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# Waste Service – Follow-up review – **Torfaen County Borough Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Gareth Jones and Allison Rees programme managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

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# Summary report

## Summary

### Why waste and recycling are important

- 1 Waste management is a Welsh Government priority. In 2011, the Welsh Government established the Collaborative Change Programme (CCP) to facilitate the delivery of more sustainable waste management services in the context of meeting the objectives of Towards Zero Waste<sup>1</sup>, the Welsh Government's Waste Management Strategy. CCP is a joint initiative between the Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)<sup>2</sup>. Towards Zero Waste is more challenging than comparable policies for the rest of the United Kingdom. The Welsh Government has:
  - set long-term targets for recycling/re-use of municipal waste:
    - 52% by 2012-13;
    - 58% by 2015-16;
    - 64% by 2019-20; and
    - 70% by 2024-25, some five years earlier than is currently the case in England;
  - a Landfill Allowance Scheme which limits the amount of biodegradable municipal waste that councils in Wales can send to landfill; and
  - put in place the potential for financial penalties to be levied for non-compliance.
- 2 For several years, waste management has been a priority for the Council. Waste management forms part of the Council's **A clean and green Torfaen** priority within the Corporate Plan (CP3) 2018-19 to 2020-2021.
- 3 There are two national performance measures for waste management:
  - percentage of waste reused, recycled or composted; and
  - kilograms of residual waste generated per person.

<sup>1</sup> **Towards Zero Waste** is the overarching waste strategy document for Wales. It was published in 2010. The strategy outlines the actions to be taken to reach the Welsh Government's ambition of becoming a high-recycling nation by 2025 and a zero-waste nation by 2050.

<sup>2</sup> WRAP is a not-for-profit company established in 2000. It works with businesses and individuals to help them reap the benefits of reducing waste, develop sustainable products, and use resources in an efficient way. WRAP is backed by government funding from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

## What we looked at

- 4 During June to August 2018, we carried out a review of Torfaen County Borough Council's (the Council) progress in addressing the nine proposals for improvement in our **Service Assessment of Waste Management Services** report issued in June 2015. We also considered the Council's arrangements for assessing its progress in addressing the proposals for improvement.

## How we approached the review

- 5 To inform our findings we interviewed a selection of elected members, officers and operational staff in the waste service. We also reviewed relevant documents and observed a scrutiny committee meeting. We also reviewed the Council's own assessments of progress in addressing the nine proposals for improvement.
- 6 Early in our review, we identified a number of important issues that provide context to the Council's progress and our conclusions:
  - the long-term sickness absence of some key waste service officers since 2016 reduced the service's capacity to fully address the proposals for improvement;
  - the significant increase in recycling performance between 2015-16 and 2016-17 as a result of the Council's changes to the waste and recycling collection arrangements; and
  - the appointment of a new Chief Officer and Assistant Chief Officer in the autumn of 2017 who are instilling a renewed focus and pace to fully address the proposals for improvement.

## Overall finding

- 7 Our review sought to answer the question: **Has the Council effectively addressed our waste management proposals for improvement made in our 2015 report to facilitate sustainable improved outcomes for waste management?**
- 8 Overall, we found that: **The Council has made slow progress in addressing our proposals for improvement and some significant issues remain, but performance has improved and there is renewed pace and focus on achieving sustainable improvements in the waste service.** We came to this conclusion because:
  - the Council has been slow to develop an integrated waste strategy, but this has not prevented improvements in performance in the short term;
  - Scrutiny now has greater engagement in developing the waste service, however, scrutiny's impact can be further strengthened through more effective challenge;
  - the Council now more actively promotes its service standards;

- workforce planning and staff training are improving, working practices are now more consistent and the Council is attempting to reduce its reliance on agency staff;
- the Council introduced a service level agreement for routine maintenance between Fleet and Waste services in July 2018;
- the Council has improved the information it provides to members on the performance of contracts;
- the Council has not yet made the necessary improvements to the performance management arrangements for waste operatives;
- the Council now uses a wider range of communication methods about the waste service to inform residents;
- The Council has made progress in strengthening its strategic risk management arrangements for the Waste service but needs to ensure that operational risks are effectively managed; and
- the Council has not adequately monitored its progress in addressing our 2015 proposals for improvement.

9 Going forward the remaining significant issues are to:

- clarify the strategic direction of the waste service to enable sustainable improved outcomes for waste management;
- improve the monitoring and management of waste service level risks; and
- strengthen accountability and scrutiny challenge.

# Detailed report

The Council has made slow progress in addressing our proposals for improvement and some significant issues remain, but performance has improved and there is renewed pace and focus on achieving sustainable improvements in the waste service

10 We have set out below our assessment of the Council's progress in addressing each of our nine 2015 proposals for improvement.

The Council has been slow to develop an integrated waste strategy, but this has not prevented improvements in performance in the short term

## Exhibit 1: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 1

### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 1

Develop a single integrated strategy for its Waste Management Service. The Council should:

- set out a long-term vision for the service, beyond meeting Welsh Government targets.
- develop a single integrated strategy which sets out:
  - how the vision will be achieved;
  - what infrastructure is required;
  - how it will collaborate with others and its approach to contracting out; and
  - how it plans to educate residents and take appropriate enforcement action.

11 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has not yet developed a single integrated strategy for the waste service.
- the Council's response to our 2015 waste management service proposals for improvement (PFI) initiated some early work to develop a single integrated waste strategy, however, progress stalled.
- public consultation took place in 2016 to inform an emerging strategy, however, following this exercise, the Council had limited staff capacity to produce a final strategy.
- the previous head of service and interim chief officer left the Council in 2016 and 2017 respectively. These departures left a capacity gap at

senior-management level. In addition, key waste service officers have been absent on long-term sick leave since 2016.

12 However, despite the capacity gap in the service's workforce during 2016 and 2017, some service developments have been achieved. At the time of our previous review, in 2015, the Council had short-term, interim contracts for the disposal of different waste and recycling materials. Since our 2015 review, the Council has developed long-term permanent contracts in partnership with other councils. These are:

- a joint Residual waste with Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, and Blaenau Gwent councils. This contract started in April 2016.
- a joint Green Waste procurement with Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire and Newport councils. The Council's agreement with its appointed contractor started in 2017.
- a joint Food Waste contract with Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire councils. This contract started in April 2018;
- the Council's recycling performance increased from 57.4% in 2015-16 to 63.6% in 2016-17, exceeding the national statutory target of 58% by 5.6%. This significant increase is in part, due to:
  - the opening of an extended Household Waste and Recycling Centre in 2015 to accommodate additional recycling materials;
  - the introduction of reduced capacity general waste ('skinny') bins in 2016, supported by a communications and engagement campaign to inform residents of this change; and
  - food and recycling participation rates increasing.
- for 2017-18, the Council's recycling performance decreased to 60.6%. To put this into context, 17 of the 22 councils reported a decrease in their reuse/recycling/composting rates for 2017-18 compared to 2016-17. This is mainly due to a combination of the drop in Incinerator Bottom Ash (IBA) reported as recycled and improvements in the accuracy of wood reporting<sup>3</sup>. The Council's national ranking for recycling performance remains 15th and the Council's 2017-18 performance remains above the current national statutory target of 58%.
- the new Chief Officer and Assistant Chief Officer appointed in autumn 2017 are providing a renewed vigour, commitment and pace to the development of a long-term single integrated strategy for the waste service.
- the Council states there continues to be limited staff capacity to make progress in developing a strategy. At the Cleaner Communities scrutiny committee on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2018, officers reported to members that to address this issue the new Chief Officer proposed to appoint an external consultant

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government Local Authority Municipal Waste Management, 2017-18 published 17 October 2018 (SFR 94/2018).

to complete the strategy. Following this scrutiny committee meeting, WRAP indicated they could assist the Council in writing a strategy at no cost to the Council.

- the Council expects a completed draft of its single integrated waste strategy by December 2018. The Cleaner Communities scrutiny committee will then consider this draft strategy in January 2019.
- whilst the absence of a single integrated waste strategy has not prevented the Council from improving the service in the short term, the Council still needs to develop a long-term single integrated strategy. A strategy should provide a clear strategic vision that will enable the Council to achieve sustainable service improvements. Whilst the Council acknowledges the importance of meeting Welsh Government recycling targets, the Council recognises that a single integrated waste strategy will need to be resident focussed and not written merely to meet statutory targets.

## Scrutiny now has greater engagement in developing the waste service, however, scrutiny's impact can be further strengthened through more effective challenge

### Exhibit 2: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 2

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 2

Strengthen the governance and challenge arrangements. The Council should:

- clarify and apply the respective roles and accountabilities of officers, members and the Scrutiny function; and
- where appropriate, utilise the Scrutiny function to inform the decision-making process and not just post-decision review.

13 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- scrutiny now engages with the waste service at pre-decision stage.
- from December 2015 to the time of our fieldwork for this follow-up review, the Cleaner Communities Scrutiny Committee has received regular reports on the development of the waste service. The Committee has considered the:
  - officers' action plan to address each of our proposals for improvement for the waste service (December 2015);
  - outcome of public and staff engagement (September 2016);
  - review of the roll out of the skinny bins (February 2017);
  - development of the Waste Strategy (February 2018); and
  - two progress updates on addressing our proposals for improvement (March 2017 and June 2018).

- in total, the committee made 13 recommendations: three regarding the action plan to address the proposals for improvement and 10 on the outcomes of the public and staff engagement. In the Council's update report on the proposals for improvement considered by the Committee on 21 March 2017, the report usefully contained an update on the recommendations, whether the recommendations were implemented (four recommendations), rejected (0) or being considered (nine recommendations), the impact, (if applicable), and the Executive member response.
- we issued our proposals for improvement in 2015 and despite the progress reports to the Cleaner Communities Scrutiny Committee, there has been limited scrutiny challenge in relation to the timeliness and pace of the Council in addressing these and delivering against the action plan.
- we observed the Cleaner Communities scrutiny committee on 20 June 2018 and noted that officers received little challenge on the timeliness of progress.
- the Executive Member is knowledgeable about the waste and recycling service and is committed to make further and sustainable improvements to the service's performance. However, the Executive Member is not invited to attend the Cleaner Communities scrutiny committee to be held to account for the strategic direction of the waste service and performance nor progress in achieving it.
- in our **Overview and Scrutiny: Fit for the Future** report published in June 2018, we reported that Executive members are invited 'by exception,' and are not routinely held to account at scrutiny committees. As a consequence, officers are usually questioned on issues which are the responsibility of Executive members, such as decisions, policies or service performance. This blurs lines of accountability. This also suggests there is a need for the Council to ensure that Cabinet, scrutiny committee members and Council officers understand and play their respective roles as part of the scrutiny process. This statement remains relevant for this waste service follow-up review. While officers attend the scrutiny committee to respond to member questions, the Executive Member is not there to respond to any strategic policy or performance related questions.
- outside of the scrutiny arrangements, the Council has other arrangements to challenge the waste service. The Chief Officer and relevant Executive Member meet quarterly with the Leader and Deputy Leader, and both attend the Council's regular Corporate Performance Assessments. The quarterly Corporate Performance Assessments should help Executive members gain a greater understanding of performance relating to their portfolios for which they are accountable as well as wider performance issues across the Council. These sessions should also provide an opportunity for Executive Members to question and challenge Chief Officers on service performance.

### Exhibit 3: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 3

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 3

More actively promote the Council's service standards and improve data quality relating to them. The Council should:

- ensure the importance of waste service standards are clearly communicated to staff so that they have an understanding of their role in these;
- ensure that performance against service standards is collated and reported in a timely manner; and
- report performance against the service standards and communicate the results to staff, members and citizens on a regular basis.

14 In reaching this conclusion, we found that:

- the Council's waste and recycling service standards inform the public on the Council's areas of improvement, the different waste and recycling collections and how the public can work with the Council to help in increasing recycling rates.
- the Council's waste service standards clearly set out what services the public can expect the Council to provide and the contribution residents can make to help to improve the waste and recycling performance.
- there are 23 service standards. All staff interviewed were familiar with the waste service standards and were clear about their role in ensuring the waste service standards are being met. The Council believes that informing the public of the performance of each service standard at the same time would be too much information, therefore, the Council promotes individual service standards as and when needed, for example, any changes to the service linked to behavioural change in residents.
- the Council promotes the waste service standards on the Council website and individual service standards through social media and Torfaen Talks (final print newsletter published in autumn 2017). The waste service also uses social media to promote and communicate individual initiatives such as nappy collections, use of nets on the skinny bins and changes to waste and recycling collections due to inclement weather.
- the Council used Torfaen Talks extensively to promote and communicate key messages to the public about the waste service. Prior to the change in Torfaen Talks from the Council's community newsletter to an electronic communication, the following articles were included for residents:
  - recycling performance (Autumn 2017, April 2016);
  - performance against service standards (February 2016);
  - changes to service – stopping green collections (Spring 2017, April 2016, December 2015);
  - skinny bin rollout (October 2015);
  - nappy collections (February 2016, October 2015);

- placing correct items in the recycling box (October 2016);
  - ensuring plastic items are washed and squashed (October 2016);
  - availability of containers and caddy liners (October 2016, April 2016, February 2016);
  - encouraging residents to personalise their waste containers (April 2016); and
  - highlighting the Council's activities with schools (April 2016).
- in addition to the County Borough wide communications through Torfaen Talks and social media, the Council also uses smaller-scale approaches to communicate with residents. Supervisors and Charge Hands have received training about communicating with the public. Supervisors and Charge Hands visit residents' homes to provide advice on how the different waste and recycling materials are collected and the different receptacles to use. The Council uses such visits to help educate the public where necessary to meet the service standards.
  - the Council also provides each household with calendars to remind them when different waste and recycling collections are made to reduce the risk of residents putting out the wrong waste and recycling material in the wrong week for collection.

15 However, despite all the proactive communication approaches, staff in the waste service told us that the public do not always adhere to the service standards.

- the Council has produced leaflets that waste operatives can leave at properties during the collection rounds, to inform residents if the incorrect recycling materials are left for collection. However, during our fieldwork operational staff told us that these leaflets have not been available for several months and staff told us that this is frustrating as it means that they cannot remind the public of the service standards.

## Workforce planning and staff training are improving, working practices are now more consistent and the Council is attempting to reduce its reliance on agency staff

### Exhibit 4: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 4

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 4

Improve workforce planning and enforce consistent work practices across the service. The Council should:

- develop alternative options to manage its workforce and provide flexibility in order to meet demand and respond to unplanned staff absence; and
- develop and communicate appropriate policies regarding work practices and expectations for all operatives, and monitor adherence to these.

16 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council's progress in reducing the reliance on agency staff has been slow, however, the Council's approach to workforce planning now provides a greater range of career opportunities and training for waste operatives.
- in the period 2016-2018, the Council trained 11 Waste Loaders to gain their Heavy Goods Vehicle driving licence. These staff members can now act up as Relief Team Leaders /Drivers when required to cover the absence of regular drivers during periods of planned and unplanned absence. This, therefore, reduces the need to source agency staff to act as drivers, however, the Council still requires agency staff to act as Loaders.
- during 2016-2018, seven waste operatives achieved the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) Level 2 Waste Operations qualification and in 2018, another five operatives are scheduled to receive this training. One operative will be going through Level 3 training this year and one operative undertook level 4 training in Waste Management between 2016-2018.
- at the time of this fieldwork, the Council was arranging through Torfaen Training for two Team Leader/Charge Hands to undertake a Level 2 certificate in Team Leader Principles. The Council plans to roll this out to all Team Leaders within the department as well as introducing this course as a standard for new Team Leaders.
- as shown in [Exhibit 1](#), the planned expenditure on agency staff rose significantly from £554,000 in 2016-17 to £831,000 in 2017-18. While the actual expenditure on agency staff in 2017-18 was less than the planned spend, this is considerably more than the previous year and approximately double the planned and actual expenditure in 2014-15. The Council has reduced its planned agency expenditure in 2018-19.
- the new Chief Officer is currently developing an alternate staffing model to recruit approximately 20 new waste operatives on a full-time, permanent

basis to eliminate the need for agency staff. The Council is confident there will be no extra costs associated with employing additional staff. The Council expects to commence this recruitment process in autumn 2018.

- low staff morale still exists within sections of the waste and recycling service due to ageing fleet, insufficient facilities available to them, such as showers, but there is now a consistent working practice with all shifts finishing at 3.30 pm.

#### Exhibit 5: summary of agency staff expenditure against budget<sup>4</sup>

(£000s)	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Budgeted (planned) agency expenditure	338	236	410	385	454	554	831	562
Actual expenditure on agency staff	368	336	484	473	641	721	807	321
<b>(Over)/underspend</b>	<b>(30)</b>	<b>(100)</b>	<b>(74)</b>	<b>(88)</b>	<b>(187)</b>	<b>(67)</b>	<b>23*</b>	<b>241**</b>

\* Includes £30,000 new costs for Ty Coch depot.

\*\* Includes Ty Coch and actuals to 14 September 2018.

## The Council introduced a service level agreement for routine maintenance between Fleet and Waste services in July 2018

#### Exhibit 6: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 5

##### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 5

Introduce service level agreements with fleet services for vehicle maintenance.

The Council should:

- ensure that the service level agreements set out expectations on both parties; and
- make appropriate provision for alternatives in the event of delays.

17 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council's response was slow in developing a service level agreement (SLA) with Fleet Services. An SLA was developed in 2017-18, but this was not formally signed until 23 July 2018, although it commenced on 1 April 2018.
- a vehicle maintenance schedule for routine maintenance forms part of the SLA between Fleet and Waste services. This informs Waste services when

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by Torfaen County Borough Council.

Fleet services need the vehicles and will be unavailable. The schedule assists the Waste service in their operational planning.

- the SLA clearly sets out the expectations of the Fleet and Waste services in relation to vehicle repair and maintenance, vehicle hire and lease, vehicle tracking system, fleet office and administration and performance monitoring and review.

18 However, Waste service operational staff felt that issues remain around reactive maintenance issues.

- many operational staff felt that additional staff are required in Fleet services as they are not only responsible for Council vehicles, but have outside contracts, for example, with Bron Afon Community Housing and conduct private MOTs. Operational staff expressed concerns that they felt that Fleet Services cannot always respond in a timely way to reactive repair requirements and any such delays in addressing reactive repairs can potentially impair the operational effectiveness of the waste service.
- the SLA ensures improved communication between Fleet and Waste services but having an agreement has not yet resolved the daily operational issues encountered by the waste service.
- the Waste service plans to review the SLA after the first 12 months to determine its impact.

## The Council has improved the information it provides to members on the performance of contracts

### Exhibit 7: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 6

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 6

Improve the provision of contract monitoring information. The Council should:

- provide regular contract performance information to members; and
- utilise the performance information.

19 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- scrutiny's involvement in waste and recycling contracts is at the pre-decision stage. The Council's arrangements place responsibility on officers for routine contract monitoring, and scrutiny committees do not therefore receive routine contract monitoring reports.
- as stated in proposal for improvement 1, since our previous Waste services review in 2015, the Council has jointly procured three different contracts for the disposal of waste and recycling materials.
- a project board consisting of officers from all partner councils met during the procurement process for the residual and food waste contracts. In addition,

there was a joint committee with two Cabinet members from each partner council that oversaw the procurement process.

- the arrangements for the green waste contract differed slightly as this is a contract of lower value and for a shorter time period. A project board of officers met to oversee the procurement process which was by 'lots'. Torfaen Council entered into a joint procurement process with Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire and Newport councils for green waste, however, each Council has awarded its own separate contract.
- now that the three contracts are in operation, officers from each of the participating councils meet monthly to monitor routine contract monitoring information.
- a joint committee with elected members from the partner councils is in place for the food waste contract. One Cabinet member from each council is part of the Executive Committee that oversees the Residual Waste contract.
- the Cleaner Scrutiny Committee decided that they do not wish to receive regular reports on contractor performance, and in light of this, the Council does not have arrangements in place to provide such reports to the Committee. The Council will engage with the relevant scrutiny committee about the Council's intended approach to the procurement of future contracts.

## The Council has not yet made the necessary improvements to the performance management arrangements for waste operatives

### Exhibit 8: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 7

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 7

Improve feedback to staff on performance. The Council should:

- ensure all staff have a regular review of performance;
- provide channels through which individual staff members can feedback to their managers in relation to performance issues; and
- ensure that the information gathered through this process is used to inform service improvement.

20 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has not developed any new arrangements since our previous Waste review in 2015, to address the frustrations of the waste operatives on staff receiving feedback on performance as part of the Council's formal annual appraisal process.
- the Council's corporate Work Smart programme remains in place for waste operatives and continues to be a source of frustration. Many officers

interviewed for this review acknowledged that Work Smart is not meaningful or appropriate for the waste operatives. The Council's HR team are currently identifying a more meaningful process. However, there are no timings for the availability and implementation of a new system and the annual Work Smart process started in September 2018.

- generally, the staff in the waste service are positive about the training opportunities available. However, a lack of a meaningful one-to-one meetings with a supervisor may prevent some staff from identifying relevant training and career opportunities available to them.
- Toolbox Talks, which are informal, group sessions, are in place for waste crews for each waste and recycling stream to meet managers to discuss operational issues. This is an opportunity to improve communication between operatives, supervisors, Charge Hands and managers, but there were mixed views as to the value of Toolbox Talks due to their infrequency.

## The Council now uses a wider range of communication methods about the waste service to inform residents

### Exhibit 9: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 8

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 8

Improve communication on waste management with residents. The Council should:

- develop systematic and regular communication with residents relating to the service, any changes to it and relevant expectations; and
- target the communication at those groups who are least likely to be already engaged.

21 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- as commented above under proposal for improvement 3, the Council uses a range of methods to communicate with residents regarding changes to arrangements and service standards.
- the Council is committed to work with those groups or residents that are less likely to recycle.
- in 2018, we worked with the Council in undertaking our 'Aligning Levers of Change' review. That review focussed on 'Making sense of food waste in Torfaen'. 583 residents across the Borough responded to the survey, which provided the Council with the public's insights about the different factors that affect food waste recycling in different communities.
- the Council is keen to explore further the views of residents in one geographical area on food waste recycling. We are working with the Council, its partners and residents to undertake a 'service user perspective' review on food waste participation in this geographical area during the autumn of 2018.

The Council wants to learn how to improve food waste participation rates both within this area and potentially in other areas of the Council where participation in food waste recycling is low.

- Since 2013-14, there has been a significant decrease in the number of waste service complaints:
  - 2013-14: 71
  - 2014-15: 42
  - 2015-16: 51
  - 2016-17: 33
  - 2017-18: 6
- complaints are categorised into themes, which link to the waste service standards, for example, missed collections (recycling/skinny bins/household waste/assisted), bins not returned to the original place, non-delivery of ordered waste receptacles, garden waste collections, damage to waste and recycling receptacles or complaints caused by the crew.
- the majority of complaints over this five-year period concern missed collections. However, the number of complaints regarding missed collections has fallen considerably from 59 in 2013-14 to five in 2017-18.

## The Council has made progress in strengthening its strategic risk management arrangements for the Waste service but needs to ensure that operational risks are effectively managed

### Exhibit 10: 2015 Proposal for Improvement 9

#### 2015 Proposal for Improvement 9

Strengthen risk management arrangements. The Council should:

- ensure that the corporate risk register is appropriately linked to the service risk register; and
- ensure that risk registers are up to date and reflect the totality of risks across the service.

22 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has made improvements to the recording of its waste risks having made links between the risk recorded in the corporate risk register and the mitigating actions in the service level and the waste team plans for 2018-19.
- within the corporate risk register (risk reference 23), the waste service risk is:
  - ‘once our Waste Strategy is fully implemented there remains a risk that we will still not meet the Welsh Government’s Statutory Recycling

Targets due to lack of participation of residents resulting in substantial fines to the Council'.

- The mitigating action relating to this risk in the Neighbourhood Public Protection service plan 2018-19, is:
  - 'produce and begin implementation of the new Waste Strategy for Torfaen'.
- The mitigating action in the Waste Team Plan 2018-19 is,
  - 'encourage residents to participate fully in the recycling schemes'.
- the Chief Officer has recently reviewed the risks across the department and is due to present the revised risk register to the Audit Committee later in the autumn of 2018. Previously, there were two high risks: Not achieving recycling statutory targets and not having appropriate sources for waste disposal. In June 2018, the Chief Officer removed waste disposal sources from the risk register as the Council had awarded long-term permanent contracts.
- while not meeting the statutory recycling target is a risk for the Council, operationally, many staff commented during fieldwork that there are additional risks to the service, such as not having the vehicles to complete the collections. Additionally, as stated in our 2015 report, other operational risks may exist that are not documented, for example, failure to implement the alternate staffing model leading to a continued reliance on agency staff. The Council's service planning guidance does not require service level risks to be recorded in team plans. The Council should however ensure that the service is effectively managing operational risks

## The Council has not adequately monitored its progress in addressing our 2015 proposals for improvement

23 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has arrangements to monitor our proposals for improvement and challenge progress against those. However, these arrangements have not been used effectively to challenge the slow pace in addressing our waste service proposals for improvement.
- twice a year, the Audit Committee receives an 'action plan for governance and improvement' to monitor progress of our proposals for improvement. This action plan states that the monitoring of the waste service proposals for improvement is performed by the Cleaner Communities Scrutiny Committee. The 'action plan for governance and improvement' considered by the Audit Committee on 14 March 2018 states October 2016 as the target date for the audit committee to receive an update on the waste service proposals for improvement for assurance purposes. As at the time of our fieldwork, the Audit Committee had not received an update.

- the Cleaner Communities Scrutiny Committee has received two progress reports outlining the service's progress against our 2015 proposals for improvement in March 2017 and June 2018 respectively. The Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to challenge the information and make recommendations.
- 24 However, the proposal for improvement monitoring information to the Cleaner Communities Scrutiny Committee contains limited information.
- 25 On 20 June 2018, the update to the Scrutiny Committee did not refer to the timings for addressing each proposal for improvement as stated in the original action plan considered by that Committee in December 2015. The update report did not provide an overall assessment on progress, whether the actions remain relevant, whether new actions are needed or if any proposals for improvement are considered as 'complete'.
- at the Cleaner Communities Scrutiny Committee on 20 June 2018, the Chair asked why the Council had yet to produce a single integrated waste strategy. Members did not seek clarification from officers about the timings of a final brief and tender being available to procure an external consultant to deliver the single integrated waste strategy. Officers stated that the final draft tender document would be presented to the Committee later in the year but members did not query the lack of detailed timings to complete this work. The progress report on our proposals for improvement did not contain an estimate of the costs associated with appointing an external consultant and members did not ask questions on this matter.
  - in our **Overview and Scrutiny: Fit for the Future** report published in June 2018, we issued a proposal for improvement for the Council: to ensure that members of overview and scrutiny committees have access to comprehensive and timely information when undertaking scrutiny activity. To assist the Cleaner Communities scrutiny committee in effectively monitoring progress in addressing our proposals for improvement, progress against original timescales, information on amended timescales and information on any changes to the original actions would assist the scrutiny committee in improving their level of challenge.
  - monitoring of our waste service proposals for improvement are not part of the Council's Corporate Performance Assessments. As noted above under proposal for improvement 2, Corporate Performance Assessments should help Executive Members gain a greater understanding of performance relating to their portfolios for which they are accountable and provide an opportunity for Executive Members to question and challenge Chief Officers on service performance. A lack of monitoring information in addressing our proposals for improvement to the Council's Senior Leadership is also resulting in a lack of challenge regarding progress.

# Appendix 1

## Torfaen County Borough Council's action plan in response to Wales Audit Office waste service proposals for improvement

Exhibit 11: the Council's action plan in response to Wales Audit Office waste service proposals for improvement

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P1 Develop a single integrated strategy for its Waste Management Service. The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set out a long-term vision for the service, beyond meeting Welsh Government targets.</li> <li>• develop a single integrated strategy which sets out:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– how the vision will be achieved;</li> <li>– what infrastructure is required;</li> <li>– how it will collaborate with others and its approach to contracting out; and</li> <li>– how it plans to educate residents and take appropriate enforcement action.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Officer, NS and PPP</li> <li>• Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>• Group Leader, Waste and Streetscene</li> </ul>	<p>January to Autumn 2016</p>	<p>The current Waste Strategy is contained within a 2009 Cabinet Report and enhanced by a 2011 Cabinet Report, which provided a route map to reach the statutory recycling targets by 2025.</p> <p>The proposals within those reports have been implemented. Officers therefore agree that a new Waste Strategy is required that clearly sets out how the authority will reach the 2025 70% recycling target, which incorporates education, awareness and enforcement as well as any further structural changes that can be made and how it is intended waste collected will be treated and disposed.</p> <p>Work on the strategy will begin early in 2016.</p> <p>Officers will incorporate those elements suggested in the WAO report such as infrastructure in place so far and what else will be required, collaborative ventures with others on procurement, clearly setting out how waste is managed, education and enforcement.</p> <p>Officers will also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake desktop research to establish what waste strategies are being used by other authorities seeking best practice where available;</li> <li>• Refer back to the original 'One Wales' documentation and make reference to emerging legislation and guidance such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill and</li> <li>• Environment Bill;</li> <li>• Engage with the wider Waste Strategy team in its derivation.</li> </ul> <p>Once a draft strategy has been written, officers will present this to a future scrutiny committee and present it to a member seminar in advance of decision by Council in the Autumn. Committee's view on what else should be included within the Strategy would be welcome.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P2 Strengthen the governance and challenge arrangements. The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clarify and apply the respective roles and accountabilities of officers, members and Scrutiny function; and</li> <li>where appropriate, utilise the Scrutiny function to inform the decision-making process and not just post decision review.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chief Officer, NS and PPP</li> <li>Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> </ul>	<p>Completed and ongoing both through the peer review actions and also continually as decision as required</p>	<p>The respective roles and accountabilities of officers, members and scrutiny were commented upon as part of the Peer Review and actions have been taken forward by the peer review action group as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular joint briefings have been set up for Leader, Cllr Jones and Cllr Cunningham (and now Cllr Clark);</li> <li>Review role descriptions for Cabinet Members involved with Neighbourhood Services - ongoing</li> </ul> <p>Officers firmly believe that the scrutiny function is extensively used pre Cabinet/Council/Executive Member decision as demonstrated in the recent reports on the skinny bin proposals, service standards performance, etc. This will continue.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P3 More actively promote the Council's service standards and improve data quality relating to them. The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure the importance of waste service standards are clearly communicated to staff so that they have an understanding of their role in these;</li> <li>• ensure that performance against service standards is collated and reported in a timely manner; and</li> <li>• report performance against the service standards and communicate the results to staff, members and citizens on a regular basis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>• Group Leader, Waste and Streetscene</li> </ul>	<p>Completed and ongoing. Fynnon will continue to be updated quarterly and an annual report will be prepared as agreed by members.</p>	<p>The Waste service standards were launched in April 2014, and personally communicated by the Head of Service to every waste operative at that time in the months following launch. They will be re-launched each year.</p> <p>Performance against service standards is reported in Fynnon on a quarterly basis, as agreed with members when the Service Standards were first agreed.</p> <p>When the service standards were first approved, members agreed an annual report. Committee received a report on performance at its September meeting and the revised report is currently with communications colleagues waiting a redesign before it can be published for citizens.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P4 Improve workforce planning and enforce consistent work practices across the service.</p> <p>The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop alternative options to manage its workforce and provide flexibility in order to meet demand and respond</li> <li>• to unplanned staff absence; and</li> <li>• develop and communicate appropriate policies regarding work practices and</li> <li>• expectations for all operatives, and monitor adherence to these.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>• Group Leader, Waste and Streetscene</li> <li>• Waste Operations Manager</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Work has been ongoing for some time to reduce levels of sickness. Overall sickness levels in 13/14 were 31.14 days lost per FTE, in 14/15 this was 24.44 and the Q1 figure for 15/16 was 5.71 (1.30) and 3.39 (1.44) for Q2. The numbers in brackets represent the short term sickness days.</p> <p>The whole Neighbourhood Services and Planning and Public Protection Division is in the process of recruiting a temporary HR officer to assist with putting in place a number of initiatives to reduce the reliance on agency staff. The date of appointment is not known.</p> <p>Some of the initiatives being considered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having permanent 'floater' staff who will cover holidays and sickness;</li> <li>• Recruiting seasonal staff during the summer to cover the 'green' collection rounds (where agency are currently used to supplement existing staff).</li> </ul> <p>In addition, a number of loading staff have been trained as HGV drivers to cover for drivers when they are not available as this is one of the areas where the department suffers the most with agency. Floating or agency staff can they be used to undertake loading duties.</p> <p>There will always be a need for some agency use to cover short term and unforeseen absences but it is envisaged that through these measures, reliance on agency staff will be significantly reduced.</p> <p>Work practices are continually communicated to the crews by the Head of Service and Operational Management either on a case by case basis following mystery shopper exercise, complaints, compliments or service enquiries.</p> <p>In addition, job descriptions were re-circulated in early 2015 to reinforce the behaviours and practices expected of crews.</p> <p>Performance is monitored and communicated in line with the comments against Proposal 7.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P5 Introduce service level agreements with fleet services for vehicle maintenance. The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that the service level agreements set out expectations on both parties; and</li> <li>• make appropriate provision for alternatives in the event of delays.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>• Head of Highways, Transportation and Property</li> <li>• Group Leader, Waste and Streetscene</li> <li>• Group Leader, Transportation and Fleet</li> </ul>	<p>January to April 2016</p>	<p>This proposal is welcomed and will be progressed.</p> <p>This is a new area for the division so discussions will be held with Fleet colleagues early in 2016 to begin the process of deriving the expectations for both parties and how breakdowns can be better covered. Again, officers will undertake desktop research to establish what other authorities have in this regard and what is considered to be best practice.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P6 Improve the provision of contract monitoring information.</p> <p>The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide regular contract performance information to</li> <li>• members; and</li> <li>• utilise the performance information and Scrutiny function to inform future collaborations and contracting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>• Group Leader, Waste and Streetscene</li> </ul>	<p>To be determined</p>	<p>Officers question the value of this proposal.</p> <p>Contracts, whether solely or in collaboration with other councils are awarded by Cabinet in line with the Council's constitution and Contract Standing Orders.</p> <p>Reports seeking award of contract will usually contain details of previous contractual arrangements, their cost and where relevant, performance. Sometimes, technologies change making past performance irrelevant. The majority of reports are open to the public albeit the tenderers will be anonymised.</p> <p>Once awarded, it is normal practice for contracts to be managed by officers as operational matters with reports to members on exception, that is, on poor performance or issue. Extensions to contract, where allowed for in the original contract award, are also operational matters and subject of a Chief Officer report.</p> <p>Reporting contract performance information when contracts are running well would lead to information only reports to members saying that x amount of waste was sent to y contractor and processed well at a cost of £. Such information is not routinely reported to the Chief Officer who empowers officers to run their services and trusts them to report by exception when necessary.</p> <p>If regular reports or information were provided, what value would members glean from the information, how would members actively use it and how would the provision of the information improve the outcome for citizens?</p> <p>The contracts that would be reported on would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treatment and disposal of residual waste;</li> <li>• Treatment and disposal of food waste;</li> <li>• Treatment and disposal of green waste;</li> <li>• Collection and bulking of dry recyclate (soon to be replaced by our own bulking station);</li> <li>• Running of the waste transfer station and household waste recycling centre</li> <li>• (performance data within Fynnon).</li> </ul> <p>Committee's view is therefore sought on this proposal.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P7 Improve feedback to staff on performance. The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure all staff have a regular review of performance;</li> <li>• provide channels through which individual staff members can feedback to their managers in relation to performance issues; and</li> <li>• ensure that the information gathered through this process is used to inform service improvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>• Group Leader, Waste and Streetscene</li> <li>• Waste Operations Manager</li> </ul>	<p>By end December 2015 and staggered annually thereafter</p>	<p>All office based staff regularly receive 1:1s and annual worksmart reviews. All members of operational staff are currently receiving electronic worksmart reviews and this exercise will be completed by Christmas. Thereafter, electronic worksmart reviews will be staggered throughout the year and repeated annually. The worksmart reviews going forward will form part of the Waste Team plan and progress against them will be monitored through the team plan process. The worksmart reviews enable individuals to feedback in relation to performance issues as well as enabling the manager to record any performance issues that will already have been discussed with individuals. In addition, regular briefings are held with individual teams on their performance based on compliments, complaints, service enquiries and mystery shopper exercises either by the Head of Service directly or other members of the operational management team to help improve performance. Missed collection data is collected at round and crew level and this is fed back to the crews verbally and through performance posters in the crew rooms. The performance posters, which are updated quarterly, also outline the current recycling performance, level of sickness and the cost of that sickness to the section, and number and nature of complaints and compliments. Each vehicle cab contains pertinent information about that particular crews round including posters encouraging better treatment of receptacles and a tidier street scape following collection. Repeated issues of poor performance by specific individuals or teams have been and will continue to be dealt with under the Council's disciplinary policies.</p>

Proposal	Responsible Officer	Timeframe	Comment
<p>P8 Improve communication on waste management with residents.</p> <p>The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop systematic and regular communication with residents relating to the service, any changes to it and relevant expectations; and</li> <li>target the communication at those groups who are least likely to be already engaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head of Streetscene and Waste</li> <li>Communications</li> </ul>	<p>Completed and ongoing</p>	<p>Systematic and regular communication about the waste service is already in place through articles in every Torfaen Talks, regular social media and website feeds and seasonal road shows. In 2014 around 38 consultation roadshows were held and there was a similar number of awareness raising roadshows in 2015 where residents were able to collect information and receptacles in advance of the skinny bin rollout.</p> <p>Waste Awareness Officers also attend individual properties to discuss waste services as required and requested.</p> <p>During each year, communication campaigns are run to highlight a specific part of the service such as general recycling, plastics recycling, metal recycling and food recycling and as need or feedback dictates. For example, if residents either through social media or through members make comment about a particular area of the service, that will become one of the specific campaigns. Similarly, if the crews report that there has been an increase in contamination of one particular waste stream, this will also form a specific campaign. Going forward, communication activities will be targeted using the Mosaic data which has recently been obtained by the Council. Officers will also work closely with the Wales Resource Action Programme to target communication in line with their segmentation modelling.</p>
<p>P9 Strengthen risk management arrangements.</p> <p>The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that the corporate risk register is appropriately linked to the service risk register; and</li> <li>ensure that risk registers are up to date and reflect the totality of risks across the service.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chief Officer, NS and PPP</li> <li>Assistant Chief Officer, Resources</li> </ul>	<p>Completed</p>	<p>A review of all council risk both corporate and at service level was undertaken early in 2015 corporately, and the corporate and service level risks have been redefined and are being monitored going forward.</p>



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