



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Amgylchedd a Chynaliadwyedd
The Environment and Sustainability Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 25 Mehefin 2014
Wednesday, 25 June 2014**

**Cynnwys
Contents**

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

Ymchwiliad i Ailgylchu yng Nghymru: Tystiolaeth gan Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
Inquiry into Recycling in Wales: Evidence from the Wales Audit Office

Ymchwiliad i Ailgylchu yng Nghymru: Tystiolaeth gan Awdurdodau Lleol
Inquiry into Recycling in Wales: Evidence from Local Authorities

Ymchwiliad i Ailgylchu yng Nghymru: Tystiolaeth gan Gyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Inquiry into Recycling in Wales: Evidence from Natural Resources Wales

Papurau i'w Nodi
Papers to Note

Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance**

Russell George

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Welsh Conservatives

Llyr Gruffydd	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Julie James	Llafur Labour
Alun Ffred Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Richard Brown	Pennaeth yr Amgylchedd ac Argyfyngau Sifil, Cyngor Sir Penfro Head of Environment and Civil Contingencies, Pembrokeshire County Council
Nadia De Longhi	Rheolwr Strategaeth—Gwastraff, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Strategy Manager—Waste, Natural Resources Wales
Jane Holownia	Cyfarwyddwr, Archwilio Perfformiad, Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Director, Performance Audit, Wales Audit Office
Isobel Moore	Pennaeth Busnes, Rheoliadau ac Economeg, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Head of Business, Regulation and Economics, Natural Resources Wales
Andy Phillips	Rheolwr Archwilio Perfformiad, Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Performance Audit Manager, Wales Audit Office
Alan Roberts	Uwch-swyddog Gwastraff, Cyngor Sir Ddinbych Senior Waste Officer, Denbighshire County Council
Andrew Wilkinson	Pennaeth Gwasanaethau'r Gymdogaeth, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy Head of Neighbourhood Services, Conwy County Borough Council
Mark Williams	Pennaeth Gwasanaethau'r Gymuned a Hamdden, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Caerffili Head of Community and Leisure Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Chloe Corbyn	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Alun Davidson	Clerc Clerk
Adam Vaughan	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:29.

The meeting began at 09:29.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Hoffwn eich croesawu chi yma. Os bydd larwm tân, dilynwch y tywyswyr a'r staff. Cofiwch ddiffodd eich ffonau symudol. Mae'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn gweithredu'n ddwyieithog, felly mae croeso ichi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg. Mae'r cyfieithiad ar sianel 1. Peidiwch â chyffwrdd y botymau ar y microffonau; byddant yn dod ymlaen yn awtomatig.

Alun Ffred Jones: I welcome you to this morning's meeting. If there is a fire alarm, please follow the ushers and staff. Remember to switch off your mobile phones. The National Assembly operates bilingually, so you are welcome to use Welsh or English. Interpretation is available on channel 1. Please do not touch the buttons on the microphones; they come on automatically.

[2] A oes unrhyw Aelod eisiau datgan buddiant o dan Reol Sefydlog 2.6? Nac oes. Rydym wedi cael ymddiheuriadau gan Gwyn Price, Mick Antoniwn ac Antoinette Sandbach; nid oes dirprwyon.

Does any Member wish to declare an interest? No. We have received apologies from Gwyn Price, Antoinette Sandbach and Mick Antoniwn; there are no substitutions.

09:30

Ymchwiliad i Ailgylchu yng Nghymru: Tystiolaeth gan Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru

Inquiry into Recycling in Wales: Evidence from the Wales Audit Office

[3] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Croeso i'n tystion ni y bore yma. A gaf i ofyn ichi gyflwyno eich hunain?

Alun Ffred Jones: We welcome our witnesses this morning. May I ask you to introduce yourselves?

[4] **Ms Holownia:** I am Jane Holownia, director at the Wales Audit Office.

[5] **Mr Phillips:** My name is Andy Phillips; I am a manager in the national studies team in Wales Audit Office.

[6] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. Croeso mawr i chi'ch dau. Heddiw yw'r sesiwn gyntaf o ddwy sesiwn dystiolaeth i drafod meysydd sy'n ymwneud ag ailgylchu ac awdurdodau lleol. Rydym yn falch iawn o gael Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru yma yn gyntaf i roi tystiolaeth inni. Felly, a gaf i ofyn i un o'r Aelodau ddechrau'r holi? Oni bai eich bod chi eisiau dweud rhywbeth i ddechrau, fel cyflwyniad.

Alun Ffred Jones: Thank you very much. A warm welcome to you both. This is the first session of two evidence sessions discussing issues in relation to recycling and local authorities. We are pleased to have the Wales Audit Office here today first to give evidence. So, may I ask one of the Members to start us off with questions? Unless you wish to make an opening statement.

[7] **Ms Holownia:** We are quite happy to go straight in to questions.

[8] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Bore da. Yr hyn sy'n fy nharo i wrth edrych ar y dystiolaeth rydym wedi'i chael ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad hwn yw'r ffaith noeth bod yr awdurdodau hynny sy'n defnyddio'r dull 'co-mingled' yn

Llyr Gruffydd: Good morning. What strikes me from looking at the evidence that we have received for this inquiry is the clear fact that those authorities that use the co-mingled method reach higher targets, on the whole,

cyflawni targedau uwch—ar y cyfan, beth bynnag—na'r rhai sy'n sortio ar ochr y ffordd. Fodd bynnag, mae'r Llywodraeth, oherwydd rheoliadau Ewropeaidd efallai, yn mynnu symud i'r cyfeiriad hwnnw. O edrych ar y targedau sy'n cael eu cyflawni a'r nod o gyrraedd rhicyn gwahanol dros gyfnod, a ydych yn meddwl y gellir cyrraedd y targedau hynny?

than those who undertake kerbside sorting. However, the Government, because of European directives, perhaps, wants to move in that direction. When we look at the targets that are reached and the aim of reaching higher targets over a period of time, do you think that those targets are going to be achievable?

[9] **Mr Phillips:** We tend to agree that the authorities that co-mingle their dry recycling collections tend to collect more waste from residents. Sometimes, of course, the rounds include some trade premises as well—shops and offices. The yield that they pick up does tend to be slightly greater, remembering that for all of the systems—there are three main types of system: the co-mingling, the intermediate twin stream, which is a sort of mix of systems, and the third system, which is the kerbside sort system—there are good examples and bad examples. An effectively run kerbside sort system will also pick up a high yield. However, if we average it all out, across Wales at the moment it looks like the co-mingling system picks up more waste. The question is whether it is picking up waste that it later has to reject as not being suitable for recycling. So, just looking at yield at the front end is a little bit misleading.

[10] Will local authorities hit targets? Nine out of 22 failed to reach the 52% target for 2012-13. A couple of them are just about getting there now—a good year-and-a-bit later on. It gets harder. The next target, of 58% for 2015-16, poses a real problem for authorities. I do not have information that I can give you that suggests that it is going to be difficult, but for every target we have had in the past, we have always thought it would be difficult for some authorities to reach that target. I think that we advised that six or seven local authorities may struggle on the 52% target, and nine eventually failed it. With a 58% target, you will have some authorities that are going to find that quite a stretch to reach. Whether they can reach 70%, I do not know. That is by 2024-25. It is possible, but there is a little bit of help from other things in reaching that target. In effect, I think that local authorities probably have to gather about 63% or 64%, and then there are other things that contribute to the 70% target that can help them get that last little bit. However, the low-hanging fruit has all been picked and it is not easy to see things now that will give you a great gain in recycling.

[11] **Llyr Gruffydd:** A ydych yn meddwl, felly, bod perygl, wrth anelu at y targedau uchel sydd wedi cael eu gosod, y bydd ansawdd yr hyn sy'n cael ei gasglu yn dioddef? Hefyd, a ydych chi'n teimlo y bydd y dull *one size fits all* yma yn broblem? Mae yn broblem, oherwydd bydd datrysiadau lleol i amgylchiadau lleol, er mwyn cyrraedd y lefel uchaf posibl o'r hyn sy'n cael ei gasglu.

Llyr Gruffydd: Do you think, therefore, that there is a danger, in aiming for the high targets that have been set, that the quality of what is collected will suffer? Also, do you feel that this one-size-fits-all approach is a problem? It is a problem, because there are local solutions to local problems, to reach that highest level of what is collected.

[12] **Ms Holownia:** One of the problems councils have in going for the one-size-fits-all approach is that councils in Wales have a statutory duty to consult with residents about what they want. We would criticise a council that did not listen to its citizens. So, if a council will consult and a citizen will come back and say that they want a different approach to that set out in the blueprint, that makes it quite difficult for a council to respond to that. So, there is a fundamental problem there for councils in meeting their duties.

[13] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Rwy'n cytuno. Fodd bynnag, rwy'n ei gweld hi'n ddifyr, ar y cyfan, fod awdurdodau gwledig yn

Llyr Gruffydd: I agree. However, it is interesting, on the whole, that rural authorities perform more effectively than

perfformio'n fwy effeithiol na rhai trefol a'r rhai yn y Cymoedd. Felly, rwy'n holi am amgylchiadau lleol a phwysigrwydd ystyried bod ffactorau neilltuol mewn rhai rhannau o Gymru efallai na fyddai'n gydnaws â chael un system gyson ar draws y wlad.

urban areas and in the Valleys. Therefore, I am asking about local circumstances and the importance of taking into account the special circumstances in some parts of Wales that would mean that it would not be fitting to have one system across the country.

[14] **Mr Phillips:** You are right. Local circumstances determine that some methods work better, either in rural areas or urban areas. Blocks of flats are an example in an urbanised area, where a particular approach is needed to get the maximum recycling. Quite a few methods will work well if they are applied and managed well. It is just a matter of targeting, particularly now as we get to the back end of the set of targets, with a percentage above the mid 50s. You have to target the areas that have previously been quite difficult to get recycling from, where there are disengaged people who are not really that interested, different social groups and ethnic groups. So, you have to know a lot about your population in a county to know how best to target them, and that was one of the findings of our report in 2012—there was not enough information available to local authorities about how to target the remaining people who were not recycling and, for those who are recycling already, to make sure that they recycle everything they can recycle. To hit the higher targets, we will need recycling of everything and to a high level. Without that, that will not happen.

[15] **Julie Morgan:** I want to ask about what Mr Phillips said about co-mingling and about there being more waste that is not suitable for recycling. What evidence do you have about that?

[16] **Mr Phillips:** We do not have direct evidence, but the Welsh Government is saying that the co-mingling method tends to pick up a higher level of contamination. The picture is quite mixed, and we do not have specific evidence to provide to you in the inquiry. Perhaps more recent work by the local authorities, the WLGA or the Welsh Government can give you that specific evidence.

[17] **Julie Morgan:** So, it is a suspicion; is that what you are saying?

[18] **Mr Phillips:** The Welsh Government was saying it was an issue during the time we did our report. We published it in early 2012. So, it was in the year or two prior to that that we were taking our evidence on that.

[19] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you; I just wanted to find the basis of that.

[20] **Julie James:** On the co-mingling point, first of all, not all co-mingling is the same, as I am sure that you are aware. Secondly, surely it is driven a little bit by the prices that you can get for the recyclates at the other end.

[21] **Mr Phillips:** Yes.

[22] **Julie James:** We know that co-mingled resources do not command anything like the prices, for example, for paper, as they do if they are correctly separated, because of contamination and so on. What do you think about the education programme that is necessary to get the people who do not recycle at all to do so, because that is still the low-hanging fruit, as you described it? What do you think a local authority can do to persuade a household that does not recycle at all to begin the process of doing it?

[23] **Mr Phillips:** That is quite difficult, because you are targeting people who have probably heard the message about recycling by now, who have hopefully assimilated the message but have decided that they do not want to recycle.

[24] **Julie James:** There are a lot of other messages out there, are there not? You hear a lot of misinformation, such as, 'Well, they just mix it all back up together again at the depot' and so on.

[25] **Mr Phillips:** Yes, I am afraid that tabloid reporting has not helped us in this way. It is very difficult, when you have a disengaged group, to turn the people around and make them engaged in some way. With education programmes, you have to target the people who are struggling to understand the message or are deciding not to recycle. Again, it is a matter of having the data and information about who these groups are. You can have a particular approach to changing their behaviour, which is very important.

[26] It is not something that local authorities naturally do very well. If you were to think back, a waste management section in a council a couple of years back probably consisted of engineers. Engineers do not necessarily lend themselves to that different skill set needed to go out to market something and change people's minds about whether they can be bothered to recycle. People tend to use recycling as an easy way into green behaviour and sustainability. So, it is probably punching above its weight. If you can get people to recycle—we mentioned it in our report in 2012—it can lead people towards a more sustainable lifestyle. Ultimately, that is what we want. Recycling is only a part of the waste management game. Waste management is a small part of 'One Wales: One Planet', living sustainably in Wales and reducing the ecological footprint. Waste can be quite important. Recycling is the right way to lead people into that sort of change of behaviour, but you have to lead it in the right way. It is very difficult to do that.

[27] **Julie James:** What do you think about applying a stick as well as a carrot in those circumstances?

[28] **Mr Phillips:** It would be nice to say that it should not be necessary, because you should not be bullying people into changing their behaviour; you should be persuading them and supporting them. The facility is there to do it. There is a way of changing behaviour. We recently met with Bangor University to discuss behaviour change for another piece of work. The representatives were talking about developing change at a very low level, so that it is not passed down from the Welsh Government up on high; it is grown from a local source, and then it is quietly dampened if it is going off in the wrong direction, or enhanced if it is going in the right direction. So, it is nudged in the right direction towards the change coming through. Change grows from small interventions that are at a very low level within the community rather than by prescription at a very high level, which is sent down with the expectation that the population will change. That was the theory that was being proposed to us about changing behaviour, not necessarily for waste management but for lots of other things in Wales.

[29] **Julie James:** Many countries that have very high recycling rates have a stick as well as a carrot, do they not? There are lots of examples from around the world where you find that if you put glass, for example, into the black bin-bag waste and so on, you will be punished.

[30] **Mr Phillips:** Yes. We already have legislation that tells you how to put the waste out, where to put it and on what day to put it out. So, there is quite a bit of restriction, and there is also the withdrawal of facilities that were previously available so that you recycle. You can quietly take away the things that make recycling more difficult. So, if you open up the facilities that allow recycling, you make it easier and appealing for citizens to use those facilities. You could implement a bag restriction, for example. My council, Swansea council, has restricted the number of bags that you can put out each week; it is three black bags a week, which still seems like a lot.

[31] **Julie James:** It is every fortnight, actually.

[32] **Mr Phillips:** It is every fortnight; sorry, you are right. A number of authorities are reducing the size of their residual waste bins, which is not really to do with recycling directly; it is to do with residual waste, but the knock-on effect is that it persuades people to recycle more.

[33] **Russell George:** You mentioned the nine councils that were not meeting their 52% target, and there is the 58% target by a certain date. I am interested to know how accurate that information is. How is that measured, and how accurate is the measurement of how well councils are doing in terms of that percentage?

[34] **Mr Phillips:** The 52% is a statutory target. The 58% is also a target, but we have already looked at the 52% target. That is a national performance indicator, which is an audited indicator. That one is accurate. It applies to 2012-13, but the verification takes until around October to go through. So, the data are only verified by around October or November.

09:45

[35] **Russell George:** Yes, but I suppose what I am asking is: what is the method of assessing? Is every recyclable item and every item going to landfill weighed? What is the method and how accurate is that method for assessing how well a council is doing?

[36] **Mr Phillips:** The Wales Audit Office does not undertake that work, so I can only answer in very high level terms. Gate receipts and returns from facilities collecting the waste will give a return on that. Civic amenity sites and local authorities use weighbridges. So, I think that that is the method that is used.

[37] **Russell George:** So, is that a uniform agreed method right across Wales or does each authority have a different—

[38] **Mr Phillips:** I have no doubt that there is some variation in there. I am giving you very high level stuff, so I do not really know the answer to your question.

[39] **Russell George:** Clearly, if the council is not meeting its target, it is going to be fined, so there is an issue of how accurate the information is. In terms of business as well, can you make any comment about how well business is doing compared with picking up residential waste in terms of recycling?

[40] **Mr Phillips:** I can make a comment because I facilitate the trade refuse benchmarking group, which is made up of the businesses that choose the local authority to pick their waste up. So, that is a small section; it is the traders that choose local authorities. There are a lot of other commercial premises that choose Biffa and the private companies available to them, because it is an open market. For the trade refuse group, the recycling rates for the businesses that local authorities pick waste up from average out at about 22% or 23% recycling. So, it has been slower to pick up. It has really only got going in the past couple of years with small traders, but I think that it is incentivised by local authorities and it will pick up quickly. The profit motive is there, of course, for traders. Sometimes, you get a local authority saying, 'We need your recyclables, so we'll pick up your residual waste at a slightly cheaper rate if you recycle, and we'll pick that up for nothing'.

[41] **Russell George:** Yes, because the business will pay for recyclable waste and waste going to landfill. I am right in saying that, am I not?

[42] **Mr Phillips:** Yes. Also, they will take the better contracts away in an area, leaving

the local authorities, I am afraid, to quite often pick up from the more difficult and lower recycling premises.

[43] **Russell George:** Is business waste included in the target of 52% as well?

[44] **Mr Phillips:** Basically, if it is picked up by the council, it counts as municipal waste.

[45] **Russell George:** I see. So, if it is not, it is not in the target.

[46] **Mr Phillips:** No, but, again, others will give you more specific information on that.

[47] **Russell George:** Okay. Thank you.

[48] **Alun Ffred Jones:** William is next, then Llyr.

[49] **William Powell:** You spoke earlier about how difficult it is to bring about change in people's behaviours to increase recycling rates. How important do you consider education to be, particularly the school sector in terms of activities that are undertaken there under the banner of Eco-Schools and other activities of that kind, some of which are supported by Keep Wales Tidy? Do you regard that as an important strand and something that could be developed further to take this agenda forward?

[50] **Mr Phillips:** The work we did leading up to our report in 2012 said that we were very unsure about whether trying to change the behaviour of schoolchildren had any real effect on recycling. No doubt there is an effect somewhere, but it is very difficult to judge with behavioural change whether and where the effect is coming through. Instilling good environmental thinking at a very young age must be a good thing, but—

[51] **William Powell:** It is a long-term investment.

[52] **Mr Phillips:** Yes, I think it is a long-term investment. However, we could not see any direct return on recycling. With Waste Awareness Wales, we did a benchmarking exercise fairly recently to see whether waste prevention and good waste awareness were successful messages, and it is very difficult to tell, even now. So, I think that we have to become a little bit smarter at trying to work out how to judge the outcomes of education programmes. Otherwise, you can misfire and spend lots of money in the wrong area, of course, and waste time.

[53] **William Powell:** Earlier, you referred to the duty of councils to consult with their own residents; both of you made reference to that, I think. Sometimes, of course, you have a situation where you have cross-authority or cross-national boundaries. There is a particular example in mid and west Wales at the moment where the local authority has decided to close a facility in Machynlleth that is widely used by people who come from Gwynedd, just across the river, and from certain parts of Ceredigion. Do you consider that there should be a greater emphasis on cross-border collaboration and on looking at the impacts of particular decisions before they are implemented?

[54] **Ms Holownia:** Yes, we do. We have not looked at that particular example, but we would expect that, where an authority has a facility that affects other authorities' residents, those authorities would work very closely to ascertain whether or not that is the correct response, as there may be other things that they can do. Indeed, it is not beyond the realms of possibility to consult residents of other authorities. So, we would expect that to happen.

[55] **William Powell:** You think that that would be good practice.

[56] **Ms Holownia:** Absolutely.

[57] **Llyr Gruffydd:** I was just noting from some of the Government research that has happened that it believes that the advantages of kerbside sorting increase as the volume of recycled material increases. So, if we are pushing for higher targets, obviously, the Government is pretty clear that kerbside sorting then becomes more attractive as a proposition and, therefore, would want to encourage that. Is that something that you agree with or do you see that the difference really is not going to be that substantial?

[58] **Ms Holownia:** We would not really have an opinion on what the right approach was. Our approach would be to look at what was yielding the best results across all local authorities, and even then, there are many other things that you need to take into account. We talked earlier about educating people; you might have an authority that has been very good at kerbside collection that is also very good at consulting and educating, and you might have the opposite. So, we would try to take a broader look. We have not done that for several years; we have not looked at what is the best method of collection prior to the 2012 report, which Andy can say a little bit more about.

[59] **Mr Phillips:** We can offer some benchmarking, which is undertaken primarily with the WLGA, but we also were involved with the benchmarking of the 22 local authorities for waste. We have looked a couple of times, over the last three or four years, at this. We have looked at recycling and we have looked at food-waste recycling and green-waste recycling, which are often combined, and we have looked at dry recycling in various different ways, and we have not found that one method of collecting comes out in any way as being the best way in terms of performance, cost or efficiency. Maybe, because we are at a midpoint at the moment, with most authorities reaching somewhere in the mid-50s in percentage terms, you are right and it will come through, but I do not know; I have nothing to offer to substantiate it. However, looking back at benchmarking—bearing in mind that benchmarking is a year or two after the event, because you need the data to come through before you can analyse them—we have not seen any significant difference, with the exception that twin-stream and co-mingling come out as collecting a little bit more in terms of yield, which we mentioned when we first spoke. There is nothing on cost and nothing on performance, and there is no measure of sustainability that we can use on that either.

[60] **Llyr Gruffydd:** The big concern that we hear about regularly from those authorities that might be expected to change the way that they operate is cost, and there is no doubting that the investment would have to be very significant. You would need to, maybe, re-educate the public, or at least engage more thoroughly with the public to support and help them to amend their practices. Do you have any—. I am not sure if I am supposed to ask if you have a view, but have you made any assessment of what that type of cost would be or what the implication for the provision of those particular services could be if that change was driven through?

[61] **Mr Phillips:** We have not made any assessment of the cost, but I think that it would be large for most authorities, depending on how much they had to change by. Yes, I think that there would be a need to re-engage with the public and talk about change in the systems and—again, I speculate—I would expect to see a little bit of a slump in the recycling rate and, hopefully, a pull-up after that, back to at least the performance that you had before and, hopefully, to make it worth while, more in terms of performance.

[62] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Before I bring in Julie James, what do we mean by ‘co-mingling’?

[63] **Mr Phillips:** This is dry recyclable waste. So, when you put your bin out, you take out the waste that is residual, which is the stuff that you cannot recycle, and that goes into the

black bin—the residual waste bin. What goes into the dry recycling bin, for co-mingling or kerbside sorting, is the paper, the tins, the bottles—it just depends. Sometimes, the bottles and glass are in, and sometimes they are collected separately, but it is the dry products, without food waste, that can go for recycling. Co-mingling is a system in which they are all picked up together in one bin. So, people tend to find it quite easy to use, and then the local authority picks it up in one collection and takes it off to a treatment plant, where it is separated out.

[64] **Alun Ffred Jones:** And the twin—what was it?

[65] **Mr Phillips:** Twin stream.

[66] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Twin streaming is—.

[67] **Mr Phillips:** There are variations in the middle ground between the resident fully sorting their waste at the point where it is collected and co-mingling, where the waste is all together, pretty much in one bin. The methods in the middle are usually where there are a couple of different ways to segregate wastes. That may be segregating glass bottles and cans, because, mechanically, those two can quite easily be separated so they can go in the same bag, and then paper has to go in another bag, and cardboard has to be separate. It just depends on the method. There is a multitude of different methods out there. However, twin streaming is a sort of halfway house between co-mingling and full kerbside sorting.

[68] **Julie James:** Just on that point, have you made any assessment at all of the prices that you get for the recyclates, depending on the type of collection method?

[69] **Mr Phillips:** We have not, but I understand that the WLGA has been doing quite a bit of work on benchmarking recyclate prices. What we understand from our work—again going back a couple of years, although I think the situation is still the same—is that there is local and national variation in demand for recyclable materials and in the price, of course, that local authorities can get for them. It does not seem a very firm basis for business. Sometimes, paper prices can go sky high, and they can drop right down to the floor, and people start to stockpile, waiting for the price to go up. It has always been a bit like that with recyclables.

[70] **Julie James:** Have you made any assessment of whether they do better combined, in terms of the procurements, or the sale, or whatever you want to call it?

[71] **Mr Phillips:** The Wales Audit Office has not done that work, but, again, the WLGA has been looking in that area.

[72] **Julie James:** My second question is completely different. Have you made any assessment of any authorities that have dirty materials recycling facilities—that is, authorities that are splitting the black bags and then taking out recyclates after the recycling process? Have you made any assessment of whether that is worth doing?

[73] **Mr Phillips:** No. We have not undertaken audit work, but I understand that some authorities, in trying to get the last bit of recyclable material out from what would otherwise be waste that was destined for landfill, do an additional sorting process. They use a contractor to go through that waste to get the last dregs of recyclables out—and there is probably more to come. As the technology gets better, you can get more and more out of the residual waste stream.

[74] **Julie James:** Again, have you made any assessment of whether the method of food collection or separation makes a difference to the recycling rate?

[75] **Mr Phillips:** Benchmarking looked at food that was collected on its own and food

that was collected with green waste, as some authorities combine the two systems, but I think that the results of that were confusing, because food-waste recycling and green-waste recycling were at different stages in every authority, and that makes comparison a problem. With food-waste recycling, the prices were the wrong side of £1,000 a tonne when it was initially started in some authorities, because it was a very expensive service to set up and was offered to very few houses at that particular time. Therefore, the unit cost looked very big. Of course, as it is rolled out, and more and more households are provided with the service, the unit cost comes down and the efficiencies start to kick in as well, as the service gets to understand how best to run its service and starts to shave a little bit off the cost through efficiency savings. So, it is not a level playing field to look at whether it is cost-effective or whether it is working or not. The general drift is to separate food and to collect it separately, rather than combining it with green waste. That is about all that I can say on that.

[76] **Julie James:** Are you planning to do another audit once some of the anaerobic digestion schemes come on stream, because they are about to come on stream now, are they not?

[77] **Mr Phillips:** We have got nothing on the books at the moment, unless—.

[78] **Julie James:** I think that quite a few of us expect that to make quite a difference. Okay.

[79] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I shall bring in Julie Morgan and then Joyce.

[80] **Julie Morgan:** Do you have any evidence of more households, for example, having their own compost and using waste to do it themselves?

10:00

[81] **Mr Phillips:** This was an area, a couple of years ago, where it was obviously a fairly sustainable thing to do, to have your own compost heap in the garden and to use the compost for the benefit of your own garden. There was confusion at the time as to whether that could be counted towards the composting side of the recycling indicator, because composting is included with recycling in the indicator. We have not looked at that very recently. I am not quite sure of the legal position and where people are with that, and whether local authorities can estimate home composting to include it. It is probably best to take evidence from somebody who has looked at that in more detail.

[82] **Julie Morgan:** That does seem to be the most sustainable way of dealing with some of the waste. Is there any encouragement given to do that?

[83] **Ms Holownia:** I am not aware of any. It would be best to speak to local authorities directly about that.

[84] **Julie James:** It counts as municipal waste if they do not do it.

[85] **Ms Holownia:** Quite. I do not think that local authorities collect that information or monitor that.

[86] **Mr Phillips:** It was obviously an area where, if it could count, it would have helped local authorities because it would have gone straight into their recycling target and made things look good.

[87] **Julie James:** The definition is ‘collected waste’.

[88] **Mr Phillips:** Yes, it refers to collected waste.

[89] **Ms Holownia:** There is no incentive to do that.

[90] **Julie Morgan:** However, in terms of the overall position, it is obviously something that the Welsh Government and we should be encouraging and promoting through education. Is there any evidence of that happening?

[91] **Mr Phillips:** Councils provide composting bins. I believe that they are at a slightly subsidised rate, as well, generally. So, yes, they do promote home composting. I would not say that it is a major promotion, but most local authorities will be able to provide a bin, give you advice on how to use it and promote it in that low-level way.

[92] You have to remember that the recycling target—the one that they are all chasing so that they can avoid being fined—is a weight-based target. So, it is about the weight of recycling, compared to the weight of waste overall that you collect. So, it is obviously good if you can collect garden waste in particular. So, lots of authorities may charge, but they can provide green waste containers so your conifer clippings and grass cuttings can go into a container and be picked up. That is a good heavy weight to go towards the composting target.

[93] **Julie Morgan:** It seems to me that that is counter-productive, sometimes, is it not? I am surprised, in country areas, to see green compost sitting outside so that it can be collected. The whole idea seems to be counter-productive.

[94] **Mr Phillips:** Composting has to be done properly to be worth doing. Composting residual waste sometimes brings problems. It has to meet quality standards and, once again, an expert could advise you a little bit more on that. I am not that expert, I am afraid.

[95] **Joyce Watson:** We are talking about recycling and things not going to landfill, but I am sure that everyone in the room has observed that where waste-food recycling takes place, you do not get—and I live in Pembrokeshire—seagulls, for example, littering the streets. That waste would have ended up, perhaps, going into landfill because, as a consequence, it would have been cleared up by those who clear the streets. Are there any incentives that recognise those sorts of savings? There is a cost, is there not, if the seagulls have spread this food—because they will always target food—all over the place and then somebody has to come behind them and pick that up? Consequently, it finds its way into landfill. Is any of that recognised?

[96] **Mr Phillips:** I think, once again, it is a mixed and very difficult picture to unpick in terms of the cost. Street scene is an integral part of waste management. Yes, seagulls are a big problem, especially if they know that there is a bag of chips in the bin. They will go at it, rip the bin apart and you will have a real problem. The collections of waste that are made using bags tend to blow around and the lids blow off recycling boxes. Also, do you want lots of bins outside the houses throughout your county? Sometimes, there is nowhere else to put them. So, there are lots of street scene issues and impacts. I have not quantified them, and I am not aware of anybody having done that. I am not certain that any costing has been done.

[97] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Have you found any evidence that less frequent collection of black bags increases the amount of recycling that happens?

[98] **Mr Phillips:** I have not, but those who have undertaken research actively support reducing the frequency of collection, and the volume of black bag containers, as a way of promoting recycling. It does seem to work. It is not our research; it just what I recount. I think the Waste Resources Action Programme would probably support that view, should it give evidence to you.

[99] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Okay. Thank you. The other question I wanted to ask was about the practical issue of having space in a household to sort your recyclable material. Everywhere I go, I see a different innovation from authorities. I know that Conwy has a stack of crates that is put on this sort of stack truck thing that you can wheel out. Surely, there must be some way of developing a uniform and more effective and efficient way of doing that. In Denbighshire, and I can speak from experience as a resident of Denbighshire, there are wheelie bins and obviously, it is co-mingled, so you would expect it to be easier, but, actually, we have a blue wheelie bin, a black wheelie bin, a green wheelie bin and the food caddy. There was a very famous front page picture in one of the local papers of a row of cottages in Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd, where you could literally only walk through the door along the front row of those cottages because each had four or five different wheelie bins—and that is for co-mingled recycling. So, I just wonder whether you have come across any particularly innovative ways of storing or putting materials out for collection and whether there might be some recommendation or some way forward that the Government could actually promote.

[100] **Russell George:** Do you mind, Chair, if I add to that? Also, the colours of the different boxes are different in different authorities, which adds to confusion, if you are on the border especially.

[101] **Alun Ffred Jones:** You are collecting from more than one household.

[102] **Russell George:** Well, if you have—. I do not know. [*Inaudible.*]

[103] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Sorry, I confused you then.

[104] **Ms Holownia:** I was going to say that the approach in terms of different coloured boxes is very disappointing, is it not? Local authorities could actually get together and do something about that, to make sure that there is a more uniform approach. Having uniform approaches in different authorities is much more difficult, because you will need a different approach in a block of flats to that which you will need in a rural community, for example. So, I think that that is a much more difficult issue for local authorities to tackle. Whether or not one would want the Government to legislate is another matter.

[105] **Alun Ffred Jones:** You say that local authorities could come together. Do you not think that the Government should have given some direction at the very beginning when recycling was being developed throughout Wales?

[106] **Ms Holownia:** That is indeed an option.

[107] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Well, it is not an option now—well, it is an option, but it was an option back then. [*Laughter.*] I am suggesting that perhaps it should have been done 10 years ago. Do you have any view on that?

[108] **Ms Holownia:** Yes, I think that that is a fair comment.

[109] **Mr Phillips:** Chair, what we have at the moment is an evolution in different authorities of different approaches, which they honestly thought was best at the time. Most have continued to refine their system and have got it working quite well, and here we are today, 10 or 12 years on, when it is difficult to change. Obviously, if they are performing well with a system, and residents like it, why change? Why go to the expense and risk the disengagement that could happen? There is a big risk there, of course. We did talk about consistency and I remember it featuring in waste management meetings six or seven years ago, when, before kerbside collection came in, it would have been probably a break point where it could have changed.

[110] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, playing devil's advocate, is there not a lesson for us there for today?

[111] **Mr Phillips:** Yes.

[112] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Otherwise, we could be back here in another 10 years regretting that nothing was done now.

[113] **Mr Phillips:** Looking long term, and, bearing in mind what Peter Davies, the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, has said, yes, it makes sense, if you can find a system that is applicable across Wales—remember that one size does not fit all; we keep coming back to that phrase—and find more consistency, even with a little bit of local variation, it might make it easier. I am looking forward to what might be happening to local authorities in terms of reorganisation. That might ease things a little bit for them as well.

[114] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I am not sure whether they are looking forward to it. [*Laughter.*]

[115] You mentioned that recycling by private contractors is not included in the figures you produce in terms of the percentages and so on.

[116] **Mr Phillips:** It is municipal waste; the performance indicator and the targets are for the waste that the council picks up, basically.

[117] **Alun Ffred Jones:** The other stuff that is collected privately, does that feature at all in any of these figures?

[118] **Mr Phillips:** Only if, say, a shop decides to ring up the council and ask the council whether it can have a trade refuse agreement with the council. The council then picks that waste up under that agreement. It is like a business side to the council's waste service.

[119] **Alun Ffred Jones:** It is a false picture, therefore, is it not, of what is happening?

[120] **Mr Phillips:** Well, the targets are for municipal waste. They always have been just for the waste the council picks up. The Welsh Government looked at the possibility of targets for the commercial sector. There are no statutory targets, as far as I know, for the commercial sector, although there is strong guidance about recycling and expectations for the commercial sector. The commercial sector is actually doing very well in some areas on recycling, because it can see there is a profit motive; it is a resource you are wasting. If you do not produce the waste in the first place, you do not have the wasted expense, or you can recycle and gain something back.

[121] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Julie, do you want to come it?

[122] **Julie James:** Yes, just on that point, do you think that local authorities should be incentivised to pick up more commercial, industrial and trade waste? As you pointed out, if you pick the recyclates out of that, you get a better target.

[123] **Mr Phillips:** It is about whether you want a local authority to subsidise what is, essentially, a trading-account-run business, a commercial arm of local authorities.

[124] **Julie James:** Do you think that will change once they have got—. If you have a municipal anaerobic digester that is required to be fed with 25,000 tonnes of food waste and you have a programme that allows people to reduce the amount of food waste they generate, because once people collect it, it goes down—. Do you not think that we need a different

mindset for picking up that food waste, from the supermarkets of the world, for example?

[125] **Mr Phillips:** It is an open market. The problem—

[126] **Julie James:** Are they then not going to do rather better out of the local authorities than they would if you put it the other way around? The local authority is going to be in a position where it needs the extra waste, rather than is providing a service.

[127] **Mr Phillips:** Local authorities should have sized their operation and commitment to the anaerobic digester on the basis of fairly sound judgment, and with a band of flexibility; I understand that you are looking at long-term contracts going into the future here. What I have seen is that there is the ability for these contracts to flex up and down by around 15% or 20%—I am not sure of the figure—to allow for waste reduction in terms of waste arising. One of the reasons for that is that people may take waste somewhere else. Also, hopefully, we will produce less waste in the future. That is far more important than recycling. If we are going to reduce the ecological footprint of waste management, then not producing waste in the first place has possibly three or four times more impact than any recycling, regardless of method.

[128] **Alun Ffred Jones:** On that important note, I will bring this discussion to an end, unless there are pressing questions from Members. There are not. I thank both of you for coming in and answering the questions. A transcript will be provided so that you can check it for accuracy. I will suspend the meeting for 10 minutes or so.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:14 a 10:29.
The meeting adjourned between 10:14 and 10:29.*

Ymchwiliad i Ailgylchu yng Nghymru: Tystiolaeth gan Awdurdodau Lleol Inquiry into Recycling in Wales: Evidence from Local Authorities

[129] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Croeso i chi i gyd—a very warm welcome to the three of you, or four of you, sorry. I am very pleased to be able to welcome you to help us in our inquiry on recycling. There are four of you who represent different counties. Perhaps you could just introduce yourselves. After the introduction, perhaps you could just give a very brief account of how you go about recycling in your particular patch. Do not go into every detail, but just give an indication of your approach. We will start with Mark.

[130] **Mr Williams:** Good morning. My name is Mark Williams. I am head of community and leisure services at Caerphilly County Borough Council. In terms of our collection regime, we collect residual waste or refuse every fortnight, via a wheeled bin. We collect dry recyclables weekly, in a co-mingled system, predominantly using wheeled bins. We collect food waste and garden waste weekly.

10:30

[131] **Mr Brown:** I am Richard Brown, head of environmental services at Pembrokeshire County Council. Pembrokeshire has a black bag collection for residual waste, your general black bag waste, which is collected on the same vehicle but in a separate pod at the front for glass, which is in a box. So, we collect glass and black bags on a fortnightly basis. On a weekly basis, we have an orange bag scheme, which is for dry recyclables, such as cardboard, plastic bottles, cans, et cetera. Also, we collect food in a separate caddy, and we have the same type of lorry, where the front pod takes the food, and the back takes the co-mingled mixed dry recycle. We also have a fortnightly subscription service for green waste.

[132] **Mr Roberts:** Good morning. I am Alan Roberts from Denbighshire County Council.

Our collection regime consists of residual and non-recyclable waste collected fortnightly, using black wheeled bins. We collect mixed recycling fortnightly, using blue wheeled bins. We collect garden waste fortnightly—that is a free service, using green wheeled bins—and we have a weekly collection of food waste using small orange caddies.

[133] **Mr Wilkinson:** Good morning. I am Andy Wilkinson and I am head of neighbourhood services for Conwy County Borough Council. We collect dry recycling and food waste weekly. Dry recycling is paper, cardboard, plastic pots, tubs, bottles and trays, cans, glass and batteries, and food waste is collected on the same vehicle every week. We collect refuse fortnightly in 240-litre wheeled bins, and garden waste fortnightly.

[134] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Those of you that collect using the co-mingling method, do you take it all back to the centre or depot and then separate it out? Is that how it works? Can you elaborate on that?

[135] **Mr Brown:** Generally, the process is that you take it back to what is called a materials recycling facility, or MRF. There are various types of MRFs, from a very technical one, which will automatically sort it, through to ones such as ours, in Pembrokeshire, which is a very simple one, where the content goes onto a conveyer belt and is hand-picked off. So, the cans, cardboard and papers are dropped into a shoot, and you end up with separated materials underneath. So, our system is a simple one, whereas others use a slightly more mechanised system.

[136] **Mr Williams:** At Caerphilly, our material predominantly ends up at UPM Shotton, up in Deeside industrial estate in north Wales, which is a high-tech MRF. Shotton, as a paper mill, has a vested interest in producing high-quality paper, so its separation is high tech and very good, and its reject rate is very low. So, its quality specification, the stuff that we have to deliver to it, is quite tight, and we have a good relationship with it. So, our material predominantly ends up in Shotton.

[137] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Does it all end up in Shotton, or just the paper?

[138] **Mr Williams:** No, there are material recycling facilities that separate all mixed recyclables. So, it uses the paper itself in the paper mill, and it sells the other materials in the marketplace.

[139] **Mr Roberts:** As you might expect, in Denbighshire, the UPM Shotton materials recycling facility is almost on our doorstep, so we have used it since it opened. As Mark says, the entire mixed recycling goes to UPM and it separates it out. It uses the paper, but I think that it has quoted figures that something like 85% of all the material that we send there is recycled in factories within 50 miles of the unit. So, cardboard goes to Manchester, aluminium goes to Warrington, and I cannot think where the plastics go at the moment. The glass goes to Ellesmere Port, much of which goes into glass bottles. Some plastic is recycled by UK re-processors, but, again, the nature of the material means that quite a lot of plastic goes abroad.

[140] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr. Thank you for that. That is very useful.

[141] Pwy sy'n mynd i ddechrau? Llyr. Who is going to start? Llyr.

[142] **Llyr Gruffydd:** May I just ask what you think are the key factors in increasing recycling rates in your respective authorities and what are the key barriers that mean that we are not achieving even higher targets? If you can answer that, we can all go home. [*Laughter.*]

[143] **Mr Williams:** We are perhaps one of the authorities in Wales that is in a slightly

unique position in that we have tried the various collection systems. We used to collect using a source segregating system, which was originally a fortnightly collection and then we moved to a weekly collection. We undertake an extensive consultation with our public every two years and our public was quite clearly telling us that it was not a system that it wanted—it found it to be confusing, it wanted to recycle a wider range of materials and there were issues with wind-blown litter from an open box, for example, in the winter with animals possibly disturbing waste.

[144] So, in 2009, we introduced quite a wholesale change: we went to a weekly co-mingled system, using wheeled bins. At the same time, we launched weekly food-waste collections and we decided to have a real big bang and go for fortnightly collections in terms of residual waste. In the written evidence that I have submitted, you will see the huge impact that that has had on our performance. In the last three years, we have been in the top-three or top-four performing authorities in Wales. Our performance at the end of last year, which is unaudited at this stage, is close to 60%. Our participation rate has dramatically increased and we now have the best public satisfaction results that we have ever had for recycling. Given the impetus in terms of guidance from the Welsh Government, which was produced not so long ago on the separate collection of recyclables, I find it slightly unbelievable that there is an explicit line in that guidance that says that the views of the citizens should not be taken into account, given the wider duties in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011, produced by the Welsh Government, to involve, consult and discuss service provision with citizens.

[145] In our last consultation survey, we asked citizens what their views would be if we actually went back to the old system, and you can imagine the response that we received. So, a very significant message has come from our citizens in terms of the system that we operate: they like it, they find it easy and convenient and, as we sit here today, it is performing for us. We are in excess of Welsh Government targets and we remain in the top performing authorities in Wales.

[146] **Mr Brown:** Could I come in on the back of that?

[147] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yes.

[148] **Mr Brown:** In terms of answering your question, I have a couple of points. I think that it is less about the system and more about the public's understanding of the system, and that it is clear about how to use it. It is also about restriction of residual collections in terms of everything that I have seen. We were the last authority in Wales to do fortnightly collections of residual waste and we did see a big jump in our recycling as a consequence. So, if you make it slightly more difficult or less convenient for people to chuck rubbish away easily, you make it more attractive to recycle because you want to get rid of it every week. So, that is a key point; that is in the blueprint and that is a really strong message. We have seen that with Monmouth and with Swansea now, which are restricting their collections.

[149] The other thing that we have done recently—we were funded through a convergence programme and got some European funding—is a lot of public engagement, and we have had waste advisers go out to knock on doors. Our waste analysis has indicated that our poorest sectors for recyclers are Acorn 4 and 5 groups, so the lower social profiles are harder to engage. That is not necessarily unusual because they are harder to engage on healthy living activities, smoking and so on—they are difficult to engage. We have seen our Acorn 4 group, where we have had direct engagement and where people have gone along—. We preach to the converted: we give them leaflets and do press adverts and that sort of thing and that is great for the people who are easy to reach, but by door knocking and talking to people—. We did surveys, we looked at who was recycling and who was not and we targeted those who were not recycling and asked them, 'Can you tell us why you are not recycling?' and 'What are the

obstacles for you—do you understand the system?’ That direct engagement has meant that our Acorn 4 group in our repeat study has become our best recycling social profile. That shows that strong public engagement with a strong approach, and with a restriction on black bags, is a really moving factor. I think that a simple-to-use system helps with that.

[150] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I notice, Mr Wilkinson, that you have a slightly different system. What is the argument for kerbside collection?

[151] **Mr Wilkinson:** I did not come here to argue with my colleagues about who had the better system, but we are all quite high-performing councils, as far as the recycling rate is concerned. When you talk about high performing, that is still only in the high 50%, so there is still 40% plus going to either landfill or energy from waste. I think that the key questions that we need our residents to ask when they have something that they want to throw away are: ‘What is this?’, ‘What is it made of?’ and ‘What do I do with it?’ Once people are asking those questions, we are talking about not only all of the materials that we currently collect—the easy things, such as plastic bottles, cans and glass—but all of the other stuff that is in the bin as well. So, we have to ask what is left in the bin, of that remaining 40%, and ask what we can do to recycle it. We are talking about things like small electrical equipment, which Conwy already collects at the kerbside, and nappies will be the next thing that we will be looking at. So, we have to look at the other things that are in the bin. I agree with my colleague that restricting the capacity of residual waste, whether that is through smaller bins or less frequent collections, is a method to do that, but, before we do that, we have to get the public on board to ask the questions: ‘What is this?’, ‘What is it made of?’, ‘What do I do with it?’ Then, it is a small step to get them to ask themselves, ‘Actually, why is it in my house? Why have I bought it and why have I accepted this amount of packaging that the retailer is offering?’ Sorry, that was in answer to your previous question, I think, about what we can do to increase recycling rates.

[152] In Conwy, we run separate collections and we sell all of the materials directly from our depot. The public is engaged with it; we have always had separate collections in Conwy. A favourite line of our portfolio holder is, ‘My residents like to put their newspapers out for collection in date order. Why would I tell them to put them all in one bin?’ So, our residents are used to it and we have a very high participation rate. We last measured a high satisfaction rate of 83%, similar to what my colleagues have said. It is a popular system. We are always looking for ways to improve it and we are trialling the stackable wheeled-box system at the moment, as are our colleagues in Gwynedd, and we are getting some very good results from that, as far as increased recycling is concerned, particularly in terms of the Acorn 4 category and low-participating households. The public absolutely loves it, so we are having some good success on that. I am happy to answer more questions on that, but I do not want to hog the speech time at this stage.

[153] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Okay. I call Joyce Watson then William Powell.

[154] **Joyce Watson:** First of all, I know the system in Pembrokeshire well, because I use it, but my question is this: in terms of reducing the means by which the public can throw things in the black bag—let me put it in those terms—have you seen an increase in fly-tipping, because everything has a potential impact elsewhere? So, that is my first question. My other question is on the capacity issue and how you have talked through the capacity issue. I know that it is co-mingling in Pembrokeshire, weekly, and I know that there is a brown wheelie bin that takes garden waste, but only during the season. Yet, I notice that Caerphilly recognises that that does not always work particularly well. What I am really trying to get at is whether you have seen an increase in fly-tipping, because you are trying to push people towards recycling who might not do that, and whether you have examined the capacity issue for those people you are talking about who are living in small houses, with small space in terms of that capacity.

10:45

[155] **Alun Ffred Jones:** There were two questions. Who is going to take them?

[156] **Mr Brown:** Perhaps I could answer the first one. I think that, since we introduced the fortnightly collections in October last year, we have seen an increase in fly-tipping, not so much on the verges or the gateways of farms and that sort of thing, but among people who take their rubbish to the end of the street and leave it, so that it is unattributed to any person. So, we have seen a bit of an increase in that. It is not huge, but it is certainly there, and we have to react to that. However, it does not outweigh the benefits that we are seeing through the other side.

[157] In terms of the capacity, I think that the people who suffer the greatest problems with the capacity are families with a disabled adult who might be incontinent, or those with larger young families with lots of nappy production. That seems to be one of the key restrictions. Those people, in particular, seem to suffer restrictions. Until now we have been able to advise everyone, and I think that it seems to be working. There is always the odd case, but it does seem to be working. People have alternative options in terms of civic amenity sites. That is not always an option for people on low incomes who might not have access to transport. It is very difficult to provide an answer for everyone, because there are always different answers. If someone has lots of cats and has a lot of cat litter being generated, it is a question of how that will be disposed of. We try to give as much advice as possible, and it does seem to work. I will not say that it is perfect, and I think that people do suffer, but I do not think that we have anything insurmountable, as far as I know.

[158] **William Powell:** It was encouraging to hear Mr Brown saying that there was a really good return on education and engagement, because I was a little disappointed earlier to have a response from the WAO witness suggesting that, actually, it was a very difficult thing to measure, in terms of the return and the performance rating. So, to actually draw on your own experience was encouraging. I was interested to get your views on the other end of the spectrum, particularly the elderly. To what extent do you offer assisted collections in your authorities, and how does that work in practice?

[159] **Mr Brown:** We certainly offer it in Pembrokeshire. It is a case of an individual, who may not have anyone to assist them, just approaching us. We can fill in a form over the phone. We will do what we call a backdoor or assisted collection for those people. However, for elderly residential complexes, rather than a glass box, we provide them with a little bag that will take six bottles or six jars and that sort of thing, so that it is easy to carry, which assists with mobility. However, we will also do those assisted collections.

[160] **Mr Williams:** We provide assisted collections on a case-by-case basis. Someone will visit the householder to see whether they have an able-bodied husband or son who can assist.

[161] **William Powell:** Or a warden.

[162] **Mr Williams:** Just to pick up your point on education, I did not mention it at the start but we did exactly the same as Pembrokeshire. When we made what we call the big change in 2009-10, we spent around £120,000 over a three to four-month period on a doorstep campaign, where we employed people to knock on every door in the borough. That did make a huge difference, and it made the transition and the jump that we were making quite smooth. Obviously, that was a one-off exercise. Since then, we employ four waste advisory wardens. Their role is to target poorly performing social groups or areas, in terms of recycling, but also to assist individuals who have specific requests or needs. Perhaps someone might say, 'I live in a terraced property and I cannot have a wheellie bin. What can you offer me?' So, they will

visit and discuss that with those individuals. That seems to work quite well.

[163] **William Powell:** Good. Also, to what extent have your authorities harnessed recent innovative technologies, such as Twitter, text or whatever, to remind people? It can be complicated, not just around bank holidays and so on, if you introduce some sort of incremental change in your system. How do you approach things from that perspective?

[164] **Mr Williams:** We certainly use the full range of social media. We have started using YouTube a lot lately. We have done a couple of exercises lately. For example, we picked a family that agreed to be filmed over a given period of time in terms of its recycling habits, and all of that sort of stuff has gone on to YouTube. So, yes, we are making full use of social media.

[165] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Have you had many hits?

[166] **Mr Williams:** Surprisingly, yes. I could not tell you how many, but it is quite significant.

[167] **Mr Wilkinson:** Just on technology, Conwy is developing a free app for mobile phones that will have all the details of our collections and any changes to collections. We have gone out to procurement on that and we are just about to award a contract to a software house to develop that app for us.

[168] **William Powell:** Finally, I just want to look at an issue that you mentioned earlier. You said that, in Pembrokeshire, there has been some increase in fly-tipping. To what extent has there been enforcement activity in the past year or so in your own authorities in terms of the stick as opposed to the carrot and any penalties given to individuals who are found to have been responsible for that? If that has happened, has that been communicated to help to deter others from doing the same?

[169] **Mr Williams:** In Caerphilly, fly-tipping has not particularly increased. We have looked at trends over the last four or five years. We are all involved in a scheme called Flycapture, which is a data collection system for fly-tipping. It is a Welsh Government/Natural Resources Wales system. It is quite easy to get information and statistics out of that system, and our trend is not particularly upwards. In fact, it is perhaps up one year and down another. I have a theory about people who fly-tip. We have six civic amenity sites and the chances are that, if you want to dump a mattress on a mountain, you have already had to drive past one of those sites to get there. So, I think that the people with the mentality to do that will do that whatever you offer. In terms of enforcement, we do quite a lot of enforcement in terms of dog fouling, littering and fly-tipping. The problem, I guess, that we come across—and that probably all authorities come across—is that waste disposal these days is an expensive thing. Waste disposal is typically £100 a tonne, including landfill tax. So, a builder who dumps three or four tonnes of waste, is saving quite significant amount of money, potentially. What you find when individuals eventually get to court sometimes is that they get fined £150 or £200 and there is not really the action through the court to stamp this out.

[170] **Russell George:** What is going to happen when local authority reorganisation comes along and local authorities that are potentially merging have different systems? Potentially, you will have one local authority that has one system that is totally different to the other or you might have local authorities that merge that have the same system but in one part of the local authority there will be a red box for paper and in the other part it will be a blue box for paper. It is going to be a right mess, is it not?

[171] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Feel free to disagree.

[172] **Mr Roberts:** That is a case for leaving well alone, is it not? [*Laughter.*]

[173] **Mr Brown:** I think that it is going to be the case that you cannot change that sort of thing overnight. You will keep it as it is. There is no point changing a perfectly good box for a perfectly good box of a different colour. I think that it would become a longer-term plan, as you seek to replace things. I have not given it a great deal of thought, to be honest, but you would have to programme it in. There are other things in place as well, such as contracts—you will be tied in to contracts. Local authority A will have a contract for 10 years and local authority B will have one for five years, so there will be some thinking to be done there. That has already started with regard to how we tie things in. We are not entering into any huge great long contracts at the moment.

[174] **Russell George:** If there is a change, of course, it is not just a change to what you talked about but a change for the residents as well, who have already gone through a difficult stage of getting used to one system. They have come to terms with it and accepted it, as you are saying, and then, of course, they find that there is a different system coming into play. Do you think that there should have been guidance, or more detailed guidance, from Welsh Government at the very beginning, so that there was a uniform approach? You will have perhaps heard Peter Davies's comments on this as well. I would like you to comment on that, really. I am someone who very much believes in local county councils' self-determination and ability to make their own decisions. However, it seems to me that it would have been a better approach to have clear guidance and a system from the very beginning for local authorities, so that there was not this issue now.

[175] **Mr Roberts:** Something that we put in our response to your request for evidence was that the power of local authorities to decide what sort of containers they use, and the numbers of those containers and their use is enshrined in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. That is where it comes from. In 1990, presumably, Government felt that it was the right thing to do to put that power in the hands of local government. I think that we have seen, over the last seven to eight years, nudges in certain aspects, for example, about how we collect recycling, coming from the Welsh Government. However, in many respects, it was very quiet for a very long time about the issue of fortnightly refuse collection. It kept quiet on that one when there was very clear evidence to suggest that collecting the residual waste fortnightly was a key factor in driving up recycling rates. There have been a few arguments about how we collect recycling, so I think that we have been fiddling while Rome burned to a degree on that.

[176] In terms of local authorities merging and things like that, I think that it goes back to the earlier question: what is the answer? I do not think that we have the answer yet. You have some of the leading authorities for recycling in Wales around this table, and I do not think that any one of us would think that our services are completely, 100% right or would argue that they could be replicated in every respect in the 21 other local authorities. So, on local government reorganisation and my soon-to-be colleague Andy from Conwy, I would want to see things left well alone for a while. I think that there are, quite possibly, things happening in Conwy that we could learn from, and I think that there are, quite possibly, things that we are doing in Denbighshire that Conwy could learn from. That is the beauty of the diversity that we have; it is one of the strengths of what we have in Wales.

[177] The confusion issue is completely overplayed. If I was being flippant, I would be talking about people who have more than one house or who live in two local authority areas. Actually, questions of confusion over recycling schemes normally come from people who have got it wrong, for whatever reason. They come in the form of complaints. Mark has terrific evidence in Caerphilly's response that residents there are satisfied with what they have, but I am sure that if somebody gets it wrong and they get a knock on the door, they will probably say that they were confused and that might be the reason behind it.

[178] **Russell George:** I think that a couple of the other witnesses want to comment, but may I add another question? Perhaps you can pick this point up in your answers. Do you think that, ahead of potential local authority reorganisation, now is the time for Welsh Government to come up with more detailed guidance, rather than waiting another 10 years and there being issues again, or not?

[179] **Mr Brown:** I will take your first point first. I think that you have to remember where we are in Wales. We are at the cutting edge. When we set a 70% target, that was hugely ambitious. It was early days, and the evidence was emerging and it has developed. What we have seen is that Conwy has a particular system that works really well and we have a particular system that works really well. I think that it would have been wrong, particularly in those early days, to say 'That's the way to do it.' I think that it would have been more problematic than right. I do not necessarily feel that, on your second point, now is the time to dictate either, because I think that we have systems that are performing well and the change would probably be more problematic and detrimental to Wales as a whole, if we were to move some authorities with good co-mingling systems into a kerbside sorting system.

[180] **Russell George:** Perhaps that is more detailed, but what about having guidance on different colours, where a local authority does use a box, for example, whether it should be red for paper and tins and blue for something else? That seems to be something that local authorities cannot decide together; it has to be Welsh Government that would come up with that approach. Surely, that is at least sensible. It is not telling local authorities what to do, but saying that if you are doing that option, at least come up these particular colours.

11:00

[181] **Mr Williams:** I will be a bit more forthright in my views. Should the Welsh Government be more prescriptive now? No. Should it have been 10 years ago? No. We have a local government Measure, as I said at the start, which is quite clear about local service delivery and how important citizens are. It should be left to local authorities to decide how they deliver those services. I have no issue, and the WLGA has no issue, with local authorities signing up to an outcome, and the outcome is 70% recycling by year x, and that may change over time. That is the outcome, and there are targets during that period. Those are outcomes as well. We have all signed up to the outcome. Let us get on with it and deliver in accordance with that outcome in a way that our citizens are happy with.

[182] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I think that that is very clear. Julie Morgan is next.

[183] **Julie Morgan:** To go back to the education element, I have been very impressed that you are able to approach so many people individually. Is that true of all of you, that you have the capacity and the resources to be able to make the individual approaches that were certainly described in Pembrokeshire? I think that you said that, in Caerphilly, you did one big sweep of people. Are you able to sustain that? Are the other authorities able to do that?

[184] **Mr Wilkinson:** Yes, we have a team of recycling officers—community recycling officers, we call them—and an education officer who goes into schools. What we do with our community recycling officers is that they are actually the lads off the rounds—the recycling loaders. We have a rotating secondment programme of three months at a time, in which the guys out doing the manual work on the back of the wagon can be selected to go into a secondment programme where they go into more of a communications role, to go out speaking to residents, knocking on doors. There are two benefits for us: one is, obviously, the engagement with the residents that we get; the other one is that the operational team sees the other side of things from a communications angle. So, once their three-month secondment is up, they are back on the recycling wagon with the rest of the team, and they will have seen it from the other angle. They know, and have had more time to speak to the residents, and they

can get across to their colleagues what the issues are on the doorstep—people want their stuff put back neatly and they want to know clearly what goes in which box. That has been very effective for us, and we think that it gives value for money.

[185] **Julie Morgan:** You mentioned the schools. That was going to be my next question. How much work is done in the schools, and how effective do you think it is?

[186] **Mr Williams:** There is an interesting debate on schools. We probably all do a lot of work in schools. It might be as part of an eco-schools programme, or a wider eco-schools programme, and we do specific stuff as well. There is great engagement at primary level. Something happens when people hit 13 years of age and they get a rebellious streak in them. I am generalising, I know, but it is generally the case, and they forget everything they learned in primary school about littering and social habits.

[187] I think that teenagers are a more difficult-to-target group, and that is where things like social media come into play. With a primary school, yes, you can stand in front of an audience of eight-year-olds and have their undivided attention, and that is fantastic. You do not get that with the teenagers; you have to target teenagers in a different way, through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat—all these kinds of things that everyone is using—which is why we have rolled out a social media strategy.

[188] **Julie Morgan:** The Wales Audit Office told us that it thought that it could not measure any effect from the education of children. Would you agree with that?

[189] **Mr Williams:** It is difficult to measure, because it is a long-term measurement, is it not? If you pick somebody up at six years of age, what are their habits like at 16, and what are their habits like at 26? It is a long-term process, almost like measuring health and activity. There is a whole raft of issues like it. So, I would not say that it cannot be measured, but I think that it is a long-term measurement programme, and, probably, the recycling strategy of Welsh Government and the delivery by local authorities are still young in terms of that measurement process.

[190] **Julie Morgan:** It seems to me that it is crucial to start as early as you can to talk about these issues.

[191] **Mr Brown:** It is quite interesting. We have a gentleman seconded to us as a waste adviser whose background is in youth offending. It is absolutely phenomenal, the way that he can engage with a certain section of the community. We have another waste adviser who is well into his 60s. This is the thing: you have to recognise that you are dealing with the whole spectrum of society. A 19-year-old approaching a 75-year-old to say, ‘Why aren’t you doing this; it is good for the environment’ might be difficult. You need different triggers for different people. As you said, for schools, you need people with communication skills to be able to target things in a way that they understand and can relate to.

[192] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Julie James is next.

[193] **Julie James:** Good morning, all. It is nice to see you here, Mark. We have some of the best performing authorities in front of us here today, but you all know that some of the authorities are not performing very well at all. So, what are you doing among yourselves to drag the rest of your less-well-performing colleagues up, by the scruff of the neck if necessary? The second part of that question is: how much sharing do you actually do? I was very struck by Mr Wilkinson telling me that they are going out to procurement for a software company to develop an app, but Swansea has an app. Why can you not share it and save the money?

[194] **Mr Wilkinson:** There are a lot of different apps out there. It is a relatively low-cost item for procurement. We are talking about somewhere in the area of £5,000. A lot of different authorities use them. My team, which has looked at this project, has looked at what is best for Conwy. Collaboration has worked in our disposal and treatment contracts and procurements—not just the big partnerships; Alan and I have done joint disposal contracts. An area where I think more work could be done, and I have been banging on about this for a few years now, is in the marketing of the materials that we collect. We all have people in our own authorities who are marketing and selling the materials that we have. The spot market, to me, gives the best value for the materials, but that is a specialised field. The people who do that for the large commercial companies are making more money than I am, doing one thing, which is selling recyclates. So, that is something on which a national war room with maps and pins on the wall is needed, where you could say, ‘I have 100 tonnes of aluminium in Merthyr and 50 tonnes of steel in Conwy; what will you give me for it?’ On doing that sort of marketing, I think that there are real benefits in collaboration on some things. On one app, I take your point, but it has a low cost and I believe that there still needs to be some autonomy with authorities making their own decisions. However, there are a lot of areas in which there could be more collaboration.

[195] **Mr Brown:** In relation to your first point, urban authorities have significantly different challenges to rural authorities. Some of the rural authorities are up at the top not because they are fantastic authorities compared with urban and Valleys authorities, but because they face different challenges. Urban and Valleys authorities have houses in multiple occupation, they have more people whose first language is not English or Welsh, there are communication difficulties, and there are more flats and higher student populations. All of those are people whom you would recognise as being much harder to reach. So, disproportionately, they do have more challenges than some of the others. It is not that they are not trying; they are doing their very best. I would not want to say that—

[196] **Julie James:** I was not making the point that they are not trying, I was more asking what you are doing to share the good practice.

[197] **Mr Brown:** Yes, we do share good practice.

[198] **Mr Williams:** We have a group called the County Surveyors’ Society (Wales), and there is a waste group within CSS (Wales), and we meet in mid Wales four or five times a year. That is one mechanism of sharing good practice. Andy Phillips from the Wales Audit Office was here earlier, and the WAO has been running, on behalf of CSS, benchmarking exercises for the last few years. It picks on specific things under the guidance of CSS. So, if we say, ‘Actually, we would like you to take a look at civic amenity sites’, it will draw out some best practice examples from that process, so that authorities can visit each other or learn from each other. So, that is going on. Like everything else, it could probably be improved, but it does happen.

[199] **Julie James:** What about the shared procurement that you were talking about? How much chat is there about that?

[200] **Mr Williams:** There is a lot of chat about that. From Caerphilly’s point of view, we are part of Prosiect Gwyrdd—obviously, the facility is just down the road from here. We are part of the Heads of the Valleys hub in terms of organics. Each procurement hub meets with Welsh Government officials on a periodic basis in terms of catch-up and where those hubs are going. That is one of the big success stories in terms of collaboration on waste procurement.

[201] **Mr Brown:** We have an informal south-east Wales procurement group for waste, and Pembrokeshire actually sits in the south-east Wales group. We contribute to that, because the group is very proactive. We have contracts for mattresses and—I cannot remember off the top

of my head—for the procurement of bags and that sort of thing—

[202] **Mr Williams:** Yes, there is a contract for paper bags.

[203] **Mr Brown:** There are cross-overs. We are looking for cost savings and we are looking for good practice. You look around the table and say, ‘I would like to do that; who do I talk to? Who’s got that up already?’ So, there is that sort of discussion.

[204] **Mr Williams:** We jointly pay for a regional waste officer. We are all busy and we all have a to-do list, and the things that would probably keep falling down to the bottom of that list, this individual does for us jointly. As Richard said, it started off as a south-east Wales group, but there are others involved now such as Pembrokeshire and some other authorities from the west. That individual has successfully procured a number of collaborative contracts for us on things such as paper-bank recycling, mattresses and waste electronic equipment, to name but a few. They would probably keep slipping down the list in terms of priority if we did not have him.

[205] **Llyr Gruffydd:** The perception that I have is that the biggest barrier to introducing a uniform system for kerbside sorting across Wales is a financial one because of the capital cost of changing vehicles, retraining staff and the whole issue of re-educating the public in some areas. The Wales Audit Office suggested that if there was to be a change, you would expect a dip in levels of recycling for a while, and then you would expect them to climb back up to where they were and beyond, hopefully, to justify the change. I am tempted to ask you whether it is just the money. I presume it is particularly the money, but what other issues do you feel that negate against this uniform system, because people talk about local circumstances, but I struggle with that sometimes?

[206] **Mr Brown:** If you look at 2013-14, the top four authorities are co-mingled in terms of their performance, and with Conwy it is five. It is a very difficult argument for me to come to you as a county councillor and say, ‘We want go down this route; we are going to drop and I am recommending a system that is not in the top three used across any authority in Wales’. That is one of the difficulties—the evidence base. I think that there is a lack of conviction that one system is going to totally outperform another.

[207] **Llyr Gruffydd:** However, there is evidence from Welsh Government research that suggests that the higher the level of recycling, the more effective or the more amplified the difference is between the two or three other potential systems, and that kerbside sort is more effective. We also surely recognise that the quality of the recycle material that you have from kerbside sort is much higher, or is potentially much higher at least. Surely, that counts as well if we want to look towards more of a closed-loop system, and also the value of the resource—because waste is a resource—that we have.

[208] **Mr Williams:** The closed-loop question is an interesting one. Looking at the wider responsibilities of Welsh Government, I will give you a scenario. If we collect paper in south-east Wales, in the Heads of the Valleys area there is a loft insulation manufacturer that uses collected secondary paper to manufacture loft insulation and I could take it three or four miles up the road. However, if I wanted to be closed loop in accordance with the Welsh Government’s strategy, I would need to take it to UPM Shotton or to Aylesford in Kent, so I would need to transfer the stuff a couple of hundred miles. Which is the best environmentally, and which is the best economically and regeneration-wise for the principality? Those questions and that area need to be explored. You say that Welsh Government has evidence relating to kerbside sort being the best system. I would like to see that evidence being peer reviewed. I think that the WLGA generally would like to see the Welsh Government evidence being peer reviewed by a totally independent peer reviewer, which has not happened. Just picking up the point in terms of the citizen and cost, the situation that we all now find

ourselves in because of austerity measures, nationally and internationally, is that we are, as local authorities, having to make some very tough decisions over the next two years. So, if we were to say to our public, 'I'm sorry; we've had to close four leisure centres, but we're going to change your waste collection system to a system that you don't want and that doesn't work'—

11:15

[209] **Llyr Gruffydd:** I accept that and that is a clear argument, obviously. If I was the Minister and I turned around and said, 'Okay, the Welsh Government will bankroll this change'—it is unlikely to happen, but, if that did happen, I am just trying to tease out, apart from the cost, and you cannot ignore that, what else negates this potential change?

[210] **Mr Williams:** In terms of cost, it is all public money, is it not, whether the Welsh Government bankrolls it, or whether the local authority pays? It is all public money from the citizen's point of view. Many of our citizens—

[211] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, it is the money then; that is what you are saying.

[212] **Mr Williams:** I think that it is a combination of citizen views and money and the performance issue, because I am not convinced that—. As Richard has just said, you have had the top-performing authorities in and three of us are co-mingling. Many of our citizens have told us that if you force them back to the old collection system, they will not just stop recycling some things, they will stop recycling altogether and put everything in the residual waste bin because that is much easier. None of us wants that to happen in terms of performance.

[213] **Mr Wilkinson:** I think that the biggest barrier is the citizen, the public and what people are used to. I think that Alan in Denbighshire has very high levels of satisfaction with its service; people really like the service and think that it works for them. We have the same in Conwy. We have very high levels of customer satisfaction—87% was the last figure, so, people are very happy with the system that they are used to, but I do not think that the public in Conwy and Denbighshire have that much of a philosophical difference, not as much as Alan and I do, certainly nowhere near as much. I do not think that the public has that much of a philosophical difference; it is just what it has been used to and changing that is going to be a big barrier. However, as an example of how things can change, going back to 2006, when Conwy introduced fortnightly refuse collections—it was before my time as waste manager—there was absolute uproar and it was a very difficult change to get across to the public, and, talking about citizen choice, if we had asked the citizen then, 'Would you rather have weekly or fortnightly collections?', they would all have said 'weekly'. So, was that what we were going to do? No, we had something that had a better economic and ecological outcome. In November last year, we had 6,000 rural properties that did not have a recycling collection; they still had a weekly refuse collection and they had a bring bank service. We eventually rolled out weekly recycling and fortnightly refuse collection to all of these properties and we did not get one complaint from those properties about moving from a weekly to a fortnightly refuse collection. It was not an issue; things have moved on. So, people can change, but I think that the biggest barrier to a uniform system, and one that we are going to face with reorganisation, is that people are very used to what they are doing. People like doing it, it is something that is close to their hearts, and they like the system that they have in place. I think that is the biggest barrier.

[214] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Russell George is next, and then there are final questions that have been prepared, or, if you have further comments that you want to present to the committee, you may do so.

[215] **Russell George:** In terms of our inquiry, how much do you think that we should be

looking at reducing waste going into households in the first place? For example, supermarket packaging is often talked about, as well as newspapers and junk mail, and the level of unwanted mail going to people's homes and the way in which products are packaged. If the level was reduced—I know what Joyce's view is—

[216] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Do not worry; you can ignore her. [*Laughter.*]

[217] **Russell George:** I will. Should that be part of our inquiry as well, looking at that, and what would be the impact on local authorities if that were to be the case? Would there be significant savings for you? Would there be a reduction in costs? Clearly, you now have your facilities in place, so, even if there were a reduction in overall waste going into homes, there would only be a certain level of saving that you could make. I am just interested in how much of an impact that would have on you if the culture changed. What would be the impact for you as local authorities financially?

[218] **Mr Roberts:** There are a number of aspects to that. Certainly, going back to 2007, when the then Minister launched the 'Future Directions for Municipal Waste Management in Wales' paper, which was going to lead to the 70% recycling target, it was on the to-do list that there was going to be greater consideration of higher up in the waste chain, as it were, and of the creation of waste and there was a recognition that the prevention of waste needed to be tackled. Not a lot has happened, but, having said that, it is very hard to do. We have seen, in the commercial sector, a lot of voluntary agreements and, if you look at weight-for-weight issues, I think that I read recently that a Coca-Cola bottle this year is 6% lighter and has 6% less plastic in it than the Coca-Cola bottle of last year, so these things are definitely moving forward, but, on the other hand, we are all buying more packaged goods. I do not see statistics on that, but it certainly appears to be the case. One of my greatest concerns is that, where we are seeing a reduction in the amount of materials used, and we are thinking about reduced sales of newspapers, making glass packaging lighter, and manufacturers moving from glass to other materials—going from glass to plastic is a massive reduction—all of the emphasis is on the materials that we recycle. So, the impact of part of it is that it is actually pushing the 70% target further away for us. It is a good thing, do not get me wrong, but, as far as our targets are concerned, it is pushing them further away. So, it is a question of how much we really want it to happen because we are put in that difficult situation.

[219] **Mr Wilkinson:** To echo that, what I would like to see a focus on is the prevention of things that are either difficult, expensive or impossible to recycle. A good example of that is the plastic bag tax, which has been fantastic, speaking as someone with a responsibility for street cleansing; the impact of that is very visible and, when we first started our weekly recycling collections, that was the most common question from residents: why can we not recycle plastic bags? So, we had all of these answers: they are not recycled in the UK, they are difficult, they mess up the machinery in the vehicle and the material recycling facilities lines. However, with the introduction of that tax, we could say that we were doing something, because the public thinks that local government and national Government are best friends, does it not?

[220] **Russell George:** We are, are we not? [*Laughter.*]

[221] **Mr Wilkinson:** Yes. We were able to say, 'Well, actually, something is being done about that. Here is this thing that cannot be recycled, but something is being done and legislation will be in place to make less of it.' There have been other examples, although not as the result of legislation, such as with large goods packaged in cardboard: less polystyrene is used in the corners and cardboard is now used instead. We are talking about little things like that and so I would like to see the focus on prevention and on materials that are either expensive or impossible to recycle.

[222] **Russell George:** I take your point about things being packaged differently, which might be helpful to you to meet your targets; I can understand that point, but, putting targets to one side for the moment, surely it would be better to reduce the amount of waste overall in any case. Am I right in thinking that the cost would then be greatly reduced for the local authority? Obviously then you can go back and keep that leisure service open or whatever in that case. There would be a significant reduction for the local authority in cost in terms of its overall waste services. Am I right in thinking that?

[223] **Mr Wilkinson:** If junk mail were banned, it would be a cost to local authorities.

[224] **Mr Brown:** Things like aluminium you might get £750 per tonne income for and to lose that sort of income—. Some things, like wood, for example, cost you, but you get a decent income from other things. Paper, which is the biggest single element, is quite a good earner.

[225] **Mr Wilkinson:** You still have the truck going past the house, so, in terms of what goes in it, if there is less of the thing that generates an income, it is going to cost us.

[226] **Mr Williams:** To be fair to the Welsh Government, I think it is a difficult thing for one devolved administration to tackle, because, obviously, most packing is in the food sector, which is a global industry with national retailers, so it is really something that has to be worked on with the Department for Environment, Food And Rural Affairs in London, the Scottish Government and at a European level. It is not an easy nut to crack. I know that there is the Courtauld agreement that the Welsh Government sits with colleagues from DEFRA and they work together, and there has been significant change. Somebody mentioned the Coca-Cola bottle; there are various other examples of how the weight of packaging, the thickness of glass in wine bottles, et cetera, has reduced. However, it is not an easy one to crack.

[227] **Alun Ffred Jones:** What is the reduction in the total tonnage that is going to landfill in general? What is the drop? Has there been a significant drop over the past 10 years?

[228] **Mr Williams:** Oh yes, it has been massive. I could not give you a figure, but it is huge.

[229] **Mr Roberts:** In Denbighshire, 10 years ago our recycling rate was around about 5% or 6%. It is currently 63%. Taking into account the fact that we are handling less rubbish overall as well, we are probably landfilling about 20% of what we used to in quantity. However, interestingly, it costs more than it did then in real terms, because of the tax.

[230] **Julie James:** It is one of the nerdy things I know, I am afraid. It reduced 2 kg per person in Wales between October and December last year and October and December the year before. So, that is quite significant.

[231] **Mr Williams:** In terms of the project with contract procurement that has been signed now—it was six or seven years in the making, as most of these procurements are, as Julie will know from a past life—one of the crucial things in securing a contract like that is a waste flow model. There was an immense amount of work done on waste flow modelling, because we were seeing that the amount of residual waste had dropped so significantly. Obviously, as recycling performance increases, the result is a drop in residual waste. It was also at a time when the economy took a dive, so that has an effect, but it has been significant. The drop in residual waste has been significant.

[232] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Before we conclude, we will have a very quick question from Joyce.

[233] **Joyce Watson:** It is going to be a quick question, but it is not going to be a short answer—although I hope that it will. You need things to recycle to make money, and clear plastic is a good example. Coloured plastic is a bad example. Do you help inform people about those choices? I know it is all about marketing, blah-di-blah-di-blah, and they will not like this question to you at all, but that is really where you need to start, because you cannot recycle some coloured plastic; it is impossible.

[234] **Mr Wilkinson:** That is a very difficult one. You have to balance what the public thinks is recyclable and reasonable to recycle against what actually is recyclable—

[235] **Joyce Watson:** I am talking about at source, when they buy the product.

[236] **Mr Wilkinson:** Oh right, when they buy the product. Again, it is very difficult for local authorities to say, ‘Do not buy this product because it is in a black plastic bag’.

[237] **Joyce Watson:** That would bring them round, though.

[238] **Mr Williams:** What confuses people is that they pick up lots of items and they see the recycling logo on them. Orange juice cartons are a classic example. They are very difficult to recycle and not particularly economically viable to recycle, yet from a public point of view, they will pick up an orange juice carton in a supermarket, and there is a recycling logo. So, manufacturers of these containers willingly stamp them as recyclable, but that does not mean that they are necessarily economically recyclable or easy to recycle. That is the difficulty. We can give one message, yet the public will say, ‘But hang on, it says on the bottom that this is recyclable’.

[239] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I am going to give you one opportunity each to offer any thoughts that you think might assist us in our deliberations. So, if you have any last requests, suggestions or messages here is your opportunity.

[240] **Mr Brown:** May I start? We have had very good support from the Welsh Government and that is much appreciated. The blueprint is very good, within the confines. I would argue against being prescriptive. We are achieving well. When we look at what we have, and when we look at the analysis of what is left in the black bags in residual waste, we see that 25% of it is food waste. It is separately collected. It is about education. The system is there, and whatever system it is, it is about education and encouraging and motivating people to use the system that is there. That is what will get us there. I wholeheartedly believe that it is not about tinkering with whichever system it is, and I really do not think that people in Milford Haven, Haverfordwest and Pembroke Dock are the slightest bit confused about what they do in Carmarthen, Ceredigion or Bridgend. I passionately believe that.

11:30

[241] **Mr Williams:** As I said when I started, there is this issue around the citizen. Taking the citizen forward with us through tough times is crucial, and we cannot afford to cheese citizens off to an extent where they say, ‘Sod it, I’m not going to participate; I’m not going to do this’. I think that the view of the WLGA is, ‘Yes, we’ve willingly signed up to an outcome with the Welsh Government, but please leave us to achieve that outcome in the best way for our local areas and citizens, because one size does not fit all’.

[242] **Mr Roberts:** I think that is the thing. In the lead-in to this session, we heard a lot about confusion and a single system. I do not know what the single system is. I am not sure that anybody in the Welsh Government knows what the single system is. I think that the evidence base that leads to some of the conclusions that the Welsh Government has at the moment is quite weak, and would benefit from peer review, as Mr Williams said. I do not

think that the timing is right to go for it. I do not think that confusion exists. If we can manage two languages in this country quite successfully, a little bit of trusting the residents to deal with slightly differing systems in different local authority areas should be perfectly achievable.

[243] **Mr Wilkinson:** It is clear that a system popular with citizens and that delivers high levels of recycling is achievable, whichever method is used. On having a single system imposed, which was proposed some years ago, we have done some quite radical and innovative things in Conwy, which I think have advanced the national knowledge of methods. Would we have done that if we would have had a single system imposed 10 years ago? Probably not. Things are still developing, and I agree that it is probably not the right time right now to say, 'This has proven to be the best system'. However, as we go into local government reorganisation, a policy steer from the Government to inform decisions made in the successor authorities would be useful.

[244] I have one last point that has not been mentioned so far in our session; I think that you mentioned it in an earlier session. Let us not forget businesses and commercial recycling. In local authorities such as ours and Gwynedd, a lot of our municipal waste comes from businesses, and it is a far greater challenge to get them to recycle than it is the householders.

[245] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr **Alun Ffred Jones:** Thank you very much. iawn ichi.

[246] Thank you for coming in and for being so forthright in your evidence; it has been very useful.

11:35

Ymchwiliad i Ailgylchu yng Nghymru: Tystiolaeth gan Gyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Inquiry into Recycling in Wales: Evidence from Natural Resources Wales

[247] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Croeso. A gaf **Alun Ffred Jones:** Welcome. May I eich croesawu chi yma i gyflwyno'ch welcome you here today to give your tystiolaeth? evidence?

[248] A very warm welcome to you. Could you introduce yourselves and your positions? If you want to make any opening remarks, you are welcome to do so.

[249] **Ms Moore:** Good morning, bore da. My name is Isobel Moore and I am head of business, regulation and economics for Natural Resources Wales.

[250] **Ms De Longhi:** Hello, I am Nadia De Longhi. I am strategy manager for waste within Natural Resources Wales.

[251] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr; thank you. Do you want to make any opening remarks?

[252] **Ms Moore:** Yes, if that would be acceptable. Thank you. Bore da. Thank you for inviting Natural Resources Wales to give evidence this morning. Our purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used now and into the future.

[253] The value of the environment to the Welsh economy is £8 billion. It is a precious resource and we are one of the main organisations responsible for managing it. Sustainable development is also a core organising principle of Natural Resources Wales, therefore, we

take our responsibilities with helping to deliver the 'Towards Zero Waste' agenda in Wales very seriously. This is in order to produce benefits for the economy, social wellbeing and the environment in Wales.

[254] The challenge that has been set out in that policy document is for Wales to become a high recycling nation by 2025 and a zero-waste nation by 2050, and to shift our nation's thinking towards waste as a valuable resource. Last year, Natural Resources Wales was responsible for regulating facilities that dealt with over 6 million tonnes of waste. This was at landfill sites, energy-from-waste plants, waste-transfer stations and other treatment sites. What we wish to do when we work with the waste sector is make sure that we are a fair and sustainable regulator, and that we seek better and smarter regulation that minimises the burdens for business, but does not compromise the smarter regulation and protection of people and the environment. We perhaps have a smaller role than others when it comes to the recycling targets, apart from our role as the monitoring authority for the local authority recovery targets and the landfill allowance scheme.

[255] There are four key points that I would like to make before I complete. First, we have an awful lot to be proud of in Wales with regard to waste recycling; we are the only UK country to have adopted statutory targets, and Welsh local authorities achieved the first target of 52% by 2012-13. Wales has also reduced the amount of municipal biodegradable waste that is received at landfills by 57% over the last 10 years.

[256] Secondly, public participation is key here if local authorities are to achieve the more challenging target set in the policy document, 'Towards Zero Waste'. The challenge for Welsh Government in partnership with local authorities is considerable: to increase understanding, confront perceptions and change the behaviours of households.

[257] Thirdly, there is a whole suite of legislation and measures that are in the early stages of implementation and those will have an impact on the quality of recycling services. It is too early, perhaps, to fully assess how effective these will be and whether additional measures are needed.

[258] Finally, while increasing recycling rates is important, we must not forget the importance of putting mechanisms and drivers in place that encourage prevention and reuse of waste. We have to create a circle economy that moves away from the current linear model where materials are fed into the economy at the start and discarded at the end. I am sure that the committee will examine all of these issues, as it proceeds through the inquiry.

[259] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr. Thank you very much indeed. Russell George is first.

[260] **Russell George:** Good morning. We have had lots of evidence brought to us about how different local authorities take completely different approaches to how they deal with their waste. Some local authorities have a kerbside-sort approach and others have a co-mingling approach. I wonder whether you could let us know the merits of each of the approaches.

[261] **Ms Moore:** Absolutely. Obviously, the Welsh Government has provided its steer and used an evidence-based approach to assess its recommendation with regard to co-mingling versus kerbside, which is in the municipal strategy blueprint. From our perspective, as the monitoring authority for the local authority recycling targets, we have a specific role to monitor how local authorities are collecting their waste, and therefore the end targets and places where those are actually dealt with. Within that scheme, we do not monitor the way in which services are collected.

[262] However, one thing that I can say from our perspective is that, as we go through that process of monitoring, local authorities may wish to be aware that when we obtain information to validate those data within the database, we specifically ask questions for evidence with regard to how those data have been accumulated within the various parts of the recycling process. For those that use a co-mingle scheme, an additional request will come to local authorities for the various parts of that validation process, compared with kerbside recycling. That might be something that local authorities would wish to consider in the future, where there are complicated waste streams from collection to final destination.

[263] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I am sorry; I did not quite understand the point that you were making. Are you suggesting that co-mingling is somehow less effective?

[264] **Ms Moore:** No. I am looking at it purely from the perspective of our role with regard to the data that are submitted to us from local authorities when we have to validate the information—

[265] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Is there any doubt about the information? Is there any doubt about the data that you are getting?

[266] **Ms Moore:** No. We are quite confident in terms of the data that we have, and we also audit around 81% of the information that is inputted by local authorities into WasteDataFlow. Last year, 65% of all of that information was evidenced either fully or partially. So, we have good confidence in terms of the information that is contained within it. However, we do ask that local authorities provide evidence as to what has happened to their collected waste. If it is co-mingled, there might be an additional few questions that we will have to ask with regard to that waste stream, because it will have gone to perhaps an intermediary in between, before it gets to its final destination.

[267] **Russell George:** Are the data collected by local authorities in their own mechanisms and structures and then you look at those? In terms of auditing the data, do you have your own structure that you expect local authorities to complete? Is there a co-ordinated approach for collecting the data across Wales, or is each local authority doing it differently and you have to deal with that?

[268] **Ms Moore:** No, there is a co-ordinated approach. We have a system called WasteDataFlow that requires the local authorities to input those data. Guidance has been consulted upon by Welsh Government with regard to what is actually captured in terms of whether it is just household waste or additional things, such as road sweepings, for example, and whether we would include beach cleansing within that. So, there is specific information available for local authorities to be aware of. In addition to that, we have issued our own guidance that sets out to local authorities how they should input those data, that it needs to be done on a quarterly basis and also how we would go about validating the data.

[269] **Russell George:** With regard to enforcement, I would imagine that most of your enforcement work is with regard to businesses rather than residential properties. Am I correct in thinking that? Do you do any enforcement when it comes to residential properties, or is your work in enforcement nearly all business based?

[270] **Ms Moore:** Currently, in terms of that specific role with regard to the local authority recycling targets and the landfill allowance scheme, it would be a matter for Welsh Government to act with regard to enforcement. That would be for penalties if, for example, local authorities have not met the specific targets. For our more traditional role with regard to regulating industry under the environmental permitting regime around, as I mentioned earlier, incinerators, landfill and so on, the enforcement role sits with Natural Resources Wales.

11:45

[271] **Russell George:** I am thinking of businesses themselves perhaps disposing of waste, and we heard some evidence before about the fact that even the fines are perhaps not sufficient because you will have a business that will dump waste inappropriately and the suggestion was that, in court, it would get fined £150 and that it would have spent a lot more if it had paid to get that waste disposed of. So, that is what I was referring to.

[272] **Ms De Longhi:** Both householders and businesses obviously have to adhere to the duty of care requirements, so they should be able to follow the chain all the way through to make sure that waste has gone to appropriate facilities. However, there are examples of when that clearly does not happen. In terms of illegal dumping, obviously we will take enforcement action on the back of that, and frequently that will result in prosecutions. We have had quite a few successful cases. Sometimes, the penalties are not what we would hope for in terms of providing a disincentive to others to behave in the same way. We do not have examples of having taken householders to court, for example, for non-adherence of duty of care. That is probably not a proportionate response. We obviously tailor our response to the offence.

[273] **Russell George:** Who is responsible for setting the level of fine? Sorry, I should know this perhaps. Both you and the witnesses in the previous evidence session talked about the fine not being sufficient. How, as a committee, would we perhaps deal with that? Whose responsibility would that be?

[274] **Ms De Longhi:** Some of the levels of fines are set directly in the legislation. So, obviously, from a politician's point of view, you could influence that. However, beyond that, it is about the standards set in the guidance given to magistrates in the court. So, it is part of that Ministry of Justice-type approach.

[275] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Llyr is next.

[276] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Obviously, the data you collect would include a lot of quantitative information. What about quality and monitoring the quality of the recycled material?

[277] **Ms Moore:** Currently, the database does not have a huge amount of information that refers to quality. We are anticipating that the future regulations around materials facilities that come into place on 1 October will give us a better understanding in terms of reject rates, for example, with those waste sources that go through the co-mingling process. As part of that legislation, there will be a requirement for those processes to monitor the quality of the recycle that ends up at those facilities and also then gets rejected. So, we would be hopeful about being able to use that information in future, although it will not be directly reported to us. It is likely to be done in conjunction with WRAP, for example.

[278] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Do you have a view as to which method is most likely to produce the best quality recyclable material?

[279] **Ms Moore:** I think that, unfortunately, it is probably too early to say. Once we have access to that information, post the legislation being in place, we will be able to get a better understanding of the quality. Certainly, the Welsh Government's desire within its 'Towards Zero Waste' document is to have high-quality recycle. Certainly, we would endorse the evidence-based approach that it has taken in terms of coming to that view.

[280] **Ms De Longhi:** Linking this back to the first question about co-mingled and kerbside collections, both in terms of quantity and quality, there is evidence that we have high performers and not so high performers adopting both methods, so it is not as simple as saying, 'This is better than that', sadly. The success of recycling has to be looked at in terms of the

overall service that is delivered. So, it is not just about what happens in terms of the doorstep collection, which is what those two methods are about. It is also about other levels of provision, such as the standard of service provided, the availability and accessibility of civic amenity sites and what services they provide in connection with the residual waste services that are provided and other things like street cleansing and on-the-go recycling and bulky household waste recycling. You have to look at the whole picture, really, because that is what delivers the service, if you like, for recycling within a local authority. It is not just as simple as what happens with the doorstep collection.

[281] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, you would not necessarily be as forthright as the Government is being in terms of trying to coerce authorities to go in a certain direction.

[282] **Ms Moore:** I think that the blueprint, as it stands, is a really good example of how evidence has been assessed to come to a view. I think that the blueprint is discretionary and is the Welsh Government's recommendation. Certainly, it has invested funding with regard to its collaborative change programme to support local authorities to come to a certain position over a period of time, but it is quite clear that, since the environment protection regulations over a decade ago, local authorities have the power to undertake their activities as best they see fit for their particular circumstances. That is why we have variation across Wales in terms of the way in which those services have been delivered. In terms of examining that, there is obviously a huge amount that needs to be explored by local authorities on the types of dwellings that are in place, the socioeconomic aspects that might impact on behaviour and also the way in which they need to communicate those messages to those residents to such an extent that there is an ability to deliver the recycling targets that need to be met.

[283] **Llyr Gruffydd:** I just have one more question. I wanted to pick up on the comment made by Mr Williams, from Caerphilly, earlier—I do not know whether you heard the session.

[284] **Ms Moore:** No, sorry.

[285] **Llyr Gruffydd:** I was asking about the importance of good-quality recycling material and the implications for closed-loop systems and the like. He suggested that closed-loop systems were not as straightforward as we thought or hoped that they might be in terms of the value to this process, because, he quoted an example where he could take waste paper to a company 3 miles down the road that would use it for insulation, but because of the emphasis on the value of closed-loop systems, he has to take it to Shotton, and obviously there are all sorts of environmental implications to transporting that. Do you have a view on that?

[286] **Ms De Longhi:** I think that there will always be examples that show one extreme or the other. I think that you have to look at it again holistically and around the whole life-cycle assessment of that material. In certain circumstances, it will make more sense to adopt something a little bit lower down the hierarchy and save on travel. For other things, it will make more sense to send things a very long distance, including export—

[287] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, who makes that call? Where could he go to make the case that, actually, this is a better approach?

[288] **Ms De Longhi:** Our understanding is that neither the blueprint nor any of the Welsh Government guidance that comes out about zero waste prescribes that you must do this. It says, 'If you look at life-cycle assessment, in the main, you will see that it is probably the right answer, but there will be circumstances when it is not.' Local authorities have discretion to make that decision, as I understand it.

[289] **Ms Moore:** I think that the most recent guidance that is out for consultation by the

Welsh Government around separate collection includes this assessment of the waste hierarchy and also the technical, environmental and economic practicability of delivering requirements. So, that should be used as the basis in terms of the decisions that authorities need to make.

[290] **Alun Ffred Jones:** One of the previous witnesses suggested that the evidence collected by the Government to support its views should be peer-reviewed. Do you have a view on that? Frankly, he did not believe it, I think.

[291] **Ms Moore:** Clearly, the Welsh Government will have looked at various sources of evidence in terms of coming to its view and also producing the guidance and documentation that are available to local authorities. I think that we would support that, wherever possible, peer review was undertaken to assess that information and also add to the debate.

[292] **Ms De Longhi:** I think that reviewing, more generally, is an important point to note, because lots of things change. The waste types change, the waste quantities change and the socioeconomic environment changes. So, you always need to keep that evidence base refreshed in order to make sure that you are making the right decisions.

[293] **Joyce Watson:** You talk in your paper about trying to drive a target and the unintentional consequences of perverse environmental and economic outcomes, so, in plain language, fly-tipping and the cost of clearing it up would be examples of that. I know that you have already been asked a question about education and enforcement. Do you have a role to play in educating people when they are having building work done on the house and when they are trying to get rid of large-scale fly-tipping—which is what you would deal with—and in terms of the need to be sure that the person who says, ‘I can take that rubbish away for you’, actually has a certificate that ensures that the rubbish will not end up in a river, or a hedge or anywhere else?

[294] **Ms De Longhi:** Because we are the enforcement body for the duty of care, and particularly the householder duty of care, then, yes, we do have a role to play, clearly, in helping to make sure that householders are aware of what their obligations are and that, in choosing a contractor to do work for them, those contractors are appropriately registered with us as waste carriers, because that is what produces the next part of the chain, to make sure that waste is taken to the final endpoint. So, there is an education role. Equally, we want to be made aware of any incidences of large-scale fly-tipping, so that we can then do the investigation and that then goes back up the chain, if you like, to find out where the chain has gone wrong, and it would enable us to make a decision on whether we need to take enforcement action.

[295] **Joyce Watson:** So, do you, actually, try in any way to get to the customer? That is what I am trying to get at, because if somebody went down the street and said, ‘I’ll get rid of this for you; they’re going to charge you 50 quid, but I can do it for five’, those people might not necessarily understand that the £5 means that it is going to end up where it should not be, against the £50 that means that it is going to be disposed of appropriately and without causing a potential hazard to the environment. Is there anything that you do, and if you do not do it, who do you think should be doing it, and is it being done?

[296] **Ms De Longhi:** As Natural Resources Wales, we would not generally try to target individual householders in that way. So, obviously, we have blanket communications through our website and leaflets and those kinds of things, but we tend to work with others who are nearer to those communities. Fly-tipping Action Wales, for example, does an awful lot of work in spreading communication messages about householder duty of care and those kinds of obligations. Equally, local authorities, which know their residents and are much closer to them, are able to share those messages. Equally, we would probably look to work with trade bodies—people like Constructing Excellence, for example—that work with the builders and

those people directly to help to make sure that the people who have obligations to move that waste correctly are aware of what they are as well, so that we are not trying to target individual operators, because that is probably not within our resource remit to do.

[297] **Joyce Watson:** Can I just check something, Chair? Obviously, I want to labour this point. I could not get the number plate, but I saw somebody doing just what I have described just off the dual carriageway from Carmarthen to St Clears. I could not get the number plate. That is exactly what was going on. I knew what was going on. So, what I am trying to get at, and the reason that I am trying to be quite insistent on this, is that there are two issues, are there not? There is the issue of the recyclability—if there is such a word—of construction materials and where they might be used, and I am sure that you would play a part in that, and you have just said that you probably will not, but there is also using those people you use, in the big construction consortia, to get that message out to the people on the ground. You have said that you do that. How satisfied are you that that message is getting out? I have never received one myself. I know that you cannot hand over to a man with a van, or a woman with a van, rubbish without having some personal responsibility. However, I will almost guarantee that 99% of the population do not know that.

[298] **Ms De Longhi:** I think that that is probably valid. We have taken steps, as I have described, to try to get that message out, either directly or indirectly through others. How well is the message landing? I am sure that there are a large number of people who are not aware, so I would have to support what you are saying.

[299] **William Powell:** One thing that is common, I think, to all waste facilities, whether you are talking about civic community sites, incinerators or anaerobic digesters, is that people tend not to want to have them too close to where they live. Could you clarify what the split of responsibility is between local authorities and yourselves in terms of monitoring and enforcing any issues around the running of such centres? There is a lack of clarity out there on these issues.

12:00

[300] **Ms De Longhi:** The regulation of waste facilities has two steps to it, really. There is a planning step, which obviously the local authorities are accountable for in terms of whether a facility can be given planning permission to be somewhere. Once it gets to that stage, there is then a permitting requirement under the environmental permitting regulations, which we would be the enforcement body for. So, both bodies have that split, if you like. Obviously, we are a consultee of the planning authority, so we would provide advice at that stage on the environmental suitability of a facility being in a particular location, from the point of view of our permitting requirements.

[301] Once a site is up and running, the main bulk of enforcement and compliance responsibility would probably fall to us under the permitting regime, but there may be certain aspects—things like transport and traffic to the site, for example—that we would not be responsible for. So, that would remain a local authority responsibility under the planning regulations. We would be more accountable for those positions that are conditions in our permit, which would cover issues like nuisance and environmental control, specifically. So, any emissions to land, water or air, for example, would be the sort of things that we would regulate and then take enforcement action against, if necessary.

[302] **William Powell:** In financial audit, it is normally the case that, every so often, you have a change in terms of the particular individual or team that deals with a particular company or concern, just for the sake of maintaining transparency and avoiding any over-familiarity with particular operators. Has NRW developed any such protocols in the first year or so of operation? Clearly, there is some parallel between both worlds.

[303] **Ms Moore:** As you are aware, Natural Resources Wales was formed from the bringing together of the three legacy organisations and, traditionally, the part of the organisation that would have dealt with this type of industry would have been the Environment Agency. We focused our attentions very much on a sector-based approach, so that individuals that were responsible for looking after particular companies could, perhaps, rotate according to their preferences, and they would also have a primary sector that they would be responsible for in addition to a secondary sector. As a consequence of that, there was a natural transfer of individuals across the organisations and businesses that we regulate. We have continued with that approach. We are in the process, through our internal governance, of reviewing that approach currently to make sure that it is still fit for purpose and that it delivers the requirements of the new organisation, and that it looks wider, not just to the regulatory activities that we would have traditionally done within our legacy organisation, but to take on the wider responsibilities that the new organisation covers.

[304] **William Powell:** I appreciate that very much.

[305] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I want to allow you to pursue this point, but—

[306] **William Powell:** I found that very helpful; thank you, Chair.

[307] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Okay. Julie James is next.

[308] **Julie James:** I just want to turn to something slightly different. You talked about the waste hierarchy, and so on, and we all agree with that in theory, but in practice, it causes some problems for some local authorities in terms of guaranteeing waste streams to anaerobic digesters or to energy-from-waste plants, or whatever. So, my first question is: how do you resolve the practical clash between trying to encourage people not to use it in the first place, to reuse it at home, or to compost it, and so on, with the need to feed the electricity-producing, renewable resource-type system that most local authorities feed? That is my first question.

[309] My second question is: do you comment on and keep under review some of the waste regulations that cause difficulties as the technologies change? For example, the difficulties that WRAP is very involved with regarding whether or not digestate from anaerobic digesters can be spread on food-producing fields, for example, or whether items taken to a civic amenity site can be removed from the civic amenities site to be reused without being classed as waste and so needing a waste-carriage licence. I am not particularly looking for specifics, but just the general feeling of whether you contribute to that discussion and what is your practical take on it, really.

[310] **Ms Moore:** I will start. To pick up your second question, yes, we do keep an eye on the development of legislation and regulation as it goes forward. Certainly, because our inspectors on the ground deal with a variety of waste sites, they will be in constant contact with operators, but also, more generally, the community and local authorities, to understand some of the difficulties that might be arising. Certainly, we review the documentation and guidance that we produce to accommodate new issues as they come forward, but also then use those as the basis to try to work with Welsh Government and others in terms of the policies that they produce and the guidance that they produce too.

[311] I am sorry, but I forgot your first question. Hopefully, Nadia will have remembered it.

[312] **Ms De Longhi:** I can try because I had forgotten the first one as well. [*Laughter.*]

[313] **Julie James:** I will tell you it again, if you like. It was just about the conflict between

the waste hierarchy, so encouraging people not to produce waste in the first place and the need for local authorities to have some certainty of a waste stream in order to feed the contracts that they have to produce energy from waste, whether that is food waste, residual waste or whatever.

[314] **Ms Moore:** I was going to start by saying that some of the guidance, and certainly the blueprint, for example, is looking over a five to 10-year period for local authorities in terms of any changes that need to occur. Separately to that, I am aware of the most recent guidance that has come out on the four waste streams of glass, plastics, metals and so on, and there is specific information in there in relation to how you use the waste hierarchy to meet the requirements of the waste framework directive, and also what I referred to previously, around the technical, environmental, economic and practicability to deliver. That is the sort of information that is helpful for local authorities to be aware of when they make those decisions in terms of how the waste streams move and also how much of that is residual waste and how that potentially will have an impact in terms of contracts that they might be thinking of undertaking for the future.

[315] **Ms De Longhi:** I was just going to say that obviously, fundamentally, we support the drive to minimise waste production in the first place. That has to be the first aim. The Welsh Government has put together the waste prevention plan and we have a role to play in moving those actions forward. You then get into the secondary argument that once waste is produced, it must be handled in the most appropriate way. The way that the hierarchy pushes it is that it pushes recycling and composting as being the next rung, before you start getting on to the disposal-type activities. Fundamentally, whichever site it goes to, what is important is that those sites have appropriate environmental safeguards and that is really our main role as NRW, to make sure that that is what happens.

[316] In terms of feeding the beast, if you like, once facilities are in place, it is a market mechanism. So, if waste is not available from one sector—if a particular waste is not available from the household sector—it may well still be available from the business community. So, as an operator of an anaerobic digester, for example, you will have to be looking more widely than just assuming that you can only rely on household contracts. There is other suitable waste that can be included in the blend to make sure that you have a viable business, and that is the way that the market would make it work, I think.

[317] **Julie James:** Well, except that local authorities are also entered into contracts that tie them to a certain amount of tonnage, so they take the risk and that money then comes out of the public purse.

[318] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I am going to bring this session to a close unless somebody has a pressing question, or unless you perhaps want to leave us with a last message.

[319] **Ms De Longhi:** No, I do not think so.

[320] **Ms Moore:** Hopefully, our opening statement covered it.

[321] **Alun Ffred Jones:** That is fine. May I thank you very much for coming in and for giving your evidence? We will provide a transcript so that you can check it for accuracy. Diolch yn fawr iawn.

[322] Llyr, rwy't yn awyddus i gyrraedd y papurau i'w nodi i ddweud rhywbeth ynglŷn â'r M4. Wyt ti eisiau gwneud hynny yn y sesiwn gaedig, neu yn y sesiwn agored? Llyr, you are keen to reach the papers to note to say something about the M4. Do you want to do that in the closed session or in the open session?

[323] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Rŵan.

Llyr Gruffydd: Now.

12:08

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[324] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Okay. We will move on to the papers to note. There are four. Most people are happy to note them, but Llyr wishes to say something.

[325] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to refer to the letter that we have received as a committee from the Minister. I am disappointed, frustrated and, quite frankly, I am angry that the Minister is declining our invitation to come to give evidence to this committee. The decision around the M4 in my mind is probably the most significant decision that this Government will make in its five-year term, and I feel that we are not being afforded the opportunity to properly scrutinise the process and the Minister in making that decision. The decision will happen during the summer and, by then, it will be too late. I am disappointed. How can we do our job of holding this Government to account if the Minister declines an offer to come to speak to the committee and she tells us that she will not provide any further information—information that she already has—which is another thing that is said in the letter? So, I want to put on record my severe disappointment about that and I ask that we, as a committee, write to the Minister again, asking her to reconsider whether she could actually come before us.

[326] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Right. You have noted that. Does anyone concur with Llyr's view that we should write to ask the Minister to reconsider her decision?

[327] **Russell George:** I fully agree with Llyr's comments, Chair.

[328] **Alun Ffred Jones:** What are the feelings of other Members?

[329] **Julie James:** I think that the Minister is entitled to say that she is not going to come. I share the disappointment that more information is not forthcoming, but I do not think that we can write to ask her to reconsider her decision not to appear. If she has decided not to appear, then she has decided not to appear, but I would personally be happy to express our disappointment that some of the information that we requested could not be provided. I am sure that not all of it might be appropriate, but I am a little disappointed with a blanket refusal.

[330] **William Powell:** I share that disappointment.

[331] **Alun Ffred Jones:** We can certainly write a letter to express our disappointment.

[332] **Llyr Gruffydd:** The question that it has raised in my mind is: where do we, as a committee, stand in terms of our scrutiny role? I honestly feel that we are being denied the thorough scrutiny opportunity that we should be afforded as a committee. I understand where the Minister is coming from to an extent, but I do not personally feel that that is reason enough to give us a blanket 'no' on everything. Where would we, as a committee, take that concern? I presume that it would be to the Presiding Officer.

[333] **William Powell:** There is the wider context of the business community being distinctly unhelpful in sharing its thoughts at an earlier point; it has really distorted the whole thing.

[334] **Julie James:** It is a constitutional issue—the way that the scrutiny committees in this Assembly are arranged and the way that they are currently arranged allows the Minister to make the decision that she has made. I do not think that we can hold a single Minister responsible for what might be the frustration of a committee about the current constitutional arrangements. So, that is why I am making a distinction between her decision and our disappointment that some of the information might not be forthcoming to our committee.

[335] **Alun Ffred Jones:** This is a public meeting at the moment, so be careful what you say. Joyce, do you want to add anything?

[336] **Joyce Watson:** I simply want to say, and it was only very lightly stated by Llyr, that he understands where the Minister is coming from, as do I and everybody around this room. There are limitations on her coming to a committee and making a statement on something that is yet to be decided, and she will be the deciding body. So, it comes back to this constitutional point. So, let us be clear and fair in the first instance.

[337] On the second point on whether we write and tell her that we were rather hoping to have additional information that we have not received, I suggest that we write in those terms and say that we were hoping for more information and ask for an explanation as to why we have not had it, if we feel that that is the case. I think that that is a more reasoned approach and it is an approach along the correct lines, given the constitutional arrangements that we, and the Minister, have to abide by.

[338] **Russell George:** I can agree with part of what Joyce has said with regard to asking for an explanation, but I do agree that we should still write in terms of how disappointed we are that she is unable to attend and even, in some form of words, ask her to reconsider that.

[339] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I think that everybody has made their points clear and that is appropriate in this open committee.

12:14

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod**

**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[340] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I suggest that we now go into a private session, because we need to deal with a couple of other issues and we may wish to consider some of the finer details of this letter that there seems to be an agreement that we should send.

[341] I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

[342] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 12:14.
The public part of the meeting ended at 12:14.*