



JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MULTI-LOCATIONAL MEETING HELD IN PENALLTA HOUSE AND VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY 27TH MARCH 2023 AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor G. Johnston – Chair

Councillors:

M. Adams, C. Bishop, A. Broughton-Pettit, M. Chacon-Dawson, R. Chapman, P. Cook, C. J. Cuss, D. T. Davies MBE, N. Dix, G. Ead, G. Enright, K. Etheridge, M. Evans, A. Farina-Childs, C. Forehead, A. Gair, C. Gordon, D. Harse, T. Heron, A. Hussey, D. Ingram-Jones, L. Jeremiah, S. Kent, A. Leonard, C. P. Mann, A. McConnell, B. Owen, L. Phipps, M. Powell, D. W. R. Preece, D. Price, H. Pritchard, J. A. Pritchard, J. Reed, J. E. Roberts, A. Whitcombe, L. G. Whittle, S. Williams, W. Williams, J. Winslade, K. Woodland, C. Wright.

Cabinet Members:

Councillors S. Morgan (Leader of Council) C. Andrews (Education and Communities), E. Forehead (Social Care), N. George (Corporate Services and Property), P. Leonard (Planning and Public Protection), C. Morgan (Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces), J. Pritchard (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change), Mrs E. Stenner (Finance and Performance).

Together with:

C. Harrhy (Chief Executive), M. Lloyd (Head of Infrastructure), R. Lloyd (Principal Waste Management Officer), C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), E. Sullivan (Senior Committee Services Officer), S. Hughes (Committee Services Officer), R. Barrett (Minute Taker).

Non-Scrutiny Committee Members:

Councillors J. Fussell, J. Jones, J. Sadler, R. Saralis.

RECORDING, FILMING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded and would be made available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would be taken via Microsoft Forms.

Due to technical difficulties with the webcast, the meeting was paused and restarted at 5.15 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E. M. Aldworth, A. Angel, D. Cushing, C. Elsbury, M. James, B. Miles, J. Rao, S. Skivens, J. Taylor and C. Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following report.

3. DRAFT WASTE STRATEGY (PRESENTATION)

Mrs Christina Harray (Chief Executive) presented the item and gave an overview of the complex set of issues being faced by the Authority in respect of recycling performance.

Members were advised that Welsh Government (WG) have set an overall zero waste target by 2050 and challenging recycling targets for councils. The current statutory target of 64% is already in place, with a further 70% recycling target already set for 24/25. The Council's recycling performance is currently 59%, which is well below the levels required to achieve the statutory WG targets, and means that the Authority is at considerable risk of facing significant fines for not achieving the required performance targets.

Presently, Caerphilly has the highest level of residual waste per person in Wales and a recent study has confirmed that almost half of the contents of residual waste (refuse) bins contain recyclable material. Dialogue with the Minister for Climate Change and senior WG officials has led to a request for the Authority to submit a Waste and Recycling Strategy to demonstrate how the Council and its residents will work differently to improve performance.

The proposed strategy document contains a wide range of measures focusing upon the waste hierarchy of "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle" and sets out the significant changes the Council are looking to implement to meet the WG statutory recycling targets of 70% and beyond, with an overall aspiration to attain the higher-level recovery targets and become an exemplar local authority in the recycling sector. The strategy focuses upon three key elements of interventions: 1) Diverting more recyclable materials from the residual waste stream; 2) Expanding recycling collection through new segregation streams, to ensure more material is collected and is of a higher quality; and 3) Improving the performance, offer and overall resident experience at household waste recycling centres (HWRCs)

Members noted the high levels of food waste and recycling being disposed of in residual waste, together with the large amount of recycling being rejected due to contamination. Members were provided with details of the current waste collection arrangements and HWRC facilities, with it noted that the service costs approximately

£10m and is currently experiencing an £850k overspend. In order to achieve WG recycling targets, significant and immediate changes are required, including a change to the service model, a change in public behaviour, a reduction in residual waste to divert food and recycling waste, and an improved offer at HWRCs. Future changes will include improving the quality of recycling, changes to HWRC arrangements, separate trade waste collections and green waste changes. It was emphasised that this is a substantial piece of work that will need to be carried out across communities, with the overall emphasis being that everyone has a key role to play in meeting these targets. The Council will engage, educate, encourage and enforce (as a last resort) to deliver the objectives within the new Strategy, and will also use in-cab technology across its waste fleet to monitor the waste being collected.

Members were provided with an overview of proposed Phase 1 improvements to be delivered during Autumn 2023, to assist in achieving the required 2024/25 WG recycling performance target of 70%. These include moving to either a 3 or 4-weekly green refuse bin collection, a new weekly collection for nappies and hygiene products, introducing free food waste liners, keeping brown bin recycling collections weekly but monitoring contamination rates, aligning bin collection days wherever possible, providing free extra recycling bins, subsidised composting bins and assessment for extra refuse bins, introducing an appointment service to access HWRCs, and the proposed closure of Penmaen HWRC.

A range of Phase 2 proposals during 2023/24 will also be considered at a later date which will be subject to public consultation and presented to Cabinet, including consideration of the kerbside collection of dry recyclables and associated infrastructure requirements, the garden waste collection service, trade waste collection, a Household Waste Recycling Centres review, and an education campaign to champion waste minimisation.

It was explained that a projected 12.7% increase in performance is anticipated if refuse collections move to a 4-weekly basis, with a 9% increase if refuse collections move to 3-weekly arrangements. It was emphasised that the timescales are incredibly tight in terms of implementation in order to avoid potential WG financial penalties for not achieving recycling targets. Whilst upfront investment is needed to deliver the Waste and Recycling Strategy, it is anticipated that this will be offset by savings that can be made through reductions in residual waste tonnages and the pre-sorting of waste at HWRC's and it is expected that the service will eventually become cost neutral.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee were also provided with details of the internal impacts arising from the proposed Strategy, with it emphasised that the Council needs to deliver its services in a different way and the Strategy focuses on improving performance through a different approach. There will be no staff reductions, although some existing staff may be repurposed, and the Strategy will include a wider corporate approach spanning numerous service areas. Members also noted the feedback from operational staff, which emphasised the need for change and described the challenges being faced by collection crews as a result of bins being incorrectly used, together with the abuse being faced by some staff when asking residents to sort their waste.

The Leader of Council emphasised the need to act now to improve performance and highlighted the precarious position that the Authority faces in terms of possible financial penalties. It was stressed that the Authority needs to take effective measures to address these issues, whilst keeping solutions as simple as possible. Whilst it was acknowledged that residents may be resistant to change, this needs to happen in order to meet the WG targets, and so it is imperative that these changes are made in accordance with residents' views, and so the Authority can produce a strategy that will

meet WG targets whilst at the same time continuing to deliver the service across the county borough.

The Joint Scrutiny Committee discussed the proposals and agreed were in agreement that the Authority must make changes to waste collection practices in order to meet the targets set by WG and acknowledged that this action needed to be urgently taken in order to prevent non-compliance fines being imposed on the Authority. However, concern was expressed that the failure to meet targets had not been highlighted sooner, rather than rushing through a strategy now without sufficient notice to Members.

Officers explained that Caerphilly Council were previously one of the best-performing authorities in terms of recycling targets; however, the Council's position has remained static over recent years whilst other authorities have already moved to 3 or 4-weekly residual collections or introduced separated recycling arrangements to improve their performance. The Council needs to make these changes in order to meet the tougher targets but are in the fortunate position of being able to draw on the evidence from other authorities and tailor the arrangements to suit the specific needs of residents.

Members emphasised that the reducing and reusing message should share equal importance with recycling and asked what, if any, partnership could be formed with local supermarkets not only in terms of packaging but also in the way in which perishable foods were packaged in large quantities encouraging people to purchase loose vegetable and fruits in smaller amounts and therefore reduce food waste. Officers explained that the reduce message will be key in the first instance, and then the reuse and recycling aspects will follow thereafter, with it noted that the Council have recently opened a re-use shop next to Penallta HWRC and will be looking to expand this model out further to promote the reuse aspect and lead to a reduction in waste.

Members referenced the difficulties in recycling Tetrapak materials and Officers explained that the Council have been in discussions with the company to determine potential recycling approaches. One Member expressed a need to promote home composting and Officers confirmed that the Council previously operated a subsidy scheme for composting bins and this is something that could be explored further. The Member also questioned the need to keep food waste separate from residual waste, given that that residual waste is sent to an energy-producing waste facility in Cardiff and so is treated in a similar fashion. Officers explained that the price for treating food and garden waste is significantly cheaper than sending it to the general waste facility in Cardiff, and so from a user perspective it is more efficient to keep these two waste streams separate.

Members highlighted the various references within the strategy to processing via the Bryn Group and raised concerns about the impact of increased heavy vehicle movements through communities where there were already traffic concerns. Officers explained as that the Council are looking to divert residual waste into other waste streams, it may be the case that the amount of refuse lorries on the road will reduce.

In relation to the 3-weekly collection and the consultation process, Members expressed concern that if this was not a realistic proposal then it should not be offered as a consultation option, and that if Officers were of the opinion that only a 4-weekly collection would ensure that the required targets are reached, then only the 4-weekly option should be offered to residents. Members sought assurances that if the 3-weekly option was proven to be residents' preferred option following the consultation, then this would be upheld. There was more support for 3-weekly collections which it

was felt may be more acceptable to the public, and limited support for 4-weekly collections.

Officers explained that other local authorities who have already been operating 3-weekly collections are now looking to move to 4-weekly collections, and that modelling has suggested that moving to a 3-weekly collection creates the risk that this would not achieve the WG 70% performance target. This would leave very little time for the Authority to move to a 4-weekly collection thereafter and the Authority would run the risk of infraction fines being imposed as a result.

Members debated the 3-weekly and 4-weekly collection options and concerns were expressed for those with larger families and suggested that there was a real risk of fly-tipping as a result of overflowing bins. Officers confirmed that the situation will be monitored if the new collection arrangements are implemented, and enforcement action will be taken against perpetrators. However, it was emphasised that fly-tipped material is usually construction waste or furniture from house clearances, rather than residual waste, and so it is not envisaged that changes to residual waste collection arrangements will have a significant impact on fly-tipping. Officers also confirmed that in cases of larger households that may generate additional levels of waste, the Council would be able to work with these individuals to see if any assistance or extra capacity can be offered.

Members were very supportive of the proposal to align collection days which they agreed would make it easier for residents.

In relation to Household Waste Recycling Centres, Members felt that the closure of Penmaen HWRC would be counter-intuitive when trying to actively encourage people to recycle. Members also requested further details of the rationale for the proposed closure of this site. Officers explained that the other two HWRCs in the Mid-Valley corridor (Aberbargoed and Penallta) are both within acceptable standards of travel, and that most other local authorities in Wales only have one or two civic amenity sites within their county borough, whereas Caerphilly Council have 6 in total. In addition, Penmaen is one of the more difficult sites to access, being on a small industrial access road which is close to residential properties, and is the focus of noise complaints, break-ins and theft from the site. Closing the site will allow the Council to enhance the service offer at the other HWRCs and make them better facilities for residents to access.

Members discussed the proposal to introduce a booking system at HWRC, and many concerns were expressed in relation to the impact that this could have on those working full time, with fears that this would again lead to increased fly-tipping. One Member highlighted the fact that trips to HWRCs are not always pre-planned and asked if bookings could be made over the weekend or if residents would have to plan and book their trips beforehand. Assurances were sought on identification checks at sites to ensure that people from outside the county borough were not using the sites, with Members expressing concern that checks had not been undertaken on visits they had made. Members queried whether the booking system would mean later evening appointments being offered. They also expressed concern that the booking system could lead to increased road journeys for residents who could not secure appointments at their local site and that this again would have a negative impact in terms of carbon emissions. Reference was also made to a previous consultation around the introduction of a booking system and Members asked if the results could be made available to them.

Officers emphasised that a booking system will produce a greater element of control and minimise misuse of the facilities and will allow for greater analysis of how the HWRCs are used. It was explained that a booking system would allow seven-day coverage at the sites and provide real-time information on how busy these respective sites are, and the system would guarantee service provision when residents turn up at their allotted time. It was also confirmed that if the booking system led to a demand for later opening hours, then this would be considered. Officers confirmed that the booking system would require some element of forward planning from residents, in that they would have to contact the Council on the Friday if they were looking to secure an appointment for the weekend.

Assurances were given that residency checks should still be carried out at HWRCs and that this message would be reiterated to staff and available resources used to ensure that these checks are upheld. In terms of the previous consultation around a booking system, Officers confirmed that they would arrange to provide the results to Members but emphasised that it would be to the detriment of the Authority if the new system was not implemented.

Members were very support of the education, engagement and encouragement proposals and agreed that these would be key in delivering the new Strategy. It was also felt that education and engagement should be extended to involve schools and community groups. Officers acknowledged that any new waste collection arrangements need to be kept as straightforward as possible, and the views of residents are imperative in helping the Authority to shape and refine its service offer. It was confirmed that the Council would be working with schools to organise awareness sessions for pupils, together with litter-picking competitions and other initiatives. Waste collection vehicles will be updated with new branding, Officers will be carrying out engagement activities in town centres and carrying out door-to-door visits to promote awareness of the new arrangements, and there will also be a social media push, together with leaflet distribution and signage on bins.

In relation to enforcement, although only considered when all other options had failed, Members agreed that this needed to be clearly defined and that a strategy for enforcement needed to be developed. It was noted that one of the recommendations in the subsequent report to Cabinet will include the creation of a Task and Finish group to help develop the necessary policies and procedures to support the Waste Strategy.

Members were pleased to note the proposal to offer a nappy/hygiene collection service and queried if there were any proposals to do the same for animal waste. Officers confirmed that they would be carrying out research to ascertain how other authorities deal with such waste and if there is any good practice that can be implemented, and that once this piece of work is completed, the results would be shared with Members.

Members thanked Waste Staff for the excellent service that they provide and expressed concern that these staff had been subject to abuse when trying to enforce recycling practice.

In relation to the proposal to introduce a Task and Finish Group, Members highlighted that a similar group had been previously established, although the outcome of the group's work and any recommendations made had not been fed back to the Scrutiny Committee, and that these should be used as a starting-off point should a new group be established.

Reference was made to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council and a Member asked whether attainment towards the 2030 target is impacting on the

Council's position in terms of waste performance. Mrs Harry confirmed that the two targets sit hand in hand, as the use of waste as an energy resource feeds into the overarching principle of climate change, and that she would check the Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes following the meeting to see if anything is scheduled for Members to consider in terms of this responsibility around climate change.

Members requested that they be provided with the public consultation document before it is circulated more widely.

Having noted the presentation on the Draft Waste Strategy, it was confirmed that the points and comments raised by the Joint Scrutiny Committee would be incorporated into the report for presentation to Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 7.47 p.m.