

SMALL CHANGES, BIG IMPACT.

A CASE STUDY: REUSABLE NAPPIES IN
PRACTICE, A NURSERY-BASED APPROACH

SEPTEMBER 2025



POWERED BY
Wen.

Lloyd Park
Children's Charity



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INTRODUCTION

Every year in the UK, around 3.6 billion disposable nappies are thrown away, generating 432,000 tonnes of waste and costing local councils over £140 million in disposal costs.

In response to this growing environmental challenge, and as part of their ongoing commitment to sustainability, the Lloyd Park Children's Charity (LPCC) has taken a meaningful step by introducing reusable cloth nappies at two of their nurseries, the Higham Hill Centre and Lloyd Park Centre.

The initiative aims to reduce single-use nappy waste, encourage sustainable behaviours among families with young children, and contribute to Waltham Forest Council's wider waste prevention and climate action goals.

This transition was made possible through cross-sector collaboration. Real Nappies for London (administered by the UK environmental charity Wen – Women's Environmental Network) and Nappy Ever After provided operational guidance, staff training, and a nappy laundry service. Additional support came from Waltham Forest Council and the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) who work with Wen to promote reusable nappy use through public education, outreach, and a funded reusable nappy voucher incentive scheme.

By integrating reusable nappies into everyday nursery practice, this project offers a replicable model for early years providers, local authorities, and sustainability-focused organisations looking to reduce single-use nappy waste, deliver environmentally responsible care, and help families adopt more sustainable habits from the start.



INITIAL PLANNING

**Consultation
Period**

**Staff
Training**

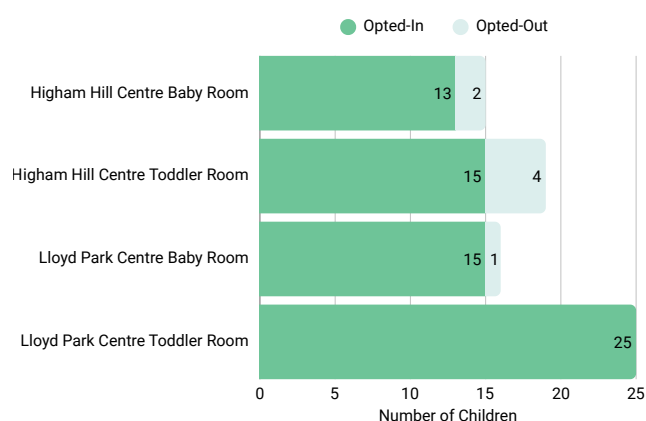
**Service Start:
Higham Hill
August 2024**

**Service Start:
Lloyd Park
October 2024**

In summer 2024, LPCC held a consultation period with nursery staff and parents to explore perceptions, explain anticipated benefits, and build confidence in adopting reusable nappies. This engagement strategy ensured everyone involved was informed, heard, and supported from the outset contributing to a smoother transition and higher uptake.

Participation rates were high across both nurseries, with 28 out of 34 children (82%) at Higham Hill and 40 out of 41 children (98%) at Lloyd Park taking part. Parents were given the option to opt out, and reasons for non-participation were primarily practical, relating to toilet training readiness or attending for short sessions.

For example, one child was already transitioning to pull-up pants, and four children in the Higham Hill toddler room attended only in the mornings (9am–12pm), making the change less practical to implement during their short time at nursery. One child at Higham Hill was already wearing reusable nappies before the service was introduced.



It's very innovative... it's saving us money, and the eco side of gives peace of mind that we're doing our bit to reduce nursery waste.

I was all for the convenience of disposables. But I can see the value of the cost implication and the environmental factor now.

REUSABLE NAPPIES IN ACTION

Each nursery is supplied with a stock of absorbent cotton prefold nappies, along with waterproof wraps (donated by Nappy Ever After) and lidded bins for hygienic storage. At every nappy change, staff place used prefolds in the designated bin for weekly collection by Nappy Ever After via electric cargo bike.

The prefolds are laundered off-site to Environmental Health Department and NHS-compliant standards, using a three-minute wash at 72°C to ensure thermal disinfection¹.

The waterproof wraps are stored separately and washed on-site at LPCC on a 50°C wash using non-bio detergent. LPCC noted that this added just one extra laundry load, with minimal impact on water use and operational routines, given existing schedules for washing towels, bed linen, and flannels. At the Lloyd Park centre, staff said that the same waterproof wrap is usually returned to the same child, although this is not a requirement.



The nappies come back like brand new, always clean and white.

- Debbie, Early Years Educator



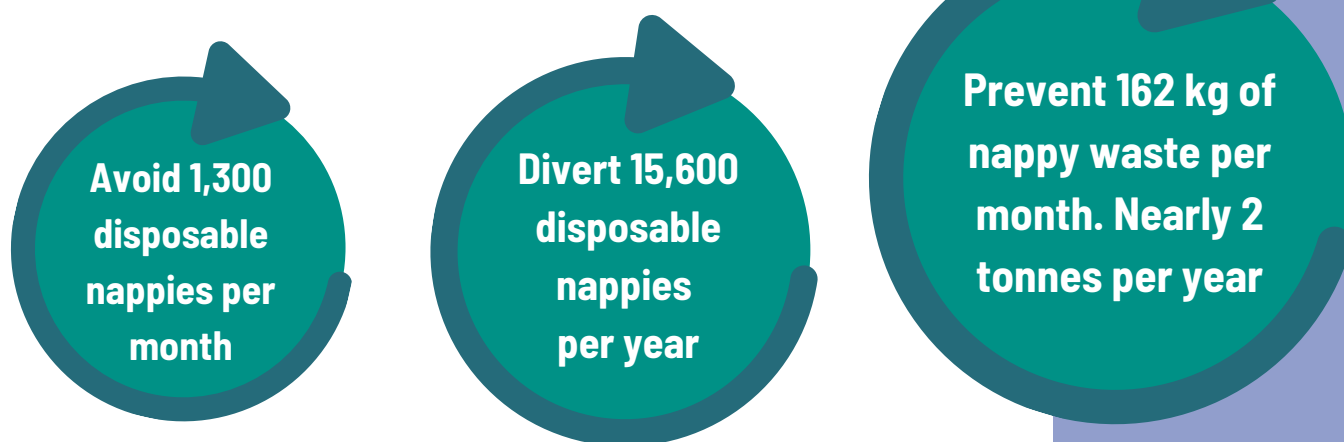
IMPACT SO FAR

WASTE REDUCTION

240 litres of disposable nappy waste avoided every week

The introduction of reusable nappies has led to a 50% reduction in disposable nappy waste across both nursery sites. Previously, each nursery used four 60-litre bins per week for disposal of single-use nappy waste. Following the transition, this has dropped to two 60-litre bins per site, with staff reporting that each nursery now disposes of approximately 150 disposable nappies per week.

Based on early figures and if trends continue, the shift to reusables has the potential to:²



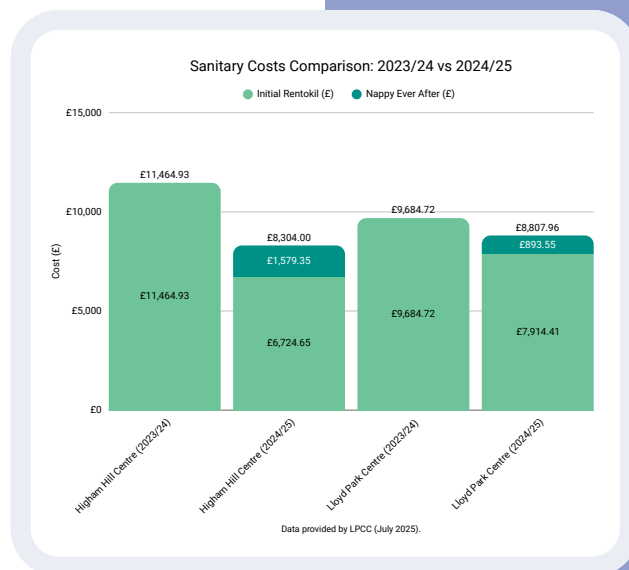
While the first and last nappy changes of the day are left to parental choice, it is typically the nappy a child arrives in that contributes to nursery waste. Additional disposable nappy waste will result from children whose parents opted out of the service or those attending on shorter sessions.

Supporting families to adopt reusable nappies at home presents a clear opportunity to further reduce disposable nappy waste in nursery settings and beyond.

COST SAVINGS

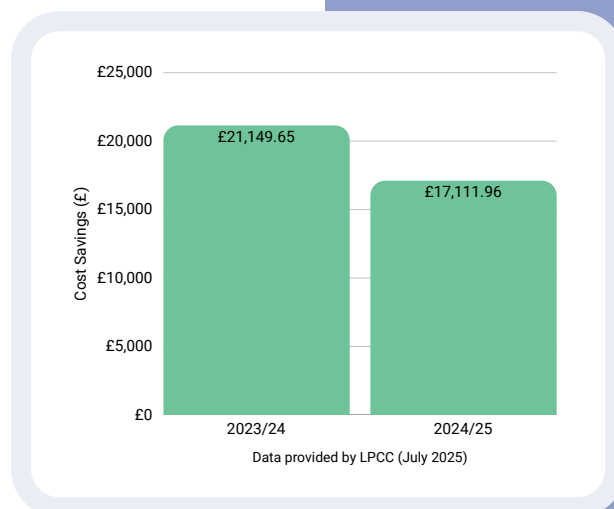
At Higham Hill, where the service began in August 2024, total sanitary costs fell from £11,465 in 2023/24 to £8,304 – a saving of approximately £3,161 (27.6%). This includes the cost of the nappy laundry service provided by Nappy Ever After (£1,579).

At Lloyd Park, where implementation started later in October 2024, costs decreased from £9,685 to £8,808, resulting in a saving of around £877 (9%). The smaller saving likely reflects both the shorter implementation period and lower weekly prefold usage compared to Higham Hill.



We're proud to support LPCC save over £4,000 through reusable nappy use.
– Alice, Real Nappies for London

Combined, the two nurseries have saved approximately £4,038 in sanitary waste management costs. These results show that, over the course of a year, reusable nappies can deliver meaningful cost savings and offer a scalable, financially viable model for Private, Voluntary, and Independent (PVI) early years providers, as well as local authority-funded early years providers.



SUPPORTING EARLIER TOILET TRAINING

Reusable nappies may also support children's early toileting awareness and independence. At Higham Hill, total nappy use dropped from 724 nappies delivered in October 2024 to 525 in February 2025 – a reduction of 27% over four months. While some decrease is expected as children begin to toilet train, staff noted that the switch to reusable cotton nappies may have supported earlier progress.

Unlike disposable nappies, cotton nappies allow children to feel the difference between wet and dry, helping them become more aware of their bodily cues. The 2025 Toilet Training Census found that 72% of children using reusable nappies are potty trained by two and a half years, compared to 54% of children in disposable nappies³.

By reinforcing this early awareness, reusable nappies not only help reduce waste but also contribute to smoother toilet training transitions, supporting school readiness and personal development outcomes in early years settings.



It's great to see the staff getting on board with cotton reusable nappies and hear that they are not only feeling the waste reduction and health benefits, but jumping on the opportunity that cloth nappies offer to get children out of nappies earlier.

– Sammy, Nappy Ever After



ADDITIONAL IMPACT OBSERVATIONS

In addition to measurable reductions in waste and cost, nursery staff observed a number of positive outcomes that support wider sustainability and engagement goals:

- **Greater awareness** among families of the environmental impact of single-use products.
- **More frequent conversations** with parents about sustainability at home.
- **Increased staff confidence** in using reusable nappies as part of everyday nursery care.



In the beginning it was challenging as it was new. But over time it has become easier as the team are getting used to it. The children seem happy, they are not phased by it. I think it's a good thing, the purpose behind it, it didn't become a big problem when we changed over which was good.

– Arshia, Early Years Educator



Staff reflections reinforce the operational feasibility of reusable nappy use in early years settings. While there were initial adjustments, these quickly gave way to confidence and routine integration. These findings highlight the role of early years settings as active agents in promoting environmental literacy and modelling sustainable behaviours within the wider community.

BEYOND THE NURSERY

Engaging parents through education, access, and community outreach

Alongside the nursery transition, Real Nappies for London has worked closely with LPCC and Waltham Forest Council to raise awareness of reusable nappies and support families to adopt them at home.

To reach new parents early, Real Nappies for London delivers information sessions at LPCC's You and Your New Baby classes (run on behalf of the Best Start in Life programme), offering practical advice on reusable nappy use and how to access Waltham Forest's £70 reusable nappy voucher funded by the NLWA. Real Nappies for London also promotes and supports LPCC to signpost families to local "Meet and Give & Take" events, where parents can access free nappies, redeem vouchers at pop-up shops, and receive one-to-one guidance.

To ensure equitable access, Real Nappies for London and Nappy Ever After have collaborated with LPCC to distribute reusable nappies through its baby bank. This supports families experiencing financial hardship – including those with no recourse to public funds who are not eligible for the voucher scheme – to benefit from sustainable options.

Leaflets and starter resources provided by Real Nappies for London are shared directly with families, reinforcing positive messaging and supporting behaviour change beyond the nursery environment.



CONCLUSION

The initial rollout of reusable nappies at the LPCC Higham Hill and Lloyd Park nurseries has been smooth, well-received, and operationally feasible. It demonstrates that sustainable change is both practical and achievable in early years settings – and that with the right support, nursery environments can serve as effective catalysts for reducing single-use nappy waste.

Building on this momentum offers real potential for wider adoptions and long-term impact across the borough and beyond. To support this, we recommend the following:

- **Review the service after one year** by measuring ongoing benefits and areas for improvement. This should include tracking waste reduction, collecting staff and parent feedback, and exploring any links to earlier toilet training.
- **Scale the service to more nurseries** by building on the learnings at the Higham Hill Centre and Lloyd Park Centre. Waltham Forest alone has around 82 nursery settings, including Local Authority-run and independent providers⁴. A borough-wide approach could significantly amplify impact.
- **Encourage reusable nappy use at home** through continued partnership with Real Nappies for London, Nappy Ever After, and LPCC. This includes parent workshops, voucher access, and targeted resources that support behaviour change.
- **Introduce reusable wipes** alongside the nappy laundry service, further reducing single-use waste and aligning with wider waste prevention goals.



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- 02** Waste reduction estimates based on self-reported reductions in disposable nappy use, applying the Defra (2023) estimated average used nappy weight of 126.6g per nappy.

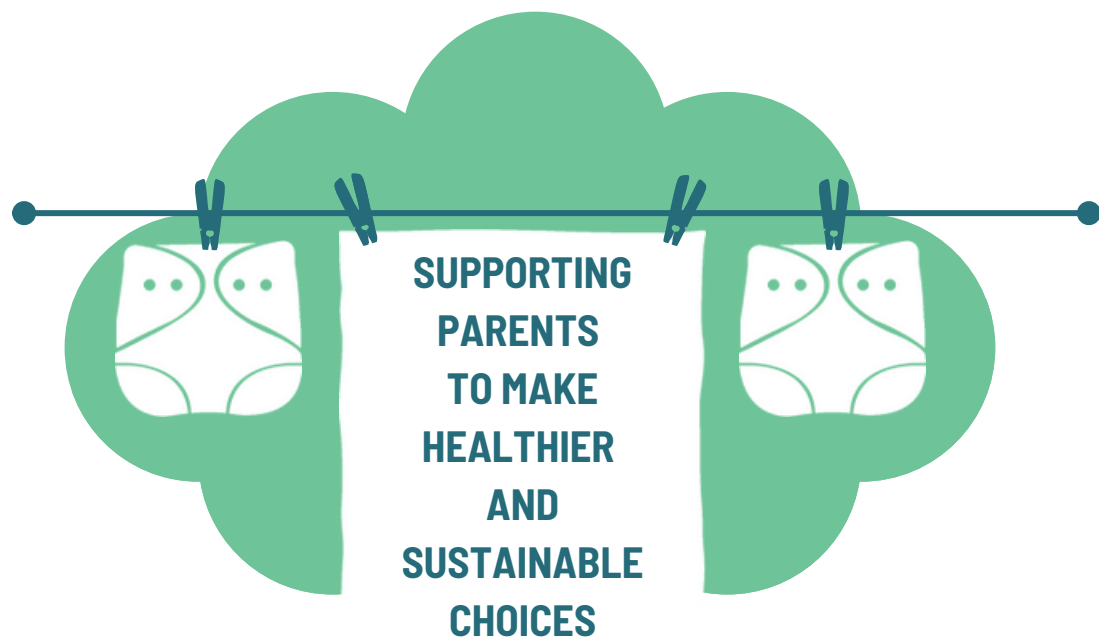
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Real Nappies for London is powered by **Wen**, the Women's Environmental Network. Wen is an environmental charity working on issues that connect women, health, equity and environmental justice.

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