

Leading on resource efficiency

The Welsh Government administers legislative requirements for environmental protection across Wales, so when it was offered advice from WRAP to assess and improve on its own systems, it was keen to take advantage of the support.



Self-service at the main restaurant at Cathays Park

Resource efficiencies in facilities management

Introduction

The Welsh Government employs around 5,500 staff, and provides catering services at 10 of its 38 locations. In 2012, WRAP undertook a Resource Optimisation Review to identify the opportunities for improving resource efficiency, and advised on tender document wording for the All Wales Catering Contract.

The Welsh Government aims to exemplify the high standards it expects of others. This involves taking the lead on efforts to prevent and reduce waste. As well as the environmental benefits of reducing waste, this means achieving value for money for the public purse. Signing up for these schemes clearly demonstrates that the Welsh Government is committed to the process of improvement.

The review took place at the Cathays Park office in Cardiff. Around 2,500 people work there, with an additional 250 visitors arriving each day. Catering services on site include a main restaurant and three coffee bar facilities. Options range from a hot food offer and a deli bar to pre-packed sandwiches and a barista style coffee offer. The four facilities oversee 562,000 combined transactions each year, with total sales of approximately £5.5 million.

Food Waste

At 15.2 tonnes per year, the WRAP review quickly identified plate waste as the most significant source of food waste, with another 3.5 tonnes generated from production and out of date or unused food.

The review suggested that the issue was mainly due to staff helping themselves to larger amounts of self-service items, such as salad or vegetables, than they were actually able to eat.

WRAP proposed that food portions should be controlled by providing smaller scoops or ladles, educating staff on the issues around food waste, and relocating self-service areas to allow people to return for second helpings.

It also recommended that food waste returned on trays should be sent for anaerobic digestion rather than being disposed of to sewer through the on-site macerator. This would cost nothing to implement but would result in a saving of more than 16 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent and costs savings of over £3,600 per year.

A big plate can give the appearance of not having much on it, so the Facilities Management team are standardizing the style and size of plates and also looking at the suggestion of using smaller serving spoons. In addition, the catering staff now make reductions and offer special deals on a Friday to try to sell items that are approaching sell-by dates.

Welsh Government appointed Eurest as the provider for the All Wales Catering Contract. The company has developed the 'Trim Trax'¹ system, designed to measure and monitor food waste. An important element is to 'track, measure and minimise food waste at site level, giving front line employees the tools, perspective and ownership that they need to 'trim' and 'track' food waste during the production process.'

Volumes of waste generated from production wastage, over production wastage and unused or out-of-date waste are measured by placing the waste in a Trim Trax container to gauge its volume. The weekly total for each of the three waste sources is then entered into a database, which generates a profile of wastage.

According to Trim Trax, waste generated through overproduction was minimal, with general production waste amounting to 35.7 per cent of food waste. However, the WRAP review highlighted that plate waste was excluded from the system and suggested that monitoring be expanded to include all food waste produced on site.

Key Actions

- Divert food waste to anaerobic digestion, with energy recovery;
- Adapt serving systems to reduce food waste;
- Improve monitoring systems to generate accurate picture of levels of food waste generated;
- Update tender documentation to demonstrate commitment to resource efficiency.

Packaging

The WRAP review identified the site as exemplary at bulk ordering. Ordering of produce takes place three days ahead of production, with chefs employing the Eurest Source online recipe-planning tool. As a result, deliveries are kept to a minimum and intermediate packaging is curtailed.

Where possible, suppliers are encouraged to deliver in returnable packaging - vegetables arrive in re-usable cages, while milk comes in returnable crates. Waste vegetable oil is sent back to the supplier, Brakes, in 20-litre containers for processing into bio-diesel. On delivery, roll cages are immediately taken to stores, checked, decanted and returned to suppliers.

Key Benefits

- Realise cost savings;
- Reduce carbon emissions;
- Generate accurate figures to assist in monitoring and track improvement



Milk delivered in returnable trays

However, disposable packaging still made up an estimated 1.7 tonnes, offering a significant opportunity to improve resource efficiency. Eliminating disposable packaging from landfill was estimated to represent a carbon saving of more than 2.7 tonnes per year, with cost savings of £3,064.



Used oil returned in container

Cup for Life

Among the disposable packaging purchased with catering products, 122,720 disposable cups - 1,373kg - were thrown away by staff every year. To address this, the Welsh Government introduced a 15p levy on each purchase. Staff were spending around £26,000 on disposable cups. The Facilities Management Team were keen to reduce the number of cups being used and also, where they were being used, to improve on the number of people recycling them rather than putting them into landfill waste.

The Facilities Management team launched an initiative called A Cup for Life, offering staff re-usable cups free of charge. Anyone not using them to purchase a drink must pay 15p more for a disposable cup.

The introduction of the Cup for Life scheme was publicised with a launch day.

Staff set up tables in the restaurant area and produced posters. They gave out the cups, explaining how important it is to use them. They also included messages emphasising that if staff choose not to use them, they should recycle the disposable cups. New cup recycling bins were procured and located next to plastic bins, to make it easy for people to place the plastic lids in one bin and the actual cup in another.

Contract Advice

The resource optimisation advice arrived at an opportune time: The Facilities Management team were about to start retendering catering services so they signed up to take this onboard for any future catering contract arrangement. It helped the team to pull everything together in one succinct specification which will continue to evolve through the life of the contract.

One of the most notable features of the WRAP advice was the suggestion to give potential contractors the opportunity to be creative, asking for their solutions to maintaining choice while minimising food waste. They were also expected to identify opportunities to affect both service improvements and cost saving initiatives.

This was one of the key questions put into the tender evaluation process, and led to some interesting proposals. For example, they might only guarantee 70 per cent of the choice for the last half hour of service rather than offering the full service throughout the whole day.

Typically, food waste comprises between 20 and 50 per cent of waste generated through catering operations, while at least 60 per cent of this is avoidable. With the wholesale value of food waste estimated at £1,900 and 3.9 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent emissions created in the

production, distribution and disposal of one tonne of wasted food and drink, reducing food waste offers a major opportunity to impact

▫ Percentage reduction in energy use, set against the number of covers served.

on the environment while simultaneously making cost savings. In addition to asking contractors to reduce food and packaging waste generated from single-serving portion packs, they were also required to report on resource efficiency activities to demonstrate improved performance.

The Welsh Government Facilities Management Team see KPIs as an integral part of the management of the contract, indicating whether or not the contractor is delivering against the specification.

WRAP provided wording to direct contractors in producing a Resource Management Plan. The plan was required to include actions including baseline forecasts of food and packaging waste arisings, and estimated levels of re-use, composting or anaerobic digestion, and disposal to landfill. It called for initiatives to reduce consumption and increase recycling, demonstrable cost savings, and details of systems for recording and monitoring data.

The team believes it is important that KPIs evolve throughout the life of the contract, and they help to defend against complacency.

With the new contract in place in 2014, the Welsh Government Facilities Management Team is looking forward to seeing improvement across its catering service. WRAP have helped the team to gain a better insight and to deliver a suitable approach that puts the organisation in a better place to minimise the amount of food waste it generates.

In addition to the initiatives highlighted in the Resource Management Plan, the Welsh Government included a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), to be reported monthly and supported by data from waste service providers, suppliers and utility metering.

These included:

- Quantity of food waste and food packaging waste;
- Percentage of food waste and food packaging sent to landfill;
- Percentage reduction in water use; and,

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