



CASE STUDY

# Using behavioural science to increase food waste recycling

Led by BIT & Wigan Council

**BeST**

Behaviour Smart community  
for Tourism



Co-funded by  
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## CONTEXT

In 2018, the [Behavioural Insights Team](#) (BIT) worked with [Wigan Council](#), in the UK, to increase **food waste recycling in Wigan**.

Despite Wigan having an overall recycling rate around the national average, rates seem much lower for food waste recycling (according to self-reported surveys).

## BEHAVIOUR

Despite food waste being recyclable, many people **do not sort their food waste from non-recyclables** being sent to landfill.

As a result, food waste is one of the most common recyclable waste being still sent to landfill.

## BEHAVIOURAL MECHANISM

A **lack of awareness** of what is available along with some misconceptions and beliefs around food waste prevent food recycling in Wigan:



Many people in Wigan did **not realize** that they could **recycle** food waste

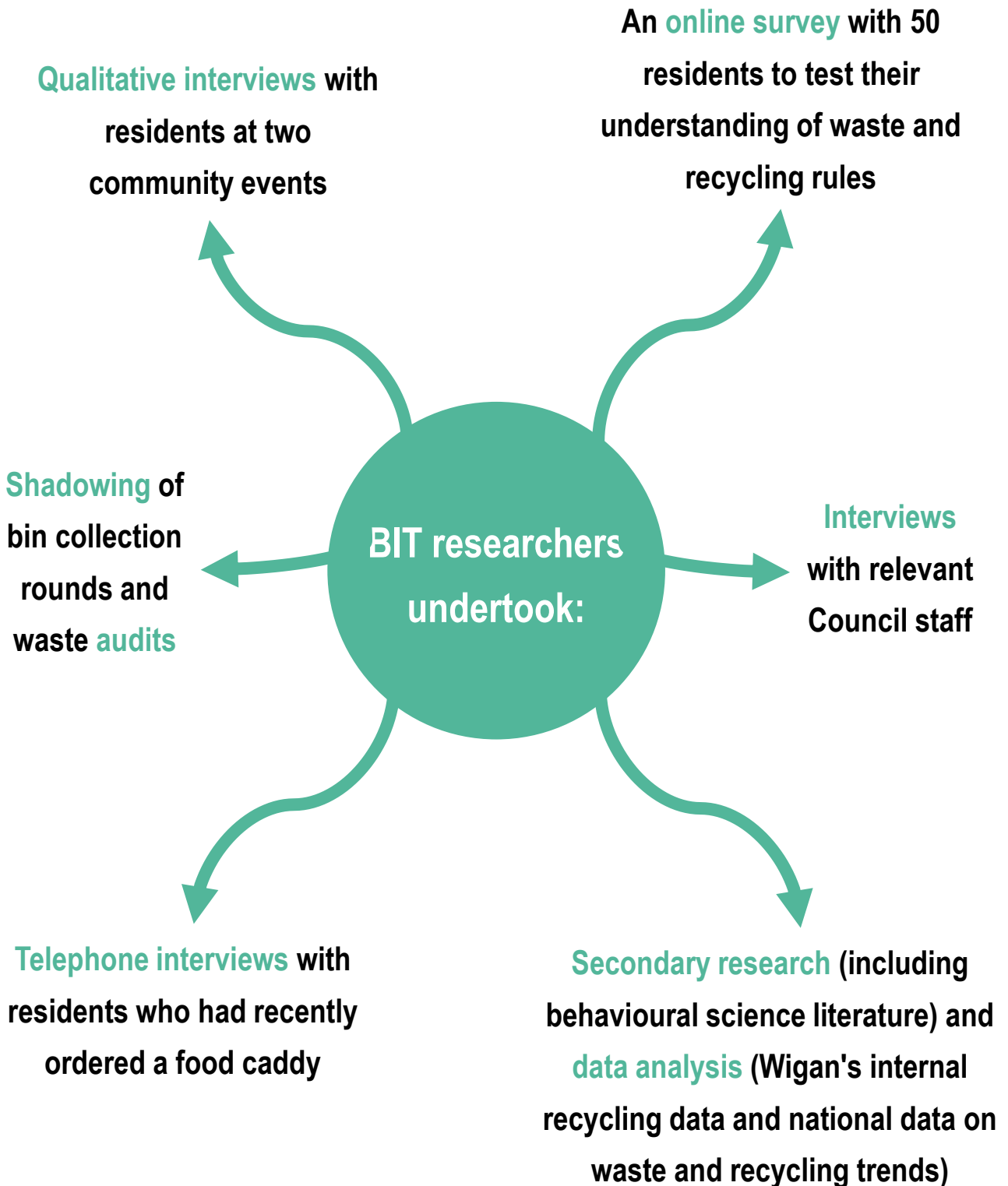


People also tended to find food waste **disgusting**, leading them not to want to think/do anything about it



They also tended to believe that they **don't produce enough** food waste for it to be worth recycling

# WHAT WE DID



# INTERVENTION

The intervention had 3 components :



1

**Bin hangers** that were tagged to all back bins on a given collection round with a prompt to request a new food caddy if they don't have one: Tagging bins acted as a timely reminder to nudge people towards ordering a food waste caddy. Households received 1 of 3 different versions of the tag, to test the effectiveness of different messages

2

### Caddy info pack:

If people ordered a caddy, they received an information leaflet and caddy sticker to tackle key information gaps

3

### Email reminders:

People who ordered the caddy had the option to sign up for 3 timely email reminders to help them establish food waste recycling as a habit

# TESTING



To identify which hanger was the most effective, BIT conducted a **randomized controlled trial** (RCT), which is a way to measure the impact of an intervention by randomizing who gets a specific treatment.

Households were randomly allocated to receive one of the three hangers. The three hangers each had their own URL to order caddies. We measured the number of caddy orders at each URL and used this to identify which hanger was the most effective.

## RESULTS & LESSONS LEARNED

# 1

**Bin tagging** significantly increased the number of **food waste caddy orders** : from 5 caddy orders in the period before the tagging to 75 in the period following the tagging, a 1400% increase. 47% of people who ordered the caddies signed up to receive 3 emails with tips and reminders to help them use their caddy.

# 2

The **message that drew on social norms** was more effective than the message that highlighted the ease of getting started with food waste recycling. This result suggests that, to change recycling behaviours, **highlighting peers' behaviours** may be a promising lever

# 3

The intervention led to 0.59 tons more food waste recycled compared to the control, a **4.6% increase in weight of food waste recycled**. However, the results are not statistically significant, meaning that we cannot be sure that the tonnage difference between target rounds and control are due to the intervention. The results are promising, although further testing would need to be conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of the bin tags on food waste recycling.

# BEST

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## LEARN MORE

The Behavioural Insights Team, 'Applying behavioural insights to increase food waste recycling in Wigan: final report'. 2018

## CONTACT

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