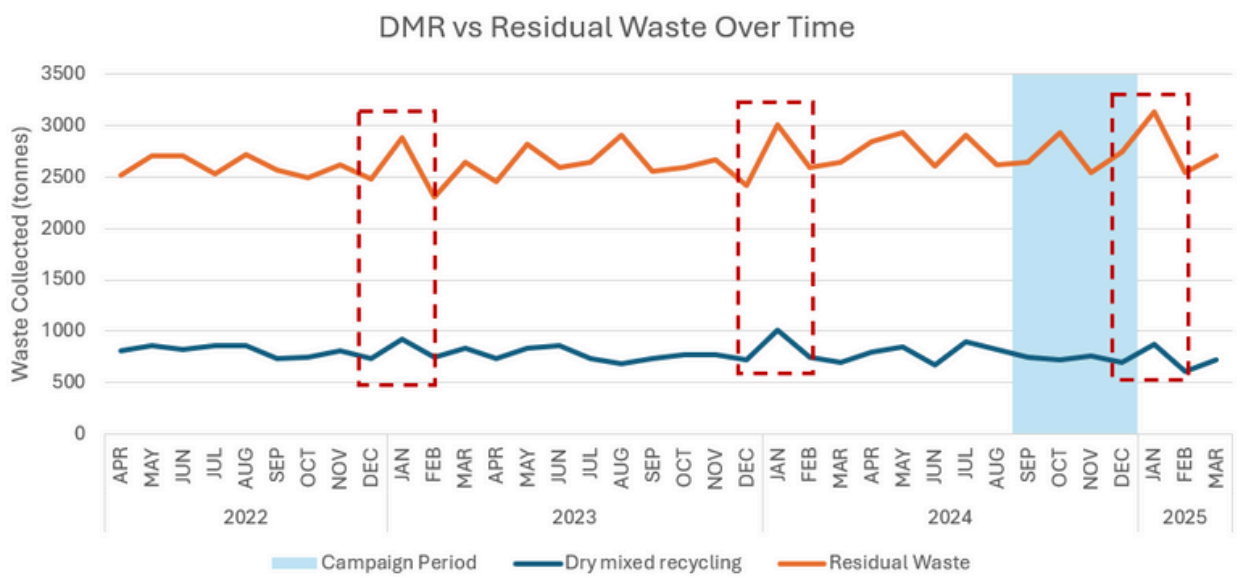


Figure 5. The combined total of Plastics, Glass & Cans and Paper & Card represented as Dry Mixed Recycling (DMR) compared to the residual waste tonnage collected by Preston City Council from April 2022 – March 2023.

Annually there is a clear uplift, for both residual and DMR collection rates in January. This is most likely attributed to seasonality, with the influence of Christmas. October 2024 shows an increase in residual waste collection, which is not displayed in previous years, while June 2024 displays a drop in DMR collection which is also a trend not familiar with previous years. A monthly drop in DMR could be associated with vehicle breakdowns, which result in single chamber collection (residual stream).

During the campaign period (Sep – Dec 2024) there was a stabilisation in collection of DMR. This trend was also visible in previous years, so was unlikely to be solely associated with the campaign. This was followed by a sharp increase in DMR which, as discussed above, is likely attributed to Christmas as opposed to campaign.

Contamination Rates

The quantity of material recovery facility (MRF) rejects were highest in the FY 2024/25, see Figure 6, but this could be derived from improved tracking and a greater awareness from waste management teams on contamination tracking due to the 2024 campaign.

The data in Figure 6 shows from the start of the FY 2024/25 the material rejection decreased by 19%, aligning with the campaign timeline and could be associated with greater public awareness of the correct material collections. A similar trend was demonstrated in the FY 2023/24 with decreasing levels of contamination between Q2 and Q3, weakening this potential correlation.

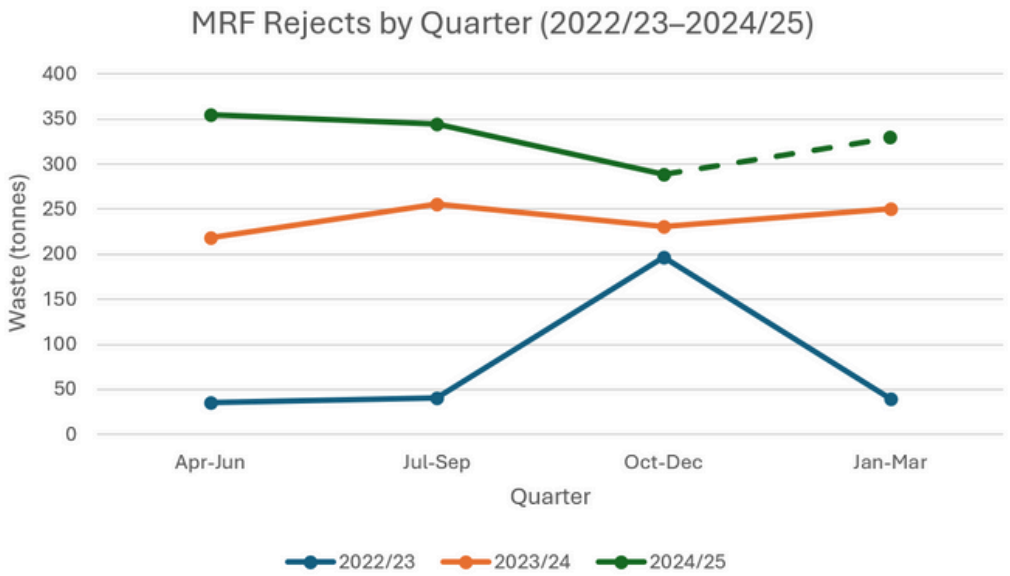


Figure 6. The comparative number of material recovery facility (MRF) rejects by quarter from 2022/2023 to 2024/25. FY 2024/25 Q4 data is estimated using averages as this data was unavailable.

Table 2 shows the number of contaminations recorded by the crew during the collection rounds. Comparison of 2024 and 2023 show the number of contaminations reported in plastic, glass & cans decreased by 13% as well as reports of contaminations in both bins. This could show a positive impact from the campaign, with greater consumer awareness of the correct material collection.

In contrast, paper and cardboard show a 28% increase in the number of contaminations from 2023 to 2024, which could relate to the fact the campaign initially was focused on plastics. Despite this, considering all material streams there is still a 7% decline in contaminations recorded during the period analysed.

	Number of contaminations			
Time period	**Paper and cardboard bin**	**Plastic, Glass & Can bin**	**Both bins**	**Total**
1/09/23-30/11/23*	803	1870	2833	5506
1/09/24-30/11/24*	1027	1620	2453	5100
Percentage change	28%	-13%	-13%	-7%

*Table 2. The number of contaminations recorded in household recycling bins. *The campaign time frame excludes December as the crews do not report as often during festive periods.*

According to crew reports there was also an overall decrease in the amount of ‘rubbish’ and ’plastic bags’ (non-targeted materials) reported in recycling bins during 2024. This could suggest that these contaminants may have been diverted to the residual waste, thus increasing the volume in the residual waste stream which is seen in the 2024/2025 in comparison to previous years.

Analysis and Limitations

Overall, the impact from seasonal variation in recycling rate and waste generated appears to be greater than the impact of the campaign. The Preston City Council recycling rate continues to decline, a pattern demonstrated for the last 3 years, irrespective of the campaign. This decline in recycling rate is reflected in wider national trends. A decline in DMR collections could be related to the lightweighting of consumer packaging inline with regulatory reforms for packaging waste. As with other local authorities, the waste collected (both residual and DMR) by Preston City Council shows a spike following the Christmas festive period.

During the campaign period (Sept-Dec 2024) residual waste collection increased, with a significant increase during October 2024. This could correlate with the campaign impact of enhanced understanding of the correct material collections and reduced contamination which was also evident. A 7% reduction in contamination rates were demonstrated by crew reports as well as 19% reduction in MRF rejection from the beginning of FY 2024/25 and end of the campaign.

As the campaign ran from September to December 2024 it is likely the seasonal festive spike will have impacted the impact of the campaign, limiting output understanding. Another limitation is that the data analysed is reflective of the full Preston City Council operations, whilst most of the campaign spanned the Preston area, some elements such as in-person engagement were focused on three wards.

The contamination rates and MRF rejects showed greatest impact from the campaign, however this data is most reliant on human reporting and therefore have greatest inconsistencies. Data availability may have also limited project results as analysis took place on input streams (collection) opposed to output streams (recyclate) when calculating recycling rates.

Learnings

The Preston campaign has highlighted many valuable insights which will be considered in future communications and educational programmes by Preston City Council and Pledge2 Recycle Plastics. They are summarised below.

- **Preparation is key.** The early work to map recycling and contamination levels across the local authority's wards identified priority areas for the campaign. Further interrogation of data and local knowledge revealed characteristics of the communities who lived there and this influenced our communications and engagement approach.

- **Targeted Community Engagement.** Engagement in the wards where levels of recycling were low and levels of contamination were high worked well. Many residents stopped to talk to us about their experience of recycling and ask questions about tricky items.

- **Time engagement work with the lifestyles of your target audience.** Timing the engagement work at a local shop, in a residential area with low recycling and high contamination, to coincide with the school run worked well as many pupils recognised staff from the school visit and this meant that the parents and children stopped to talk about their experiences of recycling and ask questions.

- **Maximise the local angle.** The 'Join us' campaign focused on Pride in Preston. Using a local and positive approach combined with simple factual information about how to dispose of household items was well received. The radio campaign used a range of voices with local accents and was well received with Preston City Council receiving positive comments from residents.

- **Use a range of approaches for the breadth of lifestyles in your area**. A range of strategies were used to reach people with different lifestyles e.g. for pedestrians we used street hubs in busy locations, billboards along busy roads, a radio campaign for commuters, leaflets for all households, a social media campaign, community engagement and a school visit in locations with low levels of recycling, and community engagement at locations popular with locals at times of the day when they are most used e.g. local shop during the school run. All material and resources included advice and aimed to drive traffic to Preston City Council website pages for further advice on recycling.

- **Be inclusive and test your material.** The leaflet was tested with Disability-Equality in Preston and was also predominantly pictorial to ensure it was accessible for the 19% of Preston residents who can not speak English well.

Like most campaigns areas of refinement were identified as well as areas for further work.

Area of Focus	Refinement
Securing schools engagement to host a workshop proved difficult. 1 school visit was delivered but we had hoped for more.	Schools are notoriously busy and hard to engage with. Currently engagement with schools is adhoc and relationships need nurturing. Preston City Council waste team hope to use Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funds to employ two additional waste team members whose remit will include developing relationships with schools.
Securing business engagement to host PCC staff engaging with residents was difficult. 1 business – the Spar shop – responded positively where as other major brands didn't.	Liaise with Preston City Council's Economic BID team to explore the Council's relationship with businesses and any existing work to encourage local businesses to give back to their community by supporting such activities.
Holding events in the Flag Market less well attended by locals as the city centre usually attracts visitors and people outside high priority wards re: recycling.	Focus community engagement work in the wards of Deepdale, Plungington and City Centre and St Mathews Ward.
The leaflet considered non English speakers and residents with low vision but not neurodiverse audiences.	Consider Neurodiverse residents in future designs – e.g. 10% of the population is believed to be dyslexic (Dyslexia - British Dyslexia Association)

Area of Focus	Refinement
The Insights work suggested people were reluctant to clean and dry recyclable material.	This was addressed in the radio campaign but may benefit from being a focus for future campaigns and educational programmes.
The campaign focused on improving knowledge about what can and can't be recycled but the wider socio-economic determinants affecting recycling were not within the scope of the campaign.	Analyse common contaminants of recycling bins, assess vehicle ownership in priority wards and access to the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC). Explore other Local Authority approaches to HWRC access e.g. localised drop off points within communities such as libraries or community centres.

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