

# CITIZEN LED INSPECTION

FEEDBACK REPORT FOR WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL

## Recycling and Waste Services

January 2019

**INSPECTION TEAM:**

**Ann Pike**

**Peter West**

**REPORT SUBMITTED TO:**

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David Goodenough, Recycling & Waste  
Services Manager

## 1 INTRODUCTION TO FEEDBACK

This feedback report has been produced following an inspection of **Recycling and Waste Services** in West Lothian Council against the Citizen Led Inspection framework and using the framework rating system.

The inspection process took place over a number of days between **September 2018** and **January 2019** and included the following steps:

- Evidence review and site visit planning
- Onsite observation and interviewing
- Consensus on strengths, areas for improvement and scores by the citizen inspection team

The inspection team comprised:

- **Mrs Ann Pike**
- **Mr Peter West**

During the inspection process every effort has been made by the team to ensure that conclusions and feedback are based on fact and are the result of consensus. The team have interviewed approximately **21** people individually or in groups and visited **3** locations.

## 2 KEY STRENGTHS

Recycling and Waste Services has demonstrated good practice/performance in the following areas. . .

- Investment in resources and systems to improve recycling rates.
- Commitment to service delivery by staff at all levels.
- A marked increase in the amount of waste being recycled
- Knowledgeable staff

## 3 KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Recycling and Waste Services requires improvement in the following areas: . . .

- Involvement of citizens when designing, implementing and reviewing new approaches.
- Involvement of citizens when making improvement based on citizens' feedback
- Improved approach to complaint handling overall with linkages being made across services, enabling citizen focussed resolutions that answer multiple issues,
- Improved communication across the service, and understanding of the strategic priorities in relation to the delivery of day to day work plans

- Improved approaches in understanding and dealing with staff perceptions

## 4 RATING

The Citizen Inspection team have rated the service as follows:

CRITERION	RATING (✓)				
	<u>E</u> (Excellent)	<u>G</u> (Good)	<u>A</u> (Adequate)	<u>W</u> (Weak)	<u>U</u> (Unsatisfactory)
1 LEADERSHIP		X			
2 SERVICE PLANNING			X		
3 PEOPLE RESOURCES				X	
4 PARTNERS & OTHER RESOURCES			X		
5 SERVICE PROCESSES			X		
6 CUSTOMER RESULTS			X		
7 KEY RESULTS		X			

## 5 OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICE

### 1 LEADERSHIP

Leaders:

- Identify a clear direction for the service
- Set long-term outcomes
- Are open, honest and accountable
- Put in place scrutiny to challenge performance

- Comprehensive information was provided in the Service Information Pack.
- The overarching aim of 'reducing landfill waste' is the driving force from the R&WS Manager, though not the prime aim at different levels below this. The focus, for example at operative level, is more on their involvement in process.
- Long term outcomes reflect a number of inputs, for example changes in legislation, changes in Council Policy, and changes in current and projected budget positions.
- There is some limitation on the Service's ability to plan for the longer term because of Council structures/constraints (e.g. 4 year temp contracts; length of time for restructuring, first mentioned 10 years ago).
- The R&WS Manager is knowledgeable, very open and helpful with no reason to doubt his honesty. He is accountable and currently being held to account more frequently than the usual cycle.
- Other managers and team leaders were also open, honest and helpful.
- All staff indicated an understanding of the service and their role(s) within it but didn't necessarily share the same overall 'vision.'
- Overall the evaluation of service performance could be improved by key Managers having a greater understanding of the WLAM process and in particular the scoring process. This could improve the ways priority issues are managed without the need for such frequent review meetings. This could also help more effective challenge of the service at all levels and what is driving the key results.
- The impression was given that there is some lack of awareness of discontent at operative level.
- Communication to operatives is weak.
- Process sharing of feedback to and from crews on a daily basis is weak, which contributes to discontent at operative level.
- We evidenced that R&WS Manager wants to be proactive but previous circumstances (pre Whitehill) and current situations (e.g. delay in restructuring, absence rate, fleet issues) force him to be more reactive and, on occasions, 'firefighting.'
- Absence rates within the service are improving. This has been helped by the changes in WLC absence policy. There is further scope for managers to improve how they implement this policy within the service. We noted the service intends to do this as part of the current restructuring. This should help people feel there is fairness in how absence is managed.

- The working environment in the new Whitehill depot is not conducive to effective partnership working. A lot of work went into the design of the building to make people feel equal, but the reality is this is not yet working as planned.

### Recommendations

- Processes for communicating up and down through the service should be reviewed for effectiveness.
- The process for managing the information from daily sheets should be reviewed for effectiveness and efficiency.
- Restructuring should be completed down to operative level.
- Consideration should be given to making the Whitehill Depot a model for partnership working and a healthier working environment.
- The Service should follow through on its plans for better absence management.
- Leaders in the council should be role models for delivering internal recycling strategies.

### Rating: Good

## 2 SERVICE PLANNING

The service:

- Develop clear strategies
  - Has effective annual planning that outlines the key activities
  - Uses reliable tools and methods to engage and consult with customers
  - Sets and meets targets for performance in all the key areas of activity
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- The Service produces strategies and plans to comply with Council priorities and National Legislation, with the aim of delivering an efficient, effective service. These plans are reviewed continuously.
  - There is a lengthy and time consuming process involved in introducing changes to plans.
  - There have been instances of confusion over short/medium term deployment of new approaches being introduced ahead of when the key resources would be in place to make these effective, e.g. introducing new routing before the Whitehill depot was in place. This had led to a spike in complaints on at least a couple of occasions.
  - Changes can sometimes be introduced without adequate information, to help explain the rationale for the change, being given to customers and to staff.
  - Plans can be overturned very rapidly by senior council officials following elected member intervention. This can have a complicated knock on effect on planning, both short and long term, and on staff morale, at all levels.
  - Individual waste management policies were discussed and it was clear there is a passion amongst the team for delivering these policies. However where it was less clear and joined up was where waste collection management aligns

to wider aspects of waste management in relation to (e.g.) improved recycling behaviours, fly-tipping, grounds maintenance.

- Consultation methods target only a small proportion of customers, or are 'reactive' to customer complaints.
- There was clear evidence of detailed planning for when disruptions to waste collection could happen (e.g. severe winter weather) with improvements being planned based on previous experiences. However this is reliant on staff good will to work on (e.g.) bank holidays at Easter, or weekends at Christmas, and when staff morale is low, plans cannot depend on good will, as evidenced over Christmas 2018/New Year 2019
- It was less clear how planning takes place for staff development needs, complaints root cause analysis, and joining up citizen consultations to inform improvements. Complaints and input from councillors appears to be the main pro-active ways citizens' views are used to inform processes and policy improvements.
- Complaints are seen as important but there was less evidence of effective root cause analysis of complaints and of complaint information reaching front line staff to help them improve their interaction with customers
- Customer handling training is being considered but we didn't see evidence that this will definitely happen as a mandatory part of staff development.
- The service should use every opportunity possible (e.g. opening of the new Whitehill Depot) to inform and involve citizens and help educate them on how to help the service meet its outcomes.
- There is a set of targets the service effectiveness is measured against. Some have been exceeded spectacularly, e.g. waste diverted from landfill. Others have targets which are not properly challenging enough.
- There was clear formal performance reporting upwards but it was less clear how performance is effectively reported downwards and the daily/end of shift meetings could be made more effective in this regard.
- Perceptions vary at different levels as to what success for the service looks like. Due to the difference of vision for the service at different levels, performance reporting will appear to some people out of line with their personal performance drivers.
- There was evidence that some targets are not being met because of issues out with the service's control.

## Recommendations

- The service should have greater involvement of both customers and employees in development of business plans and processes to meet strategic aims.
- Consideration should be given across services, e.g. Waste and NETS, to the sharing of daily information regarding waste, litter, fly-tipping, etc.
- The Council should consider how services, including waste management, collaborate to consider root cause analysis of shared issues at household level, thus optimising resources.

- The service impacts on every West Lothian household and consideration should be given to how this could be used as a resource to educate and inform citizens on a wide range of WLC policies and practices, including, but not restricted to waste management.
- Care should be taken to ensure that any changes to policy or process are fully explained to staff and tested with customers before their introduction, including the use of pilots and phased introductions, thus avoiding disproportionate negative public feedback
- Closer attention should be given to root cause analysis of complaints to inform appropriate improvement activities targeting customer satisfaction both a service level and, potentially, at Council level.

**Rating: Adequate**

### 3 PEOPLE RESOURCES

The service:

- Identifies the right people resources it needs to achieve outcomes
  - Sets out desired qualities and acceptable behaviours for staff
  - Reviews and improves individual people's performance
  - Communicates effectively with people
  - Involves people in reviewing and improving the service
- 
- The service is currently undergoing a restructure which has been discussed and planned for the last 10 years.
  - The service will be able to recognise if it has the right people resources only after the restructuring has been completed.
  - The re-structuring does not appear to be going down to operative levels therefore this will have an impact on ensuring the right skills and behaviours are being developed to work effectively within the new structure.
  - The rationale for running with lengthy and multiple temporary contracts is not clear in relation to driving staff motivation and helping deliver the councils aims of going above and beyond for its customers. The rationale and how the policy is to be used does not match to working conditions and therefore is not effective in doing what it was meant to do. (See below)
  - The recruitment of staff for some time has mainly been internal and does not enable or represent a diverse workforce or show the councils ambition to have a diverse workforce.
  - Attempts have been made to develop staff in ways that helps with absence management and disruptions to services but this has not been systematic due to the delayed plans for re-structuring.
  - The service has been somewhat restricted in arriving at the right mix of staff because of WLC recruitment policies (eg some staff has been on temporary contracts for 4 years).
  - The service sets out qualities and behaviours but does not always fully communicate these to all levels of staff in an effective manner.
  - Not all staff have individual reviews.

- Staff at all levels are not fully engaged in reviewing and improving the service on a continuous basis.
- The processes in place that staff are working with are not always focussed on customer improvement and on occasions are seen as tick box exercises.
- The service continues to have a higher absence rate than most other areas of the council. This is improving – there is a new Council absence procedure which is having some impact but needs to be monitored carefully following the re-structure to ensure the plans deliver the improvements the new structure is aiming to do.
- People know what is working and what isn't and need encouraged to play an effective part in changing things for the better. We evidenced a willingness to do this by staff.

### **Recommendations**

- Staff should be made fully aware of how the restructuring will benefit them, and how they can get the most out of the new structure.
- The service needs to reconsider its use of so many extended temporary contracts.
- The service needs to reconsider the reliance on good will of staff to maintain delivery of services at times of disruption.
- Following the restructure, the service should ensure the Council's appraisal strategy is followed.
- The service should involve staff at all levels more in creating improved practices and an improved working environment.
- There should be much more feedback to operatives on how any concerns they have raised or informed (via daily sheets for example) have been processed.
- Existing communication tools should be used more effectively to keep operatives informed.
- How service users who repeatedly do not follow recycling guidelines or perhaps do not fully understand them, reported by operatives, are dealt with should be reviewed to see if an improved approach could be more effective, with positive outcomes more obvious to staff.

**Rating: Weak**



## 4 PARTNERS & OTHER RESOURCES

The service:

- Manages partnerships to add value for the customer
- Manages finances to deliver quality services sustainably
- Uses information and knowledge to support and enhance service delivery
- Uses assets (land, buildings, vehicles and equipment) to optimum effect

- The service has internal and external partners.
- From what we experienced the service works well with external partners to give 'best' value.
- We evidenced good practice of joined up working with internal partners e.g. Corporate Comms. However from what we experienced there are still opportunities to work with internal partners in a more joined up way to add value for customers.
- As this service is the only service to impact every citizen in West Lothian, there must be other opportunities to link up challenges from other services, and, by working together, find customer based solutions, not process based solutions. This could potentially save time and money for the council overall.
- The external environment has a disproportionate impact on the cost of this service and therefore having strong external partnerships with others could help share the burden of this.
- The service's plan is properly costed and meets all budget requirements. External factors, e.g. increased waste disposal costs can impact on sustainability.
- Strategic planning and IT systems appear to be well utilised in supporting delivery. However there is an opportunity to review the systems brought in as part of Whitehill as a 'Super Depot' to ensure the benefits are being realised and utilised fully.
- Relocation to Whitehill has improved some aspects of delivery over the Deans depot. However some facilities are still not fully commissioned, e.g. waste transfer station.
- Possible safety issues will emerge as this process continues, e.g. waste transfer station floor.
- Some staff do not like the management of the new depot or its facilities and 'ambience.'
- Recycling & Waste Management staff suggested that some HWRC sites are not fit for purpose and may be unsafe. Such facilities need to be reviewed to ensure they are effective and fit for purpose to maintain a safe and usable environment for staff and the public, e.g. Linlithgow HWRC site
- Difficulties with provision by internal partners can impact on efficiency, e.g. fleet issues mean that vehicles are not always suitable or available for use.
- There is a great source of information being brought back from customers indirectly and directly as a result of some key resources that have been put in place i.e. daily sheets and phones. These sources of information could be used better for optimum effect.

- The move to have fleet and waste under 1 manager should bring about improved management of resources and delivery of services.
- The buildings and equipment in place as a result of operating from Whitehill could benefit for a review involving staff to improve efficiency and effectiveness of this 'super depot.'

**Recommendations**

- There should be a comprehensive review of the planned benefits of the move to Whitehill.
- Given the decision to retain the 5 existing HWRC sites, health and safety issues need to be reconsidered.

**Rating: Adequate**

**5 SERVICE PROCESSES**

The service:

- Designs processes to meet the needs of customers
- Ensures processes are efficient and effective
- Delivers services to customers in the way they want
- Reviews the efficiency and effectiveness of processes
- Uses customer feedback as part of the review process

- Processes are designed to improve re-cycling and meet budget reductions not but it was not always obvious how this was done with the customer in mind.
- What the customer needs and what the customer wants are not always the same.
- Complaints arise because the customer does not always get what the customer wants or thinks they should get.
- There is a definite lack of customer education and awareness of their role and responsibility in waste management.
- Perceptions of what the customer is paying for by way of council tax lags the reality of what was agreed in the consultation 'Transforming Your Council'.
- If customers are not constantly reminded/educated about the changes that are coming up the track for waste, this will have an on-going impact on complaints and potentially overturning key decisions needed to save the necessary budget targets.
- There are recent changes taking place to help educate the customers around 'why' things are done the way they are, and educating call handlers appears to be helping the customer experience on the phone. It is also leading to informed notifications being posted on WLC website and media communications.
- Some evidence exists that budget restrictions limit the extent to which processes can meet the needs of all customers (e.g. vehicle size too large for some areas, but smaller vehicles would incur higher costs). This gave the impression that costs/savings often impact on customer satisfaction.

- The Service – as evidenced by employees at all levels - certainly aims to be efficient and effective.
- The main customer ‘feedback’ is complaints. The service considers these in developing or changing processes.
- Levels of customer satisfaction are measured through traditional council wide mechanisms but for this service it is based on very small samples.

**Recommendations**

- The service and the wider Council needs to better manage customer expectations, particularly at a time of budget constraints.
- The service should continue to constantly review efficiency and effectiveness of processes.
- The service should consider how it can increase its customer sample size to help inform appropriate change.

**Rating: Adequate**

**6 CUSTOMER RESULTS**

The service:

- Are measuring the right thing(s) in relation to customer results and what is important to the customer
- Can show positive and sustained good performance over a period of 3 or more years
- Have set and met challenging targets
- Compare their own performance against performance leaders in other councils or organisations
- Can explain any dips in their performance or positive changes

- There remains a disconnect between what is important to many customers and what should be important to them in relation to the strategic aims of the service. This has an impact on customer results.
- Most targets and results shown were based on small samples and their statistical significance must be viewed with caution.
- Any changes made to the service as a result of current customer results may not be appropriate.
- The service deals with customer enquiries and complaints efficiently.

**Recommendations**

- The service should consider ways of gathering real time customer perceptions.
- The service should consider what internal indicators should be set for managing the resolution of customer enquiries and tasks raised via daily sheets.

**Rating: Adequate**

## 7 KEY PERFORMANCE RESULTS

The service:

- Are measuring the right thing(s) in relation to the key activities and the long-term outcomes
- Can show positive and sustained good performance over a period of 3 or more years
- Have set and met challenging targets
- Compare their own performance against performance leaders in other councils or organisations
- Can explain any dips in their performance or positive changes

- Measurements of e.g. waste being recycled, waste diverted from landfill, cost per household of waste disposal, waste collection effectiveness, etc. all help inform process management.
- Recycling rates show an improving trend over the last 3 years, with the rate of 61.3% in 2017/18 exceeding the target for the first time. All year's show a favourable performance against the benchmark.
- Most key targets are being met, though not all of these are benchmarked.
- There are spikes in the target for missed bins, particularly in Q4 2017/18 and Q1 2018/19. Some reasons given for this (weather and fleet issues) were out with the service's control. Service plans for managing this were in part overruled.
- Targets should be adjusted to take account of changing circumstances, e.g. Cost of refuse collection service per household target should have been reduced to take account of the introduction of the new transfer station.

### Recommendations

- The service should consider the positive impact on key results by signing up to the Scottish Waste Charter.

**Rating: Good**

## 6 REVIEW DATE

The Citizen Inspection team will return to the service between 6 – 12 months from January 2019 to review the progress in the areas identified for improvement.