

Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director for Place

Report to:	Executive
Date:	2 June 2021
Subject:	Household Waste Recycling Centre Operation
Decision Reference:	n/a
Key decision?	n/a

Summary:

This Report seeks to inform the Executive about the use of a booking system at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to provide comments prior to a decision as to whether the system should remain in future.

Recommendation(s):

That the Executive considers the issues and provides guidance on any future changes to the operation of Household Waste Recycling Centres to be considered by the Executive Councillor for Waste and Trading Standards.

Alternatives Considered:

1.	NA
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Reasons for Recommendation:

To establish the future aspirations of the Executive in relation to HWRC operation.

1. Background

The government lockdown in March 2020 and associated restrictions on essential travel due to the Covid pandemic had a consequence of HWRCs closing. Guidance on what services could operate was ambiguous and clarity was eventually received in May to provide confidence that HWRCs could be safely re-opened under social distancing rules. In the following weeks LCC

worked closely with the site contractors, container haulage company and material end processors to establish how the HWRCs could become operational again. The three main issues which were discussed were:

1. How to manage the number of people on site at any one time, to ensure social distancing.
2. How to enable the site containers to be supervised and managed to enable social distancing whilst preventing contamination of material bins and containers.
3. How to guarantee the material could be processed once removed from HWRCs as the rules on the handling of waste was unclear.

Once issues 2 and 3 were satisfied regarding the handling of waste, it was agreed that a booking system would be the best method of controlling residents' access to sites. It requires visitors to book online or via the telephone in advance and provides access during a 15 minute booking slot. Additionally, the booking system provided a record of who had been on site and the ability for contractors to plan for and manage the flow of waste onsite.

Other restrictions were initially introduced to assist with site management, namely:

- A restriction on waste types on specific days. This was later gradually removed as sites became more manageable and material end processors re-opened business, thus enabling public complaints on waste acceptance to be addressed.
- Vans and trailers limited with a permit required to allow a maximum of 12 visits per year. This was introduced in an effort to deter trade waste and also restrict unloading times.

It should be noted that the HWRC booking system was only ever intended to be a temporary measure and has been regularly reviewed and refined throughout this challenging period. Nationally, there has been little consistency by Local Authorities. A minority remained open throughout, some remained closed for a much more substantial period, most, introduced a booking system of some form.

Costs

The HWRCs were closed for approximately 6 weeks during April/May 2021 so the opening hours are not completely comparable, however there is a significant reduction in the total amount of material delivered during the period of the booking system. The table below shows the total HWRC material and kerbside collected material for the last 2 years as a comparison:

	HWRC (tonnes)	Kerbside (tonnes)	Total (tonnes)
2019/20	71,450	275,778	347,228
2020/21	24,558	294,405	318,963

There is a significant decrease of 46,892 tonnes through the HWRCs with an increase of 18,627 in kerbside material and overall there is a decrease of 28,265 tonnes (8%).

During the same period, fly-tipping has increased from 881 tonnes to 1,277 tonnes.

There are several possible reasons for this reduction in HWRC waste which could include:

- People may not have been visiting HWRCs due to Covid concerns with more material remaining in the kerbside stream.
- Trade waste may not be presented due to the need to register on the booking system. Trade waste was always a problem under the previous system but was very difficult to enforce as visits could be unregistered. Local waste managers have reported significant increases in trade waste business from the private sector whilst the booking system has been operating.
- The public may be producing less waste during the pandemic. Due to fewer purchases.
- The public may be hiring skips to dispose of material. Waste management businesses are reporting a significant increase in skip hire and general increase in business from the public.

This reduction in waste presented has the effect of reducing the haulage and disposal cost which is estimated to be circa £900k. However it must be borne in mind that this did not include a 6 week closure period, however the cost saving is still significant.

Creating the HWRC booking system has been resource intensive, including several teams, working together to constantly refine and develop the process to be as simple as possible. It has not been possible to easily quantify this resource cost, however it has, at times, required almost daily attention and the staff time required in future maintenance of the booking system is estimated to be at least 8 hours every week. Additionally, there have been associated costs within the CSC, processing of complaints, digital team (Jadu) and Waste Management Team.

Complaints

The number of complaints received in 2020/21 was 282 compared to 5 for the whole of 2019/20 (Appendix A). The breakdown of complaints are as follows:

- Booking system 58%
- Staff conduct 22%
- Waste type restrictions 14%
- Permit requirement 6%

It is acknowledged that prior to the changes introduced within the Service as a direct result of Covid-19 measures, Waste traditionally experienced a very low

number of complaints. Since the booking system became operational there have been over 600,000 bookings in a 14 month period with 96% of transactions being self-service on-line. Complaint numbers are a considerable increase, however there are many examples of visitors expressing a positive opinion of the booking system. Anecdotally, many have stated that visits are faster and in a less stressful environment where the public have appreciated the "safety" assured to them onsite. Queuing does not occur outside of the sites as was previously experienced during peak hours. Some sites have previously had to be closed when queues back onto the public highway have created a safety hazard. It should be noted that the large majority of complaints that have been in relation to the booking system were directly related to the decision to limit waste types to different days. This position, whilst reviewed regularly, remained in place and once lifted, was universally welcomed by residents.

In a recent small survey of 4 HWRCs, 50 people were asked for an opinion of whether they preferred the booking system or the previous uncontrolled system. 87% stated that they preferred the booking system.

Fly-Tipping

There has been an increase in fly-tipping from 881 tonnes to 1,277 tonnes but this is insignificant compared to the 46,892 tonnes decrease in HWRC material. However there is still a perception that the initial closure of the HWRCs and re-opening under restrictions has led to an increase in fly-tipping incidents. This assumes that residents who don't want to make a booking will act illegally and is difficult to imagine that law abiding residents will act in that way. In any event it is a theory which is difficult to prove unless more fly-tippers are caught. There has been an increase in industrial scale fly-tipping where bulk trucks have disposed of material on remote country roads and this type of material would not be appropriate for acceptance at HWRCs.

It must be noted that there are still complaints from residents that fly-tipping is caused by HWRC restrictions, but fly-tipping has always been a problem even when HWRCs allowed unrestricted access. If there is a return to the old system, fly-tipping will probably still be an issue. It should also be noted that there is more of a concerted approach to addressing fly-tipping with all stake holders and there is a clear drive to increase penalties for such offences on a national level.

National Approach

Many other authorities have introduced booking systems are looking to continue with its usage on a permanent basis. The benefits are that it allows a safer environment for disposal. It also requires residents to be more mindful of how they dispose of material as they have to plan visits to stick to the time restrictions. Site plans have now been produced and are available online to show locations of the different waste containers to enable residents to better plan their visits. This whole approach should help with our ambition of having material separated correctly to increase recycling rates and reduce contamination which should ultimately obtain a better price from material end processors.

Future Consequences

If there is a return to the uncontrolled access to sites there could be a backlash from the public who currently support the booking system. Some of the early complaints about the closure and restrictions may have been justified but as the sites have lifted some waste acceptance restrictions and simplified the booking system complaints may be subsiding. It was only as recent as March 2021 when we allowed all waste on all days.

A return to unrestricted access may increase queues at sites during peak periods and sites may have to be closed as they have been in the past. This has not happened once under the booking system.

There may also be an increase in trade waste if controls are lifted and we unwittingly dispose of commercial material which should not be part of the municipal waste stream at tax payers' expense.

Contractors Feedback

The external contractors who staff and manage the sites are in support of the booking system for the reasons stated in this report. They have also confirmed that the sites have fewer health and safety issues. For several years there have been an increase in reported health and safety issues at HWRCs by our internal audit team and the Health and Safety Executive. The contractors are also reporting fewer visitors from out of county as the booking system requires an address check for Lincolnshire residents.

2. Legal Issues:

Equality Act 2010

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.

Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

The duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the decision-maker. To discharge the statutory duty the decision-maker must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision making process.

The Council's Equality Act duties will be taken into account in any final decision as to the future of the HWRC booking system. Overall it is considered that the booking system may benefit people with limited mobility as it reduces the number of people on site at any one time. Uncontrolled access may be of benefit for groups for whom English is not a first language as it eliminates the requirement to book.

Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council must have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health & Well Being Strategy (JHWS) in coming to a decision.

The JSNA and JHWS will be considered in any future decision on the future operation of the HWRC sites

Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting

the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

Crime and disorder matters will be considered in any future decision on the future operation of the HWRC sites. Relevant to this will be an assessment of the impact of the booking system on fly tipping.

3. Conclusion

As the country emerges from Covid-19 lockdown a decision is required on the future operation of the HWRC sites including the booking system which was introduced as a means of managing safety at the Council's HWRC sites during the pandemic.

This Report sets out the issues relating to the sites and particularly the system and its future and invites the Executive to comment on the issues in order to inform a future decision by the Executive Councillor for Waste and Trading Standards

4. Legal Comments:

The Report sets out the issues relating to the operation of and the booking system for Household Waste Recycling Centres and invites comments from the Executive to inform a future decision by the Executive Councillor for Waste and Trading Standards.

The Report does not in itself call for a decision from the Executive.

The Council has a statutory duty under section 51 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to provide places at which persons resident in its area can deposit their household waste. It is for the Council to determine how best to manage and operate the sites provided.

5. Resource Comments:

It is difficult to isolate the increase in on-going costs caused by the current booking system with many of them representing opportunity cost rather than additional resource requirement. However, the current cost of processing "click and tip" calls through the Customer Service Centre (CSC) is known to be around £8,000 per month and the cost of staff time estimated at £1,000 per month. Although the implementation of a booking system is likely to be only one of the factors that has contributed to the reduced volume of waste being presented at HWRCs, the estimated saving in haulage and processing costs of £900,000 p.a far exceeds the on-going cost of the booking arrangements.

6. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

No

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

The Report has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee

d) Risks and Impact Analysis

NA

7. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	HWRC Annual Complaints

8. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Mike Reed, who can be contacted on 07557 169890 or mike.reed@lincolnshire.gov.uk.