



Bron Afon Housing Association *Torfaen*

How a social housing organisation is winning the waste war through collaborative working

Bron Afon Housing Association is a social enterprise operating in Torfaen, south Wales holding housing stock of 8,300 rental and 900 leasehold properties.

One of the biggest employers in Torfaen employing approximately 500 people, the organisation was established in March 2008 following stock transfer from the local authority. The organisation is dedicated to ensuring every tenant has a voice, they have over 1800 members consisting of tenants and residents in Torfaen who actively participate in Bron Afon and help to shape delivery and services. As one of the largest community mutual and cooperatives in the country, any profits are cascaded back into the local area adding further value, securing jobs and offering opportunities.

Bron Afon works intensively to meet Welsh Housing Quality Standards and carry out approximately 25 refits and renovations to their properties each week - this includes completely renewing kitchens and bathrooms along with upgrading central heating and electrical systems. Managing and maintaining a significant number of properties bring its own set of challenges and the organisation deals with the recovery and refurbishment of approximately 700 void properties every year.

PROJECT DETAILS

Sector leading social housing association managing wastes and helping local community.

Best practice themes:

- Recycling, reuse and diversion of construction wastes

Type of Material:

- Construction and mixed waste



PROJECT TEAM

Client: Bron Afon Housing Association - David Smith, Logistics Manager

KEY CONTACTS

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A void is a property that does not have a current tenant, tenants leave their homes for many reasons, they could be moving on to a smaller home due to the recent bedroom tax changes or others changes in circumstances, they may be moving into retirement homes or back with family. When a property becomes void as landlord Bron Afon has a statutory duty to carryout certain checks and repairs before a new tenant can move in.

Refurbishing a property in between tenancy is a great opportunity to make improvements, install contemporary and more efficient systems and to bring a property up to expected standards ready for the new tenants.

However, the renovation job doesn't finish when a new kitchen and bathroom is fitted - the job for Bron Afon continues as the organisation has the obligation to responsibly dispose of old fixtures, fittings and often abandoned personal possessions - from wardrobes to wool blankets, cots to clothing rails - these items need to be removed from a property before maintenance and refurbishment can begin.

David Smith Logistics Manager at Bron Afon leads a small dedicated team based at Forge Hammer Industrial Estate in Cwmbran, Torfaen. The team manage all kinds of waste derived from void properties and general maintenance carried out by the Bron Afon services team. Operating since September 2013 the recycling team accept, segregate and reuse or recycle disparate waste streams including decommissioned boilers, wood waste, cardboards, plastics and glass.

Dave is an experienced building contractor and project manager, used to getting results and negotiating to ensure maximum benefits for all parties.

When people move to new properties they often leave behind personal belongings and in today's society hoarding is prevalent which sometimes results in huge amount of household items left behind, for disposal, in void properties.

Often the Bron Afon 'Decluttering Co-ordinator' will help tenants to organise their property and dispose of unwanted belongings to help them improve their current living conditions, the de-cluttering team will also provide help to tenants before they move home. Working closely with Tenant Liasion Officers, the team quickly establish where waste arisings will occur and where wastes can be diverted for reuse.

Local charities TRAC 2 and Groundforce are an integral part of the group - collecting unwanted items and arranging for distribution and sale through a network or charity shops. There is a strong shared goal of environmental improvement and community assistance, an ethos of team work where colleagues work together to solve problems.

TRAC 2 consists mainly of volunteers, many of whom are young unemployed people who actively participate in the charity shop and food bank service that TRAC 2 provides to local residents in Torfaen.





The amount of waste received, reused or recycled is startling - from September 2013 to August 2014 Bron Afon collected 560 tonnes of mixed waste and 246 tonnes of wood waste. They processed over 80 tonnes of scrap which generated an income of over £35k.

Many household items can be reused by those in need; the team ensure all items are good quality and are safe to be reused. Electrical items in working order are PAT tested and reused where possible but if the item is beyond repair, specialist volunteers will strip the item by separating the components which are then sold to a scrap merchant. On occasions items such as jewellery, watches and collectables are left in void properties these are always given to TRAC 2 who will either sell the items through the shop or via ebay, any money generated from these sales is used to fund outdoor activities for families in need or to assist with buying essential items such as school uniforms.

Even the smallest consumable is reused - soap powder left behind at empty properties is collected into a large drum and then used to launder unwanted bedding and blankets which are distributed to those who need them.

Working alongside Dave Smith, a very small team manage this crucial function for the housing association including Faye Brand who works full-time but is salaried for only part of her role. Faye explains:

“I relocated to Torfaen following a move back from mainland Europe. I wasn’t well at the time and I didn’t have a permanent home, belongings or employment.

I became a tenant member of Bron Afon Housing Association and things started to come together for me and my children. I was so grateful for all the help and support I received, I began to volunteer

for the Association and when a part time job came up at the recycling centre, I jumped at the chance to get involved.

There is so much work to do that I work at the centre nearly full time hours but volunteer for part of the time, I feel like I’m helping with a very worthy cause and when you see how much waste we have diverted from landfill and the families that we have helped – that is reward enough”.

Faye’s passion is shared by all involved in the recycling project and across Bron Afon. Volunteering is an accepted philosophy with tenant volunteers being a huge and useful resource linking tenants or members with the management of the housing association, volunteers also run job clubs, CV writing workshops and offer counselling.

The Association regularly offers placement opportunities to those not in education, employment or training and to young people considering apprenticeships.

The recycling centre is a superb example of collaboration and innovation in action - Bron Afon Housing Association, a successful commercial organisation has created an exceptional facility with principles founded on the circular economy theory.

Dave and the team ensure that no useful items are committed to landfill and wherever possible items with good wear remaining are allocated to the charities to be shared with local residents across Torfaen.

Scores of families have been helped and hundreds of tonnes of waste diverted from landfill. Bron Afon’s responsibility to care for their properties, their tenant members and their waste materials is an impressive example of best practice and a demonstration of the work that a small team can achieve.