



**To:**  
**Councillor Mark Thomas**  
**Cabinet Member for Environment**  
**Enhancement & Infrastructure**  
**Management**

**CC: Cabinet Members**

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Overview & Scrutiny

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25<sup>th</sup> November 2020

## **BY EMAIL**

**Summary:** This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management. The letter concerns the meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and the Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring Report 2019/20.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

On the 9<sup>th</sup> November, the Panel met to discuss the Recycling and Landfill Annual Performance Monitoring Report 2019/20. The Panel are grateful to yourself and the Head of Waste, Parks and Cleansing for attending to discuss the report.

We paid tribute to the staff and the management of the waste and recycling services, for the hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic. The Panel heard that there has been significant public praise for the continuation of these services throughout. In addition to the commitment of the waste collection team, you also praised the public for their continuing efforts to maintain recycling standards.

You told us that at the end of March we achieved the 64% recycling target; an increase of 2.1% from the previous year, helped by the 'Keep It Out' campaign. The net effect was 2000 tonnes of waste avoiding landfill, which you acknowledged as a monumental achievement and a fantastic result.

We heard that recycling performance indicators for Wales listed Swansea as mid table, based on the amount of recycling achieved. You explained that Swansea mostly utilises landfill. Most other authorities send all their non-recyclable waste to incineration and can claim up to an extra 6% recycling rate that is accounted for by recycling tonnage from the residue ash produced. The Panel heard that this would mean we should be truly reflected in the top quarter of the statistics.

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We questioned the use of incineration for residual waste management. Although we would welcome the use of waste for energy generation, the potential problem is impact on climate change and Co2 emissions from waste incineration. We need to find a balance when looking at substitutes that give consideration to meeting climate change targets. We raised concerns over the prospect of incineration, which would help waste targets, however, would not help air quality targets for example. Our query was discussed in the context of landfill not being a long-term solution and something we need to move away from. The Panel heard that the only available, realistic, option currently is incineration. The Council is looking at other options as there are constantly new technologies being developed, although none are available to us at this time. It is likely that the Council will therefore take a short-term contract for incineration, and then move towards other newer market options and methods as they become available.

We heard that residual waste to landfill is due to come to an end in January 2022 and the Council is looking for alternative contracts. The current strategy is to exit Tir John and you are looking for alternative disposal methods. An 'energy from waste' disposal method is likely. A regional solution is no longer an option, but the Council is looking at continuing at present as a sole authority and this will be based on existing market availability.

You told us that the recycling target of 64% may not be met this year (2020/2021). This situation is effecting all councils in Wales. The target of 64% may not be met, however, we can attribute shortfalls to the impact of Covid-19, forcing recycling centres to close for two months and suspending bulky waste collections. Officers explained that under normal circumstances we would have been confident of reaching 64%. We are therefore not expecting any fines or penalties and understand that Welsh Government are sympathetic to this situation.

It was explained that the 'Keep It Out' campaign continues and the teams are out ensuring rules are adhered to.

The Panel queried whether receipt of black bags at the Llansamlet centre would now continue. You explained that the delay was due to Covid-19, however, sites are now open and a booking system is now in place at Llansamlet. We heard that the team would want to trial this new booking system for a short period, and then black bag disposal can resume before the end of this financial year.

Discussions were had about Welsh Government's circular economy strategy, no waste being the ultimate aim. Officers explained that the vast majority of carbon emissions are from production of materials, not disposal. It was heard that we need to minimise products we use and improve repair, reuse and recycle methods. Long-term strategy needs to be centred on re-use rather than disposal. We heard that 'energy from waste' is the best option currently.

Officers informed us that gasification technology is developing, however, there are no commercial operations up and running and this, therefore, is not an available option. The Council is looking at a balance of an affordable available solution with flexibility to move into emerging technologies as and when they become available.

The Panel questioned whether the team continued to inspect black bags on the curb side. We heard that this was a successful scheme, but during Covid-19 it had to be paused due to risks associated with exposing staff/public to interaction. There is a new round of the waste trainee scheme and the Keep It Out campaign will be reinvigorated through this training. Local lockdown has further hampered this progress.

The Panel queried whether you envisage a shortfall in the income of this department given that the recycle shop has closed. You explained that this area of income has been hit significantly. The Panel also heard that 90% of businesses closed so did not require commercial collections. Officers assured us that a claim has been submitted to Welsh Government for reimbursement. **The Panel would like an update on income and expenditure in this area in six months time.**

The Panel raised questions relating to external contractors and their compliance in terms of waste disposal. Officers gave assurance that every outfit utilised is registered with UK regulators. Some products are shipped abroad when appropriate, for example, glass to Portugal for use in bottle production. Officers explained we use UK brokers with various outlets and the vast majority of waste goes to UK based processors who use the material in a final product.

The Panel queried who checks that contractors go through proper channels to dispose of items. Officers explained this is a verified process and any company who we contract is regulated by NRW, who check on compliance.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Chris Holley**

**Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel**

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