



**To/
Councillor Cyril Anderson
Cabinet Member for Community
(Services)**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2024-25/1

02 August 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 16 July 2024. It is about the Council's Recycling / Waste Collection Service. A formal written response is required by 23 August 2024.

Dear Councillor Anderson,

Scrutiny of Recycling / Waste Collection Service

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session with you, which enabled the Committee to ask about the recent issues with the Recycling / Waste Collection Service which have impacted across the City & County.

We thank you and the Leader of the Council, and lead officers, in particular Chris Howell, Head of Waste, Parks & Cleansing, for providing an explanation of the disruption and how issues are being addressed.

Recycling / Waste Collection is one of the most visible Council services that every resident experiences, and we acknowledge that some believe it is the only thing that the Council does for them and will always be a source of complaint when there is disruption. Nevertheless the Council does need to put things right quickly, and we acknowledged your commitment to do so.

It was a very valuable and useful Scrutiny session, and the Committee appreciated everyone's efforts in managing difficulties and trying to resolve the current problems.

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This letter reflects on what we learnt from the information provided, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - key issues are summarised below.

Staffing

It was highlighted to the Committee that the Recycling / Waste Collection Service was a large service, comprising of 120 operational staff undertaking 220,000 collections per week. The Council will make use of agency workers in order to cover any staff shortages to avoid service disruption. However we noted that there is a particularly high number of vacancies at this time. There were currently 12 vacancies which had been as a result of retirement and staff leaving the service. Coupled with staff sickness, holidays, mandatory driver training, a shortage of suitable agency staff to cover the roles (including drivers), and other issues, such as occasional vehicle breakdowns / defects, there has been disruption to collections over the last three months. This has meant some rounds not being collected until the following day and figures indicated that on average two entire rounds per week have been delayed over the last few weeks. Committee Members queried the level of missed rounds as the perception amongst Councillors from resident feedback was that the disruption has been worse. It was clarified to the Committee that in some cases portions of the round may have been incomplete due to, for example a higher volume of waste than expected (e.g. garden waste); agency workers not showing up, and staff members being taken ill during the shift, etc. **The Committee asked for details of vehicle breakdowns within the last five weeks that have affected the service, which you undertook to provide in writing.**

We heard that the Council was in the process of recruiting staff and in addition to the 12 existing vacancies, it was planned to recruit a further 20 new staff members which will help to mitigate staff absences and in turn should result in less reliance on the use of agency staff. Therefore, the total number of staff to be recruited and directly employed was 32.

We were told that timescales associated with new employees commencing duties would vary e.g. serving notice periods, and undertaking necessary induction / training. However, we noted that many of the applicants had experience working in the service as agency staff, so potentially would be operational fairly quickly. Overall, the Council was aiming to return to a position where agency staff were not relied upon. With the additional resources we noted the aim was to be able to recover any collection delays within the same day.

The lack of trained driving staff remained a challenge for the service, which can impact the service, even when there is a full complement of collectors.

You stated that overall Swansea was experiencing similar workforce issues to other local authorities; the disruption to collection services was not unique to Swansea, but that the situation will improve.

We continued to discuss staffing matters in closed session so that we could have a more detailed discussion about working practices. **You agreed to provide a further update on the situation over the next few months, which we would appreciate. We can make arrangements for a future Committee meeting.**

Performance

The Committee was told that despite the recent resource issues, Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring showed that the recycling rate remained well above 70% and slightly above performance when compared to last year. Aside from delays, there had been no adverse impact on the amounts of recycling materials / waste or material collected. It was highlighted that Swansea had one the highest recycling performances and lowest cost per household.

We note that there is no specific Performance Indicator that relates to the timely completion of collection rounds.

Co-ordination with Street Cleansing

Given the disruption to collections we highlighted the need for flexibility in street cleansing, given the knock-on effect, to ensure that both services remain co-ordinated. We know that waste bags being left on the street for longer than usual risk being ripped by birds. Unfortunately, some residents continue to put food waste in black bags. We sought assurance that there is a high level of communication between collection and cleansing services, and that work would be undertaken to streamline cleansing services in response to missed collections, so that both are complementary.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. Specifically, we would be grateful for your response to the following:

- **details of vehicle breakdowns within the last five weeks that have affected the service; and**
- **advise when the Committee will be able to have a further update on the staffing situation**

Please provide response to these, and any other comments about our letter by 23 August 2024. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Black', written in a cursive style.

COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK
Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee
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