



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

Dinas A Sir Abertawe

Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for Environment &
Transport

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

*Direct Line:
Llinell
Uniongyrochol:*

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

*Our Ref
Ein Cyf:*

*Your Ref
Eich Cyf:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

Scrutiny

01792 636292

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

22 December 2014

Dear Councillor Thomas,

Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel 4 December 2014

The panel met on 4 December 2014 to consider the Annual Recycling and Landfill Performance. The purpose of this meeting was to monitor and challenge performance and consider the actions in place to meet the statutory targets.

The panel would like to thank you, Chris Howell and Ian Whettleton for attending the meeting to present the report and answer our questions. This letter reflects the main issues we discussed.

Targets

Overall we were pleased to hear that the Council is on course to achieve the Welsh Government recycling and composting target of 58% in 2015/16, and that the current target of 52% has been exceeded. We believe that this reflects the success of the Council's Recycling Improvement Strategy to change behaviour and we commend the progress that has been made.

However, we also appreciate that the financial situation is difficult with increasing requirements to make significant budget reductions. The next stage of the Welsh Government's targets will be to achieve a 64% recycling rate by 2019, which will require more radical action if it is to be achieved. Therefore we believe it is essential that progress is maintained and improved on, and we were encouraged to hear your

assessment that, despite the challenges, you believe that the strategy and actions are in place to meet the targets.

Key areas for improvement

We discussed some of the key areas for improvement in more detail in order to understand your assessment that the Council will achieve the next stage of targets. We were interested to hear of the plans to increase recycling rates though targeting commercial waste customers, the first step of which is to introduce a ban on food waste in the residual bin collections. This would have the double impact of significantly reducing the amount of waste to landfill and also making the inspection of residual waste in the picking line to remove recyclable materials more successful as it would not be contaminated by food waste

We spent some time discussing the relative merits of the Council continuing to provide a commercial waste service. We discussed whether it is desirable for the Council to continue providing the service, especially considering the fact that the waste collected by private contractors does not count towards the Welsh Government landfill and recycling targets. You advised us that the Council has a statutory responsibility to provide this service, however this is within a competitive market and currently the Council has approximately 50% market share, with the rest being collected by private contractors. We learnt that whilst the service does not make a profit, it is self-funding, and also cross-subsidises other element of the waste and recycling service. In addition, the commercial waste service is used by other parts of the Council, so overall there would be a negative financial impact on the Council if this service ceased.

You advised us of plans to improve the commercial waste service though joint working with private contractors as opposed to competition. For example, liaising with private contractors to propose that the Council is sub-contracted by them to collect recyclable waste from their clients, which would have the benefit of enabling the Council to increase its recycling rates whilst allowing the private contractors to continue collecting residual waste, which would not add to overall landfill figures. This appears to be a productive approach to follow.

We agree that the targeted door knocking exercise to increase domestic participation should continue, and we agree that this should be protected from budget cuts as far as possible, as this appears to consistently contribute to increased recycling rates.

Enforcement

We discussed the issue of enforcement. We were advised that work is on-going with the Public Protection Team in order to tackle particular issues of concern, for example lack of participation in student areas. There are powers in place to deal with licensed HMO properties, where a health hazard has been identified, but overall it is difficult to enforce. It is also not possible to fine people for lack of participation in recycling collections. The best approach that the Council can take is one of education and awareness-raising and the door-knocking work is an example of how this can be achieved.

Future service options/budget

We were informed that as part of Sustainable Swansea new models of delivery for the waste and recycling service will be considered. You advised us that it will be important that a high quality service is maintained as this is essential for maintaining good levels of participation in recycling services. We will be interested in hearing how this work develops.

This letter provides our views on the service but does not give any further recommendations; therefore a response is not required. However, this letter will be included in the next available agenda of the Scrutiny Programme Committee as the committee maintains an overview of all scrutiny activities, and monitors correspondence.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Mary Jones

Convenor, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

✉ Mary.Jones@swansea.gov.uk