
Introduction of Digital HWRC Permits

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	22 November 2021
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter
Date Head of Service agreed report:	11 November 2021
Report Author:	Kofi Adu-Gyamfi
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4160

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report aims to:

- (a) set out the proposal to introduce a digital permit system to replace the existing paper-based system used by residents to access the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs);
- (b) Flag potential benefits, risks and issues identified for the project; and
- (c) Recommend that approval is granted to the proposal to introduce digital permits.

2 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Executive Member for the Environment grants approval to the proposal to introduce digital permits to manage access to the Council's HWRCs.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The project has been funded using the Waste team's existing capital and revenue budgets. No new funding is required.</p> <p>The project will help the Council to make financial savings over time compared to the continued use of paper permits. The digital permit system will cost a total of £47k to implement, with c. £4k in annual maintenance and technical support costs. The existing paper permit system will cost in excess of £40k to replace on a like-for-like basis, together with ongoing annual costs of c. £4k. The main difference in costs between the two</p>

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	<p>options, is that the c. £40k expenditure for the paper permits will need to be incurred every 4 years.</p> <p><i>Unlike the paper permit system, the digital permit system does not need to be replaced every 4 years, so this will result in financial savings. The digital permit system will also help to save an estimated 200 hours of Council officer time each year which could be used more productively on waste enforcement and minimisation.</i></p> <p><i>(NB: these figures exclude costs associated with Council staff time).</i></p>			
Human Resource:	Not applicable.			
Legal:	Not applicable.			
Risk Management:	Selected key risks and identified mitigations have been covered under Section 5.12.			
Property:	Not applicable.			
Policy:	The proposal to change to digital permits will help avoid the use of paper and ink to print and post thousands of paper permits to residents each year as is being done currently. The proposed change will be consistent with the ambitions set out in the Council's Environment Strategy including achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				

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<p>A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p>		√		<p>No potential impacts on individuals with protected characteristics are anticipated. The digital permits are intended to replicate what the existing paper permit system does and will be available to all interested residents. Residents without access to the internet or a suitable technology device will be provided help by Council officers on the phone to register for the service.</p>
<p>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p>		√		<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>Environmental Impact:</p>	√			<p>The project will have a positive impact on the environment. It will help the Council to avoid printing and mailing out thousands of paper permits to residents on an ongoing basis.</p>
<p>Health Impact:</p>		√		<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>ICT Impact:</p>		√		<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>Digital Services Impact:</p>	√			<p>This change will introduce efficiencies for residents and the Council. Residents can register their vehicle details and receive confirmation of their digital permit within a few minutes, instead of having to wait for several days to receive a paper permit under the existing system.</p>

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<p>Council Strategy Priorities:</p>	<p>√</p>			<p>The proposed change will result in avoidance of paper and ink usage. This will make a small but important contribution to the continued journey towards achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030, as set out in the Council's Environment Strategy.</p>
<p>Core Business:</p>	<p>√</p>			<p>The proposed change will have a positive impact on the Council's core business. It will help to deliver on the following Council priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Support everyone to reach their full potential</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8) <i>Help people to help themselves and others.</i> • <i>Ensure Sustainable services through innovation and partnerships</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22) <i>Use data to better understand our services' beneficiaries to improve the way we interact with them and the services we provide.</i>
<p>Data Impact:</p>		<p>√</p>		<p>Appropriate controls are in place to ensure that resident data is managed in line with applicable data and privacy legislation. The relevant Privacy Notice for the proposed digital permit system has been enclosed at Appendix A.</p>

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Various stakeholders have been engaged to help us develop these proposals and mitigate potential risks. Selected stakeholder engagement activities have been outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular and ongoing: Executive Member briefings;• November 2020: Customer First Projects Group attendance;• January 2020 - January 2021: Engagement with Hampshire County Council (HCC) for knowledge sharing purposes. <i>HCC have been using a similar digital permit system for their HWRC facilities;</i>• 26 April 2021: Environment Audit Group attendance;• 29 April 2021: Environment Board attendance; and• 01 October 2021: Briefing of the Council's Liberal Democrat Group.
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4 Executive Summary

The Council owns two HWRCs which are located at Newtown Road in Newbury and Padworth Lane, in Padworth. These facilities are operated on the Council's behalf by the waste PFI contractor, Veolia Environmental Services ("Veolia"). The Council introduced the paper-based HWRC permit system in 2016, to ensure that only residents of West Berkshire District area could access the sites. Another key objective was to deter abuse by rogue traders who might want to deposit commercial and industrial waste at the sites without incurring any costs.

The paper permits are typically valid for 4 years and have to be replaced thereafter. Most of the existing paper permits expired in September 2020 but they have continued to be accepted at the HWRCs whilst the Council developed a new approach for managing site access.

The digital permit system has been identified as the most suitable option to manage site access for the Council's residents in an efficient and value for money way.

Key Drivers and Benefits: the key drivers and benefits associated with the introduction of the digital HWRC permits include:

- a. The existing paper permits have expired, even though they continue to be accepted by the Council as being valid for site access. Digital permits will improve the customer experience and ensure that they receive confirmation of their permits within minutes of registration, compared with waiting for several days to receive a paper permit under the existing approach;

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- b. Digital permits will help to continue and improve the prevention of the illegal deposit of commercial or trade waste at the HWRCs;
- c. The change to digital permits will contribute to the ongoing drive for improved digital engagement and customer services by the Council. This is made even more important due to the covid pandemic and the logistic difficulties associated with printing and mailing thousands of paper permits;
- d. It is estimated that about 200 hours of the Council's Waste team's staff time is spent administering the paper permit system each year. If we move to digital permits, the savings in officer time can be used to prioritise other work priorities such as assisting vulnerable residents with their queries or enforcing against fly-tipping. A small cost saving would be realised compared with the ongoing use of the paper permits; and
- e. The proposal to switch to digital permits is also driven by the Council's priority to maintain a green district. It will help to minimise local environment impacts through reduced usage of paper and ink. Additionally, the change will help deliver sustainable services through innovation and partnerships expanding our partnership with Veolia to improve the service we provide to residents.

It is recommended that approval is granted for the introduction of digital HWRC permits from 30 November 2021.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 This report sets out proposals to introduce digital permits for residents' access to the Council's HWRCs.

Background

5.2 The Council owns two HWRCs which are located at Newtown Road in Newbury and Padworth near Reading. These facilities are operated on the Council's behalf by the waste PFI contractor, Veolia Environmental Services ("Veolia").

5.3 The Council introduced the existing paper-based HWRC permit system in 2016, to ensure that only residents of West Berkshire District area could access the sites. Another key objective was to deter abuse by rogue traders who might want to deposit commercial and industrial waste at the sites without incurring any costs.

5.4 About 65,972 paper permits were issued at the beginning of the scheme in 2016. Since then, an average of approximately 3,700 permits have been sent out by the Council each year to replace lost or damaged permits, or to householders moving into new properties within the District. The current process involves considerable administration and staff time to review applications, and arrange printing and mailing of paper permits to householders. It is estimated that about 200 hours of the Council's waste team's staff time is spent administering the paper permit system each year. If we move to digital permits, the savings in officer time can be used to prioritise other work priorities such as assisting vulnerable residents with their queries or enforcing against fly-tipping.

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- 5.5 The paper permits are typically valid for 4 years and have to be replaced thereafter. Most of the existing paper permits expired in September 2020 but they have continued to be accepted at the HWRCs whilst the Council developed a new approach for managing site access.
- 5.6 The digital permit system has been identified as the most suitable option to manage site access for the Council's residents in an efficient and value for money way. The benefits of the proposed digital system include the fact that residents can register their vehicle details online and receive confirmation of the digital permit within a few minutes. That is an improved customer journey compared to the current approach where the resident will have to wait for several days for the Council to review the application and then post a printed paper permit to the residents.

Proposals

- 5.7 Under the proposed option, each household within the Council area can register their details and obtain digital permits for up to 3 cars or 1 commercial-type vehicle. Residents can register for themselves by first creating a *My Account* profile on the Council's website. The Council will also provide assistance on the phone to residents who do not have access to internet facilities or digital devices, so that they can register their vehicle details.
- 5.8 Validated vehicle registration numbers will then be shared with an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system. This will ensure that the ANPR equipment installed at the entrance to the two HWRCs can detect registered vehicles and facilitate access. Vehicles which are not registered for digital permits will not be recognised by the ANPR equipment and an alert (i.e. beep sound) will be sent to site operatives who will then approach the vehicle occupant and provide required assistance.
- 5.9 Registering for the digital permits would be a relatively quick and straight-forward process (requiring less than 3 minutes after a resident has signed up for a My Account profile). After the initial registration, householders can easily amend their vehicle details including deleting vehicles they no longer own or adding new vehicles to their account. An infographic summary of the registration process has been shown under Appendix B.
- 5.10 The digital permit system will open for registration to residents from Tuesday 30 November 2021, subject to successful approval of these proposals by the Council's Executive Member for the Environment. The intention is to allow a three-month "soft launch" period during which the Council and contractor's site operatives will encourage residents wishing to visit the sites to register for the digital permits. We are mindful that process changes may require some time for residents to fully adapt to them. Therefore, site staff have been trained to provide required assistance to residents who show up at the sites with a valid booking but without having registered for a digital permit. Assistance could include allowing the resident to park in a designated bay to complete their registration and giving them a leaflet which explains the process. After the initial three-month period of the digital permit registrations (i.e. after 28 February 2022), site staff will no longer allow vehicles owners without a digital permit to access the site.
- 5.11 It is important to note that the digital permit system is not intended to replace the need for residents to book an appointment online before they visit the sites. Residents who

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have registered for the digital permits will still need to book an appointment before they visit the HWRC facilities.

5.12 Selected Risks and Mitigations: as discussed, the project has many benefits. However, there are a few risks which the Council's waste team has identified effective mitigations for. The table below shows selected key risks associated with the introduction of the digital permits and the mitigations identified.

Risk	Mitigation
If there is failure to get internal approval for the change to digital permits.	This risk is rated <i>Low</i> There has been extensive engagement with key internal stakeholders ahead of this operational change. Both the Executive Member for Environment and the Liberal Democrat Group have been briefed to explain the benefits of this change, and concerns raised have been suitably addressed.
If the decision is taken by the Portfolio Holder but it is then called in.	This risk is rated <i>Low</i> This could result in a delay to the implementation date. The report has made an allowance for the call-in period and implementation has been planned to commence on Tuesday 30 November after the applicable call-in period has expired.
If residents do not find the registration process user friendly support this change.	This risk is rated <i>Low</i> The vehicle registration process has been developed and robustly tested to ensure that it is simple and can be completed within three to five minutes by residents. An internal focus group of selected members and Council employees who are also residents have been invited to test the registration process and provide feedback ahead of the launch date. A helpful illustrative step-by-step guide has been produced to help residents to register. This has been enclosed under Appendix B. FAQs about the change will also be made available to residents to help to address key questions. The FAQs can be found under Appendix C.

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<p>If some residents arrive at the HWRC facilities without having completed a digital permit registration.</p>	<p>This risk is rated <i>Low to Medium</i>.</p> <p>If a resident arrives on site without a digital permit registration, site staff will approach them and offer required advice and information to help them register. The resident may be allowed to park in a lane on site to complete the process before they are allowed to tip their waste. Site staff will be suitably accommodating during the first three months after launch (until 28 February 2022) and may allow residents to tip their waste if they have a valid booking but will remind them about the need to complete the digital permit registration before their next visit.</p>
<p>If some residents do not have access to technology devices or the internet and cannot register their vehicle details.</p>	<p>This risk is rated <i>Low to Medium</i>.</p> <p>The online digital permit registration process is straight-forward, so it is anticipated that the majority of residents can complete the registration themselves. The Council is arranging assistance via phone lines for the smaller number of residents who may not have access to technology devices or the internet.</p>

5.13 If the proposed change is approved, the Council's waste team will roll out a communication campaign informing residents about the change and requirement to register vehicles online. Channels to be used include:

- Social media accounts;
- E-newsletters;
- Banners at the HWRC entrances;
- Bin hangers; and
- Notices at selected key locations e.g. libraries, leisure centres and Council offices.

6 Other options considered

6.1 The following alternative options have been considered:

Option	Recommended?	Comment
Option 1: Do Nothing	No	This option will involve continue to let residents use paper permits. Many of these permits are out of date (with an

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		expiry date of September 2020). The Council will also need to send out new permits for lost or damaged permits, as well as new households. This approach uses up significant Council officer time and is also not good for the environment due to the continued use of paper. This option is not being recommended.
Option 2: Send new paper permits to all households in the District.	No	This option will involve printing and posting paper permits to about 69,000 households in the District, followed by ongoing replacements for lost or damaged permits. This will be costly and resource intensive to administer. It is also not environmentally friendly and is inconsistent with the Council's ambition to move towards a more circular economy and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
Option 3: Introduce a digital permit system.	Yes	This is the Recommended Option. It will help the Council to serve residents using our HWRCs in a more efficient manner. Residents applying for a new digital permit will typically receive confirmation within a few minutes instead of having to wait for several days under the existing paper-based system.

6.2 Option 3 (i.e. the introduction of digital permits) is the recommended option. The Do-Nothing option (i.e. Option 1) and Option 2 will mean that the Council has to continue printing and sending paper permits to residents at significant cost and requiring ongoing staff time commitment to administer. Options 1 and 2 above are not being recommended.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The introduction of digital permits to replace the existing paper-based system will have significant benefits for residents and the environment. Avoidance of paper use will make a small but important contribution to the Council's ambition to demonstrate leadership in achieving greater environmental stewardship and is aligned with the aspiration to achieve net carbon zero emissions by 2030. Residents can receive prompt confirmation of the permits after registering online (or with assistance from Council officers, where

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required). The proposed change will also help reduce the administrative burdens placed on Council officers in managing the paper-based system.

7.2 It is recommended that approval is granted so that digital permits can be introduced from Tuesday 30 November 2021.

8 Appendices

The following appendices have been enclosed separately:

Appendix A: Privacy Notice for HWRC Digital Permits

Appendix B: Infographic Summary of Digital Permit Registration Process

Appendix C: FAQs - Registering Your Vehicle Online for Access to Recycling Centres

Background Papers:

Not applicable.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wards affected: All

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