

MEETING	Communities Scrutiny Committee
DATE	19/03/2026
TITLE	Waste Collection and Recycling Services
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	The Council Plan 2023-28 - A Green Gwynedd
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CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Craig ab Iago

1. Why it needs scrutiny?

- 1.1 An update on the work programme was scrutinised, along with matters requiring attention, in regard to Waste and Recycling at the Committee meeting on 12 September 2024.
- 1.2 A public consultation was undertaken on the Waste and Recycling Strategy 2025-30 (draft) before the Cabinet considers its adoption. The strategy will seek to increase the level of recycling in the county to meet the national target of 70%, including consideration of actions such as green bin capacity/collection frequency and looking at potential enforcement action.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

- 2.1 As a specific set of questions have been put forward by the Committee, this report responds to those questions, in the context of the progress made against the work programme.
 - What progress has been made on the work programme?
 - Progress and challenges in achieving the target of recycling 70% of waste
 - What are the barriers/opportunities in relation to delivery?
 - What is the latest position in terms of the overspend?
 - What steps have been taken to realise the savings plans?
 - What arrangements are in place to speed up the delivery of new recycling bins? Is there consideration to establish a system to enable residents to pick up equipment from Council sites?
 - What are the arrangements in terms of damaged equipment? Is it the Waste and Recycling Service or the Ardal Ni Team that responds to cases of damaged equipment and residents not collecting them?
 - Is there a limit to the number of new boxes individuals can order in a certain period?
 - What kind of enforcement measures are being considered? How is fairness intended to be ensured in the implementation of enforcement arrangements?
 - What factors are considered when looking at changing the frequency of collection?
 - What are the key risks facing the Council in trying to meet the target of recycling 70% of waste? What risks are beyond the Council's control?
 - What is the latest in terms of the pilot using hessian bags instead of the 'Cartgylchu'? Is consideration being given to running the pilot in more rural areas of the County?

3. Background / Context

3.1 What progress has been made on the work programme?

3.1.1 This section provides an update on the work programme submitted to the Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2024.

3.1.2 As part of the changes to the Council's corporate senior management structure in 2022, the Cabinet decided that the responsibility for collecting and treatment of waste and recycling should be transferred from the Highways and Municipal Department to the Environment Department.

3.1.3 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 main priorities were identified for attention:

- Improve customer care and handling of enquiries/complaints,
- Address high sickness levels,
- Achieving the national recycling target of 70%,
- Management of over-expenditure.

3.1.4 In January 2023, a report was submitted to the Scrutiny Committee outlining the Department's plans to continue to transition and transform the services, responding to the above four priorities. This section is presented alongside the work programme in question. The work programme, together with relevant comments, is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

3.1.5 It is not appropriate to provide a percentage of the work that has been completed compared to what has been partially realised, as the different elements are not comparable. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that most of the work is already underway. It should be remembered that the work programme is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process that takes time to complete.

3.1.6 The work programme for the next phase is currently being developed.

3.2 G1: Reviewing the working arrangements of waste and recycling collectors

3.2.1 The operational structure of the South Gwynedd (Meirionnydd and Dwyfor) and North Gwynedd (Arfon) areas is now in place and functioning effectively. The Bartec 'in-cab' system is operational for recycling and residual waste collections, and has contributed significantly to improving back-office organisation and management. The system enables the Department to increase efficiency by dynamically adjusting routes according to day-to-day operational needs.

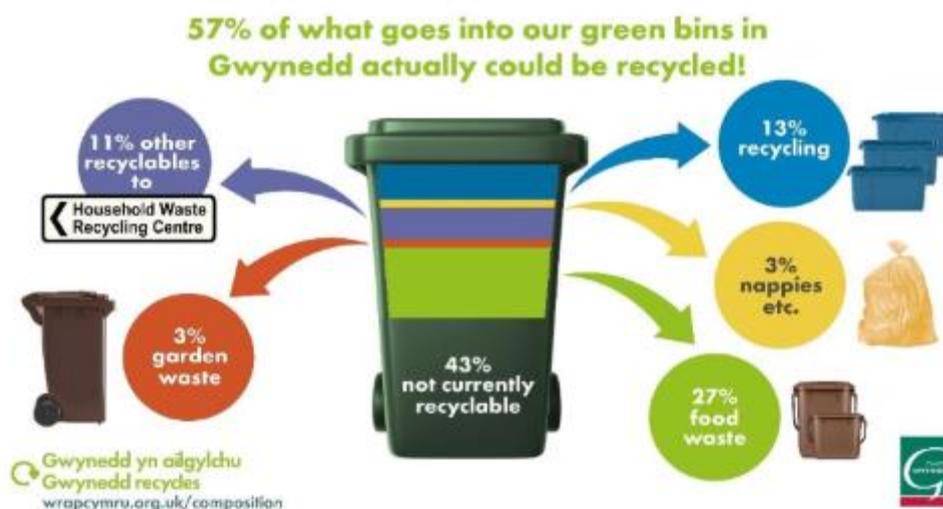
3.2.2 Upgrades to the camera system on the collection vehicles have also improved visibility of the crews' work in the field, strengthening health and safety and improving the ability to respond to complaints. Crews report issues such as bins not set-out or bins that are too full, and if a customer gets in touch, the call is immediately directed to the depot where the information on the system can be checked immediately and the issue resolved at once.

3.2.3 Work is currently underway to expand the use of the Bartec system to include commercial waste collections, garden waste, nappies and to support bin distribution. In addition, collaborative work continues to ensure full integration between the Bartec system and the Council's customer management system (Ffos), strengthening the flow of information and improving customer response.

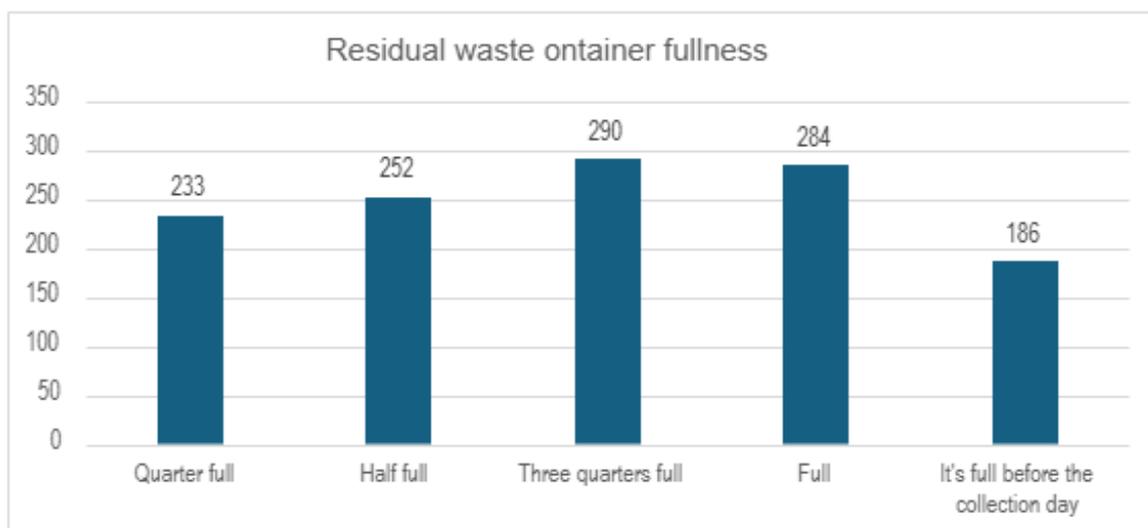
3.3 G2: Review arrangements for collecting recycling, including expected increase in recycling levels in future

3.3.1 Although Gwynedd was one of the first authorities in Wales to adopt residual waste collection every three weeks, the current weekly capacity of the green bin is now considered to be too large. Compared to the rest of the Welsh authorities, the size of the weekly residual bin is higher; only three authorities - Caerphilly, Swansea and Wrexham - currently have a higher residual bin capacity than Gwynedd.

3.3.2 The infographic below shows that recycling materials are being placed in the green bin, and recycling officers are of the opinion that the bin now acts as a "skip" for many households.



3.3.3 In the consultation on the Strategy, residents were asked how full their residual bin was at the end of the three-week period. As the graph below shows, of the 1,245 responses, 62% indicated that their bin was about $\frac{3}{4}$ full or less, but 15% indicated that they were unable to cope with the current capacity.

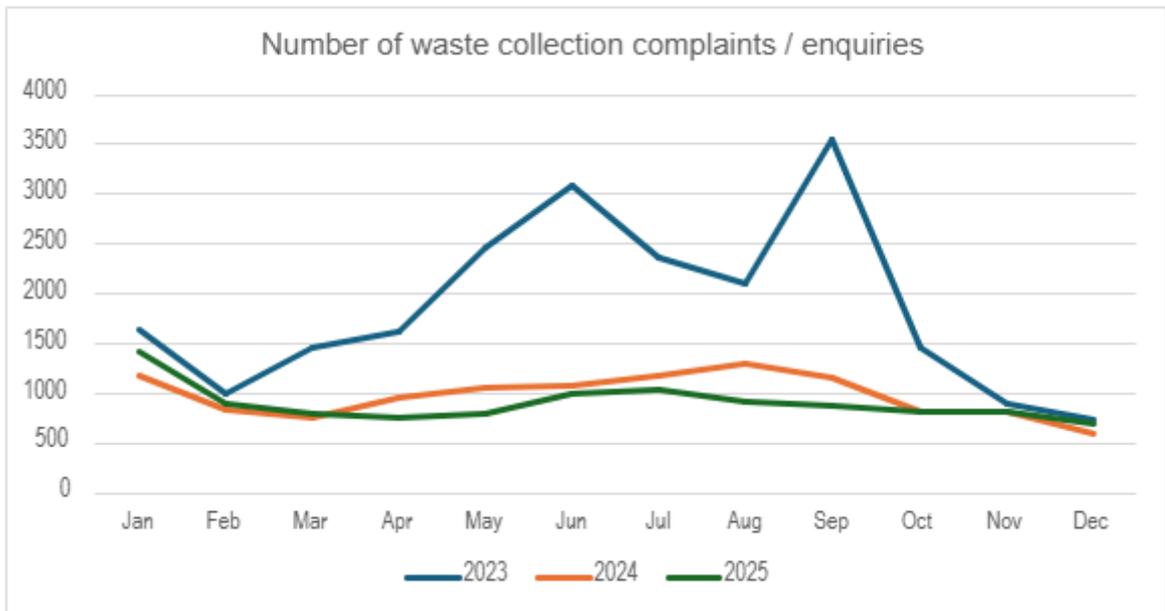


3.3.4 When asked during the consultation whether residents were willing to accept less frequent collections, 59% expressed their opposition to any reduction in frequency. Nevertheless, about half of the people noted that their bin was full on collection day. In terms of changing the bin size, only 30% of respondents were unwilling to consider this possibility.

- 3.3.5 An external company has been commissioned through WRAP Cymru to undertake an initial assessment of the frequency of collections, including an analysis of weekly capacity and the potential impact on resources and recycling rates. The results of this review are currently being assessed.
- 3.3.6 We have started trialling the use of hessian sacks for recycling materials. To date, it has been piloted in around 1,500 homes across three routes in Arfon, to assess their effectiveness in different contexts. Locations included Llanberis and Nant Peris, parts of the centre of Caernarfon, Waunfawr and part of Bontnewydd.
- 3.3.7 WRAP Cymru provided support to procure the sacks and to set up monitoring arrangements. The trial of sacks was chosen because of their higher capacity, flexibility, and the significantly lower cost of purchasing and distributing them compared to recycling boxes.
- 3.3.8 The main finding of the initial trial was a modest increase in the participation rate in recycling. The highest level of satisfaction with the sacks was recorded among residents of flats and terraced houses. Of the responses to the survey, 78% of the participants were willing to use sacks for additional materials.
- 3.3.9 The main messages of the responses were the need to improve the design of the sacks, address the perception that they tend to be lost in windy weather, and understand the influence of residual bin size on recycling performance. As part of the consultation on the Waste Strategy which took place at the end of 2025 (see paragraph 3.12), a specific question was asked about the use of sacks for certain materials. Of the responses, 35% were willing to use sacks to recycle cardboard and paper, and 32% were willing to use them for plastics and cans.
- 3.3.10 Over half of Welsh local authorities use sacks or bags for recycling, with an average recycling rate of 69.7% among those authorities, compared to an average of 67.5% among authorities using a 'trolibox' system. However, the sample is too small to enable definitive conclusions, and other factors - such as the size of the residual bin and the frequency of collections - can influence the results.
- 3.3.11 A further pilot scheme is planned to take place in different areas of Gwynedd later this year.

3.4 G3: Review of complaints procedure.

- 3.4.1 By investing in technology and redeploying responsibility for collection complaints to the depot, the number of complaints has decreased significantly over the last three years. This indicator is regularly monitored by the Department, and it remains one of the main performance measures discussed at performance challenge meetings. The graph below shows the continued decline in complaint numbers over this period. While the trend now appears to have stabilised, the current level equates to complaints representing about 0.2% of work; i.e., of the approximately 19,000 containers collected daily throughout the County, with around 40 complaints received.



3.4.2 The expectation is that the full integration of the Bartec system will contribute to a further reduction in the number of complaints. However, the main element in improving the quality of the data is the ability to clearly identify which complaints are Cyngor Gwynedd's responsibility and which are not - for example, cases where the bin was not put out on the day of collection.

3.5 G4: Data that is useful and regularly available - work completed (see appendix 1).

3.6 G5: Change behaviours to reduce the level of residual waste and maximise recycling

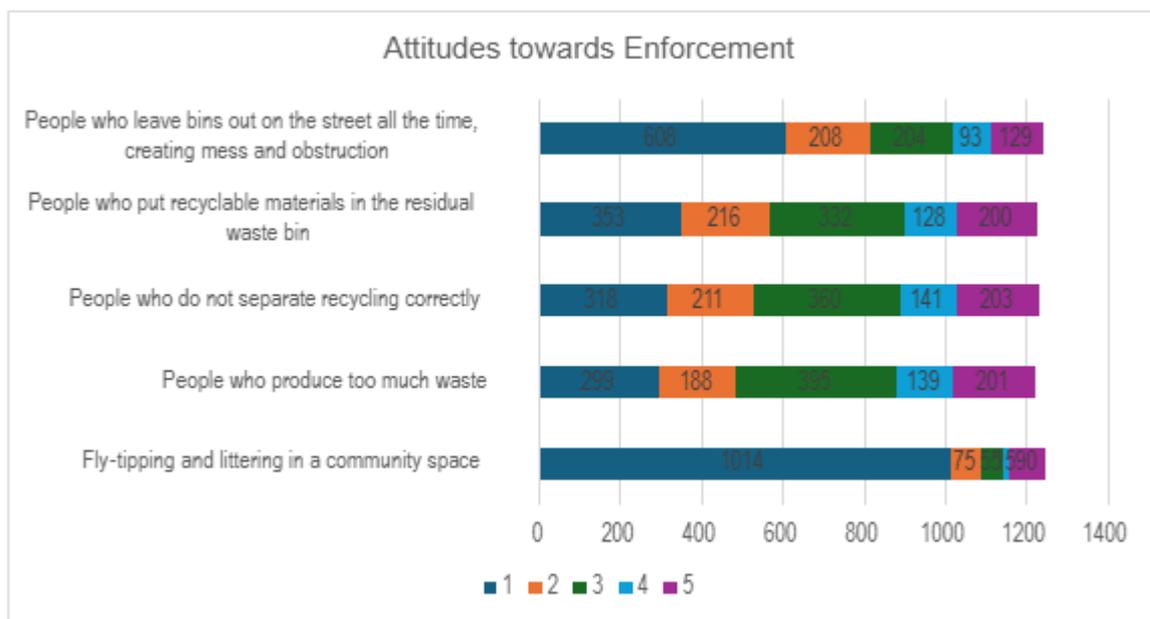
3.6.1 The work of the recycling officers is highly appreciated by the public. However, it should be noted that there are only four officers operating across Gwynedd, so their work is part of a wider behaviour change effort to contribute to achieving the 70% recycling target. However, it is recognised that there is a need to develop a more effective programme to engage with the public and bring about a significant change in residents' behaviour. Officers make a valuable contribution by supporting individuals to recycle correctly and in solving problems related to bins in specific homes or areas; nevertheless, there is a need to move away from the idea that "problem-solving" is their primary role.

3.6.2 It should also be noted that officers are already organising several proactive activities, such as the food campaign in Harlech, contributing to students' freshers week, promoting "More than Recycling" week, and working together to improve the image of bins in areas in the centre of Bangor.

3.6.3 The consultation on the Strategy has highlighted several potential areas for development. One of the lowest scores recorded in the engagement-related part was the way we share information through traditional letters. With the support of WRAP Cymru, letters will soon be sent to all homes in Gwynedd, with practical information about the recycling collections. At the same time, 80% of respondents indicated that they use the Gwynedd app or the Council's website, highlighting a clear opportunity to strengthen our digital means of communication - particularly through social media channels.

3.6.4 We intend to work with a charity to ensure that our messages about recycling reach more schools across the County.

- 3.6.5 The information collected by the collection crews through Bartec also allows us to identify households that need extra support - such as those that produce a large amount of waste or do not recycle correctly.
- 3.6.6 Our aim is to encourage and persuade residents to improve their recycling practices, but it must be recognised that there is a limit to the effectiveness of voluntary methods. In some cases, consideration will need to be given to the use of enforcement methods. The Council has enforcement powers, such as in relation to keeping bins on the street or misusing bins. During the consultation, the public's views on the use of enforcement were sought, and the results are set out below. A score of 1 indicates strong agreement with the statement.



- 3.6.7 In terms of recycling centres, we have started to open bin-bags and extend the work of reuse. While this led to some dissatisfaction at first, it is believed that explaining the rationale behind the change has been key to ensuring wider acceptance. The early trials have shown a reduction in residual waste. We also collaborate with local charities to reuse furniture, children's toys, and second-hand paint is available for anyone who needs it. In addition, an application has been submitted to the Welsh Government for funding to upgrade and improve the recycling centres at Dolgellau and Pwllheli.

3.7 G6: Waste assets plan

- 3.7.1 One of the six key objectives in the Strategy is to ensure infrastructure that is fit for the future. Accordingly, the Department intends to invest in the redevelopment of the Harlech and Caernarfon waste transfer and processing sites, to ensure that they can cope with an increase in the number and types of materials received in the coming years. This work is also essential to ensure compliance with current licensing requirements, as well as maintaining the quality of recycled materials so that the optimum income can be secured.
- 3.7.2 We have been working with WRAP Cymru and Local Partnerships for some time, and initial plans have now been received. However, it is important to recognise that significant investment will be required to fully realise these plans.
- 3.7.3 The consultation on the Waste Strategy showed that 76% of residents consider waste processing within Gwynedd to be important.

3.8 G7: Manage overspend [stemming mainly from workforce sickness and overtime]

- 3.8.1 Ensuring control over overspend was one of the top priorities when the Waste and Recycling Service was transferred to the Environment Department. At the time, overspend ranged between £1.5 million and £1.7 million. The Revenue Budget 2025/26 - End of November 2025 Review, submitted to Cabinet on 20 January 2026, states that the objective for 2025/26 is an overspend position of £617k. The report noted that "restructuring and the introduction of changes to the field continues with a number of steps involved in the process, with some of the steps slipping to 2026/27 and therefore a number of savings schemes slipping as a result of the restructuring challenges".
- 3.8.2 As well as managing the level of overspend, £1.45 million savings schemes have been identified for Waste and Recycling Services as part of the Council's Savings Strategy. The full list of these savings is included in Appendix 2, along with comments on their current status.
- 3.8.3 One of the main requirements of the original brief was to ensure better control over sickness levels. At the time, sickness not only had a negative impact on workforce morale, but also created additional costs for the service by having to pay for supply workers or overtime to complete route. At times, sickness levels were so high that it was not possible to secure a vehicle for each route. Since the introduction of Bartec, sickness has not led to the cancellation of routes. The graph below shows the improvement in sickness levels in 2025–26. For comparison, waste service workers lost 1.6 days of work per month due to sickness, compared to an average of 1 day per month across other Council services.



- 3.8.4 Through negotiations with the workforce and the unions, it was agreed to continue with the task and finish arrangements. However, unlike the previous procedure where the arrangement was considered on an individual basis, the emphasis is now on a collective task and finish arrangement. This change is believed to have contributed to a better team atmosphere and led to a significant reduction in overtime levels.

3.9 G8: Ensure there is firm control of contracts with other parties that receive our waste

- 3.9.1 We have reviewed several agreements and have been able to secure savings as a result of this work. However, as the existing assets are not fit for purpose, it is difficult to carry out all aspects of the work in-house at the moment. With the right investment, there will be better opportunities to process more of our own materials in the future.

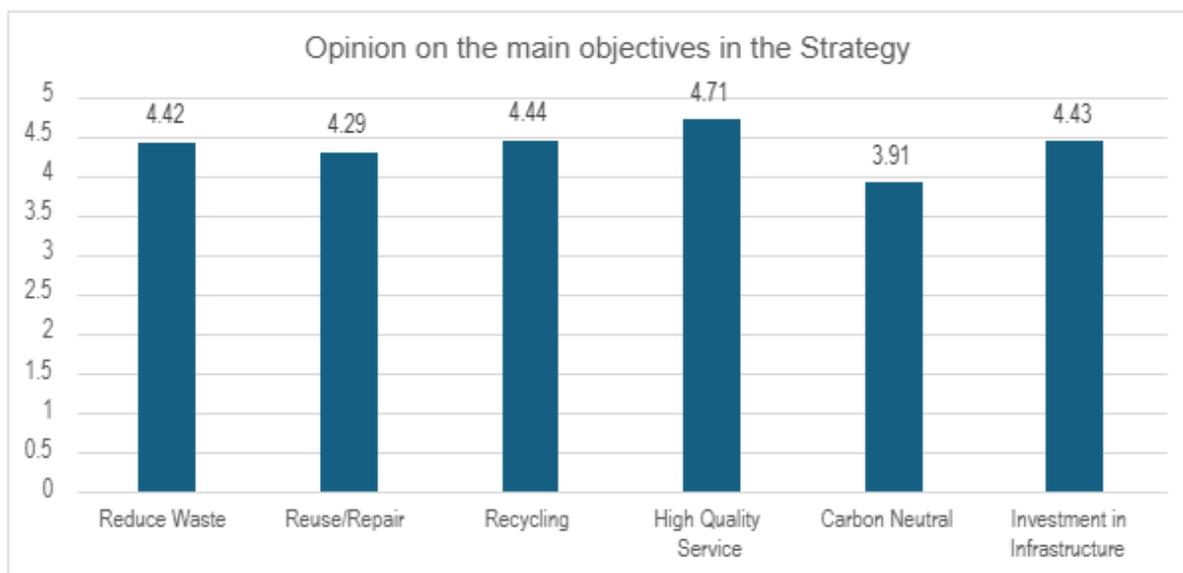
- 3.9.2 Ensuring a sustainable source of income through commercial waste and holiday homes is vital to the service and has been identified as one of the main risks on the Department's risk register. In April 2024, the Welsh Government introduced Workplace Recycling Regulations, imposing legal requirements on businesses to separate waste in the same way as households. As a result, Cyngor Gwynedd, as a collection operator, was required to collect waste and recycling materials separately from businesses for the first time. It must be recognised that the implementation of this system for commercial waste has been a significant challenge and has highlighted fundamental weaknesses in our systems and business arrangements.
- 3.9.3 The Commercial Waste Service's historic arrangements have resulted in an operational split between the collection element and the contract-setting element. Following Ffordd Gwynedd's review of the service, it was concluded that the current arrangements created operational barriers, led to tension, and limited efficiency.
- 3.9.4 Although a new system has been procured to improve the efficiency of the back office, the current arrangements in terms of the distribution of work between the two services continue to create difficulties, lack of accountability and uncertainty around managerial responsibilities. As a result, the Department is unable to take full advantage of opportunities in the market and loses potential to increase sources of income.
- 3.9.5 The restructuring of the service will provide an opportunity to address many of these barriers and to strengthen operational and business arrangements.
- 3.10 G9: Communication Plan - This was designed after the adoption of the Waste Strategy.**
- 3.10.1 While there is a work programme for the recycling officers' team involved in communication and behaviour change, this area has been identified as a priority in the draft Waste Strategy. It is therefore intended to develop and implement a new communication plan which will respond to the findings of the public survey and intertwine with the main objectives of the Strategy.
- 3.11 G10: Health and Safety Arrangements**
- 3.11.1 Two specific officers are responsible for overseeing health and safety issues within the waste services. The tragic accident that took place in Conwy last year has highlighted the true nature of the dangers associated with the industry. We have invested in cameras, which are an important tool for monitoring the safety of crews, and we have also recently started carrying out risk assessments on all circuits.
- 3.11.2 It is unclear within the current structure who is directly responsible for the health and safety of the service, and as a result there is uncertainty about accountability.
- 3.11.3 The lack of compatibility between formal accountability and practical implementation poses a significant organisational risk, undermining the ability to respond quickly and effectively to health and safety issues. The restructuring of the service will offer an opportunity to address these barriers and strengthen the governance arrangements.

3.12 G11: Establish a firm strategy for Waste and Recycling.

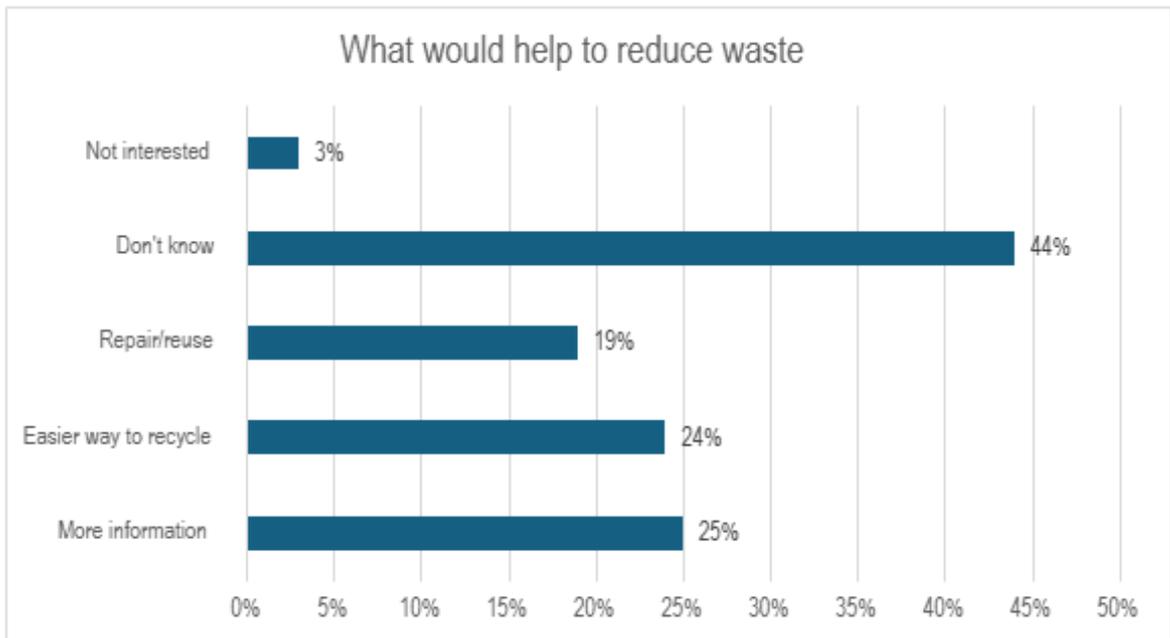
3.12.1 Cyngor Gwynedd held a public consultation on the draft Waste Strategy between October and November 2025. The consultation consisted of 52 questions gathering views and information from the public. A total of 1,266 responses were received. While the analysis is ongoing, the following presents the main results and the main initial findings.

3.12.2 There was a representation of responses from across Gwynedd (Appendix 3), and the age profile was quite representative of the local population. However, a trend of under-reporting was noted by respondents under the age of 57, and over-reporting by residents aged 57 and older. A higher proportion of responses were received from women compared to the wider population in Gwynedd. There was a response from 29 elected members, although there is a possibility that some of them also responded as members of the public. The level of response from businesses was particularly low.

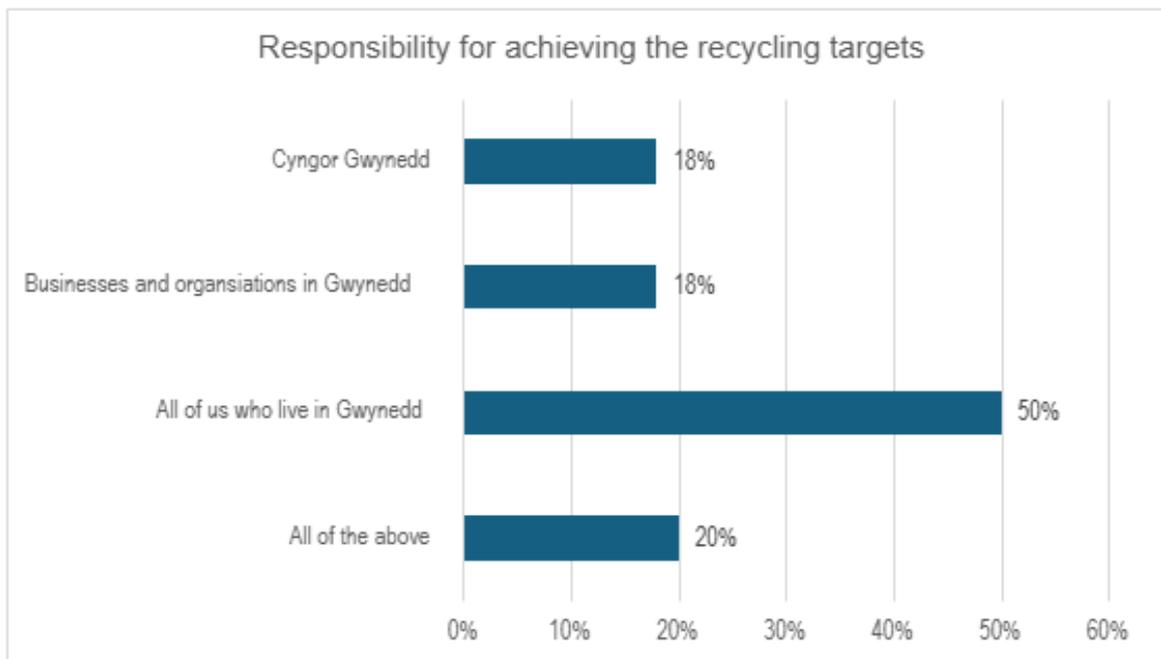
3.12.3 Six key objectives were identified in the Strategy, and the public were asked to rate their importance on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating high importance. The objective that received the highest support was to ensure a quality service, with levels of support for all objectives as follows.



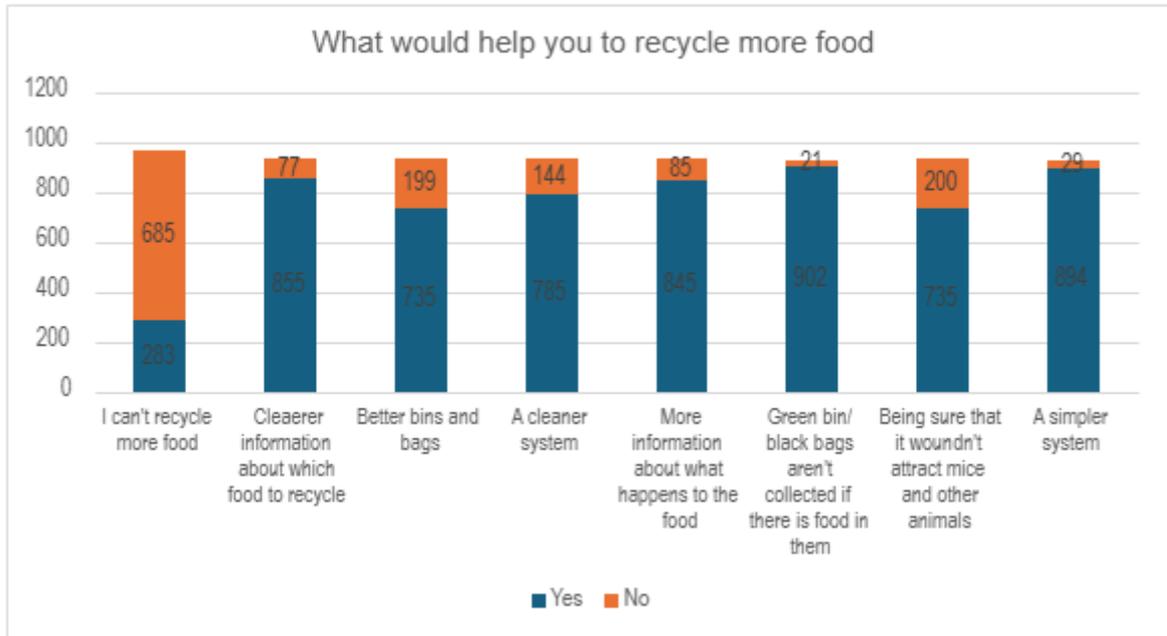
3.12.4 Respondents were asked how important it was to reduce waste, and 87% indicated that they considered this important. The graph below shows the factors that would help them do so, with 44% stating they did not know how to reduce their waste further. The biggest barriers identified were the number of non-recyclable materials, along with high levels of "upstream" packaging.



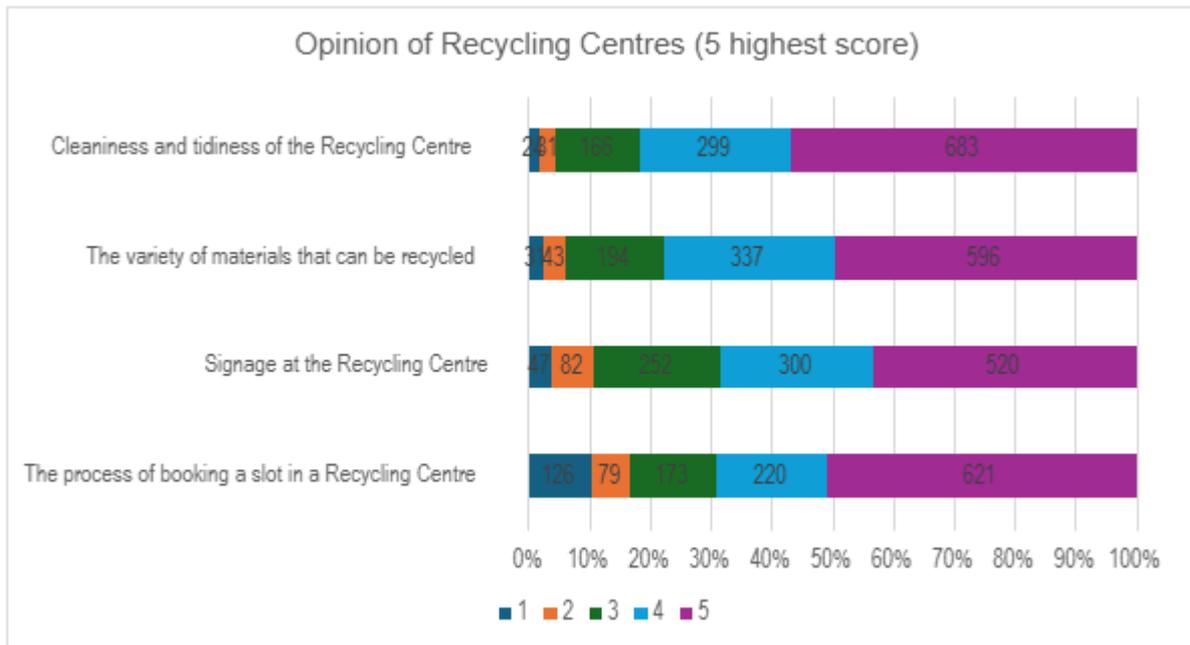
3.12.5 Respondents were asked who should be responsible for meeting the national recycling target. In a yes/no option question, 50% stated that this is the responsibility of all of us in Gwynedd. Of the free responses, 36 respondents indicated that it is the Welsh Government's responsibility to ensure the target is met. In addition, 84% expressed their view that it is important that the Council achieves the recycling target.



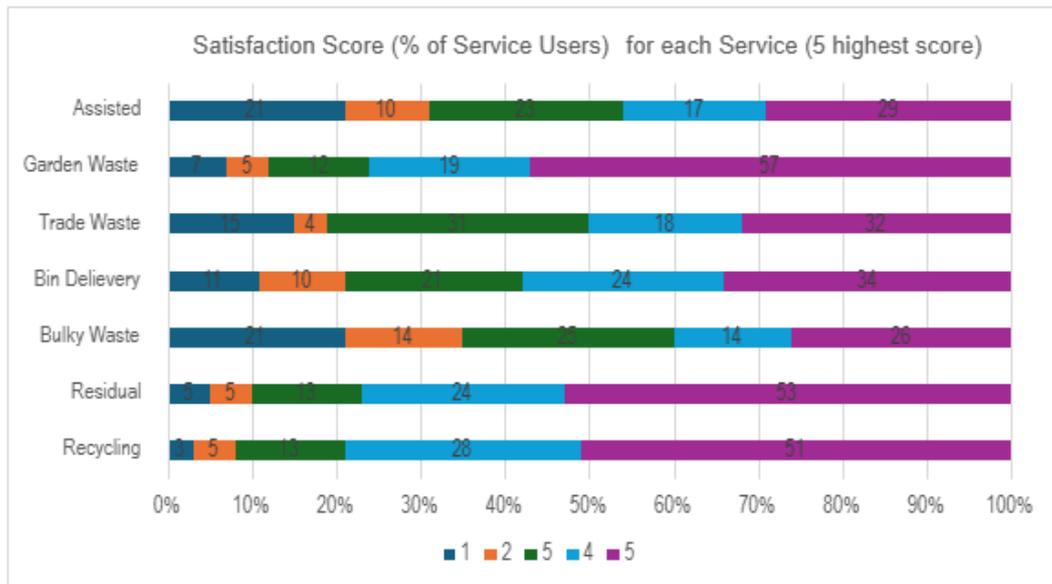
3.12.6 While 90% of respondents indicated that they recycle everything they can, this is inconsistent with the data showing the contents of the residual bin. In addition, 70% reported recycling their food waste, although evidence shows that 27% of the contents of the green bin is still food (see 3.3.7). This suggests significant gaps between behaviour and perception, and highlights the need for greater clarity, communication and support for residents.



3.12.7 There were positive comments about the service at our recycling centres, including in relation to the slot-booking system for access, which was considered functional and effective by a number of respondents.



3.12.8 While we have focused on complaints about recycling and domestic collections in paragraph 3.4.1, the graph below shows high levels of satisfaction with collection services: 91% for recycling and residual collections, and 87% for garden waste collections. This suggests that core services are widely valued by residents, but that there is clear room for improvement in other areas of the service.



3.12.9 We will now move forward to analyse the results in more detail and to incorporate the relevant ideas into the Strategy, with a view to submitting a report for formal adoption before the summer.

3.13 G12: Review the service's existing arrangements for distributing bins, boxes and bags to residents.

3.13.1 The bin delivery service is under significant pressure due to the unprecedented demand for equipment. In 2023–24, 35,855 applications were received for various types of items and equipment (excluding commercial equipment). While the focus in the early years following the transfer of the Waste field has been on improving the collection service, it is now clear that particular attention needs to be paid to the bin delivery service. It is important to emphasise that this issue does not reflect on the workforce, but rather on the managerial level.

3.13.2 We have held discussions with staff, and a number of ideas have been proposed to improve provision. Options we will be considering during the year include:

- Reviewing workflow arrangements - ensuring that ordering, preparation and delivery processes are more efficient and less dependent on manual steps by using Bartec.
- Better coordination with the collection crews - use Bartec data to proactively identify equipment needs and to reduce unnecessary delays.
- Optimising stock and storage - ensuring sufficient equipment is available at all times and minimising delays resulting from stock shortages.
- Reviewing staffing resources - assess whether the current capacity is sufficient to cope with the growing demand and whether there is a need to remodel the team.
- Improving communication with residents - provide clearer information about delivery schedules and application status, reducing the need for follow-up enquiries.
- Exploring the possibility of collecting equipment from local sites - assessing whether residents can be enabled to collect equipment from Gwynedd shops or recycling centres, provided that a robust stock system is in place first.
- Reviewing the use of 'Cartgylchu' - decide whether to phase out the use of Recycling boxes and promote the wider use of hessian sacks for recycling.
- Managing the demand for bins and equipment - consider options to manage the increasing demand, as ordering bins is currently too easy. Although the Council does not wish to introduce a fee at this time, this may need to be considered in the future if

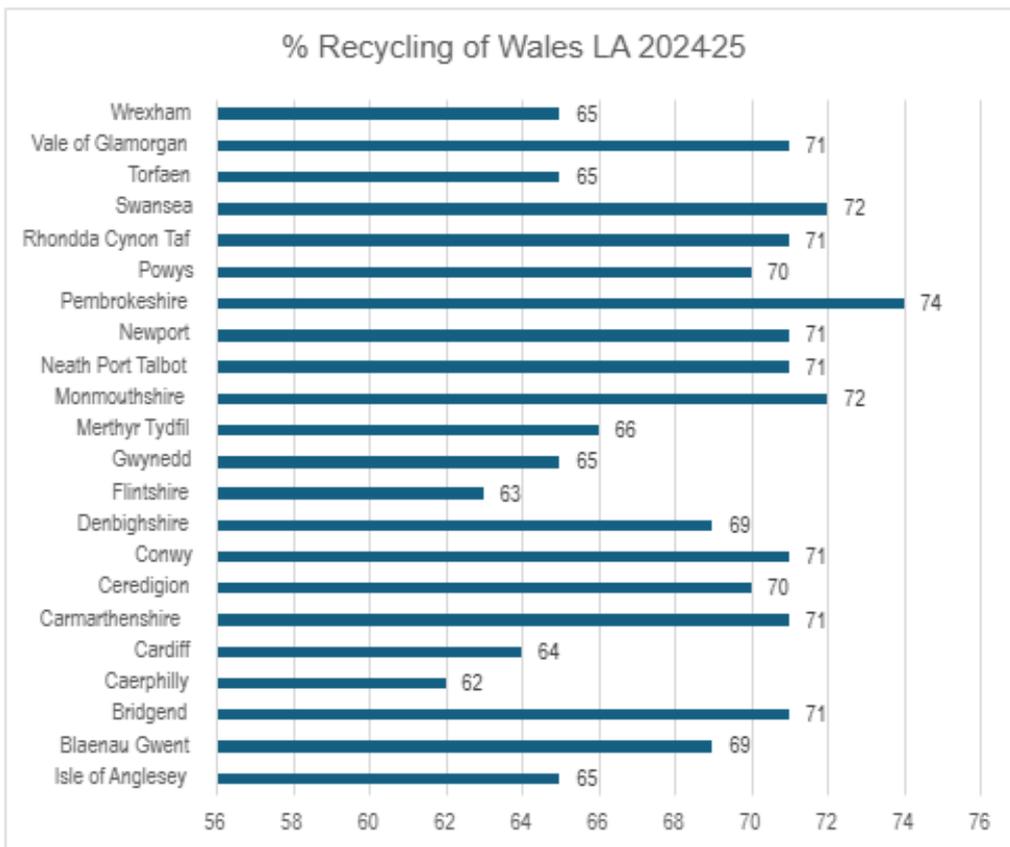
demand does not decrease. It should be noted that 10 local authorities in Wales already charge for residual bin replacement, with fees ranging from £5 to £60.

3.14 G13: Low carbon.

3.14.1 The service has approximately has around 100 waste collection and disposal vehicles. At present, we have not been able to invest significantly in electric waste collection vehicles. However, we remain committed to decarbonising our fleet by 2030, but as a Department we will need to work closely with the Fleet Service to look in detail at the technology and the business case, because currently electric vehicles cost around twice as much as diesel vehicles and there is insufficient capacity in the local infrastructure to charge these types of vehicles.

3.15 Progress and challenges in achieving the target of recycling 70% of waste

3.15.1 Cyngor Gwynedd's recycling performance for 2024–25 is 65.3%. As a result, the Council has slipped down the rankings compared to other local authorities in Wales (see graph below). Of the 22 authorities, 20 saw an increase in their recycling rates, including Gwynedd, and 12 local authorities achieved the statutory target of 70%. Failure to meet the national target increases the risk of financial penalties.



3.15.2 Natural Resources Wales has issued a notice regarding the accuracy of data relating to timber/wood recycling. Based on the information available, it is estimated that the national recycling rate for Wales in 2024-25 will be at least 1% lower than the published figures. At local authority level, the impact can vary significantly: some authorities are not affected at all, while for others the rate could fall by between 1% and 5%. Whilst we are confident that Cyngor Gwynedd has correctly calculated timber recycling, the situation raises questions about the fairness and consistency of comparisons between authorities.

3.15.3 The Recycling Strategy is an important first step on the journey towards reaching the 70% target, and the document sets out the plans and ambitions to achieve this.

3.15.4 Additional funding has become available through EPR, and we will prepare a business case to use this funding not only for the development of capital plans but also to support operational plans that will enable us to reach the 70% target.

3.15.5 The table below provides an approximate picture of the type of action that could lead to a further increase in the recycling rate. This is a desktop exercise at the moment, and more detailed work and scrutiny is needed before the details can be finalised.

Cyngor Gwynedd Recycling Rate 2024-25	65.30%	
Collect waste less frequently or reduce bin capacity	2.11%	Long-term saving
Increase business recycling by 12% (similar to domestic figures)	0.42%	Long-term saving
Increase food rate to 25%	0.35%	Long-term savings
Recycle at least 50% of our wood and carpets	1.50%	Cost
Recycle at least 50% of street waste	0.90%	Cost
Open bin bags at our recycling centres	0.64%	Cost-neutral
Flexible plastic collection (flex)	0.56%	Cost
Other (textiles/reuse)	0.16%	Cost-neutral
Total	71.94%	

8. Next Steps

To accept the report

Appendices

Appendix 1: Waste and Recycling Services Work Program

Appendix 2: Waste and Recycling Services Savings List

Appendix 3: Spatial Representativeness