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## **Abstract**

*The title of this paper is an inversion of the usual cliché of turning muck to brass, which it is arguable that charity bag collections do, by providing an income for charities for goods that would normally be thrown away. While previous research has highlighted that charity bag collections are becoming an increasingly significant source of income for charities, enabling charities to metaphorically turn muck into brass, research has been rather disparate in its analysis of four main issues highlighted as pertinent to this growth. These are: the frequency of collection requests; the amount of materials collections provide; the amount of commission received by charities from outsourced collections, and the extent of bogus/fraudulent collections. This paper uses data collected over a 12 month period using a convenience sampling method to explore these issues in some empirical detail. The findings particularly suggest in that there are a number of processes through which charities undertake their collections which risks undermining the current and future income from charity bags, and which thereby has the potential to invert the metaphor, and turn what has become muck to brass into brass to muck, thereby losing out on a significant income stream.*

## **Turning brass to muck? An small scale exploration of charities use of charity bags collections**

This article occurs from an observation made that the number of charity bags being delivered seems to have increased over time, an observation supported by the Institute of Fundraising (IoF) (2011), which notes that up until recently door to door charity collections of clothing have been a relatively underutilised method of collecting clothing, but they are becoming increasingly popular with the public and charities alike. By charity bags, I mean leaflets or enclosed plastic bags that posted through household letterboxes asking the householder to donate goods and leave outside for collection at a later specified date. This paper will explore four particular issues which the literature review below foregrounds as significant to charity bag collections. These are:

1. The frequency of collection requests
2. The amount of materials collections provide
3. The amount of commission received by charities from outsourced collections
4. The extent of bogus/fraudulent collections

Although these are of known significance, they have not been explored to any great detail, and this paper aims to provide some relevant exploratory analysis of these issues to start to bridge this evident knowledge gap.

### ***An outline of issues***

Data on the amount of good collected by charities also support the observation made above of their increasing significance. According to the Charity Retail Association (2012), 'as well as the public donating items to shops, through large-scale door-to-door collections, charity shops collect over 15 million sacks of textiles and other materials from UK households every year...In total 1.9 million households are given the opportunity to reuse and recycle unwanted items every week.' The Salvation Army alone sends out 400,000 charity bags each week (Salvation Army Trading Company website). This also highlight that it is being used as a significant generator of income by charities. An analysis of recent trends in reuse and recycling both supports and provides possible reason for this. Firstly, according to DEFRA (2009:i):

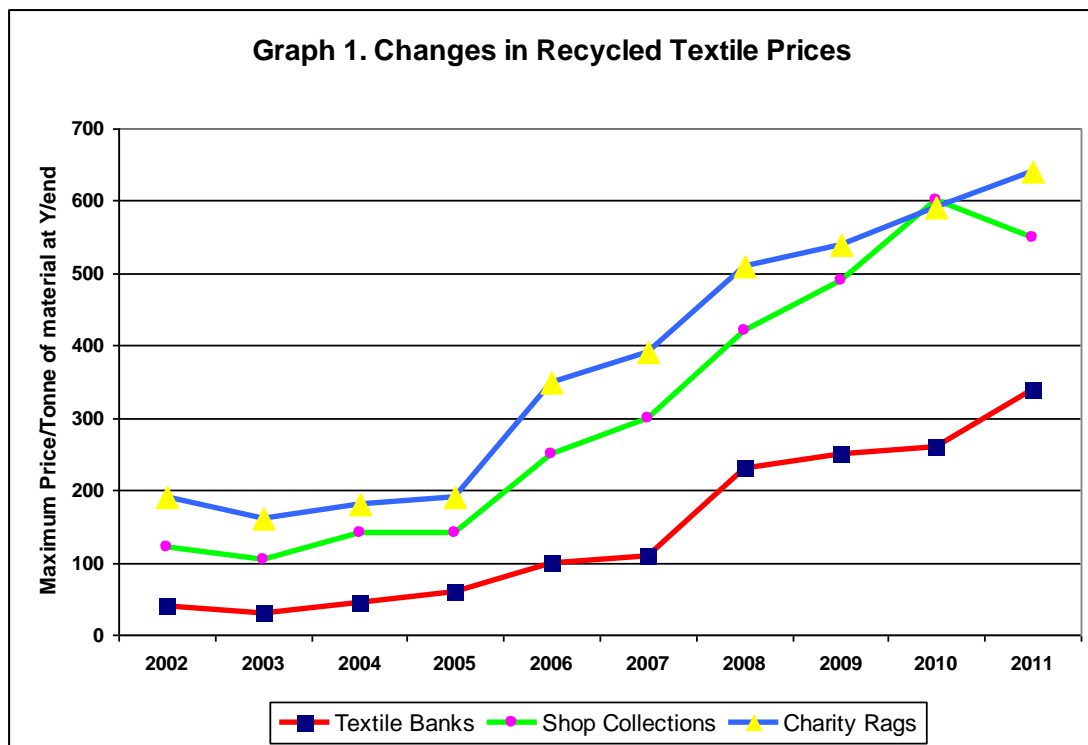
Textile collected for reuse and recycling has grown substantially in the last five years, reaching 523,000 tonnes in 2008 compared to 324,000 tonnes in 2003. At the same time the volume of textiles discarded as municipal solid waste has decreased from 1,165,000 tonnes to 1,081,000 tonnes. Hence the overall reuse and recycling rate has increased from 22% to 33% while total volumes discarded increased by 8%.

Additionally, as observed by Morgan and Birtwistle, (2009:191):

‘A recent study by the Environment Select Committee revealed that the proportion of textile waste being discarded at council refuse collection points in the past five years has increased from 7% to 30% by weight, thus highlighting the fact that consumers are discarding higher volumes of textile waste than before.’

There are no up to date figures for how much clothes recycling and reuse in general is worth to charities, the most recent estimate was from 2005, when it was estimated at £100 million a year (Ouvettes Project, 2005). This figure is very likely to be a serious underestimate of the current worth to charity shops, bearing in mind that the Association of Charity Shops estimated in 2005 that over 100,000 tonnes were being recycled through charity shops (Williams *et al*, 2005), while Defra (2009), estimated this to be 250,000 tonnes, a substantial increase over a short period of time. Thus, as most door to door charity bag requests are for clothes, the increase in charity bag requests should be seen in the context of a general increase in clothing donated to charities. This is through a combination of donations to shops, clothes banks and door to door bag collections, of which door to door bag collections play a significant role, although there are no precise figures for how much tonnage or percentage of charity collection it represents.

One of the reasons why recycled clothing in general has become so prominent has been because the price paid for second hand textiles has increased dramatically over recent years (O’Connor, 2012), as Graph 1 shows below.



Source: [www.letsrecycle.com](http://www.letsrecycle.com)

**Notes to graph: Textile banks** - this reflects the amount that may be paid to a local authority or a waste management company, usually by a collector for material from textile banks. The payment may be amended if the local authority has to pay a bank hire fee or an element of the collection costs and if a donation is made to a charity.

**Shop collections** - this price indicates the amount which may be paid by a collector to a charity shop for clothes the shop has not sold to the public directly. Prices vary on content from poorer quality material through to clothes and leather items.

**Charity rags** - this is a general term for material, usually well-presented and often from charity shop collections, delivered to the factory of a larger textile collecting business which often exports used clothing and textiles.

As can be seen, the price paid for all types of textiles which the charity sector collects has increased significantly over the last 10 years. For the purpose of charity bag collections, it is the prices for shop collections and charity rags that are of relevance, and both of these show significant increases. This highlights a particular reason why there has been an increase in such activity, as rationalised above.

One reason why it is so hard to provide an accurate figure of how much charity bag collections are worth is due to the different ways in which charity bags can be collected. There are three main types of ways in which door to door charity bag collections are undertaken. These are:

1. Charities undertake collections in partnership with commercial door to door collection businesses.
2. Charities undertake their own door to door clothing collections without the use of a commercial collection partner and do not sell the items through a charity shop.
3. Charities undertake their own door to door clothing collections and which sell the collected items through their charity shops.

Institute of Fundraising, 2011

For the first of these methods, the charity would receive a commission on the amount of material collected from the commercial partner, usually as a set tonnage after commercial cost have been accounted for. This means that the charity has no physical involvement in the bag collection processes (bag drop, clothes collection, sorting and resale), they simply lend their name to the process and collect a commission from collections. For the other two types, the charity does have physical involvement, but their income streams would be different, coming from the sale of material collected to commercial organisation who would then sell it on for number 2 above, and from the actual sale of the material in their shops for number 3 above. For these last two types of collections, there is also the possibility of income from claiming recycling credits from local government, another potential income stream from charity bag collections, but only if collections remain inhouse (see Defra, 2009:8). There is of course a fourth type of bag collections, in which commercial companies collect on their own behalf. However, it is relevant to know that to undertake bag collections as a charity, under the House to House Collections Act 1939, a licence is required from the relevant local authority, or if a nationwide charity a National Exemption Order can be applied for which covers the whole country ([charitybags.org.uk](http://charitybags.org.uk)).

Change to this system was proposed in the Charities Act 1992, but its provisions have never been brought into force due to concerns as to whether it would work in practice (Home Office, 2003). A licence is required if the collection is explicitly for a charity or more implicitly for charitable purposes. However, commercial companies do not need a licence to collect goods of the same type, they are able to simply undertake a collection, but would need a licence if there was any indication that the collection was charitable. Most charities have outsourced their collections to commercial organisations as set out in number 1 above, and for commercial companies too, it is a significant source of materials and income. For instance, in Scotland 'Nathans Wastesavers' collect more than 400 tonnes of material for recycling and reuse each week, with the vast majority of their textiles (85 per cent) received coming from charity shops (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010:355). But again, this makes it difficult to put a precise figure on how much charity bag collections are worth to charities.

The largest charity collector of clothing is the Salvation Army, which collected 18,000 tonnes of clothes from its clothes bank in 2011 (Booth, 2011). During this period, it used the outsourced method outlined above, analysis of which highlights both the profitability and problematic nature of such arrangements. Between 2007 and 2010, the Salvation Army received £17 million royalty payments from its recycling clothing bins alone. However, as highlighted by Booth (2011), that payment of £17 million did not include the £10 million in profits made by the commercial company outsourced by the Salvation Army to run its clothing banks in the same period, which when made public became so problematic for the Salvation Army that it brought the company that it had outsourced its collections to (Bowers, 2012).

The issue here was that by outsourcing its collection to a commercial company, the commission received by the Salvation Army seemed disproportionately small to the profits made by the commercial company, and this was also recently highlighted as an issue where the Variety Club received £5,500 commission from a turnover of their shoe bank of £1.9 million from its outsourced company, a 3% return (Booth 2011a). As this model of collection is significant to the charity bag sector, it is likely that the issue is also relevant to charity bag collections.

A related issue is that of bogus/fraudulent charity bag collections, which has been the predominant issue in relation to charity bags, as evident from the slew of various newspaper articles dedicated to the topic (Penman, 2009; Bushby, 2012; BBC News, 2012, Earlam, 2011), and there was a recent *Panorama* programme on the topic (13<sup>th</sup> May, 2012). There is also a website, [www.charitybags.org](http://www.charitybags.org), dedicated to highlighting fraud in the sector and which provides a comprehensive account of issues in relation to this topic, although it does not provide an estimate of the value of charity bag collections. Moreover, public complaints about theft and bogus charity bag collections rose by more than 200 per cent, according to unofficial figures from the Fundraising Standards Board (Civil Society Fundraising 2011).

However, despite this predominant emphasis on fraud, reliable estimates of the size of the problem are hard to locate, with a range of £2.5 million (Hudson, 2011) to £50 million a year (Hudson, 2011a). A comparison of fraud estimates over time, however, does enable both an indication of the growth of the sector over recent years and an estimation of the size of the sector to be provided. The Charity Commission (2003) estimated fraud from charity bag collections to be at £1million per year, while the most recent estimate by Tracey Crouch MP (who has campaigned extensively on the issue) estimated losses to charities through bag theft and bogus bags at around £14m a year (Lane, 2012), a 1,300% increase in a ten year period, which again highlights the exponential growth of the sector in a short time. This figure also enables a back of the envelope calculation (Levitt, 2001) of the size of the charity bag sector, as Tracey Crouch's estimate of fraud and theft is that it represents 12% of the total charity bag sector. This means that that we can estimate that the charity bag collections are worth approximately £116 million a year to charities.

I have so far outlined evidence of the increased significance of charity bag collections to charities, in both scope and income. In particular, I have identified four significant issues that relate to charity bag collections as:

5. The frequency of collection requests
6. The amount of materials collections provide
7. The amount of commission received by charities from outsourced collections
8. The extent of bogus/fraudulent collections

However despite its evident increasing significance to the charity sector, there has been very little research on charity bag collections, with the exception of bogus/fraudulent collections as outlined above. What related research there has been has typically focused on recycling in general (Barr et al, 2005; Curran and Williams, 2010; Farrant et al, 2010; Fisher et al, 2011; Granstrom, 2006; Hibbert et al, 2005; Ouverets Project, 2005; Parsons, 2004; Thomas et al, 2003) Williams et al, 2005;), although there has been some research undertaken on clothes bank recycling (Woolridge et al, 2006). This means that although the issues identified above are of known significance, they have not been explored to any great detail, and this paper aims to provide some relevant exploratory analysis of these issues to start to bridge this evident knowledge gap.

## **Methods**

For ease of terminology, henceforth, 'charity bags' will refer to all collection requests for donations delivered to households, even if from commercial organisations; where they come from commercial organisations and this is relevant, this will be made clear in the text. Data used for this research consists of the collection of all the charity bags delivered to the researcher's address within a period of a year. This is akin to convenience sampling. However, it mitigates some of the limitations of convenience sampling in significant ways, in that as the research data *de facto* selected the researcher and not *vice versa*, researcher bias leading to un-representativeness is limited.

At the same time, the convenience sampling used here enables a basic explorative account of issues to be highlighted, as is the aim of the paper.

Using Excel, the physical and textual content of the delivered charity bags was coded and analysed related to issues identified above. In total, there were 52 charity bags delivered during the period, a breakdown of which is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Summary of charity bags delivered**

<b>Total number delivered</b>				
52				
<b>Different number of organisations</b>				
21				
<b>Charity Organisations</b>		<b>Commercial Organisations</b>		
45		7		
<b>Charities (charity number provided)</b>		<b>Non-Charities</b>		
18		3		
<b>Number per organisation delivered</b>				
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4+</b>
5	10	3	2	1

There were 21 different organisations, meaning that the majority sent more than 1 charity bag request a year. As can be seen the vast majority were from charities, defined as where a charity number was provided, as discussed below. These results are now discussed in the context of the issues highlighted above.

***Frequency of collection requests***

The amount of charity bags delivered averages out at one a week, and most organisations delivered more than one charity bag request. One of the reasons for this is that usually, one organisation will deliver and collect for more than one charity, meaning that there is a constant repetitive supply of charity bags delivered on rotation. As RNLi (2011) states ‘ [Our collection organisation] will usually post RNLi bags every 4–5 weeks in each area, alternating the charities they are posting on behalf of including the RNLi.’ Most charity bags for collection were enclosed in another bag; there were some organisations that provided just leaflets, but these tended to be linked with non-charities and/or suspicious bogus organisations, as detailed below. Looking at the range of organisations which delivered charity bags, this differed from small organisations with income in the thousands of pounds to large organisations with income in the hundreds of millions of pounds such as Save The Children (£291 million), NSPCC (£148 million), RNLi (£163 million), and Sense (£82 million) (income data was taken from the Charity Commission



website). Indeed, as Table 2 below shows, the income of a significant number of charities which delivered charity bags was above £5 million.

**Table 2. Income of registered charities that delivered charity bags**

<b>&lt; £ 100,000</b>	<b>£100,001 - £500,000</b>	<b>£500, 001- 5 Million</b>	<b>£5 Million+</b>
1	7	4	4

This finding is atypical of the income of charities in general, where nearly three quarters of charities have an income less than £100,000, and only 1.1% of charities have an income above £5 million. This suggests that the charity bag sector is disproportionately dominated by medium to large size charities. Moreover, the fact that companies with such large income streams are intimately involved in charity bag collections suggests that as outlined above, charity bag collections have become a significant source of income for charity sector.

***Amount of materials collections provide***

No information was provided by any organisation on the amount of materials that collections provide to them, meaning that no comparison could be made, but the high number of requests supports the previous assertion that the amount is significant. One possible reason for this lack of information was the industry structure, as most collections by charities (14 out of 18) were outsourced, meaning that charities undertake collections in partnership with commercial door to door collection businesses and so charities themselves would have no idea of how much was being collected. Only 4 charities collected their goods inhouse, as with the Salvation Army. This disparity is somewhat surprising as it is from inhouse collections that charities can make the most money, through selling the good themselves (charitybags.org). However, the predominant emphasis on the outsourcing of collections mitigate against charities being aware of how much was collected, and this might explain why overall it is hard to state for definite how much the sector is worth.

Outsourced collections can either be delivered to the charity for them to sell as reusable goods in their shops or to sell on to other recycling organisations, or can be sold by the outsourcing company for recycling and then a commission be given to the charity<sup>1</sup>. Of these, it is selling reuseable goods

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<sup>1</sup> Re-use refers to using a product more than once in its original state. Reused clothing for example usually ships directly from the seller to the buyer. Recycling means separating, collecting, processing, marketing, and ultimately using a material that would otherwise have been throw away. One material can be recycled and used in the production of another product (Granstrom, 2010).

which would be the most profitable for charities (charitybags.org). However, very few organisations (3) explicitly indicated that reuse was the outcome for the collection, and this was predominantly by those which were inhouse collections, suggesting that few charities were exploiting the value of their collection to maximum effect.

### ***The amount of commission received by charities from outsourced collections***

This brings us on to the amount of commission received by charities from outsourced collections. Where charity collections were not outsourced, this would not be an issue as all the income would go to the charity, and there would also be the potential of claiming recycling credits. However, it would be an issue for outsourced collections, and as observed above, the vast majority of charity bag requests were outsourced. Overall, there was an even split between outsourced collections which did and did not provide an indication of the £/tonnage which they were donating to the relevant charity. Where donations were stated they were typically in the range of £50-£75/tonne of clothes donated. Remember, however, that a donation of £50/ tonne is equivalent to £50 per 1000kg, or 5p per kg, of clothes donated, which seems a limited amount of donation for a lot of clothes, and reflects the issue highlighted above with regards to outsources clothes and shoe banks. An interesting observation was that on the RNLI's collections bags, the amount donated was stated as a minimum of £50/tonne, whereas on the website it was stated that the RNLI received a maximum of £50/tonne donated, suggesting that minimum as indicted on the charity bag was actually the maximum. It also appeared that larger organisations which had contracted out their collections were more able to negotiate higher rates of donations than smaller organisations, as the only organisations where donations were at more than £75/tonne was for the NSPCC (income £148 million), and Midlands Air Ambulance Service (income £5 million), and it was noted on the RNLI website (income £163 million), that they had recently managed to negotiate an increase in their £/tonnage donation to £75/tonne. This suggests that smaller charities were missing out on income by not having negotiated more generous £/tonnage donation rates.

An interesting nugget of information was also provided on the NSPCC charity bag, which stated that:

Help us to raise funds for the NSPCC. Clothes Aid (Services) Ltd will donate at least £80 per tonne of clothes collected to the NSPCC registered charity numbers 216401 and SC03717 via the NSPCC Trading Company Ltd. Clothes Aid (Services) Ltd have guaranteed to donate a minimum of £800,000 plus VAT in a 12-month period.

Of interest here is the guaranteed donation from Clothes Aid to the NSPCC, which at a £/tonnage donation rate of £80/tonne suggests that Clothes Aid expects to collect at least 8000 tonnes of clothes for the NSPCC. That is a significant amount of clothes for one organisation, and highlights again the

potential volume of clothing which charity bag collections can provide towards charities income.

### ***The extent of bogus/fraudulent collections***

As highlighted above, bogus/fraudulent collections is one of the most pressing issues in the relation to charity bags. This section uses two checking mechanisms to explore this issue. Firstly, the validity of the charity number provided on the collection bag was checked, using the Charity Commission website. Secondly, this section also draws extensively on comprehensive list of door-to door collections found on the charitybags.org website to investigate this issue. As shown in Table 1 above, charity bags delivered were predominately from charities, not commercial organisations, with charity numbers provided by 18 separate organisations. Of these, all but two were active on the Charity Commission website, one of which had been wound up in November 2011, and the other removed from the Register of Charities in by the Charity Commission in February 2012. A search on the website revealed that the former was due to 'not acting in the public interest', but there was no other information on the latter. Charitybags.org did also raise concern about another charity due to the high administration cost, and advised that 'We'd recommend people steer clear of this organisation - and give their donations to a more 'efficient' cancer charity.'

This means that out of 18 organisations providing charity bags, 2 could be said to be fraudulent/bogus, and one suspicious, meaning that the vast majority of charity bags were valid charity collections. One further issue that the charitybags.org website did implicitly raise was that there were several charities which were registered both as a charity and a limited company, with their collections carried out by their limited company which was often a textile recycling company, and that the relationship between the two was unclear at times. Such explicit information was provided by very few charities on charity bags. Moreover, most organisations only provided a website as a point of contact, with no direct phone number, and where a phone number was provided, this was usually for the outsourced collecting organisation and not the charity. Some organisations provided neither. Where contact numbers were provided, there was the predominant use of non-geographic (0845/0844/0870) numbers, and no information on call charges for these numbers. The use of such numbers have been highlighted as problematic as they tend to cost more, and also confuse consumers about the price they will be charged, meaning they tend to make fewer calls to these numbers (Ofcom, 2010:51). There is of course the possibility of using 03 numbers which are exclusively for charities and non-profit organisations (and charged like 01/02 numbers and usually included in call bundles, and so free in some instances), but of course this is not possible where collection has been outsourced, as was the rule rather than the exception from the data, so the potentiality for this is limited.

Some requests did provide accreditation to trade bodies, such as the Fundraising Standards Board (FRSB) and the Code of Charity Retailing, but this was the vast minority. While the issue of bogus/fraudulent collections, then, was perhaps not as significant as suggested previously, there were

several issues which had the potential to restrict donors' confidence in the collection system, such as their inability to check for potential bogus and fraudulent collections, which ultimately could compound the perceptions of fraud and bogus behaviour and thus limit potential donations.

## ***Discussion***

The findings above have provided an exploratory description of issues related to charity bags for the charity sector. It has explored several relevant issues which were highlighted as significant to charity bags, and provided relevant data findings around these issues. These issues are now summarised and discussed.

Although the data was not able to shed light on the volume of textiles material which charity bags provided, it does indicate that it is a significant amount. This is evident from both the frequency of charity bag requests, and the calibre of charity organisations which provided collections. However, the total number of bags delivered and the number of different organisations which delivered would also seem to indicate that there is limited specific targeting of collection requests by charities. This is significant in the context of research on the effect that badly targeting campaigns can have on donor behaviour, such as the most recent *Consumer Attitudes Report* (REaD, 2012), which suggests that badly targeted mailings – for example sending a prostate cancer campaign to a young female who can never get prostate cancer - would encourage over half of potential donors to stop donating to a charity. So there perhaps need to be better targeting of collection requests in order avoid such turning away from giving through charity bags, and charities in general.

However, the charity sector has a good news environmental story to tell in charity bags, if we extrapolate figures for donated waste textiles material in general, whereby less than 10% of such material is collected as waste, and 92% of material is reused (Woolridge, 2006). Moreover, according to Barr *et al*, (2005) there is evidence that there is great potential for the unstructured recycling market, based around voluntary giving. This suggests that the more information participants have about the reuse/recycling of materials, the more likely they are to donate. However, the data suggests that this potentiality is being limited by a general lack of detail about what happened to the collected goods, with most not providing any detail of whether they were reusing or recycling. This is something that perhaps could be emphasised on more charity bag.

One thing that mitigates against either more specific targeting and more specific information on recycling and reuse is the generally outsourced nature of charity bag collections. This means that charities are not aware of the specifics of their charity bag collections to provide such relevant information. Additionally, such outsourcing would also seem to limit the revenue that charities are able to generate for themselves, due to the minimal commission that they are provided with, especially in the context of the significant increases in prices for recycled textile materials. For example, if we take the 2011 price for shop collections material shown in Graph 1 of £550/tonne, this

compares unfavourable to the typical range of £50-75/tonne that outsourced companies indicated as giving to charities on the charity bags. Charities would say that there are related costs to charity bag collections which make it necessary to outsource their collections, but even taking this into consideration, what they receive as commission seems a low price compared to the market price, and also limits potential income from recycling credits. This is also supported by the observation by Pudelek (2012) there is so much competition for recycled clothes that one commercial organisation was offering 70p per kg rather than the usual 50p per kilo for individuals willing to sell second hand clothes, way above the or 5p per kg which charities tend to receive, and which would translate into a price of up to £700/tonne, again way above the equivalent £50/tonne for charities. Charities might not be able to get that price, but it is likely that they would be able to get a better price than they achieved from their outsourced commissions.

Another interesting observation in this respect is that whereas legally charities require a licence to collect donations, commercial organisations do not, so the question is why do commercial organisations see a collaboration with a charity as a necessity, as indicated by the data. As research suggests that donating clothes to charity is the most popular method for textile disposal (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010), this provides a possible explanation to this, and also implies that charities have perhaps undersold the value of the outsourced relationship that they have with commercial organisations to collect on their behalf. A good example of this is where Marks & Spencer recently created a partnership with Oxfam, whereby, for every bag of unwanted Marks & Spencer clothing donated to the charity, the consumer receives a £5 voucher redeemable against purchases at Marks & Spencer to the value of £35 or more. This has increased not only the donations received by Oxfam but also the sales at Marks & Spencer (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009:192)

The issue of fraud was highlighted as the most pressing issue in relation to charity bags, but the data suggests that it is not as problematic as portrayed, as most charity bag requests seemed to represent operating charities, and it might prove counterproductive to keep highlighting it as the major issue, in terms of potentially limiting donor activity. Rather, the most problematic issue in this respect seemed to be the information that charities provided in relation to both who was actually carrying out their collections, and enabling them to check the veracity of collecting organisations. In relation to the first, there was a dearth of accurate information provided in this respect, and in relation to the latter, most organisations only provided a website as a point of contact, with no direct phone number, and where a phone number was provided, this was usually for the outsourced collecting organisation and not the charity, with the predominant use of non-geographic (0845/0844/0870) numbers, and no information on call charges for these numbers. The use of such numbers has been highlighted as confusing to consumers and problematic as they tend to cost more meaning they would make fewer calls to these numbers. As indicated, some charity bags did provide accreditation to trade bodies, such as the Fundraising Standards Board and the Code of Charity Retailing, but this was the vast minority. The recent 'Give with Care' campaign has attempted to minimise the risk of mistakenly giving unwanted clothing to a

commercial company rather than to a registered charity (Fairbairn, 2011), but in addition to this it would appear that charities need to provide better mechanisms to enable potential donors to make a more informed decision about who they are giving to.

## **Conclusion**

The title of this paper is an inversion of the usual cliché of turning muck to brass, which it is arguable that charity bag collections do, by providing an income for charities for goods that would normally be thrown away. Background research and data from this study suggests that this is a significant income stream for charities, indicating that turning muck to brass is indeed what charities are doing. But the inversion also suggests that there are a number of practices by charities which risks undermining the potential of charity bag collections. These practices were related to all issues explored. In relation to the frequency of collection requests, these appeared to be rather unfocussed and uncoordinated, suggesting a need for better targeting of collection requests in order to avoid turning away potential donors from giving through charity bags, and charities in general. There appears to be great potential to increase the amount of materials collected, based around voluntary giving having an environmental good news story to tell, but the data suggests in general that this potentiality is being limited by a general lack of detail about what happens to the collected goods, with most not providing any detail of whether they were reusing or recycling. Both of these were also being limited by the generally outsourced nature of charity bag collections. Additionally, such outsourcing would also seem to limit the revenue that charities are able to generate for themselves, due to the minimal commission that they are provided with, especially in the context of the significant increases in prices for recycled textile materials over the last few years. Income also appears to be limited by charities perhaps having undersold the value of the outsourced relationship that they have with commercial organisations to collect on their behalf. Finally, while the data suggests that the extent of bogus/fraudulent collections is not as problematic as portrayed, there were issues around the information that charities provided in relation to both who was actually carrying out their collections, and enabling them to check the veracity of collecting organisations. In general, it appears that charities need to provide better mechanisms to enable potential donors to make a more informed decision about who they are giving to. The recent *Review of the Charities Act 2006* by Lord Hodgson (Office for Civil Society, 2012) made some recommendations which are relevant in the context of this study, such as more compulsory use of the FRSB logo for public fundraising, the abolition of National Exemption Orders, and the possibility of licensing all houses to house textile collectors, not just charitable ones. This research is limited by its small scale nature and the sampling method used which means that the generalisations of findings is not possible, and so more large scale in-depth research is required to explore the issues highlighted to a greater extent. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that, by providing an income for charities for goods that would normally be thrown away, charities have been to a certain extent successful in using charity bag collections to turn muck into brass, but significant steps need to be made by charities in order not to invert

the cliché, and turn what has become brass back into muck, thereby losing out on a potentially significant income stream.

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