

MEETING	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE	12/09/2024
TITLE	Waste and Recycling Services
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	The Council Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Cabinet Member for the Environment

1. Why does it need scrutiny?

- 1.1 The reasons behind the overspend in this service area and an outline of the work programme to review matters that required attention in waste and recycling were scrutinised at the Committee meeting on 19 January 2023.
- 1.2 The item was prioritised for scrutiny during 2023/24 and it was scheduled for the meeting on 18 April 2024. To provide an opportunity for work streams in this field to develop further, it was decided during the Committee meeting on 30 November 2023 that it would be re-scheduled and considered in the annual workshop.
- 1.3 The service was identified for scrutiny because the 'Waste and Recycling' project had been included in the Council Plan 2023-28 and some savings schemes needed further consideration prior to coming to a final decision.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to present an update on the work programme and the matters requiring attention in Waste and Recycling, and specifically:
 - What progress has been made in terms of the work programme?
 - Progress and challenges in achieving the target of recycling 70% of waste by 2025.
 - What are the barriers/opportunities to deliver?
 - What is the latest position in terms of the overspend?
 - What steps have been taken to realise the savings?
- 2.2 Although we do not refer directly to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in the report, we feel that the report does consider that we respond to the five ways of working that are required to deliver the seven well-being goals.

3. Background / Context

- 3.1 In 2022, as part of changes to the Council's corporate senior management structure, the Cabinet decided that the responsibility for waste and recycling should be transferred from the Highways and Municipal Department to the Environment Department.
- 3.2 The Waste and Recycling Services were formally transferred to the Environment Department in October 2022, with full responsibility for the budget transferring in 2023. Four key priorities were identified for attention:

- Improving customer care and dealing with enquiries/complaints,
- Getting to grips with high sickness levels,
- Achieving the national recycling target of 70%,
- Control of over-expenditure.

3.3 In January 2023, a report was submitted to the Scrutiny Committee to update them on the work achieved since the service had been transferred, together with an outline of the Department's plans as they continued to transform the service. This report has been set out with that work programme in mind. **The work programme has been set out as an appendix to this report (Appendix 1).**

3.4 Since starting to undertake this work we as senior managers have followed the principle that nothing is sacred and that we need to review every work area as we realise the core aspirations of improving the service for our residents and staff.

Structure

3.5 We have considered our structure in detail and have restructured a little to ensure accountability, and for the staff and public to have a better definition and clarity of management of the service. The structure is divided under three dedicated managers, and the following summarises the duties according to the areas:

- **Waste and Recycling Service (Collection)** – provide a waste and recycling collection service from Gwynedd homes. The service is responsible for the weekly collection of recycling materials and food, and residual waste every 3 weeks. In addition, garden waste is collected from nearly 17,000 homes who have subscribed to the service, together with the clinical collection and nappies, and commercial waste for businesses and holiday homes.
- **Waste and Recycling Service (Assets and Waste Treatment)** – provide a service, facilities, and arrangements to receive, treat and dispose of waste and recycling once the Council has collected it. The service receives the waste in three internal transfer sites and use one private provider. From these sites residual waste is transferred to Parc Adfer and recycling materials are transferred to be treated by a third party (costs to the Council) or directly to the market (income for the Council). The Council has two of its own treatment sites – Caergylchu in Caernarfon where plastics, metals and tins are sorted, and GwyriAD near Clynnog Fawr to process food waste. The service is responsible for running eight recycling centres and for ensuring after-care arrangements for three former landfill sites.
- **Waste and Recycling Manager – (Data and Quality Assurance)** – provide administrative support, manage commercial and garden contracts and income, monitor, and ensure quality assurance for the waste collection and waste disposal services. This includes ensuring that health and safety arrangements are established and followed. The Service is responsible for the distribution of bins and for educating and promotion via local and cross-county campaigns to promote and help residents reduce the waste produced and to encourage more recycling. In addition, the team has a statutory responsibility for reporting on waste and recycling data to the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

Where we are compared to other authorities

- 3.6 The latest figures published by the Welsh Local Government Association for 2022-23 indicate that running a waste collection and recycling service here in Gwynedd costs £258.48 per property. This places Gwynedd as the third most expensive in Wales. Obviously, there are differences between every Authority in Wales in terms of geography, demographics and the type of service offered, however it demonstrates that some work still needs to be done to turn around the service to be one of the most efficient in Wales.
- 3.7 The cost of collecting recycling (dry and food) in Gwynedd is 37% higher than the Wales average at a cost of £91.78 per household. Evidently there are variations in how other Authorities in Wales operate, however, most authorities undertake weekly collections (17 authorities) and follow the Welsh Government's blueprint (14), namely collect sorted recycling from the doorstep.
- 3.8 Our dry recycling processing costs are £9.18 per property, this is £8.30 higher than the Welsh median. It is likely that one reason the Wales average cost is so low is because some authorities can sell their produce on the market for a higher price than us and have better terms with waste treatment companies. This is certainly something that we are aware of, and this will be addressed further in the following paragraphs.
- 3.9 Our food processing costs are higher than the national average, however GwyriAD, our food processing site using Anaerobic Digestion, is a project the Council has committed to until 2028. Our performance in terms of the levels of food waste collected compared with the rest of Wales is low – we only collect 68kg of food waste per property, in comparison with an average of 90kg by the rest of the authorities in Wales. Again, we will come back to this in the report.
- 3.10 The cost of our garden waste collection is reasonable in comparison with other Welsh authorities, at a cost of £6.36 per property, but again our processing costs are high. We collect 90kg of garden waste per household in Gwynedd – this is higher than the Wales average of 73kg per property. Obviously, we have reduced the garden waste collection season this year for the first time in Gwynedd to reflect the growing season, and so far, the numbers who have subscribed have remained consistent. We will not know until March 2025 whether this will have an impact on the tonnage collected.
- 3.11 Residual waste collection every three weeks cost £34.13 per property a year. This is 25% higher than the Wales average. Our processing costs are £50.98 per property, which is 19% higher than the average other authorities in Wales pay. However, we are in a long-term agreement with another four Local Authorities in the north to divert the waste that we cannot recycle for disposal at Parc Adfer.
- 3.12 Therefore, this is the general picture compared to the other Welsh authorities. The next part of the report is structured according to the headings of the work programme already presented to this Scrutiny Committee in January 2023.

Review collection arrangements

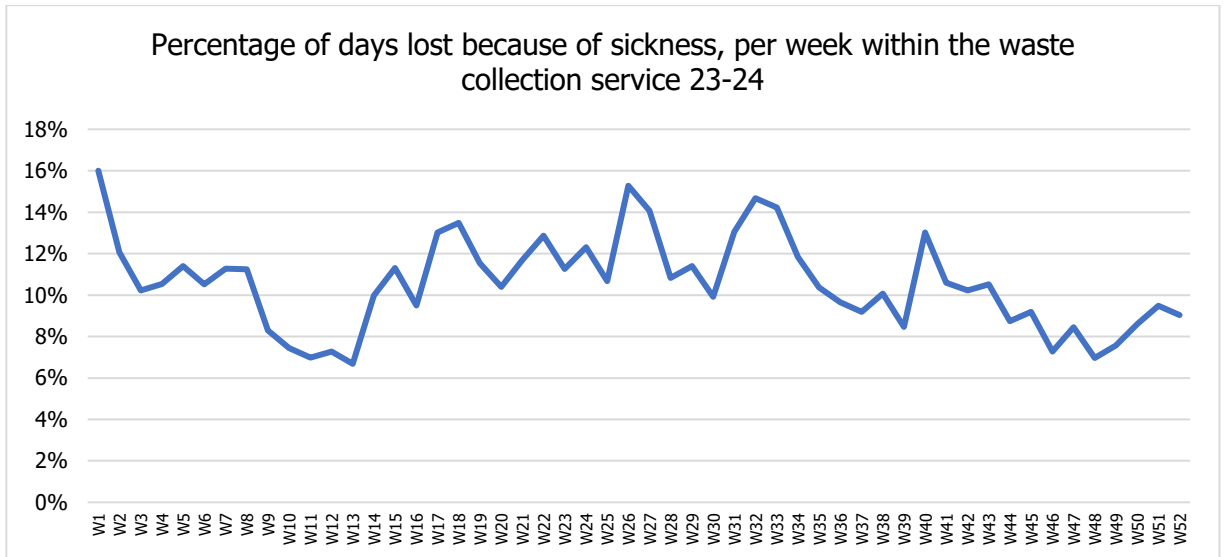
- 3.13 I am reiterating what was conveyed in the original report, namely, there is no doubt that service staff perform a key function and that the workforce's efforts are appreciated by households across the county. They are responsible for the collection of recycling, food waste and residual waste from around 64,000 domestic properties across Gwynedd, and collect garden waste, bulky waste, nappies, and medical material from some homes. They also provide a commercial waste service to around 2,000 businesses.

- 3.14 Early in the observation period it emerged that Cyngor Gwynedd had conscientious and hard-working employees, but arrangements needed to be changed, tightened, and improved to support this work. In the period following the submission of the Scrutiny report (January 2023), a new Waste and Recycling Collection Manager was appointed, and the level of senior and team leaders was restructured. In addition, it was decided to locate a business and administrative resource in the depots to support the work. A clear direction and competence were set for the team leaders' level, especially around sickness arrangements and the requirements to reduce reliance on overtime to complete the work.
- 3.15 It was also decided early on that operating the arrangements in the areas of Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd created inefficiencies and system based on three waste collection services rather than one service for Gwynedd. The depot at Caernarfon was strengthened to serve the north area, which is the former boundaries of Arfon, and another depot in Harlech to serve the south area, which are the old boundaries of Meirionnydd and Dwyfor. Although the definition of the areas is similar to what they were in the past, this has allowed us to revisit our structure and re-design the collection routes that cross former area boundaries, without having to worry too much where the crews were based. All the collection routes will be designed and modified in this manner in the future.
- 3.16 During this period of change we have seen a high level of complaints about collection failures from our residents. However, as new officers were settling into their roles and the collection workers getting used to the new regime, slowly the level of complaints was reduced. This has contributed to improving customer care and helped give a more positive image to the collection service. The following graph is proof of this.

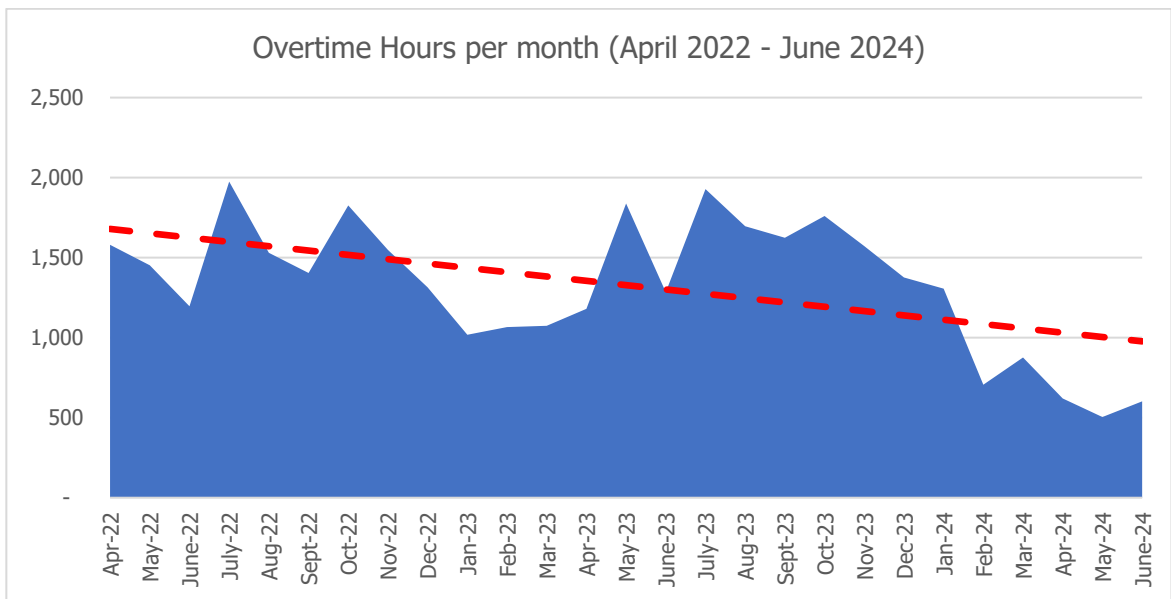


- 3.17 Placing the business and administrative officers in the depots is a new idea but their work has been essential and important in being a clear and direct communication link between the public and the collection crews. We are also working closely with the Council's customer care and information technology services to improve our 'front door', and we will be one of the first services in the Council to use artificial intelligence (AI) technology to help us with this.

- 3.18 We feel that things are going well on the waste collections side at the moment, but clearly there is still work to be done. Strengthening communication and the understanding between management and workforce has led to improved collaboration and it is also observed that there is a greater sense of workforce pride in their work. We are eager to maintain this momentum to deliver further improvements.
- 3.19 We are currently investing in better cameras to be installed in all collection vehicles to improve health and safety arrangements. We have also invested in an 'in cab' technology system (Bartec), which will again strengthen the link between the collection crews and our residents. Bartec's system will also enable our crews to report any misuse of our service, such as homes that present too much waste or homes that do not recycle. Collection crews are also currently using the Bartec system to record whether the bin has been presented for collection or otherwise. This information will be useful as we respond to queries of collection failures and will give us a more accurate picture of how many collections we have actually missed.
- 3.20 Another advantage of the system is that crews will have electronic collection maps. A high number of individual complaints about failure to collect originated from rural areas, when the usual driver was off work, and his substitute was unfamiliar with the collection points, therefore Bartec will help address any such errors. The drivers will also be required to confirm on the system once they have finished collecting from a particular street or property. The system will also allow team leaders to manage the work 'remotely', rather than waiting until the crews have returned to the depots, e.g., if there is a case of collection failure.
- 3.21 Not only will the installation of cameras help improve health and safety, but we have also appointed a dedicated health and safety officer for the waste collection service. We have also prioritised the health, safety, and well-being of staff since inception. Following the Council's sickness arrangements ensures that staff are provided with specialist support (physio, Medra etc.) more quickly, and are monitored regularly until they return to work. In addition, there has been an emphasis on sharing messages about personal health and well-being at the depots. And of course, this Department welcomes the Council's new proposed Alcohol and Drugs Policy, as this will add another layer to our aim to ensure everyone is safe at work.
- 3.22 Another main requirement of the original brief was to bring sickness levels under control. Not only did sickness have an impact on the morale of the rest of the workers, but it cost the service to have cover while an officer was sick – by either employing relief workers or paying overtime to finish the routes. As reported in paragraph 3.20, the absence of the 'usual' driver on a rural route could increase complaints of missed collections due to lack of knowledge of the area. At times sickness levels were so high that it was not possible to get a vehicle out to complete a collection route. The following graph shows the reduction in the sickness levels. The number of working days lost to the service due to sickness in 2022-23 averaged at 79 days per week or 11.3% of the workforce. This had reduced to 71.6 days or 10.6% by 2023-24. We expect further reductions again this year.



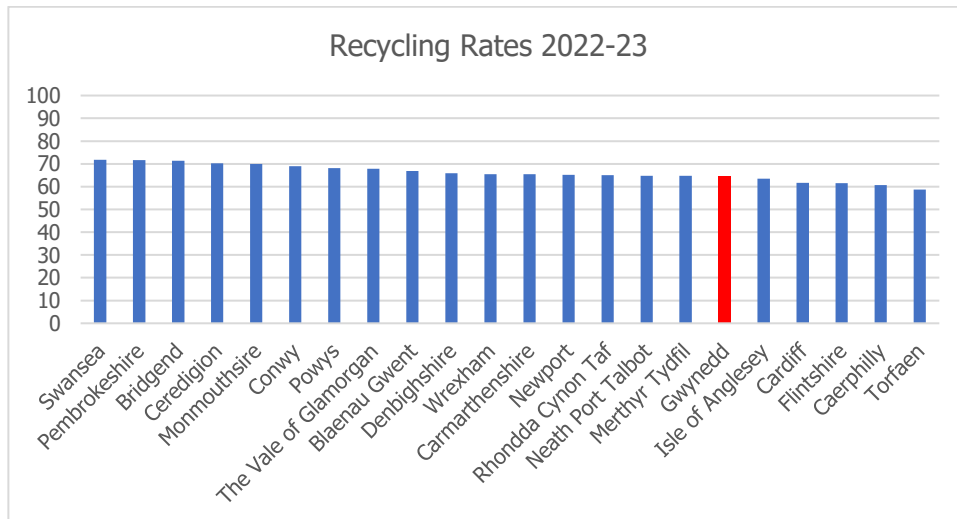
3.23 Another decision made through discussions with the workforce and unions was to continue with task and finish arrangements. But unlike the old system where this was seen as a personal task and finish, the emphasis was clearly changed to a collective task and finish. We feel that this contributed to a better team atmosphere and helped lower overtime levels. The level of overtime has reduced significantly (see graph below), and we have been able to continue to secure the service with the same number of basic hours / employees who were in the service when it was decided to transfer to the Department. We are confident that the introduction of the Bartec system will enable us to continue to push managerial improvements and improve efficiency.



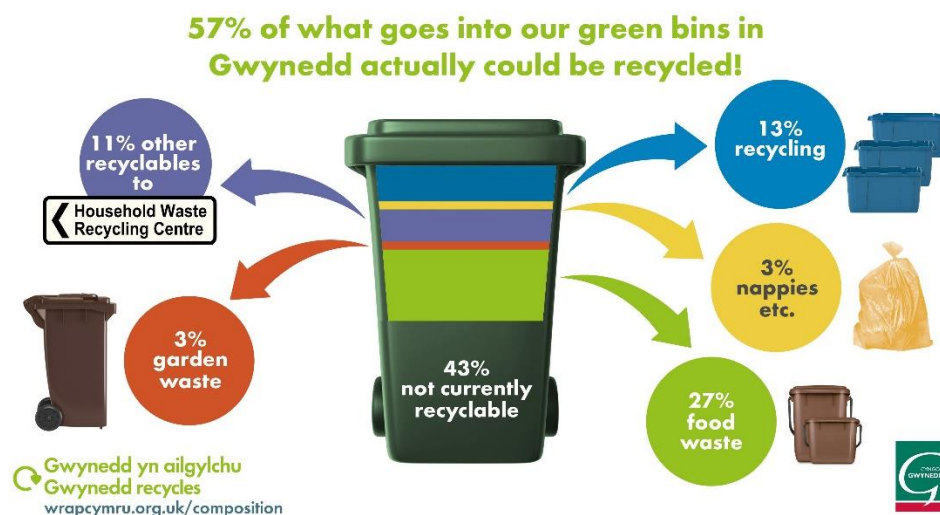
3.24 One challenge the service has is to ensure fair arrangements for employees and their ability to take a break as leave. While the majority of Council staff have been working from home over the course of the Covid pandemic, the waste workforce has been out collecting, disposing, and processing waste. This has resulted in a high number of leave accumulated by staff.

How will the service look in the future

- 3.25 Cyngor Gwynedd has always reached the Welsh Government's recycling target of 64%. However, we have failed to push past the percentage of 64% for a few years now. Cyngor Gwynedd is highly unlikely to meet the statutory 70% recycling target by March 2025, and there is a chance we may face a fine because of this. It is important to note here that not all authorities in Wales have met the statutory target of 64%, and the graph below shows that only five local authorities reached the 70% recycling level (2022-23). We are confident that we have robust plans to reach the 70%, and we are collaborating and communicating closely with Welsh Government officers and their advisors on our plans.



- 3.26 Recent research by Wrap Cymru has given us an analysis of what, on average, is currently in a green bin in Gwynedd. Our challenge is to try and divert as much of these materials into our recycling stream.



- 3.27 There are four promotion and awareness-raising officers within the waste and recycling service. Historically, the officers have been redeployed to deal with other issues within the waste area, and very often solve individual problems locally. While this work is important and appreciated by Gwynedd residents, there will now be a specific direction for them to be prioritising promotion and behaviour change. We also want to re-affirm the recycling message to ensure our residents separate their materials correctly, and emphasis will once again be placed on recycling food waste. Studies show that a 'behavioural nudge' and 'doorstepping' can make a big difference to recycling levels.
- 3.28 Although the communication strategy is yet to be written, we will have to ensure that we hit the core principles and ensure that we make the most of every penny by assessing:
- to what extent will we be successful in ensuring that people will notice the messages (impact)
 - the extent to which the communication technique will influence the recycling behaviour of the people receiving it (influence)
 - the precision with which the technique can be used to reach a very specific audience or group (targeting).
- 3.29 We cannot target our residents with the same message, it will be vital that we identify groups such as children, families, students, older and middle-aged people, and social classification will be important to this too. If we do not see an increase from the campaigns, then we will have to consider adopting some formal enforcement powers for the officers.
- 3.30 Another scheme we want to trial in the coming months is to collect paper and cardboard materials, and cans and plastics in hessian sacks rather than the Cartgylchu trolley-box system. While the results of the pilot will not be known for several months, we as officers hope this will be successful, because primarily, it is going to increase the amount of capacity residents will have to recycle. Other authorities who use a similar system report that the recycling material is of a better quality because it is separated better, and of course the hessian sacks will be cheaper for the Council than buying and replacing the Cartgylchu.
- 3.31 During the autumn we will consult on and publish a new **Waste Strategy**. This is a priority that has been identified in the Council's Plan 2023-28 – Green Gwynedd. Obviously, we will further outline how we want to meet the 70% recycling target, but also, we will consider the frequency of residual waste collection. Consideration of collection frequency has also been identified as one of the service's savings schemes. Yet there is a general suggestion that a collection capacity of 60kg of residual waste a week ensures residents recycle more of their waste. Cyngor Gwynedd currently collects a maximum of 80kg from most of our properties each week, i.e., 240 litre bins every 3 weeks.

Data – weigh bridge

- 3.32 The current system of gathering and processing data about recycling/ waste levels is fragmented and needs to be updated. Recycling percentage data is reported to the Welsh Government on a quarterly basis as part of Natural Resources Wales's statutory arrangements for monitoring levels across Wales. But securing more live data would enable the service to operate in a more timely and proactive manner.
- 3.33 Ensuring data that is of use to us, and available more regularly than the current quarterly regime would enable prioritisation of our efforts to change behaviour in fields / areas in need of improvement. The ability to compare data following intervention would subsequently assist us to measure success.

- 3.34 Therefore, we have invested in new software for our weighbridges, and this will allow us to get timely data, reducing our reliance on getting data from third parties. Wrap Cymru is also currently carrying out an audit on the quality of our data.

Recycling Centres

- 3.35 The costs of maintaining and running eight recycling centres equates to £46.99 per property here in Gwynedd, this is £13.04 higher than the average of other Welsh local authorities. And while there are eight centres in the county, six authorities with fewer facilities receive more materials per property than Gwynedd – we receive 176kg per property. The divert to recycle rate from the recycling centres is 77%.
- 3.36 Cyngor Gwynedd has eight recycling centres located across the county – the highest number in Wales. This ensures that 87% of Gwynedd residents are within a travelling distance of less than 20 minutes to any centre. Wrap Cymru suggests there should be a recycling centre per 50,000 properties – Cyngor Gwynedd has a recycling centre per 8,200 properties. Our provision is currently one of the best in terms of reaching residents – but also the most expensive in terms of cost per property.
- 3.37 We are currently reviewing the accessibility of our recycling centres. One item we want to revisit is the opening of the black bags that arrive at our recycling centres from our residents, because we know that a great deal of recyclables is often in these bags and thrown into the residual waste skip. We will also look for opportunities to improve the sites from a health and safety perspective and the ability to provide provision to be able to recycle a greater number of different materials.
- 3.38 We will also consider charging a fee for the disposal of certain items of waste, particularly materials that cost the Council to dispose of, such as tyres, rubble, and asbestos. We also want to look to tighten who can use our centres, whilst improving accessibility to certain cohorts of society, e.g., creating a 'quiet hour' for residents who find it difficult to book a slot at the centre via the current system.
- 3.39 We also want to look at creating one location or a re-use shop for the materials that come through our recycling centres. While recycling should be applauded, it is important that we try to start the hierarchy by reducing all types of waste, then repair and reuse it before recycling. We see potential here to help people and reduce our disposal costs at the same time. We will likely look for partnership opportunities to make this a reality. Promoting a circular economy has been identified as one of Cyngor Gwynedd's Climate and Nature Emergency Plan priorities, and re-use hits this brief.

Distribution of Bins

- 3.40 Our container distribution service is seen as important by our residents. But recently the levels of complaints about the service have increased significantly as residents have had to wait a long time for their bins. There are several reasons for this, including the unprecedented demand from businesses following the introduction of new collection arrangements in Wales. However, it became clear that we needed to review all our distribution arrangements as a result. We are currently working on creating a more durable and efficient bin delivery service, and also looking to put some of the smaller items in Siopau Gwynedd and Recycling Centres, so that residents can go and pick up an item without delay (e.g., kitchen caddy, food bags). By using technology and making better use of the knowledge of the delivery workers in Llwyn Isaf, we trust we will have a more efficient bin delivery service in the coming months.

Commercial Waste

- 3.41 In April 2024, the Workplace Recycling Regulations were introduced by the Welsh Government. This requirement placed legal implications on businesses to separate the waste in the same way as Welsh households. The implications of the act meant that Cyngor Gwynedd as a collection operator also had to collect waste and recycling materials separately for the first time. Admittedly, the adoption of this system for commercial waste has been very problematic for the Council and highlighted fundamental weaknesses in our business systems and arrangements.
- 3.42 Because of this we decided to review and revisit our commercial waste business, and we are currently going through a comprehensive review of the business with the support of Welsh Government advisors – Local Partnerships and Wrap Cymru. As part of the review, we will be going out to ask for feedback from businesses. We are confident that we will be in a better place in the new year with a more robust structure and systems, and that we can have a service where everyone can be proud of it once more.
- 3.43 Securing a source of income from commercial waste and holiday homes is core to the service and has been identified as one of our main risks on the Department's risk register.

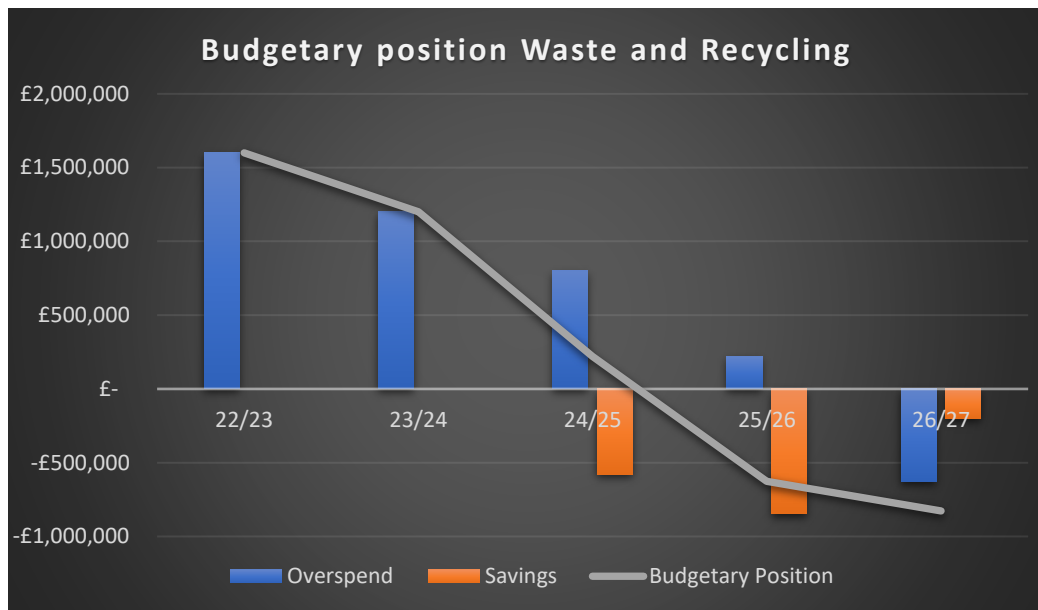
Processing – private / agreements

- 3.44 The nature of the service means that there are several agreements with external providers for the receipt of waste and recycling materials that we collect. One of these are regional arrangements whereby the Council works with other councils from the north on a Parc Adfer agreement for the disposal of residual waste. We have also partnered with Ynys Môn County Council for garden waste disposal and the Biogen company for food waste disposal at our GwyrAD site. We are also reliant on local and national private companies to treat and purchase our waste.
- 3.45 Our location on the periphery of the British market puts restrictions on us in terms of competition to sell our materials and in terms of reaching the market at all. For example, we transport our wood for recycling to the Manchester area and nappies for recycling to Ammanford.
- 3.46 The nature of the market means that prices can vary in terms of the income received for materials that are collected by the Council. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure there is firm control of contracts with other companies that receive our waste and the income received for it.
- 3.47 We have decided that our main waste processing hubs will be at the Caergyfchu and Ffridd Rasmus sites from now on. Caergyfchu is a processing centre and was started as a project in 2005 between Antur Waunfawr, Môn-Arfon Waste Company and Cyngor Gwynedd. Obviously with Caergyfchu being almost 20 years old, the site has now passed its fitness for purpose.
- 3.48 To enable us to get the best materials to market, and to maximise our selling price per material, we consider that investing in a new site, provision and facility is essential. The size of the site and the development on site, is now also a concern from a health and safety perspective. Many of the machinery at Caergyfchu have also reached the end of their working lives, and the maintenance costs of these machines are also costly and are increasing annually.

- 3.49 We also transfer waste and recyclables across the county from one transfer site to another using three haulage (hook) trucks. Not only does this create unnecessary carbon emissions, but it is costly and can pollute the materials as well.
- 3.50 Therefore, to ensure that our operations are as efficient and effective as possible we are looking to invest in two new treatment and processing centres – one in Caerylchu and having a new processing centre in Harlech.
- 3.51 We are working with Wrap Cymru and the Welsh Government to develop both sites. The initial plans have been accepted and it is hoped that by March 2025 we will have a strong business case to make to the Council. This will enable us to submit our proposal for financial support from the Welsh Government. Thus far the feedback we have received from the Government is positive.
- 3.52 The Harlech site also offers us a place to look at processing other recyclables as well. This will mean that we can reduce costs and reliance on the private sector.

Over-expenditure and Savings

- 3.53 Significant work has taken place since the transfer of Waste and Recycling Services to have better management of the historic over-expenditure. It is not as 'black and white' as stopping spending to come to a balanced fiscal position in one financial year cycle. The core causes of overspending had to be looked at carefully, balancing this with the service being given to Gwynedd residents. At the end of 2022-23, overspending within waste and recycling services stood at £1.6m. The level of overspending was reduced by £420k last year, and a further reduction is anticipated this year, which will mean a year-end overspend of around £800K.
- 3.54 As well as gaining control of the overspend level, £1.7m savings schemes have been identified for Waste and Recycling Services as part of the Council's Savings Strategy. **The list of savings is set out in the appendix (Appendix 2).**
- 3.55 If the savings plans are realised, and an expected further reduction of £400K on the overspend is realised, the Services will have reduced their budgets by more than £2.5m. The savings schemes have had to be prioritised to help the corporate funding gap, before tackling the overspending within the service. If the service had been able to use the schemes to alleviate the overspending, then the Department is confident the Waste and Recycling Service would have reached a balanced position and beyond in its budget by the end of 2025/26.



**The blue blocks show actual over-spending for 22/23 and 23/24 and projected for 24/25. Then from 25/26 the savings are subtracted from the overspend to show a cumulative position but assuming we are unable to move from the likely overspend of £800k for 24/25. The orange shows the corporate savings per year. The grey line shows the budgetary position of the service if we were to only use the savings against the service.

- 3.56 However, with the schemes the Department has to tackle overspending being placed in the savings strategy there is a significant risk that it will not be possible to bring a balanced waste and recycling budget in the near future.
- 3.57 We fully recognise that all services need to play their part in ensuring that the Council can set balanced budgets. This part clearly shows that the Waste and Recycling Service has contributed to the savings programme and continues to do so. However, it is now increasingly clear that a position of semi-neutral spending against the budget cannot be achieved, which was one of the main requirements of the original brief. Delivering corporate savings schemes, while at the same time continuing to deliver improvements to ensure a quality service for the people of Gwynedd will be a challenge.

Vehicles

- 3.58 The service has approximately 100 waste collection and disposal vehicles. At the moment we have not been able to invest much in electric waste collection vehicles. We believe that the significant changes have been enough intervention for the time being, and with the levels of complaints high, introducing more change where it was not possible to guarantee success was too risky. Evidently some other local authorities in Wales have electric recycling collection vehicles, but the findings of the Green Fleet Plan 2023-2029 (Cabinet 24/01/2023) state that *"Electric technology has not reached this market yet [heavy vehicles] at least not to the extent that would be effective in Gwynedd"*. However, we continue to aim to decarbonise our fleet by 2030, but we as a Department will need to work closely with the Fleet Service to look at the technology and business plan in detail, because electric vehicles are currently around double the price of a diesel vehicle.
- 3.59 That said, with financial support from the Welsh Government, we have purchased two electric 'telehandler' vehicles which are used to move materials at the recycling centres. Feedback regarding these machines has been positive and has given us confidence to invest in others if the financial situation allows.

After-care Sites

- 3.60 The Council has three former waste landfill sites in Ffridd Rasus, Cilgwyn and Llwyn Isaf. The Department is responsible for ensuring that aftercare arrangements take place at these sites by sampling the water and gas, maintaining the Flare system which burns the gases, as well as constant maintenance and reporting to Natural Resources Wales.
- 3.61 Two of Gwynedd's former landfill sites have recently been transformed into havens for biodiversity and conservation. Local Places for Nature funding from the Welsh Government has helped restore 74 acres in Ffridd Rasus (Harlech) and 32 acres in Llwyn Isaf (Penygroes) into rich and diverse habitats for plants and wildlife.
- 3.62 These projects will have a positive impact on biodiversity in the areas and have the potential to be able to store carbon. The work has encompassed planting trees and shrubs at all sites, and increasing water storage capacity to attract more amphibians, insects, birds, and natural mammals. The project has been led with the expertise of Natural Resources Wales and the Biodiversity Service and will be further publicised in the autumn.

Future development

- 3.63 The waste service faces internal challenges along with external developments. The latest savings will put additional stress on the service in terms of the budgetary side. The Welsh Government's latest 'beyond recycling' strategy puts more emphasis on getting Wales to be a circular economy country which will probably require us to recycle new materials from the roadside and put more emphasis on repair and reuse.
- 3.64 National developments also bring their challenges. The cost of disposing our residual waste is currently over £4m, and with a new tax on carbon emissions likely to come in 2028, these costs could increase from somewhere between £0.6m to £1.5m for Cyngor Gwynedd alone.
- 3.65 Extended Producer Responsibility (or EPR) has been phased in since 2023, and its purpose is to impose a minimum required statute on businesses producing certain types of products on the market to cover the full costs. This imposes new requirements on us in Gwynedd to sample the waste that passes through our processing centres. We have already installed camera technology on our plastic line to measure how much one-off plastics are recycled by some of the large supermarkets. However, EPR may also be an additional source of income for the Council from 2025, but the extent of this income is currently unknown.
- 3.66 In addition, the Deposit Return Scheme (or DRS) will be expanded. It is a form of extended producer responsibility, meaning drinks producers and importers will have new legal responsibilities for managing and collecting their empty containers for recycling and reuse.
- 3.67 Of course, here in Wales authorities such as Cyngor Gwynedd offer an easy service on the doorstep for recycling glass, tins, and plastics. There is of course a risk that we will see less of the materials coming through our recycling stream, and therefore have an impact on our recycling percentage and income. However, this scheme should reduce waste in the residual bin, increase overall recycling along with reducing litter that is thrown on the street and in street bins.

3.68 Some areas of Gwynedd can be problematic for us because of the different nature of society there. The number of complaints from the city of Bangor is high, mainly from areas where students live and where there is a high number of houses in multiple occupation (HMO). It must be noted here that this is not unique to Gwynedd. We worked closely with the University, the Students' Union, Bangor City Council, and other council departments to try and get solutions to some of these issues, but clearly the resources and funding do not allow us to be able to do everything.

4. Main Conclusions and the proposed work programme

4.1 The Department has acted on a number of issues and has seen progress on a variety of projects over the past two years. The Department has produced a detailed programme of work to enable us to further review some areas and propose solutions to ensure that the Waste and Recycling field offers efficient, high-quality, and safe services, and that we continue to meet the Welsh Government's ambitious recycling targets over the coming years. We are quietly confident that we were going in the right direction and that we can show improvement in the services.

4.2 The next key steps will be to introduce and consult on the Strategy, work together with our partnerships such as the Welsh Government and Wrap Cymru to develop a business case for new processing centres, and design a programme of work to achieve the savings, which could be contentious, such as collection frequency.

APPENDICIES

Appendix 1 – Waste and Recycling Service Work Programme

Appendix 2 – A list of waste and recycling service savings