

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

**Meeting of Strong Communities Select Committee held
at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk on Tuesday,
15th October, 2019 at 3.00 pm**

Councillors Present

County Councillor L. Dymock (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, R. Harris and
V. Smith

Officers in Attendance

Carl Touhig, Head of Neighbourhood Services
Laura Carter, Senior Officer, Waste and Street
Services

Dewi Lane, Systems and Special Projects Officer

APOLOGIES: County Councillors P. Clarke, A. Easson, L. Guppy, J.Treharne and A. Webb

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

2. Litter Strategy / Waste and Collections Policy and Civic Amenity Sites

Performance report on Litter Strategy, Waste and Collections Policy and changes to Civic Amenity Site

Pre-decision scrutiny had been undertaken early in 2019 on the decision to introduce permits at Monmouthshire Household Waste and Recycling Centres and to implement service changes at some sites. The committee had also scrutinised the new Waste Collections Policy and the council's Litter Strategy. The service had planned to review the changes following their introduction. The committee had requested a performance report be brought to them post-implementation to gauge whether the changes to service delivery has been successful and to discuss any implications on residents that may need to be further addressed. The report outlined performance on the following issues in turn:

- Progress on the Litter Strategy
- The implications of the new Waste Collections Policy
- The impact of the introduction of permits to Household Waste and Recycling Centres
- The impact of the closure of some of the Household Waste and Recycling Centres and the potential direction for these services

Challenge:

Litter Strategy

The anticipate progress on the Litter Strategy had been subject to some initial delay due to funding streams having only recently been confirmed by Welsh Government. The service has highlighted how earlier confirmation of funding streams would enable more

effective planning for the use of monies to deliver on the Litter Strategy. The committee challenged the officers as follows:

- In terms of defining “litter”, would garden waste that is beginning to present a poor appearance be defined as “litter”?
We are taking the view that “litter” is any material left in the wrong place, so it would be regarded as “litter”.
- We had concerns that there may be an increase in flytipping as a result of introducing service changes to Household Waste and Recycling Centres. Has this been the case?
- *Flytipping reporting has increased, but we believe this may be due to the perception that it would increase as a result of the changes we have introduced, because we haven't seen a significant actual increase since the changes were implemented.*
- Welsh Government are currently re-designating some of the rest areas as “layby’s”. Will there be cost implications for us resulting from this change and will Welsh Government be offering us any contribution towards future maintenance of these areas? Will the toilet block that is unfit for use and is currently closed be removed?
When Welsh Government finishes designating the sites as layby's, the responsibility of those will fall back to us and there is no suggestion at present of any contribution towards maintaining these areas. We are also unsure what will happen to the closed toilet block.
- We notice that Llanvihangel Crucorney Environmental Group were invited to attend this meeting but were unable to do so, but how has their work progressed since they reported to this committee?
The programme has gone very well, the group are piloting various stickers on waste bins and are reporting there has been a big reduction in litter following the changes. We will invite them back to the committee to provide an update.
- Is the litter thought to be by people driving through the area?
Yes, the litter is primarily ‘drive by’ littering. Keep Wales Tidy are encouraging the need for legislation to prosecute offenders (currently we do not have this legislation in Wales).

The implications of the new Waste Collections Policy

- We have heard that there were some initial problems when the Waste Collections Policy was introduced in terms of missed collections. Can you explain those issues and what you have done to overcome them?
One of the major lessons learnt which contributed to the missed collections was the suitability of the vehicle to undertake the collections in areas where there was limited space, either due to small roads or parked vehicles. We have found that it's not a case of the vehicle being the wrong design or the vehicles being too large, it's simply that the area the vehicle was being sent to was too small. In terms of how we have resolved this, we have now made sure everyone has the right collection with the right vehicle.
- Have the issues around capacity been resolved?
We struggled somewhat with determining the capacity of the vehicles and the staff to complete the rounds ~ in some cases, the rounds were too large and

challenging. It's very difficult to balance and we want to avoid over resourcing. In terms of the Local Development Plan and future housing, if existing estates are extended on a small scale, the rounds should be able to cope, but if a large new estate were to be built, we would need more capacity in terms of fleet. The threshold is approximately 1000 houses, which would require a new round and several new vehicles, but new properties would provide council tax income which would help, if the additional housing was built in to the Medium Term Financial Plan as a financial pressure.

- *What are other challenges you have encountered and how have you resolved them?*
- *We have learnt lessons from the implementation and often the changes that had a major effect could be addressed quite simply. For example, the initial maps we gave out were too hard to read, so we addressed that. We also sent letters to residents via Royal Mail, but we didn't allow for the fact Royal Mail wouldn't deliver over them over the weekend, so people received the information too late. Part of the issue was also that the implementation of this coincided with a reduction in staffing at the Contact Centre. The chatbot Monty doesn't have the capability to provide answers to complicated questions which required human intervention and this added to public frustration when people simply wanted to know when their rubbish collection was. We've addressed this now through having a different system to manage complaints and we would now ensure we had a designated supervisor to manage this scale of change again.*
- *We understand that different ways of communicating can cause chaos, but is the system for reporting issues more straightforward? Do you think that having so many ways to report issues may be confusing and were there duplications in terms of calls being logged via the Contact Centre and through the My Mon app?*
- *We had major problems with communication and we didn't have enough staff in contact centre to deal with the number of calls. We had a peak in complaints and there were duplicate work processes because calls were taking time to process. When we next implement a service change, we would ensure there are staff in the office to deal specifically with complaints. These were huge changes and we were saying this to the public, but we didn't recognise the level of complexity in terms of the information we needed to provide people. We have from this. Matthew gatehouse has agreed to report back on the chatbot Monty and communications in general.*
- *Are we confident now that complaints are resolved?*
Yes, but we are still receiving complaints on garden waste round. We believe the spike in complaints is due to the weather situation, but we have to manage that and balance the crews and capacity accordingly. One the difficulties has been in scheduling the rounds and as people pay for the scheme, it's very important it's done properly.
- *We recognise these have been unprecedented times for you in terms of waste collection changes, but you seem to have reflected in depth on the implementation and how you can address mistakes made and learn from them. Do you do a post-op analysis to learn from your experiences?*
Yes, at the end of the work, in April/May, we did a review of what went well/not so well and we logged issues so we understand them. We made such substantial changes in July which affected over 5000 properties, so we have learnt from the experiences in March and we will continue to learn from our experiences so that

we don't make mistakes again. We really value the opportunity to bring our portfolio through the scrutiny process as the committee offers us a very useful sounding board and we find this invaluable to us in terms of helping us self-evaluate and reflect on our experiences.

- You have experienced some issues in relation to the garden waste system. Do you limit the number of collections on a given day, so that you know exactly how many collections will be on the round?

Residents can buy as many bags as they want and as it's mapped, you have a rough idea based on previous year how many bags will be on the round, but it's not exact. It seems to be a more accurate estimation for the urban areas, but in rural areas, the rounds can be very large and if there are many bags, it takes more time.

- Could we limit the number of bags and then encourage larger properties to do composting?

We have challenging targets around this and whether we provide bins or bags, we need to work out the best option, as this a paid service and we need to ensure we get it right not just for next year, but for future years. At the moment the service is not paying for itself and we need to explore this further and return to you with options.

- As a discretionary service, we think it's important that the service is paying for itself, because it would not be fair for the general council taxpayer (for example, a single person who may live in a small dwelling) to be subsidising large properties. *We agree and this is something we need to return to and bring forward a discussion with you on how to take the service forward.*

- In terms of the Polypropylene bags, do you know yet which areas will be taking part in the pilot? What work are you going to do with members beforehand?

We will be trialling one in each depot region, so there will be one in Monmouth, one in Llangybi and Usk and one in Caerwent/Caldicot. We will advise members in advance so that they can inform the public in good time. If the pilot proves successful, we will introduce a phased input. The intention is to reduce plastic bag use and to increase the value of the recyclate. We will provide members with examples of bags to show the public and we will place them in the hubs.

The impact of service changes and permit introduction at Household Waste and Recycling Centres

- You have referred to recent internal changes, what has been the impact of this?
The restructure has brought a clearer direction in terms of where the service currently is and the direction the service needs to take in the future. Whereas the service area had relied upon temporary agency staff to cover the department over the period of change, staff were now working in permanent positions which had enabled the team to be in the right position to take forward the agreed strategic direction.

- What has been the impact of the introduction of the permits?

We introduced the permits in June to each household, but not all households were on our system, so some people didn't receive the information or their permits, which we have now resolved. Overall, the implementation has been smooth and people have understood what it's for. We did receive a degree of

criticism from the public out of county, particularly Newport and Powys. The changes have reduced our costs significantly through not taking waste from other counties. For some border communities who have requested to bring rubbish because their centre is further away, we have enabled them to bring waste to our sites if they pay a charge at the weighbridge.

- Have we publicised that people living on the border of Monmouthshire can come and pay? What publicity are we doing to ensure people are aware?
We have publicised this on the website. We have received a lot of queries on this issue via the media, so they have been helpful in informing people. This doesn't generate any revenue for us, but we understand for some communities, this is a more practical option.
- Where are we in terms of our recycling rate?
We are in the bottom quartile for first time ever. Other authorities have improved their practices which has assisted their recycling rate and our introduction of permits has lowered our recycling rate. We need to consider how to raise our recycling rate, but the likely intervention would require enforcement of black bag waste. We are liaising with Town and Community Councils to encourage the public to recycle more at the kerbside, rather than taking black bag waste to the household waste and recycling centres. For example, 38% of black bag waste taken to the Usk household waste and recycling centre was food waste, which could have been recycled.
- Where are we in terms of enforcement?
The enforcement policy has benefitted from members input. The aim is to educate rather than punish people, so enforcement is the last resort. Welsh Government are expecting recycling rates of 75-80 %, so to get from 64%, we have some way to go. Enforcement duties around litter will be encompassed within staff roles. The Section 46 enforcement notice stays with the property forever, but really is the last resort.

Outcome and Chair's Conclusion:

- We have scrutinised the performance of the service area in delivering major work streams over the last year and feel that the service has learnt many lessons and has overcome the key challenges.
- We are pleased with progress on litter and would like to review this again with the Crucorney Environmental Group to hear progress on their projects.
- We would like to table a future discussion on the Contact Centre and the chatbot and will include this into our forward work programme.
- We are satisfied with the implementation of the Waste Collections Policy and we are content that the issue of missed collections has now been addressed. Similarly, the concerns around the suitability of the vehicles has been resolved.
- We acknowledge that new housing sites not yet defined in the Local Development Plan will be financial pressures that need to be accounted for.
- We firmly believe that the Garden Waste Policy needs to be self-sustaining and we ask that you return to us for a further debate on this at the appropriate time.
- In terms of the new Polypropylene recycling bags, we ask that you engage with members and brief the public via the appropriate media. We also for increased publicity on the option for border communities to pay to dispose of rubbish in Monmouthshire, if that is more convenient for them.

- We request that the Cabinet review the operations at the Mitchel Troy and Usk household waste and recycling centres in order to improve recycling rates.
- We support both the Litter Strategy and the Enforcement Policy and recommend that these are approved by the Cabinet.

3. Next Meeting - Thursday 7th November 2019 at 10am

The meeting ended at 4.39 pm