

VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

Domestic Waste and Recycling Services Update - November 2019

I wish to update you on the recent recycling service changes and, most of all, thank you for your continued patience and support in dealing with, and responding to, the many challenges that such significant service changes inevitably bring.

The Scale of the Challenge...

The roll out of the 'Waste Collections Blueprint' in the rural Vale is the most significant service change this Council has introduced for many years. It also required us to make several collection day changes across the whole Council area, and it took some time for crews to familiarise themselves with the new routes and service arrangements. For the rural Vale, staff had to implement strict dry recycling contamination controls, whilst also sorting the various materials into specific compartments on a completely new type of collection vehicle. This is a much slower process than co-mingled collections and crews also spent a considerable amount of time engaging with residents over the first few weeks answering queries and generally raising awareness of the 'Blueprint' service arrangements.

We did have some mapping, 'in cab' technology and timing issues with the service changes which led to several missed collections, but these issues are being resolved and the problems have reduced week to week. Whilst we recognise the strength of public feeling when collections are missed, to put such issues in perspective, we rescheduled the best part of 180,000 collections of individual bags and containers per week to completely new routes, often with new drivers and crews; also many of the comments received from residents within the first two weeks of the rural vale service related to contaminated dry recycling material being left at the kerbside. This is an unfortunate, but necessary, part of the 'Blueprint' service process, as the quality of recycling in this service is established at the kerbside and not at the processing plant, as with co-mingled collections. Our residents are simply not used to this level of control being placed on their recycling efforts and an element of discontent with the 'Blueprint' service at its inception was inevitable.

The Learning....

Our messages concerning what plastics 'can' and 'cannot' be accepted for recycling could have been more detailed, and this is where residents have indicated their greatest confusion. We have been constantly updating our web site and comms messages to improve this and the numbers of blue bags now being left on the kerbside due to contamination has fallen significantly. Greater account needed to be taken of the engagement time required with residents and our crews at the kerbside as this communication is very important and must be accurate and not rushed. We will reconsider the role of temporary waste wardens for kerbside public engagement for future stages of the roll out to speed up our collections in the early stages.

Our Welsh Government advisors, WRAP, state that similar service changes introduced in Councils such as Bridgend and Blaenau Gwent have taken around 3 months to settle down. Although we have only introduced the change in part, by the start of week 4 most of all mapping / routing and capacity issues had been resolved. I realise that we still have isolated issues to address and these are mainly associated with assisted collections, collections from some flats and apartments and the more isolated properties. We need to improve on this and I ask you for your support whilst we resolve these issues over the next few weeks.

Prior to service changes being introduced, the service area received an average of 94 service requests / service queries per day via the contact centre. This peaked at 450 calls per day during week 1 of the Blueprint roll out and is now down to 120 calls per day. Whilst we are very much going in the right direction, I accept that there remains room for improvement and we have recently introduced new monitoring arrangements which will hopefully reduce this further.

The lessons we have learnt will be invaluable with the roll out of the 'Blueprint' to the rest of the Vale which will commence in the new year.

The Outcomes...

The most pleasing aspect of the changes is the quality of material produced and the almost absolute absence of contaminated material at our interim processing plant in Cowbridge. Although I recognise the challenges for residents at the kerbside, the material prepared to date, for reuse / reprocessing at the plant has been extremely good. We have been complimented on the material quality by metal and paper re-processors who have advised that it is some of the best quality material in the country.

You will recall that we recently declared a climate emergency, and what is particularly pleasing is that, at present, all of our 'Blueprint' material has been reused / recycled within the UK to sustainable markets:-

- Metals are reused back into their original use, the same for paper and cardboard.
- Glass is mainly being used in the production of fibre glass with fine glass being used as an aggregate material.
 - Plastics are a mixture but HDPE (milk jugs/shampoo/bleach bottles) are being cut and flaked into a reusable material and ours have gone into making 'Bags for Life' for Asda. Some other plastics have lesser value and limited reuse at the moment but nothing is being exported.
 - Food collected on the same vehicle is going to our Anaerobic Digestion (AD) facility and used as a bio-fuel to produce energy and a digestate for farming land.

Finally, our waste service returned a recycling rate of 67% for 2018/19. This year is a 'performance year' where fines of £200 per tonne will apply to Councils that fail the statutory target of 64%.

With the introduction of measures, such as the 2-black big limit, controls at the HWRCs and the withdrawal of single-use plastic bags this summer, we have seen our recycling rate increase in the first two quarters to 74% and 73% respectively. This is with the dry recycling contamination figure for the month of July of 52%, prior to us removing single use plastic bags from the recycling stream. The current 'Blueprint' rural Vale service has proved to have almost zero dry recycling contamination. Our performance should only improve which will ensure that we avoid fines, are one of the best performing Councils in Wales, and meet the 2025 recycling target of 70%.

I know that these last few weeks may have been difficult for you as elected members, which is why I wanted to advise of the successful position so far, and to personally thank you for your continued understanding, patience and support.

The real praise here should of course go to our residents, and it is my intention to send out similar messages thanking them for their support over the next few weeks. There is a long way to go but I am confident that the new recycling arrangements, coupled with the brilliant efforts of our residents, are the best way of us working towards the National goal of zero waste in the future.

MILES PUNTER